

# Correspondence

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## Christian Realism

To the Editors: The reassessments of neo-orthodox "Realism" in your June issue brought to mind the debate carried on against Reinhold Niebuhr by his leading Christian pacifist contemporary, A. J. Muste. Muste's position was one of Quaker and liberal Protestant idealism infused with Gandhian revolutionism, and though not the theological heavyweight that Niebuhr was, his political astuteness and pacifist commitment lent themselves to a formidable critique of Niebuhr's "Realism." Two of these articles of Muste's are contained in Nat Hentoff's *The Essays of A. J. Muste* (Indianapolis, 1967). Muste called Christian Realism a "theology of Despair" and upbraided Niebuhr for proclaiming a fatalistic emphasis on the hopelessness of Man's estate. Referring to Niebuhr, he wrote: "Though he recognizes love as a sort of ultimate, in practice he does not accept Martin Buber's counsel [an oft-repeated reference of Muste's] that, difficult as it may be, our task is precisely to 'drive the plowshare of the normative principle'—i.e., love—into the hard soil of political reality." I think A. J. would have been pleased to see Charles McCulloch's article "Up to Our Steeples in Realism."

Joseph McCarty  
*Milwaukee, Wis.*

## Re: Ziken Mizuto

To the Editors: Peter Berger pricks out an interesting new contour for the future in "Projekt Wassertor" (*Worldview*, July, 1973). The whole thing was devised by the multinational corporations which control our government, and are in turn controlled by the West German tourist industry, in order to create interest

and make Washington an exciting place for tourists to visit. Our destiny, he concludes, is no longer to be the world's policeman but its entertainer.

But in fact Watergate is the penultimate domino, planned and executed by the giant trading companies—Mitsubishi, Tokyomenka, et al.—which lined us up, all in a row, so that, at the end, only Superdomino will remain standing. Already advance parties of these rival organizations are jockeying for position at either coast; the real crisis will come when vast hordes of German and Japanese "tourists" confront each other at mid-continent.

Our destiny, it would seem, is to be neither policeman nor entertainer. The North American Continent, after centuries of isolation, will be the arena for the final face-off between the victors of World War II. And Neuhaus was right! Our own development will follow the Peruvian model—simply directing traffic and providing uniformed doormen for the contending soldiery.

Malcolm Monroe  
*White Plains, N.Y.*

To the Editors: The United States, pre-Watergate, was just not sufficiently *interesting* for tourists, says Peter Berger. From out left off the American political spectrum, however, Nixon-watching has always been interesting, if ambiguous. Outrage frustrated, commingled with a perverse and gossipy pleasure at so classic a specimen of human sinfulness.

Now, in the eerie off-color of Watergate, what was ambiguous becomes paradoxical and outright contradictory. Fascination with Nixon's left profile is both exciting

and depressing. I for one am enjoying reading the newspapers again. It is frankly exciting to see in establishment headlines what was formerly restricted to the underground press. But it is equally depressing to see in living color, to hear for deadly hours of dull, monotonous droning, the ghastly human waste from this malignant corruption. Watergate is at once therapeutic and frustrating. It transposes the decadence of American public life into symbols that can outrage consensus Americans.

But what are we outraged at? Petty burglary, gossipy snooping, low-level political harassment? And at whom? "The White House," "at that point in time" (whoever and whatever that is)? But what of the gross outrages—Christmas bombings, ITT-CIA's Chilean counterrevolution, the grain deal, rape of the Constitution, systematic extortion of individual liberties—of which Watergate is but a sensational symptom?

There is a heartening and yet terrifying paradox in Watergate. Is it not encouraging that little men, whether motivated by good intentions, like Ellsberg, or by self-interest like McCord, can bring this massive, world-encompassing, self-generated madness to a halt?

