

Editorial

What If?

It may be unlikely but just suppose some new type of government -- national or world -- should come into effect within our lifetime. Maybe along the lines of the Allies trying to re-form the world and mete out justice following World War II.

For the sake of discussion, say this new authority had far more power and knowledge than the often divided and frequently ineffective nations seeking to pin blame on those responsible for the war and for the Holocaust -- not just those who established and built and supervised and maintained the atrocity camps but all of those who stood by and supported such activity either by deliberately looking the other way or by taking no action through failure of courage.

Such has been the situation since 1945. At the Nuremberg trials, one former Nazi judge reportedly said Holocaust occurred when the first innocent life was taken and no one objected. That still applies.

Rather than the new world so many expected when the Axis were defeated, we have established a society not that different from the philosophy of the Nazis.

Jews are still persecuted, subtly on a broad range, openly in many places -- and not just in the repressive Soviet Union.

Racism in this nation persists in just about institution -- and that includes the Church. It is directed mostly against blacks but white American society manages to find the time to discriminate against others -- Indians, Hispanics, new immigrants, Orientals, etc., etc.

In addition, the world in the 40 years since WWII has gradually but surely accepted a philosophy of death as solution to its problems. The carefully nurtured specter of nuclear destruction is perhaps the

clearest example. But the espousal of abortion as nothing more than another means of birth control is equally eerie.

Euthanasia, enforced sterilization, fetus destruction by decree have become more than matters of discussion. They have come into reality.

Though discarded by many of the more civilized nations of the world, the death penalty is gaining new popularity in the United States.

How has such rationale evidenced itself in the world? One has only to look at any daily newspaper. Would anyone who was so joyous and relieved back in 1945 when the world was made safe for people again believe that the future would bring such headlines as appeared on just Page 1 of last Thursday's Rochester Times-Union:

- 16 slain in march on white suburb (South Africa).
- Israelis storm Lebanon villages (Middle East).
- Khomeini vows to keep fighting (a religious leader conducting warfare).
- War scare terrifies students.
- Soviet aide assassinated in New Delhi.
- 5 hurt in blasts at 3 Royal Jordanian offices.

Needless to look inside for further evidence of a sick world, worsening almost daily. Easy it is to tick off other places where injustice is allowed to prevail and where death and violence has been accepted as a possible corrective -- Northern Ireland, the Communist bloc nations come most quickly to mind.

Movies are made glorifying vigilantes who take the law and the lives of other people into their own hands. And when a man turns film art into reality, many endorse his action. Yes, he was a white man and the "bad guys" are black. And this is America.

When people organize to combat the legal slaying of some 1.5 million babies a year, they are stereotyped as repressive fanatics. When the leaders of the Catholic religion take up the fight, they are

castigated as un-American by some outside the faith as at the same time many within deny their leadership.

When South African police, representing and enforcing a viciously unjust system, shoot down protesters in the streets, an American president, removed from the scene by thousands of miles physically and by millions of light years socially and philosophically, calmly and publicly says that's the sort of thing that happens when people act violently in the streets. No, the United States will not change its policy toward South Africa.

Rochesterians must remember similar reaction when our own blacks rioted in frustration back in 1964. One must wonder what the leader of the most powerful nation on earth will have to say when the violence in South Africa escalates into widespread bloodshed which it will as almost everyone stands by watching, through inaction supporting established injustice, some even bemoaning the protests of the victimized. Africa, Northern Ireland, the Mideast, abortion, nuclear armament, capital punishment, Latin America -- the list is long. It contaminates the real world and infects our minds and hearts. Many of us have become the callous occupants of a callous world. As science proceeds in leaps and bounds, our souls have been transfixed. We are still the same people who warred in the 30s and 40s and the 18th century and the 4th, who stood by in 33 AD, who lived and fought in prehistoric caves.

If a new order should take over, what we will say?
 I didn't do it!
 I didn't know!
 It wasn't my fault!
 I had to do it!
 You should have been there!
 But it's probably unlikely that anyone will come with such authority and questions.
 Isn't it?

and Opinions

Raise Public Assistance

EDITOR:

During the last five years, nine million Americans fell into poverty. People are poor for a number of reasons: loss of a job, sickness/disability, death of a wage earner, divorce or abandonment, to name a few. In addition, there are millions of Americans holding jobs that pay minimum or near-minimum wage whose incomes fall below the poverty level set by the federal government (\$10,600/family of four). Poverty is deeper and more widespread in 1985 than it has been since the 1960s. Along with that growing poverty, there seems to be a growing callousness towards those who find themselves economically dispossessed.

Who are the poor of New York State? Seventy percent of those needing public assistance (welfare) are children whose families are poor for one or more of the reasons mentioned earlier. Twenty-eight percent are single parent caretakers (often women); the aged poor and the disabled poor. Two percent are adults who would work if they could find jobs.

