

CENSORSHIP

To the Editors: *Worldview's* associate editor Wilson Carey McWilliams believes, according to his "Long on Error, Short on Truth" (Under Cover, February), that "the case against censorship is not a strong one." I beg to differ.

McWilliams sounds to me very like the late neo-Marxian Herbert Marcuse, who—in a famous (or infamous) 1965 essay entitled "Repressive Tolerance"—said: "...tolerance...cannot protect false words and wrong deeds which demonstrate that they contradict or counteract the possibilities of liberation." McWilliams, like Marcuse, says: "...there may be good reasons for censoring dangerous ideas." But he seems to go beyond Marcuse when he says: "...censorship is sometimes justified, but the justifications must be proved. It is not a matter for private judgments, privately arrived at."

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Surely this is a clear plea for a public, an *official* censor. The doctrine McWilliams is promulgating...seems to go like this: The decision to censor must be a *public* judgment, *publicly* arrived at. The judgment to censor must be based on "proved" justifications.

"Proved" by whom, and for what reason? Will the judgment to censor be an ethical, moral, religious, political, or social one? Or will it be based on pure whim or ulterior motives? I see the need for a full clarification of the term "proved justifications" before even considering the rest of McWilliams's intolerant arguments.

At any rate, the case for censorship is not a strong one—not only in my opinion and that of John Stuart Mill and John Milton, but in the professed and practiced opinions of a great many others, who see the fight against censorship on all levels as central to the basic democratic faith of America. It is more dangerous to the future of democracy to permit public or private censorship—no matter what the so-called "proved justifications"—than to permit unqualified freedom to read, write, speak, listen, and view. The risks of what McWilliams calls "short-term error" are surely not as great as the very high risk of using democratic institutions to remove the keystone of democracy—intellectual freedom.

Putting it very simply, in a nation run by McWilliams's principles, *Worldview* could not be published. It is just too full of dissent from the Establishment, of "dangerous ideas." I, for one, am all for permitting McWilliams to say what he pleases...as long as those who disagree with him, like me, also have their say.

By the way, is your decision to print this letter a "public" or a "private" judgment?

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DEFENSE POLICY

To the Editors: These days I avoid the newspapers. I simply can't bring myself to read about the defense plans of the Reagan Administration, which are, alas, endorsed by most Democrats (including *The New Republic*). Whatever

potential there was for devoting some part of our enormous wealth and productive capacity for social justice, energy independence, and ecological control will be totally eliminated for the foreseeable future. And all this to pursue a defense strategy that is far more likely to decrease, rather than enhance, national security.

The bottom line on defense policy is that we can feel secure only if our adversary calculates the value of human life, more or less, as we do. If Russia actually is prepared to accept loss of life and property ten times higher than those it suffered in World War II, no amount of nuclear and conventional power can protect us. Our experience in Iran provides powerful evidence of the truth of these propositions. A grossly inferior military power is able to kidnap our citizens because we have been convinced that if we tried to release them through military means, their captors would kill the prisoners no matter how much destruction we would wreak upon them.

The hope of any civilized government is that most nations and peoples are not willing to accept unlimited consequences to achieve limited objectives unless their very existence is at stake. Therefore the only sane defense policy is to assume that—unless the Soviets believe that their very existence is threatened—Russian leaders are people whose sensitivity to mass death and destruction does not fundamentally differ from our own. To cite Russian activity in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Angola as credible evidence to the contrary is an absurdity of truly monumental proportion.

Our choice then is to squander our resources on armaments that cannot deter a foe willing to accept millions of deaths of both their people and ours, or to set our deterrent capacity at a level which will assure that the NATO forces, after sustaining the heaviest possible Soviet attack, will still be able to inflict on Russia two or three times the destruction of World War II. Obviously, this level is far below either our current or planned capacity. (None of this applies to forces required to deal with hostile nations other than Russia). If this is insufficient, nothing can save us.

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