

# worldview

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## CONFUSION IN THE PUBLIC MIND

"Never before has there been such utter confusion in the public mind with respect to U.S. foreign policy. The President doesn't understand it; Congress doesn't understand it; nor does the public, nor does the press. They all wander around in a labyrinth of ignorance and error and conjecture, in which truth is intermingled with fiction at a hundred points, in which unjustified assumptions have attained the validity of premises, and in which there is no recognized and authoritative theory to hold on to."

These are the sentiments that George Kennan committed to his memoirs in 1950 when the U.S. was engaged in the Korean War. In the light of our present national course, we can derive from Mr. Kennan's earlier reflections some small, cold comfort. We did, after all, survive the Korean War better than Mr. Kennan's observation would have suggested. President Truman's popularity — which dipped low during the trying times of the Korean War — recovered itself, and many who doubted the wisdom of his action in Korea came to accept if not applaud it. As for the war itself, many judged it to be a harsh but salutary lesson in the political maturation of the United States, for it showed that in pursuit of limited political ends we could employ limited military means and accept a qualified resolution of the conflict.

But the war took its domestic toll in ways that are difficult to discern and impossible to measure accurately. In pitting himself against General MacArthur on a crucial decision, President Truman asserted the primacy of the elected chief executive over the appointed military commander, but the incident left a number of rankling arguments unfinished. And probably more important, the Korean War, with its attendant frustrations, was an element in the social conditions which fostered the development of McCarthyism. The submergence of serious political debate in the 50's—for the "utter confusion" that Kennan noted was not soon dissipated — was part of our preparation for the 60's. What can we expect to flower from our present national debates, becoming ever more bitter and disruptive? For now the debate involves not only the moral and political propriety of the war in Vietnam. It involves the entire democratic process by which national judgments and

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decisions are formed into actual policy.

It may be that this questioning of our basic political processes will emerge as the single most important domestic consequence of the war in Vietnam. For opposition and active resistance to the war will continue as long as the war continues on its present course. And as it continues, the alienation which is everywhere evident will increase, the failure of communication will be everywhere more evident. The severity of the political crisis through which we are passing is indicated by the state of our national arguments: the danger is not that the arguments presented are not accepted but that, increasingly, they are not understood. This leads to attacks, not on the opponent's arguments, but on his sincerity and integrity.

The great division is between those who believe that the democratic process is functioning adequately and those who do not. Those who believe it is point out that the present policies were developed in acceptable political fashion, that they are open to change through the same political chan-

nels, and that no media is closed off to the dissenters. They cannot understand why the dissenters feel driven to desperate strategies, which they see as a threat to law, order, justice and stability. Those who feel the system is functioning inadequately frequently feel that they have been disenfranchised; that the goals they share with many others are proper, right and unattainable by political processes they have long upheld; that the system of checks and balances has been replaced by another; and that if they are to get a fair hearing they must pursue justice through extralegal means.

The mutual alienation between these groups will only intensify as the war continues. The relatively few persons and organizations that are concerned to limit this alienation do not have the resources equal to the task. Frequently they can do no more than warn, as did Senator Aiken of Vermont, that "the real danger to our democratic institutions lies in the U.S. and not 10,000 miles away." J.F.

## **in the magazines**

The continued existence of the "six 'half nations'" formed by the division of Germany, Korea and Vietnam are a chronic source of power conflicts which cannot "be permitted to stand much longer in the way" of constructive solutions to world problems, Eugene Rabinowitch writes in the September issue of *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. "... both sides should climb down from their high horses. They should acknowledge that one cannot insist that divided country A must be reunited, while divided country B is really two countries, whose permanent division must be recognized!"

At the 1957 Pugwash Conference, Dr. Rabinowitch "advocated 'freezing' the political map of the world, recognition of all de facto existing frontiers and regimes, and disassociation of both the West and the East from active support of 'revisionist' movements. (This is emphatically not identical with a guarantee of military support of all existing regimes against all their internal enemies!)" He argued then "that the danger of nuclear war makes all revisionism (even if it can be justified by strong historical or ethnic reasons) too dangerous for it to be used as a power-political tool." Since that time, "actual developments in the world have moved inexorably in this direction; but the reluctance of both sides to commit themselves to the 'freeze' as the only realistic policy in the nuclear

age has slowed down this process of stabilization, and has encouraged 'revisionist' violence such as has occurred in Korea, Hungary, and Vietnam," says Dr. Rabinowitch.

"What is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander! The situation in the three divided nations of Germany, Korea, and Vietnam is fundamentally similar and requires application of the same yardstick to each!"

He asserts that "the world has witnessed a renewed demonstration of the danger of revisionism in our time. For many years, Arab countries, led by Nasser's Egypt, refused to recognize the status quo created by the two Arab-Israel wars. They denied the legitimate existence of the state of Israel, and made no secret of their intention to wipe it off the map as soon as they became strong enough to do so. The three-day blitzkrieg, unleashed by Israel when the Arabs were obviously poised to carry out this threat, has achieved in the Middle East the same result the second world war had achieved in Europe after six years of carnage: the original revisionists have lost the war and face revisionism in reverse—the loss of some of their own territory and dismemberment. . . ."

"But the revisionism goes on. The Germans cherish the hope of reunification and return of the lost Prussian lands; the Arabs clamor for return of Israel-