And it is both pleasant and sobering at the same time. I for one am enjoying indulgence in righteous indignation. We on the Left have been listed, manipulated, spied upon and bullied, and everyone is at least a little disturbed. Having myself lived on the left fringe of North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Connecticut, there is an obvious and overdue pleasure at being championed by Ervin, Baker, Talmadge and Weicker.

We have heard rumblings among those on the Left that the last national Presidential campaign finally proved the incompatibility of moral concerns and American politics. Nonsense! The wake from Watergate proves them indissoluble. I am bolstered in this conviction.

Yet the abysmal amorality of these Watergatians, their droning recitation  
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theory with the practice of an authentically Russian revolutionary movement." There is a twin theme throughout all of this—that nationalism and national character transcend and inevitably modify socialism and all other revolutionary aims, and that a posture of historically chastened resignation must never cause us to lose hope altogether. Thus, in "From the Finland Station," Lichtheim combines the themes in his final sentences. "Spain ruined itself for the sake of the Counter Reformation, Turkey for Islam, Germany for the myth of the Nordic Race. Russia might just conceivably ruin itself for the sake of Communism. One must hope that it will not."

The noble themes of resignation and hope combined with the haunting dilemmas and contradictions of nationalism and socialism are best presented in Lichtheim's discussion of "Socialism and the Jews," originally published in *Dissent* in summer, 1968. In a brilliant analysis of the French Left, Lichtheim indicates the convulsions that produced anti-Semitism among the radical sects. The very emancipation of the Jews in 1793 imposed a civic dilemma on the French nation and the revolutionary parties. Could Jewish group life be tolerated within the framework of general citizenship? And could antireligious radicals seeking the overthrow of a bourgeois society also justify the preservation of ethnic, cultural and religious bodies? A legion of excuses and justifications were mounted to satisfy the excruciating pressures for a single, theoretically sound answer. As Lichtheim forcefully concedes, "It was part of the achievement of liberalism that it had for so long protected an unpopular minority from the accumulated resentments surrounding it." But even liberalism failed in the period of the Holocaust.

Lichtheim believes that anti-Semitism is no longer a major threat to democracy and that it has lost its earlier appeal to elements in the socialist movement. But, he warns, "the problems from which it arose still await a solution." One of those "problems" developed when, after

bourgeois society had failed to transform itself into the next inevitable phase dictated by history's ineluctable promise, it became popular among socialists to blame the Jews. However, Lichtheim's hopes for the establishment of a society that will achieve socialist humanist aims and permit the cultural freedom of Jews and other minorities are combined with a certain foreboding. In "A French View of Israel," a sympathetic review of Georges Friedmann's *The End of the Jewish People?*, Lichtheim notes that the fundamental fact about Israel "is the radical incompatibility of its daily life with the aspirations of the Zionist movement from which it was born." "Like communism in Russia," he continues, "Zionism has become a hollow shell, the ideological remnant of a buried East European past." But if this is true, what will be the future status of those Jews still in the diaspora? To this question, which haunts Lichtheim's essays on the subject, there is no definite answer.

Lichtheim's contribution is in the unflinching scholarship that he insisted must chasten any Marxist approach to history or sociology. His lasting legacy is in the questions he raised, questions that often go to the heart of Western Civilization's dilemmas.

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#### CONTRIBUTORS

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## Correspondence

(from p. 2)

tion of what men in saner climates would term demonic crimes, leaves doubt that Americans are human enough for politics.

In referring to us and our comic-pathetic tactics against the system, Jeb Magruder said, in an astonishing paraphrase of the New Left slogan: "We didn't believe the system could work against them." Does this mean that the Watergations have come round to our way of thinking? Or does it mean that we are all playing out a meaningless power game upon a structure in which no one believes?

I had a dream the other morning, after a night of tube-taped Watergate and wrenching through the contradictions. In my dream I was backing away from Pragmatica, a mythical cosmos of which I have dreamed before, when I bumped into three creeping figures backing round from the other side. I turned into a mutual embrace with . . . Sam Ervin, Howard Baker and Herman Tamadge.

