

heedless go-it-alone self-reliance of dissident groups which Mr. Kahn and, indeed, most of us so rightly abhor.

I hope that *worldview* will seek out more sympathetic reviewers of the grash political activism of the student Left with a yen to provide Yang for Kahn's Yin.

L. ALEXANDER HARPER

### *The Author Replies*

New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir: I will not quarrel with Mr. Harper's designation of my article as a position paper. It was originally delivered as a speech in which I sought to stake out, before an adult audience, a vantage point from which to judge the New Left.

Nor can one quarrel with the label "conservative," except to deny it. I am, by age, part of the

New Left generation. I think I am sensitive to the issues that move it. But I am also a committed radical who believes that America needs a strong democratic Left, rooted in the society and relevant to its problems. I therefore tend to view the radical impulses of my generation in the light of this consideration: in what measure do they contribute to the construction of a durable radical movement in this country? My criticisms of the New Left—not *en masse* but as a distinctive current of thought and action—are made by this standard.

There are those who—convinced that radicalism's fate is to flash cyclically in the sky, never achieving embodiment as a lasting mass movement—do not judge as I do. My judgments may be in error; they may even appear conservative. But no one who ignores the standard—I do not accuse Mr. Harper—is genuinely radical.

TOM KAHN

## **other voices**

### **MORAL DILEMMAS IN REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE**

*Another view on ethics and wars of national liberation, which has been the subject of lively discussion in the pages of worldview during the last half year, appears in the September issue of Social Action, monthly publication of the Council for Christian Social Action in the United Church of Christ. The author of the article, from which the following excerpts are taken, who also edited this issue of Social Action devoted to "Revolution and Security in the 'Third World,'" is Alan Geyer, CCSA director for international relations.*

. . . Throughout the Third World, new theologies of revolution and charters of moral indignation inspire and rationalize the seemingly relentless struggles of nation-states to attain genuine independence and security. If the social and racial elements in contemporary revolutions distinguish them from the issues at stake in 1776, it is nonetheless well to remember the long and painful struggle of the American nation to fulfill the meaning of its own revolution for two centuries—to survive the violence and bitterness of a civil war at the end of its first century and to overcome the sources of violence and bitterness in the racial tensions at the end of the second century. These tragic facts of our own national existence are not without meaning for the attitudes we bring to the turbulence on three continents in the Southern Hemisphere. . . .

The first moral and spiritual requirement which

the Third World rightly exacts from American Christians is to accept the reality and necessity of revolution itself. It is to have a faith which is spacious and humane and rugged enough to comprehend the very structure of society itself and to permit and even inspire radical political action to upset the prevailing distribution of power in that structure. . . . Whether revolution can always stay within the limits of non-violence and peaceful change, either in the Third World or in America's own struggle for racial justice, is a question of great urgency in Christian deliberations just now. What is unquestionable is the ubiquity and inevitability of revolutionary change. . . .

This readiness to accept the dynamism of emerging nations and to do so not simply as a grim secular necessity but as a human participation in the work of Christ—this is the fundamental ethical imperative to which all other attitudes, principles, and policies must relate. . . .

The struggle for power which belongs to revolutionary and all other forms of politics is forever marked by inequality, controversy, coercion, impulses to violence, the necessities of compromise. A theology of revolution cannot pretend that any of these attributes of the struggle for power can or should be entirely banished. Violence is not intrinsically more immoral than all forms of non-violence. In fact, violence is not as simple a category to define as some suppose. There is such a thing as the "violence of order": the stifling of protest and dis-

sent. Reinhold Niebuhr shocked our fixations on law and order and our fears of anarchy and conflict by declaring: "If a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which it can be ruled out." Niebuhr insists as did Abraham Lincoln that violence, bitter as it may be, serves at times as an instrument of a higher justice and an ultimate reconciliation.

... Neither a preference for order nor a pacifism concerning the weapons of conflict should obscure the extent to which unrelieved injustice is itself a potent source of further violence. In Vietnam, there has been a chronic default in getting to the bottom of the revolutionary situation politically, socially, economically—such a fixation on preserving the stability of the regime, *any* Saigon regime, that the prospects for stability itself have been undermined by the escalation of political dissatisfaction. This is a common failing of governments beset by revolution: the more frantic their quest for order and security to the neglect of social justice, the more certain it becomes that the revolution will erupt in violence and will shatter the regime itself. Christians cannot be indifferent to the need for minimal order nor sentimental about all revolutions—but they must not take a narrow view of what it takes to create authentic political stability in terms of meeting basic moral, social, and economic demands. Poverty is not simply an economic fact in the Third World: it has become a *political* fact and a revolutionary force threatening every established order.

