

correspondence

"Violence in Our Time and Our Country"

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir: In your fine and provocative editorial in the June issue of *worldview* there appeared, as there has several times in the past, reference, apparently as an established fact, to a clear causative relationship between the Vietnam war and the racial strife in the United States. While I would not venture to state that there is *no* relationship, I do not think the facts will support this unfortunately widespread assumption.

In their efforts to discredit the Vietnam war, liberals have attempted to blame all social and economic ills imaginable on that ill-fated conflict, up to (but not yet including) bad breath and falling hair. Eventually, I suppose, when the heat of the issue has died down somewhat, even the most fervent anti-war protestor will come to realize that discussion of the issue was not well served by inclusion of so many irrelevant and unsubstantiated factors.

Racial strife has been a consistently recurring theme in American history ever since the Civil War and, in fact, before. It has been cyclical in nature, outbursts of violence alternating with periods of comparative calm. No knowledgeable person would have difficulty accepting the possibility that, even if the U.S. had stayed out of Vietnam, the riots might well have occurred anyway. I think many of our liberals felt that somehow there ought to be a close connection between the two great issues that most concerned them — peace and civil rights — and that in this instance the wish became mother to the assumption. If there is a close connection, one cannot help wondering why foreign wars in the past did not produce similar violent outbursts among the oppressed in the United States. (Of course, it is not too difficult to anticipate the answer many anti-Vietnam protestors would give to this query: World War II and the Korean campaign, for instance, were "just" wars while Vietnam is an "unjust" war, etc., etc.)

When the late Martin Luther King, Jr. decided to link these two issues — and I think his influence in this instance was crucial — there was a distinct undercurrent of unease throughout much of the civil rights movement. Many felt Dr. King had jeopardized the movement by burdening it with yet another, largely unrelated, issue. It was only after opposition to the war began to gain ground that this shotgun-wedding of issues became accepted as legitimate. I have a more than sneaking suspicion that if one were

to poll the men and women on the streets of our ghettos as to the causes for the riots, one would have to do a lot of walking to accumulate any support for the idea that they feel the violence in Vietnam justifies violence in the streets.

Most important, the cause of civil rights needs as broad a base of support among the American people as it can find, especially in view of the mounting intensity of the determined assault now being made against it. By linking civil rights closely to the more partisan cause of protest against the Vietnam war, many will be excluded or alienated at a time when their support is needed most. The Vietnam war and the issues concerning it will pass; the problems of achieving racial equality in the U.S. will be with us for a long time. Our national interest is not served by an arbitrary doctrinaire insistence on a close causative relationship between the Vietnam war and riots in the ghettos.

Guy Davis

"Russia and the Czechs"

Columbia, S. C.

Dear Sir: I have the following comments to make on the editorial entitled "Russia and the Czechs" in your September issue.

To begin with, the Soviet invasion of Prague is an extreme result of the Yalta fiasco. During World War II President Roosevelt decided, against Churchill's advice, to let Stalin have his way. What the millions behind the Iron Curtain felt, and feel, about this decision is well known. The strike in East Berlin in 1953 or the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and Dubcek's liberalization policy in 1968 are only landmarks of their despair. Had the Russians not been certain that the West — meaning the United States — would do nothing, the balance inside the Soviet Union would not have been tilted in favor of invasion.

But who came to the aid of the Czechs? No one. There were impassioned speeches in the U.N. and on the floor of the U.S. Senate about the indomitable will of a people to freedom. But who did send troops to protect the Czech's freedom? No one. Not Czechoslovakia's nominal Eastern European friends, Yugoslavia and Rumania. Russians served clear notice what their fate would be. Not the United Nations, because it could never reach any agreement anyway. Not the U.S., even were its forces not tied down in Vietnam, for an armed confrontation with the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia would raise too grave a threat of all-out nuclear war.

Scant indeed is the comfort that can be drawn from

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the Czechoslovak tragedy. But perhaps it will serve one purpose here at home: Perhaps it will demonstrate to naive Americans who believe that international dealings can be conducted by slogan and a philosophy book that we live in an amoral universe.

It is a paradox, but an unavoidable one, that the atomic weapons have kept the peace between the superpowers, while permitting lesser grievances to be fought in their shadow. It also may be true that Europe today is no longer the cockpit of the world but a rather tiresome sideshow whose inconvenience the superpowers are willing to tolerate so long as

they do not get out of hand. Neither Washington nor Moscow has any intention of attacking the other, and each is willing to let his rival reign within his sphere of influence, despite the fact that both are reluctant to admit it officially. This pattern of self-restraint dates back to the worst days of the cold war.

Czech freedom has been crushed and perhaps all we can do is mourn. But we should also learn, if we did not already know the lesson.

S. Stein

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“HOW NEW WILL THE BETTER WORLD BE?”

Ernest W. Lefever

Back in 1943 when all good people; or most of them, were promoting their favorite blueprint for the post-war world, Carl L. Becker wrote an essay, “How New Will the Better World Be?” for the *Yale Review*, and later expanded it into a book with the same title. His thesis was simple and convincing: The “better world” will have to be made out of essentially the same raw materials as the present one — sovereign states, power politics and, of course, the chief ingredient, man, who has demonstrated a stubborn resistance to drastic reconstruction.

Becker’s timely essay, which ran counter to the spate of writing announcing the end of power politics through international law or world organization, reflected the wisdom of his earlier classic, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, published the year Franklin Roosevelt won his first term as President. Professor Becker, like E. H. Carr and Reinhold Niebuhr, has been a critic of apocalyptic utopianism which demands new legal structures, a new politics, or new men to “solve” the problems of war and injustice.

One would have thought that some of the more painful and inhumane postwar realities — the Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe, Mao’s conquest of China,

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and the exploitation of tribal-national sentiments by assorted revolutionaries — would have put an end to utopian, romantic, and apocalyptic assumptions in political discourse, at least from literate men. But Stalin, Mao, Ho, and Castro, even with a gentle assist from Niebuhr and an upsurge of interest in Edmund Burke, Tocqueville, and the Federalist Papers, were not enough to stop the foolish romantics, soft and hard, from promoting world government and other grand schemes.

The universal system-builders seem to have quieted down in the past decade, but there has arisen a new breed of romantics who in anger and frustration have struck out wildly against the exercise of United States power. These revolutionary romantics, goaded on by American involvement in Vietnam, are a mixture of the New Left, old Left, utopianism, and nihilism. The ideological undercurrents in this diverse movement have found their way into the work of the more respectable writers who offer prescriptions on how Washington should limit, share, internationalize, multilateralize, restrain, or otherwise mute its considerable power.

The books of two scholarly Senators come to mind. Mr. Fulbright’s *Arrogance of Power* properly warns against self-righteousness and Mr. McCarthy’s *Limits of Power* against the “illusion of omnipotence,” to use Denis Brogan’s phrase. But neither seems to understand fully the limits and obligations of a superpower or the persistence of tradition, particularly in the Third World. Both exhibit a strange ambivalence toward U.S. responsibility, a kind of neo-isolationist-