

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

ALL THE VIEWS FIT TO PRINT ON PAGE ONE. The lead column on the *New York Times* front page of June 20, written by Bernard Gwertzman, was headed "Vance Urges Effort by U.S. and Russians to Reduce Tensions." That column, it should be remembered, is reserved for hard news, as distinct from sections given to opinion and analysis. In his story Mr. Gwertzman highlights "apparent differences in approach" between Vance and Brzezinski, observes that Vance's remarks were "couched in less acerbic language" than the "bitter comments of Mr. Brzezinski and Mr. Carter," and alludes to the "ambiguity" in Carter's Annapolis speech a few weeks earlier. He implies that Mr. Vance is to be commended for his "less harsh" and "more restrained approach." He mentions that Vance criticized the press for exaggerating the administration's response to the difficulties in Zaire and then quickly adds, in defense of the media: "The interest of the press in the question arose because of accusations made by Mr. Carter and other spokesmen holding the Cubans responsible for the invasion." All this, please note, in the lead "news" story of the day. (Part of what Vance actually said before the House Committee was printed on page 12.) In the page-one story Gwertzman observes that Vance's testimony "seems sure to lead to speculation" about ongoing differences between him and Brzezinski. *Lead to speculation?* For the most part, Gwertzman's story is speculation in the service of provoking further speculation.

Somewhere in his memoirs Malcolm Muggeridge, himself a journalist of note, describes journalists as a school of hungry sharks following a passenger liner, eagerly waiting for someone to fall or get knocked overboard. The imagery fits the way in which much of the press has been headlining every nuance of difference in the statements of Carter, Vance, and Brzezinski. As is necessary in diplomacy, there are of course different tones for different purposes; sometimes "soft," sometimes "hard," sometimes conciliatory, sometimes unyielding. Perhaps journalists are overcompensating now for the way, during his early years, they gushed over the "genius" of Kissinger. Then the employment of different tones for different purposes was described, not as ambiguity or confusion, but as "brilliant orchestration."

DEATH AND FALSEHOOD IN ADVERTISING. Leo Cherne's article on Cambodia in this issue draws parallels with what happened in Nazi Germa-

ny. To some readers the comparison may seem exaggerated, to others it may seem offensive. But Cherne, we believe, makes his point effectively. To be sure, the singularity of the Holocaust must be preserved. Because it has a unique bearing on Jewish-Christian relations and on the future of religious pluralism in our world. And because each assault upon humanity, indeed each death, must be inscribed with unremitting singularity. That is the great service and great genius of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*; massification, and thus the dulling of our sensibilities, is defied by the sheer detail of individual lives and deaths.

But the commonality of horror must also be underscored. Cherne's parallels between Cambodia and the Third Reich serve that purpose. It finally makes little difference how death advertises itself, whether as fascism or as communism. The refusal to understand this is a grave moral flaw in current discussions of human rights. There are those in this country who acknowledge no enemies to the Right, and thus they remain silent about violations in Chile, Brazil, or South Korea. Others acknowledge no enemies to the Left, and thus two years ago some antiwar leaders refused to join in the protest to Hanoi by peace activists who were concerned (and continue to be concerned) about violations in re-United Vietnam.

Since World War II the most massive violations of human rights have undoubtedly been perpetrated by regimes claiming to be of the Left. That is the simple and alarmingly measurable fact: the number of people killed, imprisoned for political offenses, tortured, forced to emigrate, denied their cultural, intellectual, and religious expression. Put on the one side the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cambodia, and China, and put on the other Brazil, South Korea, Chile, and, yes, even South Africa. In terms of the sheer massiveness of the horror there would seem to be no comparison.

In view of these different scales of magnitude some people are puzzled by the way Amnesty International and other human rights groups make an effort to maintain "ideological balance" in their criticisms of violations. Surely, they say, it is absurd, if not obscene, to put on the same level of outrage Russia's systematic killing of three million in the mining camps of Kolyma (as documented in Robert Conquest's recent book *Kolyma*) and the shooting of sixty-nine blacks at Sharpeville or of eight hundred demonstrators in Soweto. How can one attribute equal status to seven hundred political

prisoners in Chile and 200,000 people imprisoned in the "reeducation camps" of Vietnam? And, of course, to what in the world today should we compare Cambodia?

