

A GALLEY

Someone recently circulated information on Bertrand Russell's "War Crimes Tribunal." I would like to comment on one aspect of that complicated political tribunal as it effects us.

As I began to probe my own current reactions to the war in Vietnam, I recalled the words of a conservative academic scholar during another difficult political situation - the Spanish Civil War. His reaction came finally during an academic ceremony at the University of Salamanca. General Millan astray, the maimed leader of the Spanish Foreign Legion, had just spoken hysterically in favor of the fascist cause, and his "iron men" in the audience had screamed back his battle cry, "Long live death!" Then fragile (almost translucent) Senor Unamuno, who had not supported the loyalists, rose and said: "At times to be silent is to lie. For silence can be interpreted as acquiescence. I could not survive a divorce between my conscience and my word."

Nor can we.

Our country proudly announced in July that we had destroyed 59, 000 acres of crops in Vietnam in six months - an eight fold increase over the average of the previous four years. Thus, even in the unlikely event that our technology will not allow us to increase that figure, we are now going to destroy 120,000 acres of crops a year for as long as the war continues in a part of the world that has always known hunger. (N.Y.T., 7/26/66)

The chemicals, described as harmless by the Pentagon, are so potent that if borne by the wind they can kill plants 15 miles from the spraying point. (N.Y.T., 7/26/66) The same chemicals were accidentally sprayed on Argyle, Minn., on July 8, 1966, and because the town found them "quite lethal!" children and old people were evacuated and an antidote was flown in. (N.Y.T., 8/16/66)

Last August 22 American scientist (including 7 Nobel prize winners) asked President Johnson to order an end to chemical warfare in Vietnam, arguing that distinctions between lethal and non-lethal chemicals are to make, and that once any chemicals are used resistance to the use of more powerful ones (and to bacteriological agents) are weakened. (N.Y.T. 9/20/66) The Pentagon replied that chemicals would continue to be used because they were deemed militarily useful. (N.Y.T. 9/21/66)

But what is not militarily useful? Our country is now using in Vietnam: a new and improved napalm which burns, sticks to the skin, and consumes the oxygen in the air; cluster bomb units that military spokesmen are not allowed to talk about; machine guns that fire 18,000 bullets a minute; new tumbling, small caliber rifle bullets that tear a hole in a man the size of a watermelon like the old dum-dums outlawed after World War I; strikes of 500,000 tons of high explosives dropped from airplanes that fly so high they cannot be heard before the bombs explode; canisters of thousands of tiny, fluted, razor sharp needles that explode above the ground and kill every living thing above ground over a city block (called "lazy dogs"); a non-poisonous tear gas sprayed into caves (which during one reported spraying killed two Australian soldiers); high speed digital computers; the largest reconnaissance force in U.S. history with sensing devices that detect body heat through the jungle from the air and that see in the dark. It is a technological masterpiece.

But technology is not enough. Ultimately the human being must be molded. Viet Cong prisoners are interrogated in airplanes and pushed out if they refuse to answer; electrodes are attached to male genitals and female breasts. (N.Y. Herald Tribune, 4/25/65) On the Canadian television documentary "The Mills of the Gods" I watched a prisoner tortured to death while Americans stood and watched, kicking the inert body when it was all over. Asked about this later on the program, general S. L. A. Marshall - a gregarious man I have met and could have called a friend - said

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he was "shocked, shocked and horrified that an American officer would allow a scene like that to be photographed." Then he added after a pause that he meant, of course, even to take place. Sergeant Donald Duncan said that he was taught to torture in the Special Forces. Do we really doubt him?

And yet despite all the technology the war inexplicably goes on. Five more years? Ten perhaps? Our president is vague about that. Pentagon officials say off the record that we may need one million men in Vietnam and that it will be at least five years before a single one of them can be brought home. (N.Y.T. 7/11/66) Now men between the ages of 24 and 36 have been asked to take the tests. There are unconfirmed reports that after the elections graduate students may lose their deferments.

Meantime, U.S. troops pour into Asia. In Thailand and Vietnam seemingly permanent military bases are being built. General Ky has called for a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam, and Secretary of State Rusk has said that such an invasion might be necessary. Former President Eisenhower has argued that nuclear weapons may have to be used.

And what will China do as the war escalates? Our president is vague again.

We stand essentially alone in Vietnam. Our allies with sufficient independence to do so condemn us; our vassalages equivocate. Because whatever reason or right there may have been in our cause, our technological indifference to humanity and our willingness to blunder into war with a third of the world's people, have made our cause irrelevant.

I do not think we will win in Vietnam. But even that is now irrelevant. For the victory would be pyrrhic, and the arrogance of those who manipulate the technology would be insatiable. Unamuno understood that. "You will win," he told Astray, "but you will not convince. You will win because you possess brute force, but you will not convince because to convince means to persuade. And in order to persuade, you would need what you lack - reason and right in the struggle."

We should recall also that only twenty years our country (with others) stood in judgement at Nuremberg and found guilty the bureaucrats of an inhuman technology. Was that justice or simply the vengeance of the victor?

It is on grounds such as these that I think we must sign the petition to support the tribunal.* I recognize that all political choices are difficult ones. The commitment to action is necessarily a commitment to a muddled world of ambiguous motives, confusing alternatives, and strange bedfellows. We can seldom pick our allies in politics - only our enemies. But because it is in our name that Vietnam is being sacrificed to technology, the time has come when for us to remain silent is to lie.

Christopher Koch

*Among the members of the Tribunal are: Gunther Anders, Lelio Basso, Simone de Beauvoir, Lazaro Cardenas, Stokely Carmichael, Josue de Castro, Isaac Deutscher, Danilo Dolei, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Peter Weiss.