"What the hell are you doing here?" said I, a bit disoriented.

Ervin replied, not a bit disoriented, "A-a-as the Scripture says, 'the lion shall lie down with the lamb.'"

George Williamson, Jr.  
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To the Editors: The spectacle of, first, James McCord and, then, Jeb Magruder "explaining" their participation in an almost endless series of illegal, immoral and improper actions as motivated by the law-breaking of the antiwar movement has set free a proud and bitter memory. On a cold December day in 1968 I watched a small group of numbed students, a few young professors and a minister laboriously, awkwardly, conduct an elaborate, symbolic obstruction of employment

recruiting by the Dow Chemical Company on the campus of the University of Connecticut at Storrs. After extensive negotiations with a cordon of riot-helmeted state troopers surrounding the warming hut of the university skating rink, which had been selected for recruiting interviews because of its isolation and defensibility, one by one the demonstrators stepped through the cordon, identified themselves to police officers inside the hut, and proceeded quietly to a waiting police bus.

Though I spent the next two years attempting to defend these and other members of the university community from the wrath of their colleagues, the administration, the trustees and state legislators, and though I earned the reputation as a prime troublemaker and have barely kept my job, I still feel guilty over my own reluctance to join those brave people in their perilous journey.

It is an obscenity to equate the actions of high government and political officials—armed with the full might of an overblown Presidency and executive branch, bankrolled by the financial élite of business and industry, defended by the best legal talent available and economically secure because of government office, private employment and payments of hush money collected for legitimate campaign uses—with a ragtag bunch of semi-impoverished students and untenured professors, passing the hat to pay for legal fees or soliciting free legal services from law professors with no background in criminal matters.

Certainly disruptions of lawful government and university func-

tions, advocacy of draft resistance and public and private destruction of draft records and draft cards and the like raise the profoundest questions of political and personal morality. Final judgment of the propriety of morally motivated, illegal actions would require a minute examination of the circumstances and the actual motivations of the alleged wrongdoers. But illegal acts by government officials specifically sworn and paid to enforce the law, and by attorneys with their special relationship to the law, cannot be equated with those committed by private persons who are bound solely by their duties as citizens.

The notion of government officials and those closely allied with such officials raising civil disobedience arguments is curious, to say the least. Certainly those who command the vast power of the State must be held to the highest standards of conduct. Not only is it infinitely easier for government officials to implement their illegal plans—Kissinger need only ask for wiretaps, and the CIA and FBI are arsenals of the most sophisticated “burglar tools”—but it is extremely difficult to catch them at it. The uncovering of the Watergate operation was a fluke. If only someone had thought to remove the tape from the basement door we might never have known how close to a police state we had come. And even after the capture of underlings the Administration might have brazened it out if James McCord’s nineteen years of loyal service to the CIA had not induced outrage at the attempts to lay this “entire mess” at his former employer’s door.

We have created a world where huge, powerful governments seem unavoidable. Moreover, even in allegedly democratic societies, it is far too easy for the party in power to use its control of the executive branch to maintain that power. To considerable extent we must trust the men we choose for high office to conduct themselves in accordance with the limitations set down in the Constitution, the statutes and accepted political mores. Should they betray that trust, they must be exposed and removed from power, not for the sake of punishment, but to deter others. Admittedly this is a thin shield, but, together with a free press and active Congress, it is the only one we have. That, plus the ever more attenuated moral integrity of those who choose to accept public power.

William Sloane Coffin fought against the war in Vietnam publicly and nonviolently. He fought it because he deemed our killing of Southeast Asians as murder. Those responsible for the deaths resulting from the destruction of a building at the University of Wisconsin also committed murder. Magruder and McCord are free to measure their actions by the standards of the Weathermen. But I’ll be damned if I will let them garb themselves in Bill Coffin’s robes or the Levis of the shivering group that fearfully and bravely defied the power structure in front of that cold hut in Storrs.

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