

in the magazines

In the forefront once again, the issue of conscription. Says *The New Republic* of President Nixon's draft reform proposals (May 31):

"Random selection is an advance over a system that has allowed individual draft boards idiosyncratically to draft or exempt graduate students and Peace Corps volunteers; defer all manner of workers in medical, defense and religious jobs; draft disproportionate numbers of poor, rural, uneducated whites and blacks while sparing affluent, better educated men; and decide for good reason or none who stays or goes.

"The principal lapse in Mr. Nixon's proposal is his failure, yet, to face squarely the matter of exemptions. He has directed the National Security Council and General Hershey 'to conduct a thorough review of our guidelines, standards and procedures for deferments and exemptions, and to report their findings to me by December 1, 1969.' As Burke Marshall suggested last week, 'the lottery has for many become synonymous with reform; but the real key is the matter of deferments, exemptions and the discretion boards have in determining whom to draft.' The President has said nothing about exemptions for sole surviving sons, fathers, hardship cases, conscientious objectors, farm boys, or any of the other categories of men who now lay claim to exemption. If too many men are excluded from the lottery draw, there will be no more equity in a lottery than in the human judgment of draft boards. . . .

"Drawing names from a fishbowl or from the run of a computer, even when done within the framework of existing boards, is mechanistic and impersonal, no doubt. But with exemptions held in check, it is a fairer selection system than the present one."

A "Congressional Conference on the Military Budget and National Priorities," sponsored by members of both Houses, met March 28 and 29 on Capitol Hill. In attendance and actively participating were Democrats and Republicans; "some who have abandoned all trust in the conventional politics of the two-party system"; scientists and scholars who have counseled past Administrations; and "former officials who have enjoyed the confidence of Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, or Kennedy." Although press and public were barred from the discussions, an edited transcript of the proceedings was solicited by *The Progressive*, and appears in the magazine's June issue with an introduction prepared by ten Senators and Representatives. The editors of *The Progressive* consider the exchange an "historic dialogue," their estimate "based not only on the urgency of the issues discussed, the prominence of the participants and the special expertise they brought to their deliberations; or the eminence of the

auspices under which the Conference was held," but on "the fact that the Conference signaled and symbolized a momentous change that is taking place in America — a widespread revulsion against war, the instruments of war, the constant threat of war, all of which cast such a hideous pall over our nation and the world."

It is in the area of *action* that "the persisting lack of identity of the Christian-Left position becomes most apparent," Phil Beisly asserts, and "such a failure is manifest in our ambiguous attitude towards violence" (*Slant*, March, 1969). He attempts no "answer" but shows "the challenge it represents if the thinking is to be carried through consistently." Thus — in part:

"Any occasion of revolutionary violence must achieve the same degree of sophistication in what it exposes and points to as the critique which preceded it, and this demands in the revolutionary movement a comparably greater comprehensiveness in appreciating the way that understanding functions in the social processes. This is the key area which makes possible greater effectiveness on the level of praxis and, throwing back from this and in turning modifying it, a thorough work of liberating self-criticism. 'Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.' Failure to conceive revolutionary action in this way is the surest means of capitulating to capitalist irrationalism, the surest way of committing suicide as a revolutionary, since it is to desert the consistent exercise of rationality which brought into existence and defined the previous underlying radical critique.

"Such revolutionary activity will be violence in a real sense, since it not only opposes present structures but implies alternatives to them. It is the conviction of the real possibility of alternatives which threatens capitalism. It will not be a door-mat type of pacifism, but will pass the crucial test of connecting with the real issues of a situation. Uncritical violence expresses only the frustration of understanding; critically conscious violence expresses what understanding has been able to grasp and affirm of future possibilities. Its success is relative to the degree that future possibilities can be expressed at all in a capitalist situation. The degree to which a revolutionary language, in the widest sense, is achieved, this is the degree to which the revolution is already being achieved.

