

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHINA. "O.K., we've talked about the violation of human rights in South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand, Cambodia, and even Japan. Now, let's move on to China."

—"To China? You've gotta be kidding. China!"

—"No, I'm not kidding. Why not China?"

—"Why, it's...it's...it's so big."

And so it is. The idea of coping with the issue of human rights in China is one that boggles the mind, depresses the spirit, and disconcerts the diplomatic bureaucrats. But if we are going to take the issue of human rights seriously, we can hardly ignore approximately one-fourth of the human race. And there is an organization that is not overcome by the challenge. The Society for the Protection of East Asians' Human Rights (SPEAHR) is a nonpartisan international organization that seeks to encourage respect for human rights in such areas as China, Korea, and Taiwan and to publicize abroad the state of human rights there. SPEAHR says that it "takes no position respecting the legitimacy of geo-political boundaries."

Regular membership in SPEAHR is \$25 per year, for which one receives regular information about human rights in all parts of Asia. For membership in or for additional information about the organization write to SPEAHR, Box 1212, Cathedral Station, New York, N.Y. 10025.

THE SLIPPERY OIL ISSUE. As if offering some good pre-Christmas news, the *Wall Street Journal* published a short article on December 23 last that suggested the present oversupply of oil around the world may well last through the middle of the Eighties. That at least is the opinion of Arnold E. Safer, an economist at Irving Trust Co. and an expert in appraising energy trends. The reasoned faith in this oversupply rests on new reserves and the potential of new discoveries, conservation, a sluggish world economy, and higher oil prices. If that estimate is sound—and it is supported by other experts—the news is indeed good news. It gives the U.S. and the rest of the world time to decide and act on a policy. So far the record of the United States is dismal. President Carter's clarion call for an assault on the energy problem seems increasingly like a sour note that everyone wants to forget. The way in which the energy issue has been presented to the American people has produced interest, skepticism, confusion, and finally boredom. We now have a chance to reverse that path and maybe even skip a step or two.

DISARMAMENT, THE CHURCHES, AND PUBLIC OPINION. That's not quite the title of a fine little (ten pages) pamphlet that we encountered recently, but it comes close. The pamphlet is based on lectures by Alan Geyer, a regular contributor to

Worldview, and published by the center of Theology and Public Policy of which Geyer is executive director. We were particularly struck by a couple of paragraphs that bear on the comments made in the last issue of this journal by Richard Neuhaus and Homer Jack. Herewith the paragraphs:

...let me propose three vital functions—three morally imperative functions—which public opinion ought to perform in relation to disarmament: (1) to generate and sustain the *political will* to achieve substantial and increasing disarmament; (2) to be *adequately informed* so that propaganda distortions (so common in this field!) may be resisted and overcome; and (3) to understand the *legitimate security* concerns of people and their government—which means viewing disarmament as a process which can and must increase real security.

It may be too much to expect the general public to perform all these functions well. But it is not too much to ask of opinion leaders in NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), including the churches, along with education and the media. If they don't, nobody else will.

Right on, Alan Geyer, right on.

RCDA-USSR-NCC-HR. To backtrack along alphabet lane, HR is our abbreviation for Human Rights, with which this magazine has long been concerned. NCC is the National Council of Churches, with which some people think we are too concerned. USSR is the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with which we're all concerned. And RCDA is an organization concerned with Religion in Communist-Dominated Areas.

With that straight, we can now say intelligibly that RCDA recently issued a news release informing us that NCC has expressed deep interest in HR in USSR. More specifically, the governing board of NCC unanimously passed a resolution on human rights and religious and political suppression in the Soviet Union. It appealed to President Brezhnev to release, in the spirit of Helsinki, "all imprisoned Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Moslems, Orthodox and other believers as well as political dissenters." It went on to ask religious communities in the USA to pray and act for "all prisoners of conscience in the USSR and all other countries under Soviet domination, and for all victims of oppression and by whomever they are being persecuted."

NCC, our prayers are with yours on this occasion.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS LITERACY. A while back *Newsweek* slipped a colorful little promotion piece into our newspaper. "How much are you missing by not reading *Newsweek*?" blared the lead, immediately putting us on the defensive. To find out what we've missed we were urged to take a five-

minute quiz consisting of twenty questions. Did we know that "Star Wars" had grossed \$100 million? Did we know that Kissinger, Billy Carter, Gerald Ford, and Bruce Jenner all have their dogs signed with agents? Did we know there are 25-30 million soap opera addicts in this country? Did we know that narcotics agents located restaurants in Marseilles by using a heroin-sniffing device? No, we did not know any of these things. The awareness of such ignorance tends to inhibit one from saying anything at all about the great questions of the day. We fight the inhibition.

