

The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Anniversary

NEXT week marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis. It was a crisis that found the President of the United States and the Premier of the Soviet Union poised over the nuclear push buttons.

The week of October 22, 1962, began with a nationally televised broadcast by President John F. Kennedy in which he disclosed that Soviet missile sites were being constructed on Cuban soil within lobbing distance of American cities. The President's statement was tantamount to an ultimatum to the Soviet Union to remove the missile installations. He said that he had ordered the U.S. Navy to intercept Soviet ships bound for Cuba. The blockade would continue in force, he said, until the missile sites were dismantled.

The nation as a whole rallied behind the President, though there was a numbing realization that the stage was now set for an incident that could touch off a nuclear war. The President had neither ignored nor minimized this possibility in deciding on the blockade. And all at once people—not just Americans but people everywhere—realized they had been wrong in believing that nuclear war was so horrible that no nation would dare unleash it. Even though the arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union bulged with atomic explosives, and even though both countries had centered their military strategies on nuclear force, people everywhere had been sustained by the illusion that the bomb would never be used. But all this changed during that week; people suddenly had to face up to the implications of atomic warfare.

Day by day during that week, a tragic flaw in the organization of human society became increasingly apparent. The nation was the ultimate form of organization on earth; but the interests of the nation were not necessarily consistent with the interests of the human species. In the fact of warring against one another, the nuclear nations would be warring against the whole of the human race.

The feeling of mounting helplessness was one of the most memorable—memorable in the scarring sense—aspects of the week of the Cuban crisis. Pope John XXIII provided moral leadership when he appealed to both governments to accept their obligation not just to themselves but to the cause of human life. He urged restraint in the name of a common humanity and a common sanity. Few other voices spoke for the human family that week.

What about the men who presided over the nuclear switchboards? Were they unmindful of the moral implications of what might happen? Both President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, we now know from various memoirs, were fully aware of the shattering meaning of the confrontation; yet they were steered by their separate national identities. A nation had not only its interests to uphold but its pride. A nation went to war before risking the appearance of weakness. Nuclear war was not unthinkable; the only thing that was unthinkable was a departure from one's conception of the national honor. The survival of the species

was a "soft" question. The "hard" question concerned the national security.

The Soviet Union was intent on proving that if the United States thought it could supply Cuban émigrés with the military means of staging an invasion, the U.S.S.R. could supply the Cuban government with missiles as a deterrent. The United States was intent on proving that it would not allow its national security to be jeopardized by Russian missiles a few miles off the American coast. Both objectives were readily explicable in the context of a world of plot-and-counterplot in which force was the only arbiter.

But the "soft" question—the question raised by Pope John—persisted nonetheless: Who had responsibility for human destiny? However impressed personally the leaders of the two governments may have been by the Pope's appeal, they still had to contend with the issues raised by a test of strength. The men who were close to President Kennedy at the time have said that the United States was completely determined to go all the way if it had to—yet they have drawn a picture, too, of a President, a human being, who was eager to explore every possibility by which the other side could back down without loss of face.

What about Khrushchev? Several months after the end of the Cuban crisis, I was involved in negotiations with Premier Khrushchev for the release of two cardinals who had been under house arrest in the Ukraine and in Czechoslovakia for almost two decades. Premier Khrushchev spoke freely about the situation in the Kremlin during the week of the Cuban crisis. From his description, the Soviet situation emerged as a mirror image of the American experience. The people around Khrushchev sought to steer him away from any action that would be a confession of weakness.

"When I asked the military advisers if they could assure me that holding fast would not result in the death of five hundred million human beings, they looked at me as though I was out of my mind or, what was worse, a traitor, he told me. "The biggest tragedy, as they saw it, was not that our country might be devastated and everything lost, but that the Chinese or the Albanians would accuse us of appeasement or weakness. So I said to myself: 'To hell with these maniacs. If I can get the United States to assure me that it will not attempt to overthrow the Cuban government, will remove the missiles.' That is what happened. And now I am being reviled by the Chinese and the Albanians. They say I was afraid to stand up to a paper tiger. It is all such nonsense. What good would it have done me in the last hour of my life to know that though our great nation and the United States were in complete ruins, the national honor of the Soviet Union was intact?"

In the United States, there was no official gloating, or order of President Kennedy, when Premier Khrushchev removed the missile sites. But the resolution of the missile crisis was widely interpreted as proof that if only we would stand firm we would always come out ahead. Very little was said about the fact that if both countries had been guided by that notion, both would have been destroyed.

The real lesson of the week of October 22, 1962, was that the cause of life on earth is too important to be left to the national aggregations. That lesson will make its mark only when a genuine world order comes into being that is able to resolve disputes on the basis of justice and codified law and that is responsible not just to national governments but to the society of humans on earth. —N.C.

