

■ A famous historian points out an analogy or similarity between the Vietnam and the Filipino revolution on the subject of criticism and dissent.

THE PROBLEM OF DISSENT

In 1899 we fought a war that has interesting parallels with that which we are fighting today — war which we now have almost wholly forgotten, perhaps for reasons that psychologists can understand better than politicians. That was the war to put down the Filipino "insurrection." For the Filipinos — like the Cubans — thought that they were to be liberated, but Admiral Dewey cabled that the Filipino Republic represented only a fraction of the Filipino people and that independence was not to be thought of and the United States threw her military might into the task of defeating what they called an insurrection. Soon the presses were filled with stories of concentration camps and tortures; soon American soldiers were singing.

Damn, damn, damn, the
Filipinos
Slant-eye'd Kakiak Ladrones
And beneath the starry
flag

Civilize them with a Krag
And return us to our own
beloved Homes!

The Filipino war excited a wave of outrage and protest among intellectuals, reformers, and idealists as vociferous as that which we now witness. Mark Twain addressed a powerful letter, "To a Person Sitting in Darkness," which asserted that the Stars and Stripes should have the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by skull and crossbones. The philosopher William James charged that "we are now engaged in crushing out the sacredest thing in this great human world. . . . Why do we go on? First, the war fever, and then the pride which always refuses to back down when under fire." And from the poet William Vaughn Moody came a memorable "Ode in Time of Hesitation":

Alas, what sounds are these
that come
Sullenly over the Pacific
seas, . . .

Sounds of ignoble battle,
 striking dumb
 The season's half awakened
 ecstasies. . . .
 Was it for this our fathers
 kept the law?
 Are we the eagle nation
 Milton saw
 Mewing its mighty youth,
 Soon to possess the moun-
 tain winds of truth
 And be a swift familiar of
 the sun. . . .
 Or have we but the talons
 and the maw?
 And "To a Soldier Fallen in
 the Philippines" he wrote
 just such an ode as might be
 written for a soldier fallen
 in Vietnam:

A flag for the soldier's bier
 Who dies that his land
 may live;
 O banners, banners, here
 That he doubt not, nor
 misgive. . . .
 Let him never dream that
 his bullet's scream'
 Went wide of its island
 mark
 Home to the heart of his
 darling land
 Where she stumbled and
 sinned in the dark.
 Nor were these men of let-
 ters alone in their passionate
 outcry against what they
 thought an unjust war. They

had the support of a bril-
 liant galaxy of public leaders:
 Carl Schurz and *Samuel*
Gompers, El L. Godkin of
 the Nation and Felix Adler
 of the Ethical Culture So-
 ciety, Jane Addams of Hull
 House and President Jordan
 of Stanford University, and
 Andrew Carnegie and scores
 of others. And when the
 defenders of the war raised
 the cry "Don't haul down the
 flag," it was no other than
 William Jennings Bryan, ti-
 tular head of the Democra-
 tic party, who asked, "Who
 will haul down the Pres-
 ident?"

We need not decide now
 whether those who protested
 this war were right or wrong.
 It is sufficient to remember
 that we honor Mark Twain
 and William James, regard
 Jane Addams as one of the
 greatest of American women,
 and still read Godkin, and
 that Bryan is somewhat bet-
 ter remembered than Wil-
 liam McKinley. Those in-
 fatuates patriots who now
 assert that it is somehow trea-
 sonable to criticize any poli-
 cy that involves Americans
 in fighting overseas would
 do well to ponder the lessons
 of the Philippine War.

But, it will be said, as it is always said, this war is different. Whether history will judge this war to be different or not, we cannot say. But this we can say with certainty: a government and a society that silences those who dissent is one that has lost its way. This we can say: that what is essential in a free society is that there should be an atmosphere where those who wish to dissent and even to demonstrate can do so without fear of re- crimination or vilification.

What is the alternative? What is implicit in the demand, now, that agitation be silenced, that demonstrators be punished? What is implicit in the insistence that we "pull up by the roots and rend to pieces" the protests from students — it is Senator Stennis we are quoting here. What is implicit in the charge that those who demonstrate against the war are somehow guilty of treason?

It is, of course, this: that once our government has embarked upon a policy there is to be no more criticism, protest, or dissent. All must close ranks and unite behind the government.

Now we have had a good deal of experience, first and last, with this view of the duty of the citizen to his government and it behooves us to recall that experience before we go too far astray.

We ourselves had experience with this philosophy in the ante-bellum South. The dominant forces of Southern life were, by the 1840s, convinced that slavery was a positive good, a blessing alike for slaves and for masters; they were just as sure of the righteousness of the "peculiar institution" as is Senator Dodd of the righteousness of the war in Vietnam. And they adopted a policy that is many Senators now want to impose upon us: that of silencing criticism and intimidating critics. Teachers who attacked slavery were deprived of their posts — just what Mr. Nixon now advises as the sovereign cure for what ails our universities! Editors who raised their voices in criticism of slavery lost their papers. Clergymen who did not realize that slavery was enjoined by the Bible were forced out of their pulpits. Books that criticized slavery

were burned. In the end the dominant forces of the South got their way: critics were silenced. The South closed its ranks against critics, and closed its mind; it closed, too, every avenue of solution to the slavery problem except that of violence.

Nazi Germany provides us with an even more sobering spectacle. There, too, under Hitler, opposition to government was equated with treason. Those who dared question the inferiority of Jews, or the justice of the conquest of inferior people like the Poles, were effectually silenced, by exile or by the gas chamber. With criticism and dissent eliminated, Hitler and his followers were able to lead their nation, and the world, down the path to destruction.

There is, alas, a tragic example of this attitude toward criticism before our eyes, and in a people who inherit, if they do not cherish, our traditions of law and liberty. Like the slaveocracy of the Old South, the dominant leaders of South Africa today are convinced that whites are superior to Negroes, and that Negroes

must not be allowed to enjoy the freedoms available to whites. To maintain this policy and to silence criticism — criticism coming from the academic community and from the press — they have dispensed with the traditions of due process and of fair trial, violated academic freedom, and are in process of destroying centuries of constitutional guarantees. And with criticism silenced, they are able to delude themselves that what they do is just and right.

Now, it would be absurd and iniquitous to equate our current policies toward Vietnam with the defence of slavery, or with Nazi or Afrikaner policies. But the point is not whether these policies have anything in common. The point is that when a nation silences criticism and dissent, it deprives itself of the power to correct its errors. The process of silencing need not be as savage as in Nazi Germany or in South Africa today; it is enough that an atmosphere be created where men prefer silence to protest. As has been observed of book-burning, it is not necessary to

burn books, it is not enough to discourage men from writing them.

It cannot be too often repeated that the justification and the purpose of freedom of speech is not to indulge those who want to speak

their minds. It is to prevent error and discover truth. There may be other ways of detecting error and discovering truth than that of free discussion, but so far we have not found them. — *By Henry Steele Commager, extracted in part from SR.*

RESEARCH AND PLAGIARISM

Nicholas Murray Butler and Professor Brander Matthews of Columbia University were having a conversation, and Prof. Matthews was giving his ideas as to plagiarism, from an article of his own on that subject.

"In the case of the first man to use an anecdote," he said, there is originality; in the case of the second there is plagiarism; with the third, it is lack of originality; and with the fourth it is drawing from a common stock."

"Yes," broke in President Butler, "and in the case of the fifth, it is research."