

THE PRESIDENT'S bringing Gen. Westmoreland home in order to explain the war reminds me of an instructive afternoon spent during the Second World War. The country and the Congress were divided on the question of whether to strike first



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against Hitler or first against Japan. Churchill and Roosevelt had agreed on the policy of Hitler first. But there were large and powerful groups in the country, many of them former isolationists in the sense that they were anti-European, who wanted to concentrate American forces on winning the war against Japan. Even the American chiefs of staff were divided on this question of high strategy.

Churchill had come to Washington, accompanied by the British chiefs of staff, to work out with President Roosevelt and the Administration the general plan of the global war. One morning I had a telephone call from Sen. Austin, who was a strong believer in the Churchill-Roosevelt line. He said in effect "I know you are seeing the Prime Minister this afternoon and I wish you would ask him to tell his chiefs of staff to come to Congress and testify in favor of our strategical policy." Quite innocently I said I would do this, and when Churchill received me that afternoon I began by saying that I had a message from Sen. Austin. "Would the Prime Minister instruct his chiefs of staff to go to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . . ." I never finished the message. For the old lion let out a roar demanding to know why I was so ignorant of the British way of doing things that I could dare to suggest that a British general should address a parliamentary body.

As I remember it, what he said was "I am the Minister of Defense and I, not the generals, will state the policy of His Majesty's government."

No one who ever aroused the wrath of Churchill is

likely to forget it. I certainly have not forgotten it. I learned an indelible lesson about one of the elementary principles of democratic government. And therefore, I take a very sour view of a field commander being brought home by the President to educate the Congress and the American people.

THERE IS, of course, no argument about Gen. Westmoreland's tribute to the valor of his troops. The argument, which he does not seem to understand very well, is about whether the President is committing those brave and competent men to a mission which serves the honor and the interests of the United States and of the worldwide community of nations of which the United States is such a powerful member. This is the most unpopular war in American history. Even those who have conformed and support the war are not all of them inspired to feel that their sons are being asked to fight a just and necessary war.

Gen. Westmoreland will not be able, any more than are the President and the Secretary of State, to silence the doubts and the misgivings of our people. The real feeling of the country about the war is expressed by something much deeper than the protest marches, the draft card burning and the heckling, the speeches of the Senators and the articles of the editorial writers and the columnists. That deeper expression of the real feeling of the country is in the fact that in this war for the first time in the memory of man it is taken to be quite normal, it is almost fashionable, for the leading families in Government and business not to send their sons to war. This abstention, this attitude of sitting it out, is much more eloquent than anything that is said openly against the conduct of the war.

THERE IS no denying that our adversaries take comfort from the evidence that the country is not United behind President Johnson. They will no doubt find in Gen. Westmoreland's mission in the United States confirmation

of the fact that the President knows he is not leading a united country. And no doubt this will help Hanoi and the Vietcong to endure the terrible punishment which they are undergoing.

But Gen. Westmoreland is quite mistaken if he thinks he could win the war if only Sen. McGovern and Sen. Fulbright and Sen. Kennedy decided to remake themselves in the image of Hubert Humphrey. And the President is mistaken if he thinks he can light a bonfire in Vietnam that will rid him of his enemies abroad and of his opponents at home.

THE PRESIDENT is indeed playing with fire. If there are any plain-spoken men to whom he still listens, they should speak before it is too late.

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