

SYRACUSE PEACE COUNCIL

Annual Meeting
Potluck Supper



Time: Thursday, June 8, 1967, 6:15 p.m.

Place: St. Andrew The Apostle Church, 124 Alden Street
near the Vincent Apartments

Speaker: REV. JOHN J. McWEILL, S. J.

Assistant Professor of Philosophy at LeMoyne

"The Catholic Community and Peace"

Bring a dish (Casserole, Salad or Dessert to serve 6-8)

Bachelors: Rolls and Butter

R.S.V.P to 422-5316, please

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DR. JOHN C. BENNETT, President of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, pointed out that U. S. policy in Vietnam "is based on certain convictions clearly held by at least some of the makers of the policy" which are "mistaken convictions." It is important for critics of U. S. policy to examine its presuppositions because "our present leaders are (not) likely to find another way until they become less sure of their present presuppositions" or unless there develop "sufficient internal political threats to force them to find another way."

Six presuppositions can be identified which are held by policy makers pretending to have superior knowledge. Their information is of little use if "what appear to be facts" are seen "through the lens created by certain presuppositions that are wrong." The challenged

assumptions are:

1. "That the United States must always oppose Communism" which, it is assumed is worse than all other fates that might befall a nation. Thus the United States must not risk a compromise settlement in Vietnam because this would run the risk of a Communist regime in the future.

2. That "this is a test case of aggression." If, in Vietnam, we can prove that aggression does not pay, we can contribute to an ordered world. The U. S. must punish aggression with allies if possible, and without them if necessary. The stress on aggression does not do justice to two aspects of civil war in Vietnam; between a North and South temporarily divided, and within the South. It is an oversimplification to call this a war of aggression.

3. That this is "the test case of wars of liberation." There is a strong American tendency to generalize without recognizing that every revolutionary situation must be understood in its own national context. There are differences in the internal health of countries, the strength of existing governments, and the "extent to which some kind of liberation is needed from the present situation." In South Vietnam one finds a weak country, a weak government, and a people in need of some kind of liberation. The corollary of this assumption seems to be "that the United States must be a counterrevolutionary power opposed to all wars of liberation in Asia and Latin America" and this "is one of the wild ideas that is set forth with surprising calmness by some of our own leaders." It implies that if the United States tries hard enough to prevent Communism, that somehow democracy will emerge. Trying hard enough may mean the application of sufficient military force.

4. That Vietnam is analogous to Europe at the time of Hitler's ascendancy. First, it is amazing that American leaders are prone to compare Hitler's aggression to the power of Ho Chi Minh within one nation. Second, Hitler's threat was primarily military. The Communist threat is primarily political in Asia and Latin America, and cannot be successfully met by military means. Third, in supporting Western European nations against Hitler (and later Stalin) we were giving help to nations with long traditions and substance, and with a capacity to solve many of their own problems. A revolution was not necessary in Europe, and the United States did not assume a counter-revolutionary stance in Europe.

5. That there are no limits to American Power. The Englishman, Dennis Brogan, speaks of "the illusion of American omnipotence."

That is a useful phrase indicating "a habit of mind that somehow the United States can do almost anything if it sets its mind to it." Retired Ambassador Reischauer has pointed out that when we take the initiative in sponsoring internal changes in Asian lands, our influence can be so preponderant as to produce frictions between our well-meaning efforts and their nationalisms.

6. That "a substantial military success, not necessarily total victory... is important as a brake on the power of China." Here the spectre is raised: if we do not defeat the Communists in Vietnam, we must fight them in Hawaii or Seattle. To believe this requires one to believe in a monolithic, universal Communism. China itself represents an enigma. She now seems weak. Her words may be harsh but her acts are mild. The destruction of the stamina of Vietnam itself is to lose a real brake on Chinese power. Moreover, American power close to the borders of China will accentuate the paranoiac elements in the Chinese outlook on the world.

The war in Vietnam must be viewed in moral perspective. There are three elements to be considered.

First is "the inherent evil in what we are now doing." The ferocity of the warfare in both North and South is causing much dislocation of the populations. What must come next in order to insure victory before the 1968 Presidential elections? Must we bomb the dikes of North Vietnam? Must we succumb to the advice of the "wild men in Washington"--fortunately not now in policy making positions--who suggest that we must bomb Vietnam back into the Stone Age?

Second is the "cumulative effect of what we have been doing together with what we are likely to do if the war doesn't end soon." What effects will two more or five more years of this war have on the people of Vietnam? The effects will be all out of proportion to the evil that we are trying to prevent. To impose on others what we believe is good for them is a misuse of the loyalty and heroism of American men. General Westmoreland has said that he sees no end in sight; rather, we will keep on bleeding the other side. Who are we to be doing this? Must many generations hence suffer from our bleeding them?

Third is "to see how self-defeating it is. Not only does this have a bad effect upon the people... but we can't do by this method what we seek to do." Gunnar Myrdal has reminded us that success in overrunning Vietnam will be the beginning of our hell. The Vietnamese will have the sympathy of the entire world in trying to rid their coun-

