RACISM AND POLITICS

There is a definite connection between our domestic conflict over racial justice and our role in international affairs. The most important relation, let it be said at once, is not that which is usually proffered. It may be true that our national prestige is damaged when the plight of the American Negro is publicized abroad, that our democratic sentiments are looked at askance and that our call for freedom in other countries is turned back upon us. But to assert this fact of international political life as a reason for granting to the Negro the rights which are justly his is to lean on true but relatively inconsequential arguments.

The Negro must have the rights of a first class citizen because they are, in justice, his. This is the first and final response to what is ultimately a moral question. All other reasons must fall into line behind this. But this fact, even when widely acknowledged, is only a prelude to the hard and urgent task of achieving racial justice in this country. The nexus between our domestic crisis over civil rights and our foreign policy becomes evident when we ask ourselves how this task is to be accomplished, when we examine the fate of major bills before Congress and the major issues which are already emerging for the next presidential campaign. Those who support a strong civil rights program must inevitably ask themselves what price they are willing to pay in terms of other legislation they would like to see enacted, what candidates they would like to see elected, what general lines of policy they would like to see developed. For there are those who are determined to see that they pay a high price.

It is easy to say, quite accurately, that the problem of making such choices is perennial with politics. And the issue of racial justice is admittedly a very special, a particularly crucial issue. But just because of that it shows more clearly than any other issue how intimately our foreign policy is related to our domestic politics.

in the magazines

The Review of Politics celebrated its 25th Anniversary with the October 1963 issue. In addition to articles dealing with the evolution of the journal and of the parent institution, Notre Dame University, this issue of the quarterly contains items by Raymond J. Sontag ("The Origins of the Second World War"), Marvin Rintala ("A Generation in Politics"), Vincent De Santis ("Politics in the Gilded Age") and Stephen D. Kertesz ("The United Nations: A Hope and Its Prospects").

Dr. Kertesz has reviewed the development of the UN and its successes and limitations. He maintains that "the fundamental difficulties in international politics have persisted and have even increased since 1915 because the discrepancy between the development of physical and social sciences is greater than ever and we have not found means for clarification of fundamental issues that divide mankind."

While there has been some progress in "specific fields," Kertesz writes, it is in the area of "moral consensus on the nature of man and purposes of mankind" that progress is most imperative for the success of the world organization. "A world-wide political authority can hardly operate according to democratic principles without shared moral values. Therefore, a reasonable way to make progress would be through enlargement of common understanding on fundamental moral issues. Neither Charter reform nor development of international law will mean genuine progress unless we succeed in basic understanding among men."

Robert F. Gray of Tulane University has contributed an "anthropological view" of political parties in new African nations below the Sahara in the quarterly Comparative Studies in Society and History (July 1963). For his study he has tempered the "morally neutral philosophy of cultural relativism" dictated by the anthropological discipline by asserting "without relativistic reservations that democracy is of great value for any nation."

Gray has examined briefly the institutions and political methods long associated with democracy as practised in the West and then asked whether these elements are necessary for maintaining the "basic values of democracy." Following this, he has suggested the kind of democratic process for which the African nations are best equipped by reason of their own heritage.
It is the author’s contention that the parliamentary system of the West is but a particular mode of democracy, having evolved during the Christian era from a series of sharp economic, social and religious conflicts. As a result of this history there is implicit in Western democracy the notion of “bipolarity of standards of judgment,” and of “irreconcilably opposed factions.” These are reflected in the parliamentary system with its “organized opposition” and the process of vote taking to decide the outcome of an issue.

But these political forms, Gray maintains, are not essential to a democratic government and might even prove to be disruptive in a nation which has not shared the West’s economic and social experiences. Indeed, he writes, in Africa there is no tradition of “repressive religious orthodoxy and dogma,” there is unanimity in the struggle against poverty, and many elements of social and “psychic inequality” were displaced upon the removal of the colonial powers from the African continent. Thus, the sequence of struggles to achieve many of these goals has been avoided, and democratic values “are either inherent in the traditional societies of Africa or have been created during the struggle for independence.”

Almost without exception the traditional mode of tribal decision-making has been a process of “discussion and consensus”—a process not any the less democratic for want of a quantitative vote. Gray contends, if “freedom of thought, freedom from autocratic power, and from economic and psychic inequality” are the values upon which the system rests.

His conclusion is that “if the governments in the new African nations are to embody traditional modes of political thought and procedure to any appreciable extent, then a one-party system may provide a more congenial milieu for the traditional procedure of discussion and consensus than a system of opposing political parties. This of course would not be an ideological party, as in the totalitarian systems, but an ideological party, as in the totalitarian systems, which technical developments have condemned to impotence.”

In addition to those from the United States and Britain, editorial advisors for the publication were drawn from thirteen nations including the Commonwealth, Western Europe, Japan, Ghana, Pakistan and Yugoslavia. Although at present the journal is available in English only, summaries of each article will be appended in Russian, French and German. Also international in scope is a section of “Abstracts of Publications,” a list of recent books and articles in the field which numbered eighty-six in this first issue.

General Pierre M. Gallois has presented his country’s view of the strategic and technical realities of the modern world in “The Raison D’Etre of French Defence Policy.” The article appears in the October issue of International Affairs, a quarterly published in England by the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

One of the most important developments in recent years which has been instrumental in the creation of a French independent nuclear deterrent is, in the general’s opinion, “the extent to which the United States and the Soviet Union are becoming able to ensure the invulnerability of their respective retaliatory forces.” In light of this, “a recourse to force by one, to the detriment of the other, will prove impossible... A conflict of this kind would be so absurd that one cannot even regard it as likely.” But such a development, while ensuring the security of the nuclear powers themselves, also “paralyses their role in the world because no government can seriously believe that one or the other can either lead a coalition and share their power with its members, or risk its existence for the sake of its allies.”

General Gallois “foresee[s] as a corollary of this enforced status quo, a general spread of fait accomplis, carried out at the expense of those countries not capable of converting themselves into inviolable ‘sanctuaries’.”

He asks: “In a world which seems bound to be ruled by laws, which, though they are new, weigh no less heavily on the weak, is it unnatural that a country aware of the danger of the present situation and with sufficient resources, should also attempt to convert itself into a ‘sanctuary’? In such a context, what is meant by describing France as a bad ally...? In what way does international morality forbid her to be concerned over the obvious results of a whole sequence of technical achievements—in which France, at the outset at least, took no part? And why ought she systematically to ignore the new international situation, with the chance that one day she might become its victim, precisely because she had created no substitute for a system of security which technical developments have condemned to impotence?”

PAMPHILUS

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