No one is getting rich on welfare. Based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics/Lower Living Standard the four person family grant of \$297 per month is supposed to provide food (with food stamp supplementing), household costs, transportation, clothing, personal care items, utilities, miscellaneous items. Often, money is taken from this basic grant and added to the shelter allowance which, in many cases, does not cover real shelter costs. There is no money for educational or recreational activities and no money for anything that falls outside the bare bones budget described. There is no money for birthday cards or gifts for children; no money for newspapers or postage stamps. Even in areas where

public transportation exists, one family round trip to the library would use up a considerable portion of the amount estimated for monthly transportation expenses. Those of us who have experience with the real costs of day to day living, understand that welfare grants provide a no-frills lifestyle and, indeed, imposes a deprivation on some in the midst of affluence.

Governor Cuomo's proposal to provide a 10 percent increase in public assistance in the form of a home energy grant is welcome, but hardly sufficient. A 25 percent increase is necessary just to break even with the loss of purchasing power caused by inflation and the potential loss of food stamps that accompanies any cash increase. Since many counties in New York State are experiencing financial difficulties, we feel that the state must absorb all the non-federal share of the grant increase.

Finally, "...if we are honest, those of us who have enough, will have to admit that we receive far more from the government than those on welfare. And whatever we receive, we must always see and speak of the poor as brothers and sisters, who, precisely because they are in need, have a special claim on us. The fact that more than 15 percent of our nation's population live below the official poverty level is a social and moral scandal that must not be ignored." (From the first draft of U.S. Bishops Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy).

Please contact your State Senator and Assemblyperson urging their support for an increase in the basic public assistance grant today.

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Commission 'A Mockery'

EDITOR:

Last year, Ronald Kitchen and George Eng were placed in punitive segregation at Auburn Prison after the two inmates made speeches at a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People picnic that criticized institutional conditions. Although Auburn's superintendent said the two men made "radical and inflammatory statements," my own feeling is that, since the prisoners did not advocate violence, it was unfair to punish them. I expressed my opinion on this case in a letter to the editor which appeared in the 1/2/85 issue of the Courier-Journal.

I shared this with the New York State Commission of Correction, the prison watchdog agency, and a commission official recently wrote me that "commission staff found no evidence that the disciplinary sanctions imposed on the inmates were inconsistent with the violations to which the inmates pleaded guilty."

But they did not plead guilty and appealed (unsuccessfully) to Commissioner Thomas Coughlin to reverse the superintendent's decision. I shared the commission's letter with Kitchen, one of the involved prisoners, who replied that this official's letter "is not only insulting to the intelligence, it is vulgar and belittles the office he occupies."

Why didn't anyone on the commission communicate with Kitchen or Eng or simply review the care record before they completed their so-called investigation?

Is it any wonder that neither corrections personnel nor prisoners take the commission seriously? Is it any wonder that organizations involved in prison upgrading efforts regard the commission as part of the pro-

blem rather than the solution?

The commission was created to be a counter balance in the system but, during its 11-year existence, it has been weak and ineffective. Granted that many complaints of prisoners are unfounded or frivolous, there are also legitimate grievances and the commission has been unresponsive to them. As one Attica prisoner wrote me: "The commission itself is a crime because tax dollars are being drastically misappropriated or misused, paying people to hold shallow titles."

Unless the commission becomes totally accountable -- both to prisoners and to the public -- its existence makes a mockery out of the purpose for which it was created.

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Stop Funding Of Abortions

EDITOR:

Forty-two states do not pay for Medicaid funding of abortions. Since New-York is one of the eight states that does, it spells out the fact that during the last several years every taxpaying New York State citizen has been financially supporting abortions.

The state budget every year includes money for state-funded abortions. Now is the time to put a stop to the daily murdering of our innocent children with our taxpayers' money. For several years now, an amendment has been introduced to the budget bill to forbid the use of our taxpayers' money for abortions. Every year the amendment has fallen a few votes short of the number needed to pass. We should not allow this tragedy to continue. Every concerned adult of voting age must phone and write to both his state senator and state



assemblyman about this issue. Urge them to introduce and/or support an amendment to the state budget that will forbid the use of tax dollars for abortions. Ask your senator and assemblymen to respond with his or her answer on how they will vote on his life and death legislation.

The budget will probably be voted upon the week of March 25. Immediate action is essential. Please mail your responses to New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms (NYCF), PO Box 265, Spencerport, N.Y. 14552. For more details, the number is (518) 489-1148.

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Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writer's signature, full address and telephone number. They should be sent to Opinion, Courier-Journal, 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, no longer than 1 1/2 pages.

We routinely condense letters, edit offensive words and libelous statements, and reserve the right to reject letters. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made and the letters will reflect the writer's own style.

Because submitted opinions exceed the space for letters, we publish only original letters addressed to us. We will not use poetry, open letters, or copies of letters sent elsewhere. To ensure diversity, we limit each writer to one letter per month.