

# worldview

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## CIVIL RIGHTS AND VIETNAM

To many people there is little if any relation between the civil rights workers in this country and attitudes toward the war in Vietnam. The connection has been noted, however, both by people who are active in the civil rights movement and those who are critical of the movement. Because this is a serious issue, because it may become more important and troubling, and because it illuminates further some relations between domestic and foreign policies, it is worth examination.

A good place to start the examination is to ask why there seems to be an increasing number of people within the civil rights movement who are advocating generally pacific measures for the U.S. presence in Vietnam—measures ranging from withdrawal to negotiations to immediate cease fire.

One reason that has been offered by those outside of the movement is that at least one of the organizations in the movement has been “infiltrated by beatniks, left-wing revolutionaries and—worst of all—by Communists.” This is the charge that Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, New York *Herald Tribune* columnists, have levelled specifically at the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and they have some evidence to support their spectrum of charges.

Apparently dismissing the history of Communist exploitation of the race issue in this country, John Lewis, national chairman of SNCC, has said that he will accept anyone who will help the movement. In or out of SNCC, the Communist position on Vietnam would be predictable. Evans and Novak qualify their statements, however, by saying that only an infinitesimal fraction of SNCC members have Communist ties and that extreme radicalism in the organization “is by no means solely or even primarily due to Communist influences.” To credit the Communists who have attached themselves to the civil rights movement with much influence in determining SNCC attitudes toward Vietnam would be to give them

more than they deserve. A satisfactory answer to our question must be sought elsewhere.

It has been suggested that a disproportionately large number of pacifists are members of civil rights organizations. Further, the influence they might normally be expected to have has been compounded by the theoretical cogency and the practical success of the non-violent approach of Martin Luther King. These people, who might individually have been opposed to present U.S. policy in Vietnam in any case, now find mutual support within a civil rights organization and, united, their voices sound stronger and louder.

There is enough truth to this formulation to allow some people to accept it as a totally adequate explanation. One difficulty with it is that it raises other complex problems, especially for those who support both the civil rights movement and present U.S. policy in Vietnam. These people must ask themselves why a domestic movement they support contains such a large proportion of people who disagree with them on what is presently our most crucial international problem. Is this simply one of the normal expected crossing of lines that one expects in political affairs, or is the relation between the two issues more fundamental?

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A quotation from *No More Strangers*, a recent book by Philip Berrigan, S.S.J., will indicate how one man sees the relation between our racial problems and our foreign policy. “It may become clear in the course of reflection that . . . segregation is psychologically creating a climate in which our massive reliance on nuclear weapons may flourish. . . . It may become obvious that the tyranny that we impose upon our own citizens, one-tenth of our population, has now threatened to take an international form in the larger neighborhood of the world. . . . It may become obvious that the commonly dispassionate decision of the American people to relegate the Negro to the cellars and slums of American life makes it not

only easy but logical to enlarge our oppressions in the form of international nuclear threats. I submit that the two phenomena, segregation and the arms race, are very much connected and that the vicious seeds of one can help promote the other. . . ."

Not everyone will agree with this proposition nor with the larger argument of which it is a part. The full argument does, however, apparently persuade many people who are vitally concerned about the entire political effort in which our country is engaged and with the effect that effort has upon the health of our society. Others who do not accept the theoretical relations which this argument attempts to establish are quick to point out some of the practical relations. It is not, they point out, that the production of nuclear arms and the limited war in Vietnam drain off monies that could be spent improving the lot of the disenfranchised, the poor and dispossessed; the U.S. is wealthy enough to do both if it has the will

and the talent. It is that crises in other parts of the world inevitably turn our attention from the crisis we must struggle with at home. Consider, for example, what would have happened if the Selma march and the murder of James Reeb had occurred simultaneously with an explosive, particularly threatening act in Vietnam. Would the nation, and the world, have turned its eyes on Selma? Would President Johnson have been moved to give the vigorous speech he did? Would we now have for enactment the Civil Rights Bill that we do? The negative answer is all too obvious.

It should be evident that there is not one but a variety of reasons for relating civil rights to Vietnam. It is inevitable that those who are most moved by one reason will be inclined to find that primary and to dismiss or slight the rest. And this is a danger open to those who support the civil rights movement, including SNCC, as well as those who would undermine it. J. F.

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## ***in the magazines***

"The conduct of diplomacy can be no better than the institutional framework which supports it," writes Nathaniel McKitterick in *The New Republic* (March 27). And yet, "the United States is the only great power today which has persistently refused to accord to professional diplomacy both continuity and high status in the formulation and conduct of policy. All recent Presidents and Secretaries of State have paid a high price for this refusal. All have been unnecessarily surprised by the actions and reactions of other governments, simply because the State Department has not been allowed to organize its professional bureaucracy to provide constant, timely and professional guidance to the Secretary of State. As a result of this critical shortcoming, State has gradually forfeited to others, the Pentagon usually, or the Central Intelligence Agency, or even at times agencies like the Peace Corps, its legitimate role in the formulation of policy in key areas."

"President Kennedy," McKitterick says, "learned of State's crippling ailment early in his term." In his opinion "the still, small voice of indecision which characterized State's briefing of President Kennedy in advance of the Bay of Pigs disaster—a briefing which masked strong views held by some professional officers experienced in Latin American affairs

—permanently poisoned relations between the Kennedy White House and the Kennedy State Department. State's role in Vietnam during the Kennedy years became one of playing the dinghy, dragged on behind the Pentagon's yawl. Even the most brilliant diplomatic success of the Kennedy years, the Cuban missile crisis, must be credited to the Secretary of Defense and his staff, not to the Secretary of State and his staff."

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Richard Falk writes that he welcomes the translation into English of the opinion of the District Court of Tokyo in the case of *Shimoda and Others v. Japan* handed down in December 1963 (*The Nation*, February 15). This decision, which involves "claims against the state brought by injured survivors of the atomic attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki" suggests to Falk "that the time is ripe also for a moral reckoning in the United States."

He reports that in reaching its decision "the court was careful to refrain from making extravagant claims about the relevance of international law to the conditions of atomic attack and to avoid 'legislating' on the delicate matters before it. At the same time, it reached the clear and momentous conclu-