

To

To the Editor;

The current protests against the Vietnam war, and the reaction to them, involve two issues. One is still the war itself--which in my view, based on accounts by independent reporters, becomes progressively more senseless. It is a war that can never be won. It is like a football game where there are no rules, no time limit, no sidelines, and no goal line to be crossed. We can evidently, at the cost of enough lives--American and Vietnamese, Communist and non-Communist--keep the Viet Cong from taking complete control. But we cannot create a democratic society where the very concept of democracy is unknown to the masses and despised by the so-called government.

A recent story in "Life" told of a South Vietnam doctor whose only instrument was a pair of rusty scissors. This is a perfect example of the priorities established by those whom we whimsically call the "leaders" of that tortured country. However great the evils of Communism, they would be less than what the people now endure.

The other issue is the right of protest in a free society. A few of those who protest the war are clearly moved by hysteria and fanaticism. But only hysteria and fanaticism on the other side will deny that the great majority are utterly sincere. And to all those--government officials, editors and columnists, professional patriots--who seek to rouse mob hatred against these upholders of conscience, I address two questions.

First, if a person is convinced that our government's present policy in Vietnam is both morally wrong and also in the long run destructive of our nation's welfare, should he surrender that conviction at the behest of leaders whose statements have often been misleading, whose judgments have often been mistaken, and whose predictions have never come true? And second, how do those who would coerce him into such a surrender distinguish themselves from the one-time followers of Hitler of the present followers of Mao Tse-tung?

The real American patriot is the citizen who does his own thinking and speaks his thoughts--especially when these are unpopular. The real betrayal of America lies in the attempt to silence the critics of official policy because their arguments cannot be answered.

Ellsworth Barnard
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