

Storm Warnings

The signs are there for anyone to read. No less than five separate official investigations are under way to link up communism, subversion and civil disorder. Senator McClellan's Permanent Investigations Subcommittee will probe all types of civil disturbances, with initial emphasis on race riots which, in the past three years, are said to have killed 130 persons (including twelve policemen) and injured 3,625 in seventy-six cities. Senate Internal Security Committee has disclosed plans for a sweeping investigation of organizations of the New Left, after facilitating its labors by appropriating documents improperly, if not illegally ("stolen" is the term used by lawyers for two of the groups under attack). House Un-American Activities, of which little has been heard in recent years but which still draws its annual appropriation, throbs with new hope. This is all much too familiar, but because such waves of official fear and anger have swept the country recently without toppling democratic

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forms—though leaving behind the debris of a few thousand ruined lives—people are apt to think that this too will pass. But this time the implications are far more dangerous.

While the furor is mounting, possible remedies for the underlying malaise are being jettisoned. Last year anti-poverty measures received \$1.75 billion; this year the Johnson Administration asked for \$2.06 billion. The Office of Economic Opportunity waits glumly while the House debates whether to allow it \$1.5 billion or perhaps only \$1.2 billion. Anti-poverty officials warn that the projected cuts would be "disastrous." Morale is sinking in the anti-poverty centers all over the country. To his credit, Sargent Shriver refuses to serve as a figure-head, beguiling the American people into belief that something substantial is being done about the problem at home. He threatens to resign if the funds are not forthcoming. We hope he is not brought to that, but if Congress insists on sabotaging the OEO's work, he should, as he says, refuse to contribute to a fraud.

Is the Johnson Administration vitally interested in its anti-poverty crusade of yesteryear, or is it now totally preoccupied with the problems of re-election? The outlines of its strategy for 1968 are emerging with ominous clarity. Obviously riots are not to be tolerated during a Presidential campaign. Secretary McNamara has authorized an increase of 12,000 men in the National Guard, and Guard sources explain that these will include special detachments to provide command and control during riots, military police companies, headquarters companies for battalions and larger task forces. Evidently the Guard and local police, and no doubt the Army, are preparing for large-scale operations in the cities. Mr. Johnson himself has once more jumped on the Goldwater bandwagon: "crime in the streets" is not going to be left as a ready-made issue for the Republicans. At what was to be a routine swearing-in ceremony, he suddenly announced that the American people "are going to rise up and revolt at the lawbreaker in this country." As in times past, the perplexed and apprehensive middle class will respond with violence of its own, always in the name of law and order.

The Nation uses the word "fascism" with extreme caution. We never bandied it about during the worst excesses of the McCarthy period. Bad as that was, it did not seem to have the smell of fascism about it. McCarthy himself lacked an ideology and an economic program; his only gimmick was redbaiting writ large. But the situation now emerging does have a Fascist potential. A war that is wretched in its origins, inconclusive in its operations and generally hated among the thoughtful; the resistance generated by the war; the simultaneous disaffection of the Negroes and the insurrectionary aims of some Negro groups; the mounting danger of nuclear war, and the disintegration of the anti-poverty effort—these and other forces juxtapose to erode the defense against fascism which at one time seemed inherent in the American style and spirit.

Clearly the government is turning toward repression as the answer to disaffection; clearly, also, a large part of the middle class will go along. A Fascist ideology could

be put together out of the law-and-order fetishism which has always masked official lawlessness in this country, racism directed against militant Negroes, and anti-intellectualism fanned by the resistance movement, which is centered on students, sections of college faculties and the intelligent generally, with a fringe of bizarre rebels to give the whole movement a bad name among the respectable. And communism which, however impotent it may be at home, remains powerful abroad after almost a quarter-century of cold war, can still serve as a focus for floating hostility. If the United States gets through the 1968 elections without an irreversible departure from its past traditions, it will be by an act of Providence rather than by the wisdom and forbearance of official Washington, either manifest or in prospect.