But Amnesty International and others are right in trying to maintain a balance. There is no balance of magnitude, nor is there a balance in the sense that all offending regimes pose an equal threat to the future of the world. But there is a balance in the lies told and the excuses offered and the labels claimed by such regimes, whether of Right or Left. Apologists for horror advertise "national security" or "building the revolution," but the different slogans cannot disguise their collusion against humanity.

Only by criticizing South Africa when we criticize the Soviet Union can we prevent the human rights issue from being taken captive to simplistic cold warism. Only by criticizing Vietnam when we criticize Argentina can we prevent its being taken captive to the ideologists of "revolutionary necessity." Only by balanced criticism can we expose the lethal false advertising that is the temptation of *all* political systems, and only thus can we preserve a sense of reverence for the singularity of every person, every life, every death.

ON THE MYTH OF NEUTRALITY. Although people are becoming a bit more uneasy about the claim, it is still common for academics and media types to assert that they are "neutral" and "value-free" with respect to topics of controversy. "Just the facts, Ma'am," as Sergeant Joe Friday used to say. The Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., decided to take a look at the way high schools are teaching about American government. More specifically, they invited three critics (Michael Novak, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Anne Crutcher) to examine a widely used textbook, *American Government in Action* by Miriam Resnick and Lillian Nerenberg. The resulting pamphlet, "Values in an American Government Textbook," makes fascinating reading. In a response to their critics Resnick and Nerenberg are unshaken in their belief that they have been as "neutral" as it is possible to be. The critics, we believe, have the better part of the argument. In any case, the exchange very usefully exposes what often remains hidden and makes more explicit the values by which, knowingly or otherwise, we make political decisions.

HOLOCAUST LIBRARY. That is the title of a new series launched by Schocken Books. The first original volume in the series is *Ghetto Diary* by Janusz Korczak who, with two hundred of the orphans for whom he had cared, went to the gas chambers of Treblinka. The series has also reissued in paperback four works of classic or near-classic rank: *The Death Brigade* by Leon Wells; *The Holocaust Kingdom* by Alexander Donat; *Justice in Jerusalem* by Gideon Hausner; and *Their Brothers' Keepers* by Phillip Friedman. Perhaps because we were young at the time and it was the first detailed eye-witness

account of the Holocaust we had read, Donat's *Holocaust Kingdom* has remained for us the single most vivid telling of a story that dare never be forgotten.

The reissue of Friedman's *Their Brothers' Keepers*, first published in 1957, gave us welcome occasion to consider again a part of the story that is too often forgotten. Friedman establishes the record of the many thousands of Christians who—always at the risk and often at the cost of their own lives—protected Jewish brothers and sisters from the Nazi "Final Solution." Friedman was one of those protected. In the areas seized by the Nazis there were approximately 8,300,000 Jews. It is estimated that six million died by lethal devices, disease, or starvation. "It is indeed a miracle," writes Friedman, "that more than two million remained alive. Those surviving were saved by flight, emigration, or evacuation before the arrival of the Germans and the changeable fortunes of war. But at least a million Jews survived in the very crucible of the Nazi hell, the occupied areas." Friedman's book is dedicated to the "small army of valorous men and women who opened their hearts and their homes to a people marked for extinction, defying the invader and death itself."

In the foreword Catholic historian John A. O'Brien notes that these events "show that nineteen centuries of Christian teaching were not without results." But why did so many Christians watch in "stunned silence and agonizing impotence"? O'Brien asks. "Because," he answers, "they could not fight armored tanks and machine guns with bare hands. Such was the predicament of millions who loathed the Nazi creed and all its works." One's initial reaction is to suspect that O'Brien is too easy on those who stood by and did nothing. But then one remembers the danger of presumption in prescribing heroism for others in situations that we have not and, one hopes, will never face. The best word on the heroism recorded by Friedman may have been written by the Jewish writer Sholem Asch:

It is of the highest importance not only to record and recount, both for ourselves and for the future, the evidences of human degradation, but side by side with them to set forth the evidences of human exaltation and nobility. Let the epic of heroic deeds of love, as opposed by those of hatred, of rescue as opposed to destruction, bear equal witness to unborn generations.

On the flood of sin, hatred and blood let loose by Hitler upon the world, there swam a small ark which preserved intact the common heritage of a Judeo-Christian outlook, that outlook which is founded on the double principle of love of God and love of one's fellow men. The demonism of Hitler had sought to overturn and overwhelm it in the floods of hate. It was saved by the heroism of a handful of saints.

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.