

Correspondence

I Was a Prowar Idealist

To the Editors: Re: "The Vietnam War: Is It Time to Forgive and Forget?—Three Views," *Worldview*, January-February. The Vietnam debate will not be resolved until the difference between ends and means is clearly spelled out. As a supporter of that war until the bitter end, I owe a great deal to the antiwar crusade for making me see precisely that difference.

I believed that the war's primary purpose was political and social; that is, it would give the people of Vietnam a democratic alternative that assured their well-being. Nevertheless, I was shocked at the primarily military response of the U.S. Government to the situation. As I saw it, an outside power could never hope to win a war against communism unless the people of South Vietnam were politically, as well as militarily, motivated to fight. Yet American policy seemed to say that military affairs came first, social motivation after.

While I do not mean to devalue the efforts of many valiant American AID and other economic advisors, it is true nevertheless that U.S. policy was aimed overwhelmingly at a military solution, and military means were used to achieve vague and often meaningless political and social ends.

To me, the antiwar movement's greatest contribution was its insistence on pointing out the disproportionate use of military means in a political and social situation. The military means not only ignored the people of Vietnam but, in the end, came to be a symbol of their ultimate unimportance in U.S. thinking. The strategic means became more important than the human ends, and this is the key to understanding the entire movement, and especially William Shawcross's book on Cambodia.

When we search for the reason for this disproportion in the record of the war, one document—it appears in the Pentagon Papers—stands out. This is Undersecretary of Defense John T. McNaughton's spelling out of U.S. aims in Vietnam. In his memo of March 24, 1965, McNaughton wrote:

- "1. U.S. aims:
70%—To avoid humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as guarantor).
20%—To keep South Vietnam territory from Chinese hands.
10%—To permit South Vietnamese people to enjoy a better, freer way of life."

It is this memo, I believe, that condemns the administration people directly involved and aims a clear moral blow at supporters of the war, for the weighting should have been the exact reverse....

What those of us who supported the war must ask ourselves is whether we ever tried to force the government to place the Vietnamese people at the top of our priorities. The truth is that few of us ever did. The antiwar protestors clearly saw this failure and deserve credit for seeing it.

On the other hand, the antiwar elements did not try to reverse the priorities either. Instead of reorienting American policy, the antiwar movement sought more and more to quit Vietnam outright, making Communist victory inevitable. In the end, the antiwar people cared as little for the people of Vietnam as McNamara and McNaughton; they simply wanted out of the quagmire, whatever the cost to the people of Vietnam.

The tragedy of Vietnam is that prowar Americans found themselves supporting a government policy that was as abhorrent as the one the antiwar forces supported....

The prime culprits are the government officials who accepted McNaughton's memo without protest, believing its contents would not be divulged. As a result, both prowar and antiwar people could only guess at how immoral U.S. policy was. I, for one, feel cheated by my government because of its lies about "winning hearts and minds." The people of Vietnam were worth our efforts—and deserved to be our primary concern.

I firmly believe that the antiwar movement was more accurate in its analysis than were we who cherished ideals betrayed by McNaughton/McNamara in ours. I may not yet agree with the pull-out mentality of the antiwar movement; indeed, I feel they were as wrong in their way as McNamara was in his. Yet I cannot condemn them for
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WORLDVIEW

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs (CRIA), which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. CRIA is independent and non-sectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of CRIA's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

Worldview is open to diverse viewpoints and encourages dialogue and debate on issues of public significance. It is edited in the belief that large political questions cannot be considered adequately apart from ethical and religious reflection. The opinions expressed in *Worldview* do not necessarily reflect the positions of CRIA. Through *Worldview* CRIA aims to advance the national and international exchange without which our understanding will be dangerously limited.

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abuses of corporate power. But inflation may pose a greater challenge. History teaches, warns Ross, that when a country struggles through inflation at an annual rate of 15 per cent or more for three successive years, "the result is a change in its form of government."

Oil-importing nations, Ross laments, "have pusillanimously engaged in the greatest peaceful transfer of wealth in recorded history." Their power as refiners, distributors, and consumers should be used to counter the OPEC cartel. His vision of international economics, however, tends to emphasize cooperation, not confrontation. East-West trade should be vigorously promoted, he feels, accompanied by "drastic reductions" in armaments of all kinds.

Although less cogent politically than economically, Ross's essays are thoughtful and well-informed. His rational problem-solving approach deserves the attention of analysts and policymakers in both the public and private sectors.

—Ernest H. Schell

For Capital Punishment: Crime and the Morality of the Death Penalty by Walter Berns

(Basic Books; x + 214 pp.; \$10.95)

This is a book that deserves careful reading and argument. Berns, a distinguished political scientist at the University of Toronto, contends that "a country worthy of heroes" requires a transcendent sense of justice that, when egregiously violated, calls for the ultimate punishment, just as its defense rightly requires that citizens be ready to risk their own lives. There is much that is appealing in such an argument, especially as it challenges the sterile positivism and doctrines of calculated self-interest that dominate so much of contemporary jurisprudence. Berns is especially skillful in his appeal to Albert Camus's argument against capital punishment. Camus contended that the state has no right to impose death precisely because there is no value in the world higher than man. Berns suggests that this is the strongest argument against capital punishment, but it is fatally dependent upon the assumption that there is no such higher value, and Berns believes there is. Finally, howev-

er, Berns's contention is a poetic, dramatic, and morally intuitive abstraction that cannot overcome the healthy repugnance toward government killing felt by those who believe the primary purpose of the state is to protect all who are part of an expansive understanding of human community. In short, it is the conviction of the sanctity of human life—a conviction based upon precisely the sense of transcendent value which Berns would affirm—that militates against capital punishment. The author does make a powerful argument for the importance of punishment in society, but not for *capital* punishment. His efforts to draw parallels between capital punishment and the readiness to kill in justified war are unconvincing, since, as he concedes, the evidence for capital punishment as a deterrent that saves other human lives is inconclusive. The book is an elegantly written and reasoned case in a bad cause.

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being worse than McNaughton or his boss McNamara, whom I supported without knowledge of that telling memorandum.

As I've said, the objective of the sensitive prowar and antiwar supporter should have been to bring ends and means into proportion on the basis of political and social issues involved. Instead, after 1971, when the U.S. signed the peace treaty, we escalated the bombing in Cambodia and reduced social and political programs in South Vietnam. In the end, the U.S. was humiliated and our reputation scarred forever.

Robert McNamara, despite his efforts at the World Bank, has not yet paid his debt to those of us who believed his lies while he was secretary of defense. I supported the war, yet I condemn him. I believe that the people of Vietnam were worth our best efforts, even as I now decry the kind of efforts the U.S. did make. The name of McNamara will forever be one of infamy. For it is he who betrayed America's ideals—not the antiwar movement as a whole.

Anyone care to go back to Vietnam and do it right this time? I do.

Jeremiah Novak

The Asia Mail
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Appeal

To the Editors: It is with much humility that I bring to your kind attention the need for books in English in many underdeveloped lands. A new general public library has just been completed in the Dehiwala-Mt. Lavinia township in Sri Lanka.

May I appeal to your reading public through your columns to send all their unwanted used and new books to this public library. They may be sent by boat as book post in packages containing up to 18 pounds each, with an open top for postal inspection. Large quantities may be sent in special packages by ship.

These packages or shipments should be addressed to the Chief Librarian, The General Public Library, Frazer Avenue, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka.

The books that are most needed are encyclopedias and books on accounting, statistics, mathematics, management, social studies, biology, medicine, and science, as well as any other books of general interest to the reading public.

All contributions of books will be promptly acknowledged by the library.

Dr. Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe
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