

Question and Answer Period

Following Dr. Martin Luther King's
address, Riverside Church,
4/4/67

1. The first question is addressed to Dr. King. IF PRESENT AMERICAN POLICY DOES NOT CHANGE, WILL YOU ADVOCATE WHOLESAL RESISTANCE TO THE DRAFT, ESPECIALLY BY BLACK MEN, IN KEEPING WITH YOUR PHILOSOPHY OF NON-VIOLENCE? WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH A POLICY?

DR. KING:

As I said earlier in the speech, I think the time has come for those of us who feel that this war is immoral and unjust to advise young men of the alternative to the draft, which is to serve as conscientious objector. I think this will do a great deal to arouse the conscience of the nation on this whole situation, and certainly if the war is continually escalated I think this will be absolutely necessary. I also mention the fact that we are not only caught up in a situation where I feel we are wrong in Viet Nam, but if there are not some changes in our national direction and character, we are going to be in several more wars like this. There are many potential Viet Nam's in Latin America, in Africa, and in other places in Asia. And the young men of our generation and other generations will continually confront this problem of going into armed service that is really serving as the counter-revolutionary forces of the world. I think somewhere this has to stop, and this is why I have already advised many young men that I have talked with to serve as conscientious objectors. And if things continue to go on, it is something that won't only have to be advised, but many will do it anyway, as was quoted in Dr. Bennet's speech: college students have already started responding with the kind of disenchantment and the kind of dismay that causes many to say that they will go to jail if it continues like this before they will fight in an unjust war. It is my conviction that we had ought to do everything in our power to bring an end to this tragic conflict.

2. The next question is also addressed to Dr. King. WOULD YOU PLEASE COMMENT ON VICE-PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY'S POSITION THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR PEOPLE WHO CRITICIZE OUR BOMBING TO CONDEMN INSTEAD VIET CONG TERROR.

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DR. KING:

Well, let me say first that I am opposed to violence. I think that I have said that enough now over these last twelve years so that people know my philosophy at that point. ~~I happen to be a pacifist on this whole matter of war; I am not a self-righteous pacifist because I understand the moral dilemma of the non-pacifist, but I do think we have reached a stage where war can no longer serve as a negative good that it may have served against a tragically evil and sick force like Hitler. And because of the potential destructiveness of weapons of nuclear warfare, we have got to find some alternative to war. And I would advise everybody to seek this alternative. Including the Viet Cong. I don't want to give anybody the impression that I am saying that this is the best way for anybody. I would prefer that we would come to the day that we can deal with all of these problems over the peace table and through the U.N. and end the long night of war that we have faced so long. But I do think, as I tried to say in my talk, that there are many things that we have done that must be condemned with all of the might that we have, and I think that there are some things that the Viet Cong can say, if we only listen to them, to explain why they are acting as they are acting. I think, as I said earlier, that we initiated this. After all, the Viet Cong came into being during the period that Diem was reigning, and Diem was going through terribly suppressive, oppressive and ruthless methods of dealing with his opposition. It was the Vietminh before which declared independence and fought as you know, trying to hold off the attempt to go back into colonial status as a result of the French seeking to place them there, and to a large extent the Viet Cong came into being as a result of the Diem oppression and as a result of the real sabotage which took place in destroying the promise of the Geneva accord. I think it is necessary for us to honestly say this. The Viet Cong, as many have tried to say all along, did not represent forces coming from the North, but it represented forces right there in the South -- which certainly gained support as time went on from the North -- but they were basically forces right there in the South seeking to overthrow a government that had proved to be unjust and committed to evil ends. This is why many of us say that this is basically a civil war, and the United States should not have been there in the beginning. So I am very sorry, but I have to disagree with our Vice President, and I must say very strongly that we had ought to stop the bombings in the North and in the South.~~