

The Anguished Dissenter

Fulbright: 'Good God, I'm Discouraged'

4/17/66
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AS IF to ease the pain, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee rubbed his fingers across his forehead as he sat in his office.

"I feel so isolated and discouraged," he said wearily. "Good God, I'm discouraged."

"The war fever is increasing. We Americans are so powerful, so self-righteous."

Most public officials try to maintain a cheerier facade. But the anguish of Sen. J. William Fulbright over Vietnam rolls out in almost every interview and speech.

Fulbright's profound disagreement with U.S. policy in Vietnam will once again emerge when Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara appear in public session before the Committee early this week.

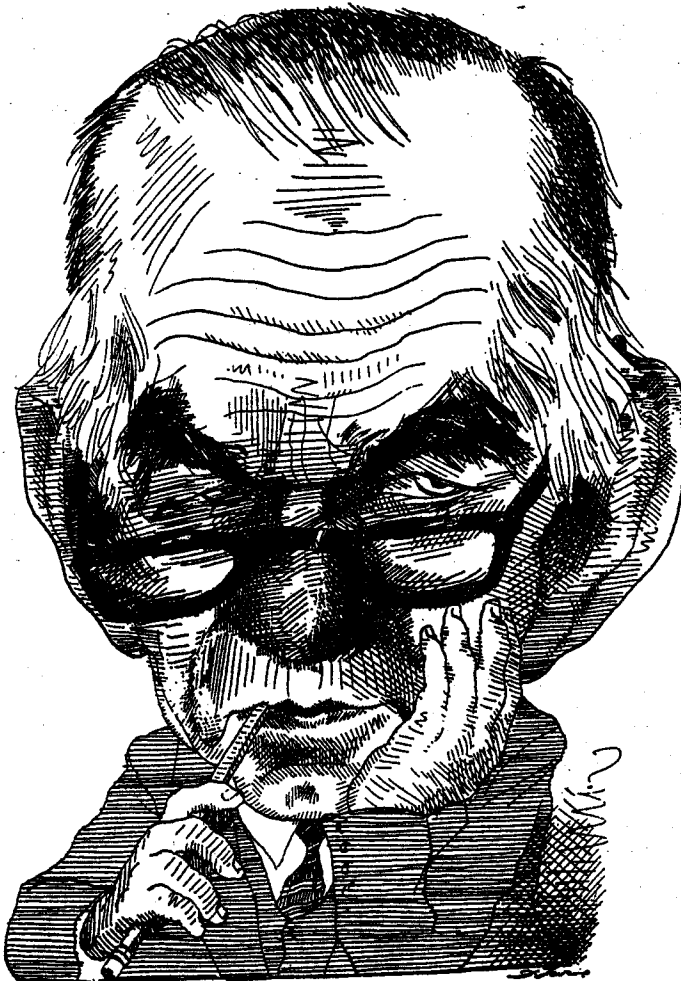
Many dove-like Senators pretend that they support the President's Vietnam policy, even as they voice their reservations.

Fulbright makes no such pretense. He has made his break with the Administration on Vietnam—a break that few would have predicted six months ago.

THROUGHOUT 1965, Fulbright supported the Administration on Vietnam. His backing for the President was hardly surprising; he has known Lyndon Johnson for a long time. Fulbright made it a matter of personal honor to see that Arkansas gave its electoral votes to Mr. Johnson in 1964, and he supported him for the Democratic nomination in 1960. Lyndon Johnson is reported to have reciprocated by suggesting to President Kennedy that Fulbright be chosen Secretary of State.

Why then did Fulbright finally break

See FULBRIGHT, A12, Col. 1.



Drawing by David Levine

A12 Sunday, April 17, 1966 THE WASHINGTON POST

FULBRIGHT—
From A1

Fulbright Is Feeling 'Isolated and Discouraged'



with President Johnson on Vietnam?

The reason for Fulbright's alienation is one shared with other Senate critics, a fear that the ever-increasing American military commitment will lead to a catastrophic Asian war.

In a recent interview, Fulbright said, "If Rusk's statements mean anything at all, they mean escalation to a military conclusion—a long protracted war, the possibility of a nuclear war."

Fulbright's concern ranges far wider than Vietnam. He has become convinced that the Administration's general conduct of foreign relations was "off the track."

A MILESTONE in the public venting of Fulbright's discontent was his convening of hearings last year into the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic. He voiced his criticisms of the Administration's Dominican policies in a Sept. 15 Senate speech that decried the tendency of the United States toward "opposing every reform movement."

