

Letters

Viet Nam and the Professors

The "Professors," or the "high-minded lost heads," as Hare prefers, ("Bundy and the professors," Letters, 18 June, p. 1541), have two main functions in society: (i) to seek understanding of phenomena and (ii) to share this understanding with their charges and commissioners. These functions require thorough and objective examination of available information and some form of dialogue among themselves and with their audience—which in the mid-20th century has broadened to include all segments of the general public. . . . If the objectivity of the participants in the dialogue is open to question, there can be no faith in the comprehension achieved or in the wisdom of collective action based upon it.

The unnerving fact revealed by the teach-ins, and by enlightened commentaries, is that separate dialogues are being conducted by groups which are not seriously communicating with one another. If for the sake of argument we grant that the groups have equal intellectual powers, the disparity of views and the sharp difference in proposals for collective action indicate that no bona fide dialogue is possible. There may be several good reasons for this, and one may even credit those suggested by Hare. Two others come immediately to mind, however, since they have figured in the more intemperate exchanges between two of the factions concerned: (i) one or both groups are appraising the available information without the requisite objectivity; or (ii) the two groups are dealing with quite different information and are not sharing it. For the sake of the public's faith in both its government and its professors, it is to be hoped that the differences lie in the available information rather than in the ability or right to deal with it. . . .

Some would interpret the "challenge" of the "academic dissenters" to the administration as a demand for the exposure of that concealed information. If the professors are generous enough to assume that it is access to additional facts that drives the administration, against its publicly expressed will, along a road toward a thermonuclear intersection, I don't think that such demands are unwise. I certainly don't think that they are "politically irrational," as Hare implies.

Hare expresses great faith in the ability of the Republic to survive hysteria. This can be granted, but the question is whether the Republic is to survive in the spirit and practice of democracy rather than with mere republican displays and periodic formalities. In such a context the challenge posed by the professors is not only politically rational but essential to our cultural and possibly corporeal survival.

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In saying that both Bundy and the professors "lost their heads," Hare's critique took the safe form of "a plague on both your houses. While his analysis of Bundy's sanctimonious tone may be valid, Hare misses the significance of the academic criticism of Bundy and other administration intellectuals.

Opening an avenue of debate to these men had several premises. The first was that there was evidence of a lack of candor (and, in some cases, of a lack of honesty) on the part of the administration in presenting the facts about the Viet Nam war, the Diem government, subsequent governments, and U.S. Viet Nam policy. Many academicians felt that the escalation of the Viet Nam war was being conducted without an adequate opportunity for the people to hear the rele-

vant facts and the long-range goals of the President's chief advisers.

Second, the usual lines of communication and criticism in Congress were being silenced by Presidential pressure. Many felt that a responsibility of Congress (the declaration of war) was again being side-stepped by a brace of aggressive administrative "hawks" and an acquiescent Congress. This trend was culminated by the rubber-stamp passage of a \$700-million emergency appropriation to support military action in Viet Nam.

Finally, as we said in our letters to Bundy, a few intellectuals hold their very powerful administrative positions at least partly because of their academic credentials. A brilliant, articulate intellectual can have an enormous effect on national policy by influencing high government officials who have reached their position through politics and who may lack the rating of "expert" that accompanies a scholar in any setting. Thus, the intellectual in government carries an academic rating but seldom is judged by his professional peers. However, as a surgeon general is responsible to professional medical standards, so must we expect an intellectual in an advisory capacity to match the standards of scholarship and of open discussion of alternatives expected of academicians.

In the case of the Viet Nam war, alternative proposals to the policy of escalation were not being considered despite their prevalence among non-government experts on Southeast Asian problems. As some columnists noted, there appeared to be an absence of "no" men in the administration. The acid denunciation of academic critics (and the old questioning of loyalty) by Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy served only to heighten the impression that these very powerful former academicians could not be bothered with alternatives. We could not "ignore the hard realities of this dangerous world" (to use Bundy's words) by ignoring this apparent indifference to criticism. The realities of this dangerous world were that (i) the President depends upon the advice of experts; (ii) these experts acquire enormous power over our lives; (iii) the critical machinery of Congress has been growing moribund; (iv) the press (except for the *Times* and the *Post-Dispatch*) was not stirred up about the possible escalation of the war. The challenge to Presidential advisers was therefore a quite ra-

tional and realistic political step. Many of us felt that it was the responsibility of academicians to alert the public to their lack of confidence in the soundness of the advice given to the President by their former colleagues. The foregoing reasons were far more important than any particular policy alternative in fostering the sudden growth of teach-ins and other debates. . . .

The teach-in can be looked upon as a simple revival of older democratic forums such as the town meeting. . . . The teach-ins can and in some cases did allow for a side-by-side comparison of the areas of disagreement. At least, they aired many of the complexities of the Viet Nam war which had too often been obscured by the administration policy of an "optimistic outlook." The "academic dissenters" probably have stepped into a vacuum of criticism and discussion, where foreign policy seems too complex for the individual to get hold of. In doing so they have signaled the end of a time when one or two advisers will be given carte blanche to advise the President on matters of national importance. In order to have their advice accredited, the Bundys are going to have to go back periodically to the debate platforms, to the colleges, to Congress, and to the people they serve. Bundy has referred to the academic critics as "my people." How true!

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Rank Discrimination

Being a community rich in degree-holders of every kind, Princeton is likely to have Ph.D.'s, M.D.'s, D.D.'s, and so forth among its candidates for election to the school board. Under the auspices of the League of Women Voters, our recent candidates gathered before elections for public questioning. In front of each was a name plate. The title "Dr." appeared with the names of M.D.'s; the Ph.D.'s were designated "Mr." Searching for an explanation, I found that the League of Women Voters solemnly believes that being identified by the title "Dr." embarrasses a Ph.D.—especially "after hours" (a reservation that apparently does not apply to M.D.'s or D.D.'s seeking public office "after hours").

Pundits on etiquette were also cited as authority, although with some controversy, since apparently they differ. Inclusion of the title in one's telephone-directory listing was an additional criterion for establishing the right to it (three Ph.D.'s are so listed in Princeton, including the president of Princeton University).

Are degrees becoming obsolete? Are we headed toward the abolition of titles, or is this manifestation reserved for Ph.D.'s?

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Lullaby for Male Voices

Herewith a contribution to Rossi's Brave New World. [See Alice S. Rossi, "Women in science: Why so few?" 28 May, p. 1197.]

*Hush, my little baby, and brush away
that tear.*

*Your mother needs to have a scientific
career.*

*Please don't fret and whimper, that's
an affective quirk.*

*Mother's just out looking for more
meaningful work.*

*Her absence is a blessing, for this
negative condition*

*Will make your heart grow fonder and
will stimulate cognition.*

*You'll love the child-care center, which
is cunningly contrived*

*To cope with all the problems of the
maternally deprived.*

*Your Ma's maternal instincts are more
than merely ample—*

*She's providing the whole family with
a shining good example.*

*So what if meals are tardy and the
cleaning ineffectual?*

*Take comfort in the fact that your
Mama's an intellectual.*

*Think of the ultracentrifuge and other
apparatus*

*That are going to help Mother in her
search for equal status,*

*Though real equality for her depends
on one condition:*

*Persuading Dad to take over the task
of parturition.*

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**You
don't
have
to buy
two . . .**



Beckman pH Electrodes now come in a Twin Pack. When you order one electrode, why not order two? It saves ordering so often. It avoids delays during important determinations. You've always got a spare.

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