A KIT ON HR. Questions flow irregularly into the mailbox of AMM (your humble servant, Abraham Martin Murray) asking if there is a single volume on Human Rights that provides essential information about the main issues and about organizations that are doing something about the issues. There is, alas, no perfect volume that we can recommend. But there is a very good one. (We know it's not perfect because it looks as if it were put together on an all-too-scanty budget. And besides, when it mentions journals concerned with Human Rights, it finds room for *Time* magazine but not—you guessed it, not *Worldview*.) Nevertheless, veteran activist Roger Baldwin says of this volume that "as a source book for all up-to-date information on the world-wide human rights goals and procedures, the kit produced by the World Without War Council tells it all." A high recommendation. To order write to World Without War Bookstore, 67 East Madison Street, Suite 1417, Chicago, Illinois 60603. Price is \$3 per copy, five or more 40 per cent off.

INDOCHINA. It won't let us go. However much many Americans would like to forget it, or wrap it in another simplistic theory, Indochina continues to assert itself into our consciousness in all its troubling particulars. Only the perverse can take joy in the knowledge that Cambodia and Vietnam are now fighting each other. Or that China has resumed its usual hostile posture toward Vietnam. But just as certainly, the fact of that fighting, that hostility cannot be overlooked in our present assessments of the area and its future. Ancient hostilities have reasserted themselves, nationalism assumes more importance than ideology, and the domino theory has collapsed before the dominoes themselves.

In terms of U.S. policy that part of the world is reshaping itself—and in ways over which the U.S. has little or no control. Among the items over which the U.S. has some control, and responsibility, is the question of Vietnam refugees. The reports from Indochina indicate that the stream of refugees continues, in spite of grave, even dangerous obstacles. The refugees who are leaving now have varied backgrounds, although most of them are of humble origins. What they have in common is some experience of present Vietnam and a desire to leave it. The U.S. bears a high degree of responsibility for those "boat people," who, having depended upon U.S.

policies for years, fled Vietnam at the conclusion of the war. The continuing flight of refugees presents a continuing problem to the U.S. and to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Like other problems related to Indochina, it is serious, painful, and complicated.

THE "WILMINGTON TEN"—TIME FOR FEDERAL ACTION. The "Wilmington Ten" are the new Amnesty International "Political Prisoners of the Month." Their leader, the Reverend Benjamin Chavis, has become America's best-known political prisoner around the world.

Chavis, an official of the United Church of Christ and once head of its Commission for Racial Justice, went to North Carolina to do civil rights work. As a result of the then fierce racial tensions in the state, he was convicted with nine others of involvement in the firebombing of a local grocery in 1971. Chavis and the others vehemently deny the charge, and Chavis has no prior record of violence. The prosecution witnesses have since recanted their testimony (and one has re-recanted) in a trial marked by irregularities such as gifts to a witness by the prosecutor.

In late January, North Carolina Governor James Hunt reduced sentences enough to make eight eligible for parole this year. (A ninth, the only white, has already been paroled.) Chavis will not be paroled until 1980. Hunt "reduced" Chavis's sentence from 25-29 years to 17-21 years—for a first offense!

The time is long overdue for federal action, principally because of the strong possibility that the injustice of long-term wrongful imprisonment has been done, but also because the Carter administration's championship of human rights around the globe makes federal action for justice at home all the more compelling.

There has not yet been a full-scale Justice Department inquiry into possible violations of civil rights in the jailing of the Wilmington Ten.

In a news conference broadcast nationally President Carter told syndicated columnist Mary McGrory that he has not communicated with the governor of North Carolina expressing concern for the Ten.

If Benjamin Chavis were the best-known political prisoner in the Soviet Union, would the president communicate concern to that government?

Anatoly Shcharansky is the most widely publicized Soviet political detainee, and Jimmy Carter has expressed himself on Shcharansky's behalf.

Given North Carolina political realities, helping Ben Chavis won't be easy, but astutely managed presidential interest in this human rights case is needed.

Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.