

Correspondence

A Friendly Disagreement With James Finn

To the Editors: After reading "A Friendly Disagreement About Human Rights" by James Finn in the July/August issue, it appears to me that the words placed in the mouths of Proctor (Pro) and Conrad (Con) do not offer a complete presentation of the relevant arguments. Allow me to respond, on Proctor's behalf, to the illogics of Conrad.

In addition to Con's peripheral pronouncements on the admirable statesmanship of Henry Kissinger, the incredible infancy of Andy Young, and the desirability of retiring the U.N. Human Rights Commission, I also take exception with his basic arguments. Countering them in the order they were presented, I would point out that:

1. The difficulty in obtaining equal degrees of information on rights violations in different countries due to their variable openness is not insurmountable. As Cyrus Vance pointed out, the freedoms of speech, the press, religion, and movement (all vehicles for the flow of information) are themselves human rights. As such, obstacles to these freedoms could be subject to U.S. sanctions, thus encouraging a uniform openness in other societies.

2. The argument that national security (a much abused, ill-defined term) should take precedence over human rights is a nebulous one and does not take account of the fact that these considerations do, or should, often overlap.

3. The application of a consistent rights policy to all countries would add clarity to our foreign policy, not make it the confusing "crazy quilt" that Con contends it would.

4. Present events notwithstanding, a human rights policy does not necessarily portend counterproductivity. Con cites the example of the negative effect of the rights issue on the SALT talks. Perhaps this intransigence by the Soviets is a ploy they would abandon if convinced that our commitment is steadfast and not susceptible to such pressures. Unfortunately, the application of our rights policy so far, as Con

would be quick to admit, has been selective enough to signal that our rights policies are negotiable.

5. Con's argument that there is no developing country where Western democracy would really work is actually quite a subversive argument. What is it that our foreign policy establishment has been attempting to make work, anyway? Equitable societies with a reasonable distribution of wealth accomplished by agrarian reform, regulation of foreign-owned enterprises, and other measures? Or societies that guarantee the stability of high profit levels for American-based multinational corporations, regardless of the attendant political liberties accorded the populace? Recent history indicates the latter.

6. Human rights might be, at present, a poorly defined "baggy monster" of a term, as Con points out, but this can be remedied by referring to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as Pro suggests.

Among Con's other scattered arguments I find debatable are his contentions that "power and self-interest have proven to be more trustworthy guides" than moralistic impulses (have not our shortsighted policies in Cambodia, Chile, and elsewhere backfired tremendously?) and that there are no means of implementing our proclaimed moral principles anyway (is the world's most powerful nation at a loss in choosing from the variety of economic and political sanctions open to it?). What betrays Con's arguments most is the metaphorical context in which he describes concepts of morality. Can it be so undesirable to "break out in moralistic blotches"? Is the prime test of a policy's desirability, as Con implies, the extent to which it is in the interests of the U.S. alone? What has become of the global concern with which, it has been assumed, we have been infected all along?

Gary Kaufman

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Pro

To the Editors: James Finn's debate with himself on Carter's human rights policies summarizes capably the competing claims of idealism and pragmatism in pursuing a human rights commitment at the international level.

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WORLDVIEW

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs, which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. The Council is independent and nonsectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of the Council's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

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iar, but he presents it well. In addition, he correctly shows Marx's ambivalent attitude toward industrialism, his lack of sympathy for the victims of colonialism, and his belief in German and American supremacy over subject peoples. Although the tone of the book is highly critical, Wesson praises Marx for stressing the significance of technology, putting economics into history, and showing how ideology often masks self-interest. Marxism, he finds, has been particularly fruitful in the field of sociology, as witness the galaxy of theorists from Mannheim to Mills who draw heavily, if selectively, upon his work. Nor does Wesson condemn revolution per se, finding it necessary for absolutist nations with all-pervasive governments, closed ruling castes, and intolerable tax burdens.

Yet much of the book reads like a lawyer's brief, and the verbal overkill weakens many of Wesson's most thoughtful arguments. Is it really true, for example, that "before the Russian Revolution, Marxism was of no special importance in European politics, much less Western culture"? Or that "Marxism is moved much more by hatred of possessors than love of the unfortunate"? Or that "fascist ideology was only a shallow mimicry of Marxism"? Surely Wesson's comparison of Marxism to the weird pseudo-science of Immanuel Velikovsky (he of "worlds in collision" fame) is a bit heavy-handed. Wesson notwithstanding, many Marxists join the movement not out of any attraction to a "metaphysics of revolution," but rather because they seek order in a chaotic world, rationality in

place of what they perceive as the anarchy of the marketplace.

At times we are dealing with half-truths at best, or at least with topics far more complicated than Wesson would have us believe. Take, for example, Wesson's claim that Marx "took delight in violence," or that "Lenin's politic approach to the nationality problem practically won the civil war." He asserts, without showing evidence, that "the Soviet Union today probably profits little by control over its satellites."

Nonetheless, Wesson's book is rich and rewarding. One looks forward to the rebuttals, if there are any, by Marxist writers.

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Correspondence (from p. 2)

According to my understanding, a component of a genuine commitment to human rights is an implicit affirmation of the premise that ends and means must be consistent. Or, that while societies necessarily vary as to culture, economics, and political structures, neither "security," "development," nor anything else justifies the violation of the individual, the avoidable failure to meet basic material needs, or the denial of political and civil freedoms.

Thus, if the Carter administration does intend by its pronouncements on human rights to affirm the interrelationships between means and ends just mentioned, it must follow through on that logic and step back (unilaterally, if need be) from the depravity of nuclear armament. Two very modest steps would be to forgo building the neutron bomb and to renounce any first use of nuclear weapons.

One can no more defend peace by preparing the destruction of the world than one can build democracy by jailing one's political opponents. I agree that rights may be defined, priorities argued, and gross violations denounced. One can only be disturbed, however, that the American public apparently expects Mr. Carter's defense of human rights to be accompanied by the augmentation of U.S. military forces and the willingness to use them.

It is urgent that we, as a people, learn to distinguish between "moral interventionism" (i.e., speaking publicly on the premise that systemic repression is in no instance an "internal affair") and military interventionism (remember the Vietnam war?) or the revival of American cold war belligerence. And, in the long run, the success or failure of Carter's rights aspirations will rest less upon his rhetorical skills than upon the attainment of disarmament, and the willingness of individuals everywhere to defend without violence the material and civil rights of themselves and others.

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The WCC & "Related Phenomena"

To the Editors: I want to express my appreciation and gratitude for the article by Richard Neuhaus on the WCC and related phenomena ("Toeing the Line at