

worldview

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FOREIGN POLICY: THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The manner in which the United States has engaged itself in Vietnam and in the Dominican Republic has raised questions that are crucially important in a democratic society. Simply put, the questions are these: (1) In our representative democracy, what are the limits to the faith that the ordinary citizen must and should have in his elected leaders? How free, for example, is the Administration to engage in activities that pre-empt large-scale war without seeking prior support for these activities? (2) In a free society, how does a free press resolve its obligation both to the government whose foreign policies it attempts to report and interpret and to the public to whom it reports?

These are questions of perennial importance; they are not destined to receive abstract and definitive answers. They can be tested and, possibly, answered only in concrete and particular circumstances—such as those surrounding our engagement in Vietnam and our intervention in the Dominican Republic.

Prescinding from the general debate about the propriety or morality of our present Vietnam policy, we can direct attention usefully to the way in which the public is informed of that policy. No president who has attempted to explain the reason for and the conditions of the U.S. presence in Vietnam has performed entirely creditably, i.e., each president has failed to persuade a significant portion of the interested public that current policies were necessary or desirable. This does not mean that the policies were not supported but, rather, that much of the support was based on trust not persuasion.

This seemed at least a tolerable situation as long as the policy was one of American aid in a Vietnamese war. But the situation becomes increasingly intolerable as the amount and degree of American engagement increases and as the trust is gradually eroded. We have reached a phase in military operations where, it could be

argued, the nature of our engagement is undergoing a radical change, where the conflict is becoming an undeclared war in which America, not South Vietnam, is one of the principal protagonists. If we cannot mark exactly where the change occurs, it is clear that we have travelled some distance from the time that President Kennedy said, "we can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it, the people of Vietnam, against the Communists." If this be the case, and U.S. military efforts are no longer to be viewed as steps toward negotiation, if the process of escalation is extending the conflict to dimensions not initially discussed or approved, our policy has shifted radically enough to warrant clarification from the Johnson Administration.

The actions of the U.S. government in the ongoing crisis in the Dominican Republic do not distract from the nation's concern over Vietnam policy. Because they involve some of the same issues these actions compound that concern. In press reports of the Dominican crisis the public encountered familiar difficulties. There was sudden U.S. action followed by conflicting explanations from the Administration. These explanations were accompanied or followed by the skeptical statements of informed and responsible reporters.

Out of the impressively complicated situation in the Dominican Republic it may be well to concentrate on one issue: the initial character and possible evolution of the pro-Bosch uprising. President Kennedy deplored the military coup of September 1963 which removed from office one of the few presidents fairly elected to office in Latin America—Juan Bosch. Early in the present crisis President Johnson said the uprising had started as "a popular democratic revolution committed to democracy and social justice." Why then wasn't U.S. support given to the pro-Bosch

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forces? Because, according to President Johnson, these forces had been "placed into the hands of Communist conspirators." Pressed to support this analysis of the situation, Administration officials raised the number of conspirators from seven or eight to 55 or 58 and released a list of Communist agents. Unfortunately press correspondents in the Dominican Republic were unimpressed and *Newsweek* reported that "the embassy failed generally to convince the 156 foreign correspondents in Santo Domingo that 'the 58' were a menace."

It can and has been argued by Washington officials that numbers are irrelevant here, that even seven or eight dedicated Communists who know exactly what they wish to accomplish represent a threat. Such reasoning does little to inspire confidence, for in Latin America it would be difficult *not* to find at least seven or eight Communists in almost any uprising. It does Communists more than credit to suggest that they are so capable that, in such limited numbers, they will automatically wrest control in a conflict of opposing forces. The evaluations of a number of respected reporters lend support to the despairing judgment of Juan Bosch: "This was a democratic revolution smashed by the leading democracy of the world."

in the magazines

Challenge, "an independent review edited by Catholic laymen" in Johannesburg, South Africa, has reprinted in its April issue a speech delivered by Archbishop Denis Hurley before the South African Institute of Race Relations, and in an editorial in the same issue it discusses the Archbishop's remarks about the racial problem in South Africa and raises a number of questions about the role of the Church in matters of public policy.

Archbishop Hurley notes a number of "favorable forces" in the private sector which might contribute to better race relations. But he feels that "politically there is nothing that can be done within South Africa to alter the present course of events. Power lies with the white electorate. The white electorate, by a majority of nine to one, or more, is violently opposed to participation of all races in a single society, and its opposition grows with every report of an anti-white speech by a foreign African politician and every atrocity committed in the Congo."

Hurley characterizes South Africa's problem as "a

The harshest judgment on President Johnson's decision is that it was ill-advised and hasty. But even a sympathetic judgment—that speed was essential and the action appropriate—would have to cope with the serious lapse in communicating reasons for such a decision to a citizenry that is asked to support them.

We find ourselves in a situation which invites not cooperation between the government and the press, nor a proper and expected tension, but estrangement. It is impossible, given these conditions, for much of the country *not* to feel confused about matters they have every reason to think they can and should understand. This is not a situation that can be cured by an exhortation from the President or any number of teachers. President Johnson still has widespread support for his policies and decisive acts in foreign affairs, but one can legitimately question whether, given the nature of that support among the informed citizenry, it is firm enough and stable enough to long maintain a policy that demands patience, perseverance, and increasing commitments. If present U.S. policies are not to change, the manner in which they are related to the public certainly should. J. F.

crisis of love" and states that "a political change can come in South Africa only if there is a moral change first, a change of moral outlook and attitude." He does suggest one course of action: collaboration with the government in its "urging its white citizens to develop greater respect for non-whites." Although the government's aim here "is to make Separate Development work . . . there is nothing wrong in taking up the government's challenge and participating vigorously in a crusade of moral re-education of the white population," the Archbishop states. "We may reserve our right to comment and protest when the occasion seems to demand it, but our chief concern could be with the kind of missionary crusade that is necessary if we are to create the moral atmosphere for political change."

The editors of *Challenge* wonder aloud "how the policy of creative acceptance works in practice. . . ." For example, "how do Africans accept it and remain free from bitterness: for that matter how do we ourselves apply the policy and avoid the temptation