

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

THE END OF SUMMER and we were throwing out a number of clippings that had collected in the drawer. One was an invitation to subscribe to a journal that "represents a new approach to political science and the study of leadership," an approach based on psychohistory. Not immediately persuaded that we were to enter new realms of insight and understanding, we had put the invitation aside. Yes, even though a Special Carter Issue represented "an ambitious, scholarly and well-documented attempt to seize the political and psychological essence of a *present* historical moment." Well, most essences are not to sneeze at, and, in the waning days of summer, we looked again at what this journal claimed to offer.

For one, the issue on Jimmy Carter offered a reading of Carter's speeches and documents based on a new technique of *fantasy analysis*. This technique ignores the obvious content of the statements—that is, what most people think they are about—in favor of "metaphors, similes, feeling states, body images and other emotional terms" found in the document. One conclusion: "that the President's statements, like other group communications"—funny, we never thought of Carter as a group before—contain a message that "has to do with body memories stemming from the primary trauma of all our lives: birth." Well, sir! But on to more exciting things. The military overtones of Carter's imagery led this acute fantasy analyst to see that the American people have assigned to Carter the role of war leader and that he "is very likely to lead us into a new war by 1979."

Now we didn't feel good about that, as they say in California. Our first impulse was to start a draft for new speech writers whose metaphors, similes, and feeling states would project a less militaristic image of Carter, one that might save us from that 1979 war. But then we were inspired to think that there were real, objective situations out there that could spark a war, and these situations were worth the attention we might otherwise bestow on the psycho-historical fantastical analysis of Carter's statements. So, with the mildest of regrets, we consigned the invitation to the wastebasket.

CAMBODIA. Other clippings, going back to May, concern Cambodia, a country about which, some maintained, our knowledge was too uncertain to make sound judgments. Few would hold this posi-

tion today. But in mid-May, Daniel Burstein, editor of a Chicago-based Marxist weekly, who had led a group of Western reporters on a visit to Cambodia, reported glowingly about the achievements of that country. The reports of suffering and atrocities, he said, were the result of massive propaganda efforts by the CIA.

Quite naturally the Cambodian leaders were no less ebullient about their accomplishments and no less severe with their critics. On May 15 a note from the Cambodian foreign ministry criticized Britain for taking before the U.N. Commission on Human Rights the record of the Cambodians. According to the note, the British "are still very savage and very barbarous....Millions of English people live in misery with no guarantee of the right to live. What rights has the British government given them, other than the right to be the slaves of English monopoly capitalists, the right to sell one's labor, the right to be unemployed, the right to rob and steal, and the right to become a prostitute?"

So much for objective observation.

HARD PRESSED. Two men who have been widely praised in this country—and in these pages—and who will undoubtedly win high praise again, fell on hard times in the press this summer. Oddly enough, considering their very different backgrounds, the storms aroused by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrew Young swirled around their references to law and the legal system in this country.

Speaking at a Harvard commencement, Solzhenitsyn lashed out at the moral violence, pornography, materialism, and trivialization of life that is abundantly evident in the West. His targets here are well chosen. These evils do exist, and they confound our efforts to deal with them. They are part of the price we pay for freedom, we say ritualistically, piously, and truthfully. But Solzhenitsyn sees it otherwise.

"I have spent all my life under a Communist regime," he said, "and I will tell you that a society without any legal scale is a terrible one indeed. But a society with no other scale but the legal one is not quite worthy of man either." Lest there be any doubt about his judgment and at whom it was directed, he said that if, in the West, "one is right from a legal point of view, nothing more is required, nobody may mention that one could still not be entirely right, and urge self-restraint....Everybody operates at the extreme limit of those legal frames."

Further, "the defense of individual rights has reached such extremes as to make society as a whole defenseless against certain individuals. It is time in the West to defend not so much human rights as human obligations. Destructive and irresponsible freedom has been granted boundless space...."

Solzhenitsyn has earned the right to be taken seriously. This demands that we should neither dismiss nor silently submit to his judgments when, as here, they are questionable. We should instead engage them with the energy they deserve. In this case it demands saying that if we had no other scale but the legal, if everyone operated at the extreme limit of legality, if one could not realistically urge self-restraint, and if society were truly defenseless against individual abuses, Solzhenitsyn would be right. In fact, to the extent that such charges are true, his judgment is merited. But one must go on to say that in this country the legal system itself rests upon and is imbued by moral principles, high among which are respect for the individual person, an acknowledgment of the social good, and the need to protect both. Without such moral principles our system of law could well be a tyranny rather than a source of liberation, but without such principles our system of law would not have come into being.

On the issue of this relation of law and morality we think Solzhenitsyn profoundly wrong. But we cannot stop here, as Solzhenitsyn himself did not stop. He went on to say that "We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life." Not unrelated to his discussion of law, this statement is profoundly true. For his continuing development of this theme as well as for his exposure of a society without an "objective legal scale" we will continue to honor or attend to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Andy Young, you will recall, created a sudden furor by stating that political prisoners existed in places other than the USSR. The United States, he said, had hundreds, maybe thousands, of political prisoners. This statement, which would have ignited a number of lively debates at any time, received high notoreity because of its unfortunate timing—the period of Anatoly Shcharansky's trial and sentencing. Before one can intelligently answer if and how many political prisoners the United States has, one must define "political prisoner." Without engaging in that necessary task (with its tempting invitation to debate) we will accept the description of Aryeh Neier, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, who said that the term should be reserved for those who are persecuted for their stated views: "There are a lot of people imprisoned unjustly, but I can't think of anyone I would call a political prisoner." And then we will assert that people are not jailed and sentenced in this country for monitoring violations of human rights—as they are in the Soviet Union. Any statement that blurs or obscures that fact should itself be buried in obscuri-

ty. It is noted here, not to add to the unseemly fuss about Ambassador Young, but to mark, once again, the abyss that exists between the legal system in this country and the absence of an objective legal system in the USSR.

WORLDVIEW has published within the last five years a number of excellent, highly informative articles on China, written by scholars and by persons who have lived and worked in China in recent years. Now *Commonweal* (August 4) has published a thoughtful article by Tim Brook, who spent two years (1974-76) as a student in the People's Republic of China. Although he notes that there is some evidence to suggest that "folk religion may be far stronger than I, or even my Chinese friends, realize," his own observations lead him to this description of China and religion:

...a nation where a larger and larger sector of the population lives without the overt observance of religion. Buddhism is no longer the force mitigating the violence of the natural world, and in a land of paddy agriculture the floods and droughts of nature can be violent indeed. Taoism is no longer the call of brotherhood against the oppression of the imperial throne. And Christianity has become a limited and private fellowship. Only Islam still flourishes with a public life.

Institutional reform has done away with the social and economic bases on which the traditional religions of China have relied....

Building on his observations, Mr. Brook then hazards a broad speculation about the future of religion in China:

...And somewhere beneath the carapace of urban China the young may still give the old a religious burial. But the trend over the last thirty years is decline. The Cultural Revolution seems to have brought the gods of China to death's door, and I see no one who will call them back. That time, it appears, has passed.

Whatever the validity of his concluding speculation, Mr. Brooks's observations provide another glimpse into what is still relatively unknown territory.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS. Rising paper and postage costs plague all publications. Not unnaturally the editors of this journal have real sympathy with others who struggle against the rising tide. For that reason, among others, we wish the *Christian Science Monitor* well in its efforts to establish an endowment fund to help defray expenses. For several years now it's had an annual deficit of \$5 to \$6 million.

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.