

'What Can We Do?'

By Vercors

PARIS — Where is the difference? Between the devastation of Guernica by the planes of Hitler and the devastation of Hanoi by those of Mr. Nixon, where is the difference? Between the raids of terror over Hanoi to force the Vietnamese to surrender and the raids of terror over Warsaw to force the Polish, over Rotterdam to force the Dutch to surrender, over Coventry to force the British (but Churchill did not surrender and the Vietnamese do not) where is the difference? Between the shredded infants of Spain and the shredded infants of Hanoi? At the time of Guernica, Warsaw, Rotterdam and Coventry what raised the world's conscience with a sacred horror was the recurrence, by the will of one man and his military advisers, of the most barbarous, the cruelest, the most horrifying, the most homicidal means to win a political design. It was the return to Sardanapalus and to Nero multiplied by ten, multiplied by a hundred. The world fought five years against that, against the incredible return of forgotten practices, that one thought had disappeared forever. America was not the least fierce nor the least sincere in that struggle to establish between nations a minimum of civilized relations. It was America which by its initiative (the creation of the U.N.) showed most visibly that will of healing. And now it is America today that brings back Guernica, Warsaw, Rotterdam—that brings us the equivalent of Hiroshima. In order to make an adversary surrender and to make a political design succeed.

During more than twenty years, how many have not been able to return to Germany because they would not know what hands would be offered there to grasp, if those that would be held out to shake would not be stained by the blood of the innocent. For a whole people were silenced by Hitler, had submitted at first, then accepted and covered up his crimes. A courageous resistance had struggled there

in the beginning, a few months and then there was no more resistance. And that is recurring—this time in America! There have been without doubt a few beautiful and courageous movements of protest, of opposition—but now? One listens closely, but if anything remains it is very weak, and in spite of the few brave ones still left, they are obliterated in the soft silence of a consenting population. And will it happen that we will not be able to shake the hand of one of these Americans as we could no longer shake the hand of a German not so very long ago?

But if this is true for us what can we do? We weep and I weep, that comforts. You will say to me what else can we do? I don't know, I don't know. Seeing that Russia doesn't dare anything, that China can't, that Europe doesn't want to, Mr. Nixon and his Pentagon feel themselves all-powerful, and this power intoxicates them. They feel they are masters of the world. They know they can, if they want, do ten times worse than Hitler without risking the same fate, and this power intoxicates them. And we know that at least for the near future they will do what they want without anyone opposing it. For the moment they are content with transposing an entire land into a lunar landscape and an entire people into deadmen from out of the Stone Age. And perhaps before having totally arrived to that point, they will have in effect, by means of blood and suffering, imposed their political design on Indochina, as Hitler did on the Spanish, the Polish, the Dutch. And if that ever happens it will be more horrible. Because the Nero-like shadow of Nixon will hover over all of us who will have done nothing to have stopped him. And we will believe we are free when it will no longer be but the surveillant freedom of vassals.

Vercors is a pen name for Jean Bruller, author and engraver. This originally appeared in the French paper, Le Monde.