

Confessions of an ex-peacenik

By MARK BRUZONSKY

In recent months both George Meany and Henry Jackson have apparently changed their minds about Vietnam. Meany says that if he knew then what he knows now he never would have supported the war he so thunderously cheered. Jackson, incredibly as some think, opposes supplemental aid for South Vietnam and Cambodia. It seems both men are now operating on one or more of the theories that there is little hope the legislation would be passed, that it would be bad Presidential politics, that there is no use throwing good money after bad into an open pit, and that the Thieu regime is now (finally) recog-

speaking their minds, while some, for whatever reasons, have convinced themselves they are no longer concerned with South Vietnam and would prefer to forget. Only a few have actually decided the U.S. was definitely wrong to intervene in this primarily civil war. Many more are at least convinced it was surely wrong to commit American credibility. Meanwhile, "Peace Movement" doves fear that the U.S. will not com-

struggle to end the brutal American role in the Indochinese peninsula. In the summer of 1971 eight of us traveled to South Vietnam as a fact-finding delegation of representatives of American student organizations to work with the repressed student leadership.

Today, I am deeply troubled by the implications of my earlier views and association. I am troubled that my views on Vietnam have been colored and distorted by many of my former colleagues into an unknowing and inwardly focused isolationism that seeks the virtual paralysis of American foreign policy.

I am troubled that so many of my former associates are unable to differentiate between legitimate interests and mistaken policies, between necessary American involvements and unwarranted American interferences, between morally right and morally wrong actions, and between the world as it is and the world as we want it to be.

We have become an intellectually immobilized and historically unaware society. This is most pronounced when it comes to foreign policy. We seem almost complacent in the evil we have created but even more about the good we could do. Complacency is the result not of not caring, but of not thinking deeply and clearly about causes, values, repercussions, interests, and choices. By not acting we seek to spare ourselves further mistakes and pain. The new isolationism is a selfish religion. It is a failure of will, a false innocence described best by Rollo May.

Instead of defining legitimate policies and interests for the present and future, we seem to be preoccupied with congratulating ourselves for discovering the errors of the past. We have cloaked ourselves in cynical and moral pretensions that what is going on elsewhere doesn't matter and we shouldn't "intervene."

We are secure in our own democracy and freedom and freely use its protections, but we are disinclined to translate American values and ideals into any meaningful philosophy of an

American world role. We hide behind slogans of non-interference, self-determination, and imperialism, knowing very well that the world doesn't really operate on such phrases, platitudes and dogmas. We refuse to insist upon impartiality from such institutions as the U.N. because

its loudest and longest response when he said:

"The movement we're part of, when we succeed in the struggle for peace in Indochina, is not over, will not be dead, will go on . . . The principles of peace and respect for the right of self-determination which have guided our movement in its struggle about Indochina clearly demand fundamental changes in our foreign policy . . . As we opposed and struggled

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nized to be something less than a real democratic alternative.

Meany and Jackson are probably right. Still, there have been substantial reasons for their stubbornness.

I too still firmly oppose American financing of the continuance of this supremely tragic conflict. Henry Kissinger has brought the present Congressional intransigence upon himself. But the perceptions of the impending defeat in Vietnam, and possibly in much of Indochina, have repercussions that must be contradicted.

These repercussions are essentially validation of the fears behind the unwillingness over the years of the Meany and Jacksons to buy the message of the "Peace Movement."

Now that it appears to some that they have finally come over, it should instead be understood that what the "Peace Movement" has really achieved is victorious bankruptcy. The meaning being attached by the spokesmen of the "Peace Movement" to their Indochina achievements needs to be challenged and discredited. Otherwise we will have learned the wrong lessons from the Vietnam nightmare.

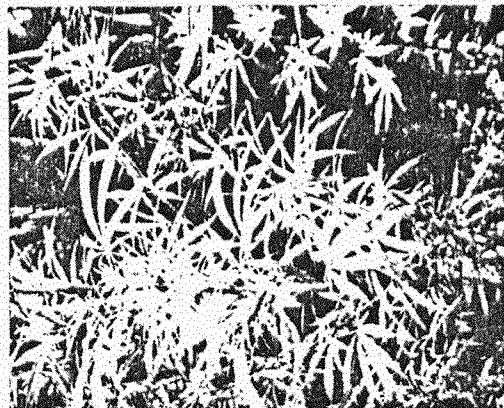
We are in a period of repressed anxiety when it comes to Vietnam and to American involvement in world affairs in general. Reformed hawks fear the political ramifications of

pletely terminate American involvement in Indochina — compromise is undesirable for those who believe one side is virtuous, the other evil.

But others like myself, once but no longer "Peace Movement" disciples, have feared and shunned the responsibility entailed in remaining dovish on Vietnam while breaking with the movement's now institutionalized viewpoints on overall American foreign policy.

While numerous of the Vietnam War sponsors have apparently turned sheepish, the makers of American foreign policy should be made aware as well of another reality. Whereas support for perpetuation of the Vietnam War is minimal — and consequently we should force a political settlement by our complete withdrawal — the "Peace Movement's" call for American recantation of "intervention" in world affairs *en masse* is completely unacceptable — even to many of its former leaders.

Back in 1970 after the Cambodian invasion I helped to found the national lobbying organization called Law Students Against The War, signed a statement with other law students saying "We Won't Go" if drafted, and as representative to the United Nations of the International Student Movement for the U.N. participated with both international and American student organizations in the



we have become intellectually politicized against ourselves.

And as a consequence of all this, the coming "fall" of Vietnam and Cambodia will have sure effects upon international affairs and our own domestic policy through the perceptions of the undermining of American credibility and resolve. We have been living a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Those of us who have helped bring the country to this posture

against U.S. intervention in Indochina we will oppose and struggle against U.S. intervention — anywhere — in the world."

At that moment, with the prolonged roar of applause, it became clear to me that the coalition that has become known as the "Peace Movement" has degenerated into blanket isolationism and even into know-nothingness.

Energized by momentum and

'Intellectually immobilized and historically unaware'

of impotence through our "Peace Movement" have an obligation to determine finally what we are for as well as what we are against. We have prevailed in our Indochina preoccupations and we have been right, on this issue, all along. But there are many other issues and conflicts. So what now?

Now it is simply too late to forget the past, pretending that what happened in Indochina is not affecting American policies and sense of self. More potentially catastrophic are the perceptions of us by others . . . especially those who wish us or our allies ill.

Not only is neo-isolationism covering the U.S., but also there is an unwillingness even to inquire into what is happening worldwide economically, politically and militarily. World politics and human conflicts continue as they always have. Many countries and peoples will be the less for our failure of purpose and our inability to promote the virtues of our own civilization.

At the Convocation for Peace on Jan. 28th in Washington, Ron Young, the evening's M.C., brought the overflow crowd to

slogans instead of by reason and historical awareness, the movement no longer even troubles to question what positive role the U.S. should play in world affairs and what we as Americans have to offer to the world in terms of institutions and principles of civilization.

Rather, in place of questions and of searching concern about what it would be right for us to do, there is a nearly fanatical determination to fight any attempts, whatever and wherever they be, to promote U.S. and Western world interests.

The world is a bad place, yes. Vietnam has been a terrible tragedy and requires contrition, yes. But our overall withdrawal will not make this world a better place and will not be acceptable to very many for very long as an expression of what we should have learned from the quarter-century following World War II.

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