

Voices of Conscience

Throughout the long years of America's ill-fated involvement in the war in Indochina, the peace symbol remained a persistent expression of determination and hope. As time went on and the yearning for an end to the bloodshed grew in intensity, that symbol's message became emblazoned in the minds and hearts of millions. It formed a nonpartisan bond for many who agreed on little else.

Now that the official protocols at last give hope that the killing and suffering may indeed come to an end, it would be an ungrateful act of instant historical revisionism to fail to note the contribution of the peace movement. That movement gave expression to a facet of the American character which ought not be forgotten at the very moment when its prayers appear—at least temporarily—to have been answered and its goals approached. Few nations have managed in time of war to keep the voices of peace so compellingly raised. Few nations would, under similar circumstances, have allowed those voices to be so clearly heard.

Occasionally there were excesses and abuses. The sign of peace, like any symbol, was at times defiled by small bands of those who tried to exploit the protest and the anguish for their own less honorable purposes and politics. But for the most part the movement remained simply the conscience of a coalition: young and old, religious leaders and veteran politicians, idealists and pragmatists worked and marched under its banner.

It in no way belittles the tough efforts of the skillful negotiators who eventually hammered out the agreements to give recognition now to those who doggedly kept pointing and pushing toward peace. Many—particularly the young—never faltered in their conviction that peace was too serious a matter to be left to Government. Their faith would be ill served if those often unpopular but never despairing efforts were now to be allowed to fade unrecognized from memory.