

## Peace With Charity

President Nixon dispatched Henry Kissinger to Hanoi with a commendable mission to advance the cause of reconciliation. Yet, at the same time, Mr. Nixon closed his heart and mind to pleas for similar acts of reconciliation toward his own country's draft resisters and anti-war exiles.

"Amnesty," Mr. Nixon said in his press conference, "means forgiveness. We cannot provide forgiveness for them." With this harsh judgment, the President who has so often made public reference to his Quaker roots brushed aside the fate of tens of thousands of Americans. As if to minimize the problem, Mr. Nixon referred to "those few hundreds," when he must surely know that the actual numbers involved are very much more than that.

The President's mood left little room for charity. He mocked the draft resisters' "higher morality." He lumped together under the common label of "deserters" all those for whom amnesty might be urged. He barred any suggestion of compensatory public service by contemptuously ruling out "a junket in the Peace Corps, or something like that," thereby downgrading those many idealistic young men and women who in the past donated their efforts to peace rather than war. In an appalling reversal of the tradition that has long made America the haven for the world's dissenters, the President wrote off any Americans who, having dissented from this country's policies, "are certainly welcome to stay in any country that welcomes them."

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If the American people's humane past remains a valid guide, the President's truculence will not be the last word on this issue. Amnesty, particularly when related to a painfully misguided military adventure, is a complex matter that cannot be resolved by political rhetoric. The cases of those who refused to serve, or deserted from the military, differ greatly. Nor can the issue be justly and rationally dealt with before all the prisoners from every theater of war have safely come home again to their families.

But as the country gropes toward peace and reconciliation, the time has surely come to make plans for sorting out the different categories of those who refused to serve for a variety of reasons. The most constructive step for Congress now would be to establish an Amnesty Review Board to chart the administrative and legal procedures by which individual cases can be judged.

Contrary to the President's demeaning assessment of national service without a gun, such a board ought to give full consideration to alternate ways in which men can devote their efforts to the common good. It is a better way than to fill the prisons.

Amnesty is not the radical invention of those whom Mr. Nixon has denounced as advocates of "bugging out." As a President who so often invokes the example of his distinguished predecessors, Mr. Nixon undoubtedly knows that even outright insurrectionists were granted amnesty by George Washington and John Adams. Amnesty was proclaimed in the past by Presidents Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, Lincoln, Grant and Coolidge. President Truman pardoned men who evaded the draft during World War II, a war that had the support of the overwhelming majority of Americans.

Healing the wounds at home as well as abroad calls not for Mr. Nixon's eye-for-an-eye doctrine that "we cannot provide forgiveness" but rather for Cardinal Krol's earlier admonition to "blend charity with justice." Such charity toward the nation's own sons should not fail to find a rightful place in any definition of peace with honor.