"Human understanding does not exist on an ethereal level like the cartesian ghost in the machine . . . Un-
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Understanding is incarnated into life, and the meaning on which it feeds, its dialectical opposite, is embodied meaning. The way that things *are* their meanings is the way that the world is meaningful; the way that things are not their meanings is the way that world is still only potentially meaningful, at present irrational. . . . Critically conscious revolutionary activity is such a process of understanding in an explicitly social context A radical movement justifies calling itself a movement by being a movement of understanding in society, progressing from frustration to a grasp of a fully humanized meaningful world. Understanding, itself a social process, is the way towards greater sociability. So revolutionary activity is another name for a self-awareness and self-criticism in society.

“Increasing grasp of meaning, progress towards a more human society, is a movement towards absolute meaning; absolute, that is, in terms of the context where this process takes place and where its nature is defined, the only terms which are meaningful. Absolute meaning is a definition of God. Hence the religiously revolutionary declaration, by the movement claiming to have experienced in some way the incarnation of this, that God is to be found in the fully human. The significance of this declaration for the revolutionary movement generally is the implied possibility of more effective action through greater self-awareness, a more fully integrated revolutionary consciousness. The question of the uniqueness of this particular incarnation is the question of the kind of difference this makes to the radical movement (and the order of priority must be seen in this way). Part of the answer to this question is the attainment of greater explicitation, but, since explicitation is not divorced from activity but a correlative of it, the answer is reached, finally, from a position of engagement within the whole revolutionary process, not from the theological sideline. It is from such a position that one begins to discover what Christ meant when he talked about the kingdom of heaven being taken by force.”

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What reaction in the USSR to campus unrest in the United States? From *America* magazine (May 17) comes the intelligence that the Soviet press has carried “almost no mention of our U.S. campus disorders.” And, *America* adds, “since nothing is left to chance in Soviet news coverage, one begins to wonder what the silence means. Apart from student protests against Vietnam or the ROTC, Russian citizens have been able to learn little of what has been headline news here.”

But “an exception recently appeared in a journal of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and it amounted to a ‘tut-tut.’ The author attributed the student movement to political inexperience and judged it to be marred by a ‘romantic and irrational character.’ Even worse, signs appear of ‘tendentious theories,’ meaning anarchism, ultra-leftism and the ‘demagogy of Maoism’ with its extremism.”

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A view of international priorities in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (May 29): “The five-year-old who preferred the Lucy Show to Apollo in mid-flight on television had something of that down-to-earth simple logic which is one of the enviable qualities of the child. Priorities are rational in the innocent mind, but they do not survive uncorrupted in the adult. That same child will quite probably find himself climbing mountains the hard and dangerous way simply because it is hard and dangerous. That, of course, is the much hackneyed justification for putting a man on the moon — because it is there, like Everest, and the North Pole and the South Pole, and source of the Amazon. Hackneyed and sentimentalized though this may be, it is true that one of the distinctive qualities of man is to attempt the seemingly unattainable and attain it. That is what makes men godlike, as we suppose. We are masters of our environment. Or we can be when we try.

“What remains in doubt is whether we try the right thing, or the right thing first. To contrast the Apollo mission with the ghettos of the American cities is trite. Yet it does lead to the conclusion that to organize a lunar expedition is perhaps easier than to grapple with poverty. When President Kennedy set the time limit of this decade for a landing on the moon he prescribed an exact, defined target. Poverty is diffuse, not exactly definable. So, while the graphs of technological progress soar upwards, some parts of the world are getting poorer. What is missing in the areas of neglect in human affairs is the precise target, the purposeful planning, the rational priorities

“It would be a mistake, though, to take an excessively pessimistic view of our choice of priorities. The so-called spin-off from extravagant ventures might never have been obtained otherwise. There is a real prospect now of an agricultural revolution in some of the developing countries, thanks to the breeding of new strains of grain in nuclear research stations. The original stimulus, nevertheless, was the search for nuclear weapons. So too the space programs have already yielded vastly better communications, new ways of predicting the weather, and new possibilities for exploration of the resources of the remoter parts of the world. Whether, after all that, we shall be better and happier people is still — to some extent at least — a matter for rational choice.”

PAMPHILUS