

Everything has its season — and that adds to complexity

by John W. Holmes

"Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it" — Lewis Carroll

The argument about morality and foreign policy is never-ending. There is no "solution", for any solution would be a "final solution", the not-unfamiliar posture of a state that, knowing itself to be the guardian and promoter of right, can do no wrong. It is rather a matter of agonizing reappraisals so long as there is life in the body politic and a conscience and democracy. Either as a community or within ourselves as citizens, we always need the moralist who cares for values and the pragmatist who can chart the way without doing more harm than good.

The assurance of "moralists" is often alarming. Whether they argue for the exorcising of North Vietnam, Chile, South Africa, Uganda or China, they know God is on their side. Because truth is theirs, they may lie, traduce the motives of their antagonists, steal documents, and indiscriminately set their eclectic wills against that of governments chosen by all the people. The assurance of the self-designated "realists" is no less alarming. These hard-headed guardians of our national interest cannot envisage one step beyond the next. Having helped to establish the code for an international jungle, they insist on the necessity of a country adopting that code to survive. They ignore the fact that nations must do as they would be done by if they are to survive in this interdependent world. It is the absolutists of both kinds who are dangerous, those for whom compromise is weakness or sin.

"Moralists" can too often be charged with fixing their gaze on the issues of others far away to the neglect of more troublesome issues at home. The rear-echelon crusaders who demand from the security of Canadian campuses violent revolution in the Middle East or southern Africa ignore the perspective of those Israelis, Zambians or South Africans who will provide the blood. If Canadian reform-

ers spent as much time learning French or English as they have marching and waving banners on behalf of United States blacks, California fruit-pickers, or Biafrans, the great Canadian experiment in racial tolerance might not today be in such a parlous state. That is an argument, however, not for ignoring wickedness abroad or renouncing Canadian responsibility towards, for example, Rhodesia or Chile but just for devoting equal time to pains at home that hurt more. As Mackenzie King commented: "It is a sort of escapist position to be continually taking up matters relating to other countries than our own . . ." King was not the most consistent guide to morals in foreign policy, but he did have a traditional Canadian canniness about means as well as ends. Although he believed, perhaps excessively, in the need for calculation in a moral foreign policy, he also recognized that there were times when we did have to stand up and be counted — in 1939, for example — against a truly diabolic challenge.

Compromise is necessary to save individual countries and the world at large from destruction, but it is not an absolute value. There are times when defiance of the law is the only way — provided the cause is of sufficient consequence to compensate for the endangering of respect for the law. When Canada rejected the jurisdiction of the International Court over its pollution-control zone in the Arctic on the grounds that existing international law was inadequate, it may have been right, but this is a type of action to be taken very rarely and never lightly. The "realist", too, can be right to protest when his country is destroying itself or some other people in the name of some unachievable moral cause. It is a question whether the war in Vietnam was ended when the moralists in the United States overcame the realists or when the realists overcame the moralists.

When is the right path ever clear? What would have been the moral thing to do in 1939 if the allied leaders had known that the Nazis were on the verge of discovering the atomic bomb? Would there not have been a moral case for the continuation of appeasement? The murder of Paris and London could serve no good purpose. Would it not have been better for people to remain alive so that they might eventually restore civilization? George Kennan made a similar argument in the Fifties for the slogan "better Red than dead" if the Russians occupied Western Europe.

In a nuclear age, the arguments for appeasement are

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