

A Canadian appraisal of the state of the Union

Grave problems need new solutions

By W. A. Wilson

No nation affects so many others as pervasively, in as many different ways, as the United States — not even the other nuclear super-power, although the force of its ideology, coupled with its military might, makes it a close second. American influence, direct and indirect, is exercised either consciously or unconsciously through military power, economic dominance, politics, the force of the social trends and movements that begin in the United States and, in the broadest sense, the nation's culture. The massive role of the Soviet Union in the world community is felt as strongly in some of these respects but barely at all in others. Any other nation is as conscious, and with as good reason, of Russian military might as of American. Contrary to popular mythology in the West, the Soviet ideology does not spread only through the ways of conspiracy and military intervention. Its force and vigour are as powerful as the American philosophy. But the Soviet Union offers no counterpart to the influence of American social movements because, the U.S.S.R. not being a free society, such movements develop less easily there and, if they appear contrary to the interests and prejudices of the regime, they are harassed from birth onward. The freedom of America remains one of the powerful influences in the world 200 years after its first expression in rebellion against an imperial parent. Nor is there a Soviet counterpart to the influence of American culture in either its best or its worst manifestations.

The political, social and economic health of America is of vital importance to its friends and allies, which include most of Western Europe, Canada and diminishing areas of Asia. The word "America" itself has been used historically both by citizens of the United States and outsiders to encompass not merely a geographical area but also a set of ideas, ideals and

social forces. Reliance upon America is decreasing, but the same factors that are of intense interest to its friends are matters for wary concern among the opponents and enemies of the United States.

While President Nixon's fatal domestic difficulties were well under way, the most powerful man in the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, travelled to the United States to confer with him. A Russian official in Ottawa was asked whether he thought the President's difficulties would make it hard for him to negotiate or would offer temporary advantage to an opponent. He replied thoughtfully to this effect:

"I do not think our leaders are paying very much attention to Mr. Nixon's domestic difficulties. The thing that matters for us is that the United States is a very powerful country. That will go on."

That appraisal from an opponent was probably one of the most realistic of the foreign assessments of the effect of the Watergate affair. Since America is a colossus, the details of its national health are likely always to be complex but unless or until it finally begins to decay as Rome did its underlying strength will remain because it is based on economic and social reality. Concern for the condition of America will always fascinate a wide international circle, from the most popular to the most influential levels.

What follows is an attempt to piece together a picture of the American condition now from public sources of information and conversations with a variety of knowledgeable men and women. As it ap-

Brezhnev's assessment of Watergate

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