

Books of The Times

Let Us Spray . . .

By JOHN LEONARD

THE ULTIMATE FOLLY. *War by Pestilence, Asphyxiation and Defoliation.* By Congressman Richard D. McCarthy. 176 pp. Knopf. \$5.95.

JUST last week President Nixon came out against most germs and some gas. To many it will seem that a bad dream has been called off, a dream of chemical and biological weapons on which the Army has spent \$203.8-million since 1963. Plague, anthrax, tularemia, psittacosis, botulism, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Venezuelan equine encephalitis are no longer to be considered legitimate extensions of statecraft. The Senate is prepared, only 44 years late, to ratify the 1925 Geneva Protocol, binding us with over 60 other signatories in one of those agreements by nations to pretend to be civilized. Haven't we therefore abolished the dream by executive order?

Is it really necessary to ponder Representative Richard D. McCarthy's angry, disquieting, fact-filled book?

It is necessary. "The Ultimate Folly" is part history: Sir Jeffrey Amherst in the French and Indian War giving away small-pox-infected blankets to Indian chiefs, deliberately causing an epidemic; the United States in 1962 contemplating gas warfare against Cuba. And part journalism: why those 6,400 sheep in Utah died from nerve gas; which Government agencies, universities, research institutes and industrial organizations engage in CBW activity. And part moral inquiry: asking the questions that went unanswered in Mr. Nixon's directive last week.

Tear Gas Is Exempted

That directive promised that we would never use germs in combat, that we would use incapacitating chemicals only, in re-

taliation (the common cold war), and that our bio-illogical arsenal would be destroyed. Tear gas and defoliants of the sort employed today in Vietnam were exempted from the Presidential order.

Yet the New York Representative demonstrates that CS tear gas, a "super" variant which attacks the lungs instead of the eyes and is moisture-resistant besides, is used in Vietnam in a lethal way: to flush enemy soldiers and civilians from buildings and caves in order to kill them with air and artillery strikes (contrary to most interpretations of the Geneva Protocol). He also demonstrates that the defoliants, attacking rice crops as well as jungle, might have dangerous long-term effects on Vietnam's ecology. (Defoliants and ecology were unanticipated by the protocol draftsmen.)

Ethical Generalities

Beyond the specifics of Vietnam are all those unappetizing ethical generalities. We apparently abandoned our pursuit of a CBW capacity not because anyone thought it was evil, but because there was no way to test it, and smaller, poorer nations might develop it as a substitute for the hydrogen bomb, and no one could figure out how to keep a contagious disease from crossing the wrong border, and domestic transport of the stuff was a hazard. (Even so, the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed Mr. Nixon's directive to the last yawp.)

In addition, Mr. McCarthy points out that only five Congressmen, unknown even to their colleagues, are sufficiently briefed and privileged to slip funds for such projects—CBW, C.I.A., Green Berets—into appropriations bills. He alludes to the moral responsibility of the bureaucrats, scientists and businessmen who kept the very hairy ball rolling toward a possible "pandemic." He wonders how much even a President knows about autonomous process of commitment.

The only aspect of this ugly business unexplored by the admirable Congressman is why we experiment with such stuff only on Orientals, rioting blacks, and young white demonstrators. Is it so very paranoid to speculate that we only spray upon those whom we wish didn't exist?



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Richard McCarthy