future. It is still not clear, however, that this hope can be realized in the concrete to any great extent. During the course of dialogue, and during the course of the present discussion of dialogue, much emphasis has been placed on openness to change, the sort of change not prescribed by antecedent ideological blueprints. There has to be hope in both the desirability and possibility of just this sort of change on the two sides of the ideological divide. While it would be too pessimistic to say that those hopes have been put to rest, it would be less than realistic not to question whether the present state of affairs is in fact open to change or whether the Party—chiefly in Moscow—has not already decided what can and cannot be thought or said, what can and cannot be allowed to happen. Hope is presently at a low ebb, and the difficulty of receiving answers to some very pertinent questions is not reassuring. By the same token, one looks in vain in the Christian world for substantial signs that emotional opposition to Communist "atheism" has not induced a real blindness to the need of "revolution," if the patent inequalities in our world are not to persist.

Little has been said in the present discussion about the expansion of dialogue to include members of the Third World. For one thing, if Christianity and Marxism are considered the poles of opposition between which dialogue is desirable, the Third World is not "third" in relation to them. Separately, perhaps, Christians and Marxists will reach a point where they can successfully engage in dialogue with this other world, and the larger exchange of views and aspirations can then take place. A second reason for the apparent lacuna in the present discussion is a realization by both parties that a dialogue in the future—one which will be attended by all the difficulties of bringing together radically different mentalities—cannot realistically be treated in the same framework as a dialogue which has already been initiated. Nonetheless, Marxists and Christians cannot dialogue as though no one else in the world counted. They must both envisage a future in which all civilizations have learned to coexist and to work together in a common effort to achieve the brotherhood of man, which, in relation to the Third World, will be the monopoly of neither Christians nor Communists. It is obvious that dialogue alone will not bring men together effectively, but their coming together can only be realized if first they learn to talk to each other.

correspondence

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Silver Spring, Md.

Dear Sir: Mr. Ernest Lefever is to be commended for pointing out that Dr. Martin Luther King helped spread an outrageous falsehood when he said in his Riverside Church speech that we (the United States) may have killed a million civilians in Vietnam, mostly children (*worldview*, November, 1970). Since there are those who defend this Big Lie even today, it is important that the truth be made known. I have devoted considerable time to the investigation of what can properly be called "the million children myth." I discovered that the charge that we were responsible for a million civilian deaths (King) or casualties (Eccles and others) was originally constructed from the flimsiest of evidence and was subsequently repeated and embroidered by people who did not bother to check the validity of the figures.

The myth began with the publication in *Ramparts* of an article by William F. Pepper which alleged that 250,000 children had been killed and another 750,000 wounded as a result of the war in Vietnam during the period 1961-66. As far as I could determine, Pepper simply pulled figures out of the air in estimating civilian deaths in Vietnam. He then multiplied the figure by three to obtain an estimate of the number of casualties, on the ground that it is a military rule of thumb that the wounded always outnumber the dead by three to one. He then assumed, with no evidence to support it, that 60 per cent of all the dead and wounded were children. That produced the figure that became "the million children myth."

Pepper's figures could not stand up under analysis, since they were based on three invalid assumptions: the number of civilian deaths, the ratio of wounded to killed, and the ratio of children to adults. I soon discovered that no one had any statistics on the number of civilian war-related deaths. However, there were statistics on the number of civilians admitted to hospitals in Vietnam with war-related wounds. In 1967, the year of peak military activity, such admissions were at the rate of 4,000 a

month. They had numbered about 30,000 the previous year. They were very much lower in the preceding years. A team of six doctors that went to Vietnam to make an appraisal of civilian medical facilities in the summer of 1967 confirmed that the number of war-related civilian injuries was then running at less than 50,000 a year. They acknowledged that there were cases that were not treated in hospitals, but they concluded that total civilian casualties would not be as high as 75,000 a year. If there were one killed for every three wounded, as Pepper assumed, the total civilians killed and wounded in the year of heaviest military activity would not have reached 100,000. Actually, our military records in Vietnam show that the wounded outnumber the dead by more than five times, and if this figure applied to civilians the best estimate for the number of civilian deaths in 1967 would have been less than 15,000.

