



McNamara as Speer

By SANCHE DE GRAMONT

PARIS—In his memoirs, Albert Speer quotes a 1944 article in *The London Observer* that described him as "a type which is becoming increasingly important in all belligerent countries: The pure technician, the classless bright young man without background, with no other original aim than to make his way in the world, and no other means than his technical and managerial ability. It is the lack of psychological and spiritual ballast, and the ease with which he

handles the terrifying technical and organizational machinery of our age, which makes this type go far nowadays. This is their age; the Hitlers and Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us."

This is their age and they are with us still. I have been discussing with a friend assigned to the McNamara project in 1967 some of the implications of the Pentagon Papers. He drew the analogy between McNamara and Speer: Men with a technological background, Speer an architect, McNamara a Ford executive, the one named Minister of Armaments, the other Secretary of Defense, transposing the techniques and philosophy of industry to the waging of a war. A commitment to efficiency and productivity places them beyond the reach of moral dilemma. Speer saw to it that his forced labor was decently fed, not for humane reasons, but in order to obtain the greatest output. McNamara, by countering the Air Force proposal for saturation bombing on Hanoi and Haiphong in 1965 with a plan for the gradual bombing of selected targets, gave the North Vietnamese time to organize their anti-aircraft defenses and probably saved a considerable number of Vietnamese lives, again in the name of efficiency and cost estimates.

Such men do not look beyond their immediate task. Speer knew about concentration camps, but ignored what went on in them. "I did not investigate," he writes, "for I did not want to know what was happening there." Whether or not McNamara knew about the tiger cages and Mylai-type massacres while he was in office, the result is the same. It was not his concern. To the man responsible for shaping the nation's military policy, such matters are trivial; they are not part of the big picture.

Such men are not callous. Speer, as he rose in the Nazi hierarchy (he never became a party member), expressed growing doubts about Hitler and the war.

McNamara too was a man beset by doubts. Unlike Dean Rusk, whose private and public positions were identical, McNamara in private tended to unburden the misgivings of his troubled conscience. But during working hours, he again became the chief managerial talent behind the war.

Speer, although he came to realize that the war was a monstrous mistake, continued to take pride in his achievements as Minister of Armaments.

Did McNamara also leave office with the feeling of a job well done? That would help explain why he brought together some forty specialists in a Pentagon office and gave them six months to chart the course of American involvement in Vietnam, drawing on Pentagon archives. And yet when the volumes were ready, he did not even read them. One of the experts expressed his surprise, and McNamara said: "They're incomplete." They are, in the sense that the authors of the papers (Henry Kissinger, by the way, who claims not to have seen the papers so as not to appear better informed than his boss, was, in fact, a project consultant), were not able to draw on State Department files or C.I.A. files other than the daily intelligence estimates for the period. But they are also the best record we have

and one of their accomplishments is to discredit the man who ordered them written. Reading them makes one realize how dangerous the Speers and McNamaras can be, the men with a belief in the invincibility of logic, the men who disregard factors that cannot be fed into a computer.

It remains to be better explained why McNamara wanted the study written. Was it the concept of the Ford annual statement adapted to the war in Vietnam? Or a feeling that history must be served? Or simply something worth having for the Pentagon files? As it turned out, while Speer's memoirs are an exercise in self-justification, the McNamara papers are an exercise in self-immolation.

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