

worldview

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AMERICANS AT WAR

What was, yesterday, the insight of a few is rapidly becoming the possession of many: there is a real and intimate relation between the war in Vietnam and the war which found its bloodiest expression in the riots that exploded across the country this summer. A few people have been insisting upon this relation for years, refusing even to distinguish the civil rights movement from the peace movement and grouping both under the overarching term, The Movement. Some few others have questioned the official assurances that more American bullets abroad will not mean less butter at home.

Now these few people, whose voices went largely unheard, have such respectable company as Bishop Fulton J. Sheen of Rochester — who startled many of his admirers recently by calling for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam — Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and Senator J. William Fulbright. Speaking to the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, Senator Kennedy agreed with those who see a relation between the war and city problems and said that the violence in which the U.S. is engaged as a nation must affect the individual. "If we as a nation say that it is justified in killing thousands and thousands of people 12,000 miles from our own country, then it becomes a rather more acceptable instrument for change within the United States itself." And he further asserted that the war in Vietnam is draining off resources that otherwise would have been pumped into the cities.

The most developed and thoughtful expression of the relation between the two conflicts came from the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Speaking at a meeting of the American Bar Association, Senator Fulbright said, "I believe that the two wars have something to do with each other, not in the direct, tangibly causal way that bureaucrats require as proof of a connection between two things, but in a subtler moral and qualitative way that is no less real for being intangible." And he went on to give an example of what he meant: "Anxiety about war does not breed compassion for one's neighbors nor do constant reminders of the cheapness of life abroad strengthen our faith in its sanctity at home. In these ways the war in Vietnam

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is poisoning and brutalizing our domestic life. Psychological incompatibility has proven to be more controlling than financial feasibility; and the Great Society has become a sick society.”

Not all will agree with Senator Fulbright's analysis, and what he terms the intangible many will regard only as airy speculation. But those who dismiss the intangible of which he speaks seem to be those who are most puzzled by the riots, their cause and their unfound cure, and who now seek answers in statistics compiled by investigating teams.

Even those who would agree that the relation between Vietnam and Detroit is that described

by Senator Fulbright need not, however, arrive at his judgment of the war in Vietnam. It is, after all, possible to admit that the cost of the war in Vietnam is high; that it demands much in terms of life, intelligence, money, and resources; that its impact on our own society is deleterious — it is possible to admit all this and yet say that it is a cost we must, as a nation, be prepared to bear. But in considering, or reconsidering, our attitudes toward the war in Vietnam what we should not be able to do is to exclude from our calculations the impact of that war on our society and the disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged members of our society. J.F.

in the magazines

In the city of Dearborn, Michigan, the “only community to have held a referendum on the Vietnam war thus far,” 41% of those who cast their ballots answered “yes” to the question “Are you in favor of an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of United States Troops from Vietnam so Vietnamese people can settle their own problems?”

As reported by Harlan Hahn and Albert Sugarman (*War/Peace Report*, May), who conducted interviews with a cross-section of Dearborn residents, “the outcome of the vote represented more than a simple response to the referendum question. Significantly, a small working class neighborhood in the shadow of the main Ford plant was the only area of the city that cast a majority vote in favor of an immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. Conversations with a large number of Dearborn residents revealed a striking contrast between relatively high status residents whose opinions were shaped by ideological considerations and lower status voters who took a highly personal approach to the question. The differences between upper middle class and lower class people were reflected both in their voting on the question and in their attitudes toward democratic processes such as a referendum in the shaping of U.S. military policy.”

The authors assert that “in most American communities probably few legal barriers exist that would prevent the holding of local referendums on questions of war and peace. In all three Michigan urban areas,

city attorneys advised that the submission of such issues to the electorate was legally permissible. A last-minute effort in the federal courts to obtain an injunction to prevent the Dearborn referendum was unsuccessful.”

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“Betrayal” is one among *A Catalog of Sins* with which William F. May deals in a forthcoming book, a portion of which is reprinted in the Spring issue of *Cross Currents*. Here May offers an examination of the theological understanding of treason; and when he relates this spiritual problem to American life, he finds a “tension between social structure and social style.”

First, “men owe their very existence and well-being to God. Apart from him, they would vanish into nothing. The creature belongs wholly to God and to God alone. The protection that God offers, moreover, is not a general sort of protection proffered from a distance. In redeeming men, he shared the very substance of his life with them in the person of his son. He extended himself toward men in the way that no country could afford to: he died for them. This fact is touchingly clear in the rites attendant to a military funeral. The casket of a soldier is draped with his country's flag, but when the coffin is about to be lowered into the ground, the flag is neatly folded and withdrawn. At the last moment, if you will, it betrays