The response was a slashing series of attacks on Fulbright by Administration spokesmen and by Administration stalwarts on Capitol Hill, such as Senate Democratic Whip Russell Long of Louisiana and Sen. Thomas Dodd (D-Conn.). This seemed to cut the cord between Fulbright and the Administration.

"If the Administration had been less angry about his Dominican speech, he'd probably still be supporting them on Vietnam, even if he would feel uneasy about it," one Fulbright associate said.

"For the first time, he no longer feels restrained by the fact that he's Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, or because he's a Democrat, or by the fact that the President might not like what he says," an adviser notes. He's just standing up there and telling the truth as he sees it."

The truth—as Fulbright sees it—is that the Administration's foreign policy is now characterized by what he calls "aggressive moralism." Fulbright's title for the lectures he will give at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies in the next three weeks is "The Arrogance of Power."

FULBRIGHT often quotes the English conservative statesman Edmund Burke, who risked unpopularity by opposing his government in its war against the American colonists in 1776.

Fulbright shares Burke's conviction about the mixture of good and evil in all men, in all nations. And, like Burke,

he is not loath to assert publicly that his own country may be guilty of error, and that its enemies may, at times, act from worthy motives.

Among professional politicians, Fulbright's philosophic and scholarly temperament marks him as something of a curiosity. A former Rhodes Scholar, law professor and university president, Fulbright has a cosmopolitan demeanor that transcends the Ozark Mountains background in which he grew up. But he still bears the mark of those mountains.

When Fulbright peers quizzically over the "Ben Franklin" spectacles he has let slip to the end of his nose, he looks like a mellow Ozark doctor who knows all the frailties of his fellow men but who still retains bemused affection for them. In his happier moments, he speaks with a continuous smile that casts a benevolent glow over his whole face and lights up his twinkling gray-blue eyes.

HIS IRONIC, self-effacing humor is reminiscent of Mark Twain—whom he also frequently quotes.

Fulbright's literate public statements and his creation of the Fulbright scholarship program have given him renown abroad.

But in the United States, he has somehow never towered either in the national political arena or in the U.S. Senate club. As one of his Senate colleagues, Sen. George D. Aiken (R-Vt.), comments, "He's not a politician by nature—he's an educator."

Fulbright is not a club man by nature. Nor does he share the average U.S. Senator's appetite for power. His impatience with the folklore of American politics has tended to erupt at times in the form of raking sarcasm.

"He sees through the sham of American politics, which is bound to make him sarcastic," comments Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), one of the keenest Fulbright appreciators in the Senate.

Fulbright is often accused of being lazy. But his weekday agenda usually begins at his Capitol Hill desk by 9 a.m. He doesn't leave until after 7 p.m.

"He is a funny bird," confides his wife, Betty. "He never looks like he's under pressure, but his mind is always working."

DESPITE the chilly relations between Fulbright and the White House since the Dominican speech last September, the Arkansas Democrat speaks

of his President without any show of bitterness.

"Lyndon Johnson has a great capacity," Fulbright insists with conviction. "He could make a great President if he could get back on the track in foreign relations."

Early this year Fulbright sent a confidential letter to the President outlining a program for neutralization of Southeast Asia. Mr. Johnson's response was described as "somewhat formal."

Speaking of his relations with the President, Fulbright reflected:

"It is difficult for me to communicate with the President, any President. You go there, but the atmosphere is very difficult for discussion. If I were an intimate, it might be easier . . . I don't feel like discussing things with people who are not interested in what I say."

WHEN FULBRIGHT talks about the future of U.S. foreign policy, his face grows worried as he peers over his spectacles. Between slow puffs on his cigarette, he speaks of his fear that American leaders are acting as though they had "a mandate from God."

"We can lord it over everyone, and knock the hell out of everybody," he speculates. "It would be too bad for us, but I guess we're going to do it."

"If we keep on like this, we're heading for a downfall sooner or later," he says.

But Fulbright's outlook is not one of unmitigated gloom.

"I have some hope," he says, "because of the United Nations and the existence of the hydrogen bomb. Because of the bomb, it's too dangerous to resort to old ways of pushing people around. And we do have the United Nations machinery if we're willing to work with it."

BACK IN ARKANSAS, word is out that Gov. Orval Faubus may have his eye on Fulbright's Senate seat in 1968. Should Faubus run, it is the verdict of many canny courthouse politicians that he could give Fulbright a tough battle. The Governor has a base of power among the state's rural voters.

But Fulbright doesn't seem to be worrying. He doesn't need the Senatorial salary or the cocktails-and-canapes social whirl of Washington. "I'm not afraid to go back to Arkansas," he says.

Cast in the role of an anti-Administration heretic on Vietnam and on the basic directions of American foreign policy, Fulbright seems determined to play his part to the drama's conclusion.