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Flyer About Peace Symbol Disturbs Many

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The belief among some adherents of the political right that the peace symbol represents a broken cross or a Communist-inspired anti-Christian device has begun to worry both Christians and Jews here who have seen literature expressing that theory.

The controversy over the origin of the peace symbol, the well-known design that resembles the imprint of a four-toed bird, surfaced in Westchester County recently in the letter-to-the-editor columns of the North Castle News, a weekly newspaper published in Armonk.

Karl Landt, a life insurance agent and youth adviser at the Armonk Methodist Church, wrote to the paper to report that an American Legion member had sent him some literature referring to the peace symbol as "the broken cross."

Intentions Unquestioned

Mr. Landt said in a recent interview that he had received the material after a youth service at the church, where a poster showing a peace symbol superimposed on a cross had been displayed.

"While I do not question the good intentions of the Legion, they have plainly been deluded into doing what the enemies of our country want—spreading propaganda which will cause dissension and create disunity among us," Mr. Landt wrote to the newspaper.

The paper then printed a letter from Edwin J. Schultz, commander of the American Legion post here, disclaiming responsibility for the material.

The on-page flyer was reproduced in the paper. It contained the words: "Distrib-



uted by the American Legion Post 544, Minersville, Pa.," and it included such statements as, "The Communists have infiltrated the garment industry and you find the broken cross embroidered on packets and other garments for the casual American to wear." It also contained a statement from Michael Wurmbrand, identified only as "formerly of Rumania," that the peace symbol "was called 'the witch's foot' in the Middle Ages, and it was a common symbol of the devil, with the cross reversed and broken."

"If the American Legion is distributing this kind of junk, the public should know about it," said Mr. Landt, who added that he was a registered Republican and has never been active in politics. "I want to stamp out anything that throws a bad light on the peace symbol."

The peace symbol was designed in 1958 in London by the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War as a nuclear disarmament symbol. It was a graphic composite of the semaphore signals for the letters "N" and "D", standing for nuclear disarmament, and was first displayed at peace marches in England that year.

Mailing Acknowledged

Mr. Schultz said that he did not know where the literature had come from. At the Legion's national headquarters in Washington, D.C., James Watkins, National public relations director, said the national office was definitely not distributing such material, although the more than 16,000 Legion posts around the country operate on charters and are relatively autonomous.

"Still, I'd be amazed that

a post could do that," Mr. Watkins said. "They can't back any of it up with facts."

Reached by telephone in Minersville, Elvin Laudeman, commander of Post 544, acknowledged that his post's un-American activities committee had prepared the flyer and distributed it around the country. "We're just trying to get some of this stuff out of the bag about Communist-inspired organizations," Mr. Laudeman said. He said the information had come from "mailings," but that he did not know the specific origin of any of the ideas.

Coincidentally, American Opinion magazine, a monthly publication of the John Birch Society, carried a 16-page article entitled "Peace Symbols, The Truth About Those Strange Designs," in its June issue.

The article, by David E. Gumaer, a staff writer for the magazine, details the adoption of the symbol at the Aldermaston Easter peace walk in England in 1958, led by the late Lord Bertrand Russell, whom the article described as "the radical and atheist."

Photograph of Devil

"Far from being a modern design, the symbol which Russell adopted as the Communists' insignia for peace dates back many centuries in the history of anti-Christian activity. In 711 A.D., for instance, when the Saracen hordes crossed into Spain to establish their Moorish kingdom, the shields of the invaders were decorated with the inverted broken cross," the article states.

The magazine article includes a photograph of a 16th-century woodcut of the devil. "The symbols representing the eyes of the demon are exactly like the peace symbol being promoted by the Reds," the caption reads in part.

"Yes, I admit that this business is weird," the author writes. "But it does explain the comments in the Establishment press about a resurgence of satanism, and the proliferation of black-magic shops in areas where leftist students and radicals gather. The revolutionaries are pushing this business like there's no tomorrow. And those peace symbols are

a part of it. They are symbols of the anti-Christ!"

Scott Stanley, who edits the society's monthly in Belmont, Mass., said in an interview that the staff had fun with the article. "We thought people would be interested," Mr. Stanley said. He added that there had been about 200,000 requests for reprints, a figure which he described as "about average." "Almost everything we do is controversial," he added. American Opinion sells for \$1 a copy and has about 50,000 subscribers.

Mr. Stanley said he did not think that the article's interpretation of the peace symbol could be interpreted as anti-Semitic. "It was a prominent anti-Christian symbol, but it was also anti-Jewish too," he said. "It cuts both ways."

However, Israel H. Moss, Westchester director of the Anti-Defamation League, places a more serious interpretation on the right-wing interest in the peace symbol. "I see this as an effort to label the entire peace movement as Communist," Mr. Moss said, adding that "it is easy to pick out anti-Semitic inferences" in the material. He cited the reference in the American Legion literature to the garment industry, which is generally identified with Jews.

"There are people of all shades of opinion, including some of the leading statesmen and clergymen in the world who have identified themselves with peace groups," Mr. Moss said. "Even the Pope is for disarmament. Does this make him a Communist?"