Editor
Norman Cousins
President
Carll Tucker

Managing Editor
Peter Young
Editorial Director
Horace Sutton
Art Director
Alfred de la Houssaye
Senior Editors
Hallowell Bowser,
Roland Gelatt, Doris
Grumbach, Susan Heath,
Irving Kolodin, Albert
Rosenfeld, Roger M.
Williams
Associate Editor
Susan Schiefelbein
Copy Editor
John Tarkov
Associate Art Director
Lily Hou
Assistant Art Director
Laura Hart
Assistant Copy Editors
Joan E. Henricksen,
Carol Mauro
Assistant Editors
Karen Braeder,
Susan von Hoffmann,
Susan Ochshorn
Contributing Editors
Goodman Ace, Clarence
Brown, John Ciardi,
William Cole, Fred M.
Hechinger, Katharine Kuh,
Karl E. Meyer, Thomas H.
Middleton, Gordon
Rogoff, Christopher H.
Stern, Walter Terry,
Margaret R. Weiss,
Anthony Wolf

Advertising Director
Anthony Salisbury
Associate Publishers
Richard B. Barthelms,
William Stutts
**Travel Advertising
Manager**
Jay Stelzer
Advertising Sales
Rebecca Landsman,
TICKI H. RICHARDS
**Classified Advertising
Manager**
June Tooni
**Director of Advertising
Services**
Joan Grant
**Advertising
Representatives:** Western
Region, Donald G. Dickey
Co., 681 Market Street,
San Francisco, Calif.
4105; Midwest
Region, Joseph Wall &
Associates, 400 Ascot
Drive, Park Ridge, Ill.
60068; Detroit, Robert M.
Morin, S.M.A., 19400 W.
0 Mile Road, Suite 216,
Southfield, Mich. 48075;
Metropolitan Publishers
Representatives, Inc.,
Atlanta (404) 352-2173,
Miami (305) 856-8326,
Tempe (813) 837-5618
Research Director
Judy Berenberg
Circulation Director
George Reeves
Controller
Nathan Cohn
Assistant to Controller
Lobby Levasseur
Accounting
Dave Freed
Office Manager
Susan Selby
Administrative Assistants
Leni Friedman, Dorothy
Murray, Emily Suesskind,
Mary Swift

Letters from Readers

Back Door Sex

I was disturbed by the Back Door piece in your July 23 issue. Mr. Tucker seems to think that because homosexuals are guaranteed certain rights by the Constitution and its first ten Amendments, we will enjoy them without hindrance. Where was he during the Sixties? Is he aware of the women's movement?

Perhaps we are not meant to take this seriously, but he says, "What I object to is that they are demanding these rights as homosexuals rather than as ordinary citizens." These rights are withheld because we *are* homosexuals. Is he aware that our esteemed representatives in Congress recently approved "legislation" that would specifically deny legal assistance funds to homosexuals engaged in "legal disputes or controversies on homosexuality or so-called 'gay rights' "? In most states we are without legal sanctions against ignorant or bigoted employers, landlords, and legislators. Tucker believes this is as it should be: the Dade County "ordinance guaranteeing homosexuals these rights was unnecessary and should be repealed."

"The issue, I know, is more complex than that," says Tucker, as though someone informed him that the issue is complex but failed to explain to him how. There are "too many groups around the world whose fundamental rights are endangered..." (Indeed) Tucker looks forward to the day when "we can concentrate on more immediate and more important concerns." Because homosexuals are threatened by a worse than bleak future, "some of the more significant issues of the day are slighted or ignored."

The issue is human rights, Mr. Tucker. The issue is the creation of a legally defined second-class citizenship. You should be aware that the issue is tyranny.

Don Wolff
Denver, Colo.

Carll Tucker replies: If a person is discriminated against on the basis of sex, race, or sexual preference, he or she has recourse to the courts. If a person is injured by a law that sanctions discrimination, he or she can challenge the constitutionality of that law. If, for instance, the Senate passes a bill specifically denying homosexuals legal aid funds to finance their civil rights suits, the bill should be challenged. To campaign for legislation granting rights that are already guaranteed is diversionary and—witness the Dade County referendum—divisive.

To equate the homosexuals' battle for civil rights with those of women and blacks is misleading. Sex and skin color are given, not chosen, and are impossible to conceal. Among

With this issue *SR* begins a monthly feature, Education Now, whose purpose is to create a dialogue between educators and our readers on matters of specific and general concern in the field of education. Each month, a question posed by an *SR* reader will be answered by a specialist. Unfortunately we will not be able to acknowledge or respond to questions that are not answered in the magazine. Please address questions to Education Now, Saturday Review, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019.

the "more important and immediate concerns" to which I referred are the battles in behalf of those who can do nothing to help themselves—the unemployed, the handicapped, children. I heartily regret that Anita Bryant and her opposites are forcing us to devote energy and attention to a question that never needed to have been raised.

Shaping Up

The ideas reported in *The People Shapers* [August 20] regarding the control of human traits seem to me behaviorism gone mad.

That the soul is not to be identified with the body has been stated "from above down" by the wisdom teachers of all the great races and is now being verified by the modern psychology of the unconscious and many of the branches of parapsychology "from below up."

Eugenics and other disciplines seeking to improve the physical vehicle are legitimate and desirable. To improve the mental, moral, and other nonmaterial factors in human life by constraints on the body could lead to worse repression than anything Communist governments have yet attempted.

Gertrude Borchard
Upper Montclair, N.J.

Your August 20 excerpt from Vance Packard's book *The People Shapers* is both fascinating and frightening.

In "Packaging Superior People," the question "And what about [an] embryo that combined the seed of a certified genius and a well-known actor or actress?" reminds me of the story about George Bernard Shaw. A beautiful and talented performer—I think it was Isadora Duncan—is said to have written to Shaw expressing her admiration and proposing that they get together to produce a super-child who would have his genius and her beauty. Shaw wrote the reply: "But suppose it had my body and *your* brain?"

B. A. Speck
Washington, D.C.