

Perverting the Geneva Protocol

Senator Frank Church has chosen the lesser of two evils in proposing that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee send back to the White House for "clarification" the Geneva Protocol banning chemical and biological weapons.

To delay further in ratifying the Protocol, which the United States sponsored at Geneva in 1925—*forty-five years ago*—and which all other major powers have ratified, would be to perpetuate a national disgrace.

But it would be even more disgraceful for the Senate to pervert the Protocol by ratifying the document as the Administration has presented it—with the "understanding" that it does not forbid the use of tear gas and herbicides. This interpretation is completely at odds with the views of the majority of nations as expressed in a resolution adopted by an 80-to-3 vote of the United Nations General Assembly in 1969.

The Federation of American Scientists has succinctly observed that the Administration's reservations on the Geneva Protocol are "highly questionable legally, absurd politically, repugnant morally, and foolish strategically." In attempting to justify the continuing use of tear gas and herbicides in Vietnam, where these loathsome weapons appear to have had only marginal military utility at best, the White House has invited the censure of the world. It has risked undermining the barrier against more lethal chemicals which American statesmen wisely sought to erect at Geneva after World War I had exposed the full horror of gas warfare.