While Pepper assumed that 60 per cent of the dead and wounded civilians were children, the hospital figures for 1967 showed that only 21 per cent of those admitted with war-related wounds were children. It is apparent that Pepper's figure of a million child casualties in Vietnam in the 1961-66 period was an incredibly wild exaggeration.

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It is important to note that Pepper, reckless as he was, did not attribute all of the civilian casualties to the American forces. Many of the killed and injured were victims of Viet Cong booby traps, or were deliberately murdered by the V.C. Others were injured when caught in cross fire, and it was impossible to say whether the shell fragment or bullet came from a Communist gun or an American gun. A survey of doctors in the field in 1967 produced the estimate that 40 per cent of the civilian casualties were caused by V.C. raids, booby traps or mines, 30 per cent by allied artillery and air strikes, and 30 per cent by small arms fire, mortar rounds and other weapons used in direct engagements. This would suggest that over half the casualties were caused by the V.C.

Mr. Marriner S. Eccles took Pepper's wild figures on total child casualties in Vietnam and made matters much worse by blaming the entire total on us. He said: "We have killed, wounded or burned more than one million children," absolving the V.C. of any responsibility for any casualties in Vietnam.

Martin Luther King made matters still worse by confusing casualties with deaths. Even Pepper had estimated only 415,000 civilian deaths in the 1961-66 period, and he had not attributed all of those to our side. Dr. King escalated this to a million deaths, all attributable to us. Thus he made the same errors as Pepper and Eccles and added one of his own.

Marriner Eccles admitted his error when the facts were called to his attention, but Clergy and Laymen Concerned prominently displayed his original statement in an ad placed in the *New York Times* on May 3, 1968. This was done in spite of the fact that Mr. Eccles had not authorized the use of the statement and had specifically notified them that it would have to be modified. This suggests that Clergy and Laymen Concerned were not interested in the truth, but in the dissemination of the Big Lie.

The latest chapter in this disgraceful story was the statement made by Senator Kennedy on December 2, 1969, to the effect that there had been more than one million civilian casualties in Vietnam in the 1966-69 period, including 300,000 dead. Senator Kennedy's office subsequently described this as an "off-the-cuff" statement inspired by testimony given to the Senator's subcommittee on refugees. Sad to say, an examination of that testimony showed that the Senator's figures were far out of line with the testimony given by all but one of the witnesses. The one witness who used such high figures derived them in part by exaggerating considerably figures that Senator Kennedy himself had used in earlier speeches.

Exaggerated though Senator Kennedy's figures are, they expose the far greater exaggeration in the figures Dr. King used in his Riverside speech. If there were only 300,000 civilian war dead, attributable to the action of both sides, in the four years of heaviest fighting, it is certainly clear that a million civilians had not died in the war as a result of our actions alone by April, 1967, when Dr. King gave his talk. My own guess is that at that time civilian deaths attributable to action by our forces were probably less than 25,000.

Reed J. Irvine

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in the magazines

(Continued from page 2)

mula is erratic, capable of bruising and bewildering friend and foe alike . . . A consistent policy founded on a believable political formula reduces the need for the use of force, permitting national objectives to be achieved without committing the full power and prestige of the country to every crisis.

"What is needed is a political formula that will reflect the virtues, vices and dreams of the American people. . . . To be effective . . . the political formula would provide for 'a fusion, in certain amounts, of lofty sentiments and low passions' [here quoting Italian political scientist, Gaetano Mosca]. It is on this rock of 'low passions' that the proposed formulas of the liberal verbalists continually founder. So long as Messrs. Goodwin, Schlesinger and Cleveland refuse to incorporate the base metal with the pure, they will meet failu e. . . ."

PAMPHILUS