



# War is a Racket

*Smedley Butler*

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In *War Is A Racket*, Butler points to a variety of examples, mostly from World War I, where industrialists whose operations were subsidised by public funding were able to generate substantial profits essentially from mass human suffering.

The work is divided into five chapters:

1. War is a racket
2. Who makes the profits?
3. Who pays the bills?
4. How to smash this racket!
5. To hell with war!

It contains this key summary:

"War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small 'inside' group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes."

In another often cited quote from the book Butler says:

"I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents."

The book is also interesting historically as Butler points out in 1935 that the US is engaging in military war games in the Pacific that are bound to provoke the Japanese.

"The Japanese, a proud people, of course will be pleased beyond expression to see the United States fleet so close to Nippon's shores. Even as pleased as would be the residents of California were they to dimly discern through the morning mist, the Japanese fleet playing at war games off Los Angeles."

Butler explains that the excuse for the buildup of the US fleet and the war games is fear that "the great fleet of this supposed enemy will strike suddenly and annihilate 125,000,000 people."

In his 1987 biography of Butler, Maverick Marine, Hans Schmidt gave a brief review:

"Butler's particular contribution was his recantation, denouncing war on moral grounds after having been a warrior hero and spending most of his life as a military insider. The theme remained vigorously patriotic and nationalistic, decrying imperialism as a disgrace rooted in the greed of a privileged few."

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