

The Quest for a Cause

A Dissenter's Guide to Foreign Policy,
edited by Irving Howe. *New York:*
Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1968. 349 pp.
\$6.95.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to predict with any confidence the outcome of the current struggle between the forces of radical change—specifically that small but highly vocal group of political activists who call themselves the New Left—and those who oppose them in the interest of order, tradition, and political stability. That the New Left, now composed largely of college-age youth, will have some permanent impact on our political life can hardly be doubted; the doubt concerns the degree and direction of the impact, for the diverse elements

now constituting the New Left, seem united mainly by a common discontent with whatever is and by common detestation of the "Establishment."

These dissidents in their manifestoes and demonstrations focus most of their attacks against the structure of our domestic society. Such views as they have about foreign policy embrace a wide spectrum of utopian, pacifistic, racially-sensitive, and revolutionary opinions, all of which seem to revolve around one central issue: Vietnam. The very word has become a symbol not only of the hateful war itself but of everything that is wrong with the contemporary American "Establishment."

The radical point of view on foreign affairs then is even less sharply defined than its attitudes toward domestic concerns. In both cases the ideas of the New Left are vague, essentially negative, lacking coherence, and without any deep intellectual or philosophical foundation. They are frequently expressed in emotional, sometimes hysterical, demands that the government disengage from Vietnam and devote the bulk of our natural resources to a renovation of domestic society; but they also appear to reflect that moralistic-legalistic attitude toward international affairs which is said to have characterized traditional American approaches to foreign policy.

The symposium here reviewed represents an attempt to begin inquiries which might (hopefully) lead to a logical and consistent leftist position on foreign policy. Lewis Coser in a foreword acknowledges the present lack of such a position but hopes that the book will contain "a number of signposts which, though by no means always in accord, [will] all point in the same general direction." The discussions are intelligent, reflective, occasionally brilliant but the purpose of the book is unfulfilled. Indeed, the radical reader is likely to be more confused than ever about what a leftist foreign policy ought to be. On the basis of the discussions it might be possible to reduce leftist thought about foreign policy to the following common denominators: (1)

innate sympathy with international "underdogs," that is Asia, Africa, Latin America; (2) priority of domestic over external concerns; (3) revulsion against power politics, especially as employed in the conduct of the Cold War. But even these bare essentials do not serve to link all the contributors together. Some hold opinions or propose policies that seem to have little if any relevance to leftist doctrine and a few of the positions taken could more accurately be described as conservative.

Michael Harrington, however, in his introduction summarizes better than any of the others the general strain of radical opinion about current international relations. His main theme is economic and his plea is for the eradication of poverty in underdeveloped areas of the world. After asserting that the United States is an imperialistic power he urges a turn to "the democratic left," the better to implement the international economic revolution he deems necessary. He sees foreign aid programs, the international financial system, and modern capitalism in general as serving to plunge the "third world" deeper into the mire of poverty while increasing the wealth of industrial Europe and America. He foresees that unless the system is changed the situation will go from bad to worse until it reaches explosive proportions. He reinforces this view with a variety of statistics and goes on to propose, among other things, massive allocations of economic resources to the new nations on the basis of their needs and capacities, discriminating trade policies in favor of developing countries, and multilateral aid projects. Finally, he injects a familiar dose of political ideology into his essay by urging greater American support of foreign revolutionaries and greater caution and restraint in our dealings with rightist dictators. Gunnar Myrdal produces essentially the same arguments with an emphasis on the agricultural necessities of developing nations.

William Pfaff by contrast makes the leftist argument for isolationism or at least for

limited foreign involvements. Philip Green attacks what he terms the American "over-reaction" to Cold War issues while Ronald Steel strives to show that the Cold War is irrelevant. Richard Lowenthal and Benjamin Schwartz analytically dispell any Maoist illusions about Red Chinese political domination of the "third world." Irving Howe, the editor of the book, produces an excellent review of the American intervention in Vietnam, remarkable, among other things, for its dispassionate tone which is refreshing contrast to vehement or vituperative rhetoric of most dissentients. In four articles Robert Heilbroner and Dennis Wrong engage in a dialogue about the political modernization of the developing nations; the former takes his position on the farthest left, even advocating communism. Wrong adopts a more moderate stance, and his arguments are, in this reviewer's judgment at least, the better balanced. Michael Walser denounces what he considers excessive military brutality in wartime.

In the leftist context, however, Keith Botsford's defense of President Belancourt of Venezuela can only be described as "counter-revolutionary"; and there are at least three other departures from the familiar radical track. Walter Laqueur discusses the economic development of new nations from a perspective which is quite contrary to that of Harrington and Myrdal. Henry M. Pachter's article deals with the international responsibilities of the great powers. In the brilliant and incisive essay which concludes the book George Lichteim shows the present-day irrelevance of such concepts as "pure capitalism" or "pure socialism," and the ascendancy of what he calls "corporate authoritarianism." He hopes for a resurgence of European civilization and its values.

In sum then the book is of interest for the ideas individually expressed rather than for any fresh insight that it provides into the psychology of the New Left. There is indeed plenty of dissent, but the range of opinion is so wide and so various as to

make one doubt whether there ever can be a philosophically coherent leftist doctrine of international relations. The problems in this field are of such protean complexity as not to lend themselves to doctrinaire solutions.

Reviewed by JOHN J. TIERNEY, JR.

The Fires Last Time

Slaughterhouse Five, by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. *New York: Delacorte Press, 1969.* 186 pp. \$5.95.

The Destruction of the Dutch Jews, by Jacob Presser, translated by Arnold Pomerans. *New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1969.* 545 pp. \$10.00.

TWO OF THE enduring horrors of World War II have been the destruction of civilian populations by air attack and their slaughter in the extermination camps of the Third Reich. The wholesale killing of hundreds of thousands of people in Hamburg, Dresden, Berlin, and Tokyo, not to mention Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and innumerable other centers of human habitation was not as protracted as the beltline murders in the extermination camps and it had certain other advantages as well; not only were more people killed in a shorter time by the bombing, but the tiresome bookkeeping of the deaths was left to the enemy instead of, as in the case of the exterminations, being carried out by the executioners. Also bombing was more impersonal, its victims instantly became statistics.

Dresden in 1945 was not only one of the most enchanting of the cities of Europe, it had seemed for a long time to be one of the safest. No bombs had been dropped on the inner city, although in the autumn of 1944 a suburb had been hit by a raid, which the