Christian attitudes toward the meaning of law and legal institutions must be informed by a grasp of social realities and a sensitivity to justice which may override legalistic constructions. International law, for example, has a bias toward the territorial status quo, which often means the rationalization of boundaries artificially laid out by imperial Western powers in Asia and Africa without sufficient regard for ethnic and other indigenous realities. International law also tends to assume conventional models of warfare and is confounded by the combination of war and revolution which has been so conspicuous in Southeast Asia. Guerrilla warfare exposes and exploits both the traditional biases and the lack of agreed definition of terms like "intervention," "aggression," "domestic jurisdiction." . . .

Another distinction which revolutionary warfare obscures is that between the combatant and the noncombatant, a precious moral boundary in traditional Christian teaching and in international law. Of course, the unfolding logic of total war in 1933–45 had already obliterated that distinction by the

sheer devastation of strategic bombing and then of the atom bombs. But in the more revolutionary context of the Third World, there is a quite different strategic reason: the peasant farmer by day (the "fish in the sea") becomes the guerrilla by night. Unquestionably, thousands of noncombatants have become casualties of the war in Vietnam because they were suspected of being Vietcong, or were located too close to Vietcong, or were simply victims of targeting mistakes—whole villages on occasion. . . .

The horror of such actions is clear enough; the difficulties of effective counter-guerrilla action which is also faithful to the traditional distinction are also manifest and are fully exploited by the guerrillas themselves. The highly political nature of the guerrilla effort, especially as waged by Communists in Southeast Asia, has involved a much more selective attack upon noncombatants . . . who are made political object lessons and whose killing may serve to expose the weakness of governmental protection.

The sensitive conscience cannot easily accept the degree of terror and torture which has consistently accompanied revolutionary violence. It takes either a very cynical or an extremely sophisticated morality to countenance such things. Both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries stretch their rationalizations for "necessary evils" very far, as has been the case in Vietnam where there is surely no clear moral superiority of the Saigon regime as compared with the Vietcong. The legitimacy of American intervention has been gravely sullied by publicity and propaganda concerning terror and torture, difficult as it is to prove direct American responsibility for them.

One Christian moralist has repeatedly argued that there is no absolute basis for rejecting water-tortures or pulling out a prisoner's fingernails one by one if information is produced which may save hundreds or thousands of lives. Justifications for such practices typically ignore the consequences for the persons or nations responsible for them. What happens to the spirit of a man who can permit himself to do such things to other men? What happens to his judgment, his capacity for decency and sympathy, his power to reason? To such questions it may be replied that war itself in all its forms is evil, that if we require some men to kill other men, limited and controlled physical pain may actually be more humane, especially if many lives can be spared thereby. Again, it is said that terror and torture are terms which are rather relative in their meaning: they are not absolutely separable from all other forms of oppression, including some which do not require physical force, and there are wide cultural

variations in judging what actually constitutes cruel and inhuman treatment.

Perhaps it is well for Americans to remember that, as people "advanced" in educational and religious development, they found it possible to rationalize area bombing and then atomic bombing and that they need to show some restraint in condemning the qualities of warfare in the developing countries. It is also fatuous to assume that one nation can reform another by moral exhortation. Perhaps the most that can be expected in some cases is an appeal to national or revolutionary self-interest in not antagonizing the populace or outside opinion—which is to say, to put the problem not solely in moral or legal terms but to put it in an effective political context.

It is a cardinal principle of political realists, as well as of traditional moral philosophy, that there must be a balance between commitments and resources, between power and obligation. An issue of the profoundest import is thus raised for political ethics: how much of a risk of failure can a government tolerate? Can it ever justify a policy which seems to have little if any prospect of success? . . .

At the level of guerrilla warfare, the Vietcong had very nearly triumphed in the spring of 1965—a near-triumph in proportion to the spiritual and political weakness of the Saigon regime. Massive escalation of United States commitments provided a

temporary reprieve, a belated opportunity to meet the revolutionary requirements of an outraged and disinherited South Vietnamese people who have never been given an effective voice in the government which was supposed to represent them. But the United States cannot indefinitely compensate for political failure with military force which may make ultimate failure more, rather than less, likely. South Vietnam is not ours to "win" or "lose," but we may contribute to its losing itself by an extravagant notion of what we must do to save it. Similarly, our intervention in Santo Domingo, anti-Communist though it was in its inspiration, was a bonanza to Communists themselves, both on that island and throughout Latin America.

There is a fateful new paradox in American power in the nuclear age. As our military capabilities have gained at a dizzying pace, our *political* capabilities have declined and will perhaps continue to do so. The same is true for the Soviet Union. As our power to destroy has multiplied, our capacity to create a world in our own image has diminished. It is more true now than ever before that military power cannot simply be converted into political power—that indeed, by an ironic development which is dramatized most vividly in the Third World itself, the moralist's natural skepticism about military force has become at last the ally of political prudence.

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