

The New York Times

Published every day by The New York Times Company

ADOLPH S. OCHS, Publisher 1896-1935

ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER, Publisher 1935-1961

ORVIL E. DRYFOOS, Publisher 1961-1968



Germ Warriors Retired

The Administration's unilateral renunciation of germ warfare and its reaffirmation that the United States will never be the first to use lethal gases is a welcome move that should raise President Nixon's prestige at home and American prestige abroad. The unequivocal abandonment of bacterial weapons is especially gratifying, since this particular concept of warfare is as senseless as it is horrifying, disease germs being as great a threat to the user as to the enemy. Since even in peacetime it poses a threat of accidental epidemics, it is particularly reassuring to have the President's pledge to destroy the army's entire stockpile of germ missiles.

As for chemicals, Mr. Nixon is asking only for ratification of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibits first use. Unofficially this has been national policy all along—with certain exceptions. Those exceptions, now in evidence in Vietnam, are tear gas and various defoliant chemicals. We regret that the President failed specifically to include these as coming within the scope of the Geneva declaration. The next best hope is that the Senate will express its understanding of their inclusion if and when it ratifies that 44-year-old agreement, as Majority Leader Mansfield seems confident it will.

The tear gas in use today, CS-2, is really a lung gas, far more painful than the simple chemical used when the Geneva Protocol was drawn up—and it has been used in Vietnam to flush enemy soldiers out of hiding places so they can be shot down. The defoliants are triply reprehensible in that they destroy food supply far into the future, upset the ecology and threaten future generations with deformity.

Nevertheless, the President's action is a major step forward and a credit to the Administration. When credits on this score are being distributed, incidentally, it would be grossly unfair to omit the name of Representative Richard D. McCarthy, Democrat, of New York. More than any other man, the Buffalo Congressman took the initiative in revealing the dangers and follies of chemical and biological warfare, exposed the extent of the stockpiling, and fought, sometimes singlehanded, for the renunciation that is now official policy.