

Businessmen For Peace

One of the most heartening developments on the current American scene is the new nation-wide organization, Business Executives Move for a Vietnam Peace. These dedicated businessmen came from all over the country to meet at the Statler-Hilton in Washington on September 27, to form their organization and expressed their determined and cogent opposition to the war in Vietnam. There were none of the very big businessmen represented here — none of the Rockefellers, Watsons, or Weinbergs — in short, none of the big businessmen tied in with the federal government and its machine for war spending and war contracts. These were the middle-rank executives throughout the country, presidents of their own firms, genuinely tied in with the free, private market economy.

It is one of the widespread socialist canards that wars are brought about by the capitalist economy; that wars are inherent in the private enterprise system. The truth is really the reverse: since the rise of business enterprise, this system has been one of the requisites and mainstays of free trade, free markets, and international peace. All of these go hand in hand. But, as one cynic once shrewdly said, “The only thing wrong with capitalism is the capitalists,” and particular capitalists have often turned to the state to promote wars for their own benefit. In doing so, they have given the capitalist system as a whole an undeservedly bad name. Now these businessmen have come forward to redeem that name.

The most publicized speech at this gathering was made by Senator Thruston Morton (R., Ky.), who has so far embraced the cause of peace, in contrast to his usual bland and mild position on public affairs, that he accused President Johnson of being “brainwashed” to extend the war, and he particularly pinpointed the sinister influence of that “military-industrial complex” that President Eisenhower warned us of in his clearest and most penetrating public address. Morton’s speech reflects a growing and pervasive shift toward peace by congressional Republicans, sparked by the much-abused Republican staff White Paper on Vietnam a few months ago. Doubtless these Republicans remember that Eisenhower was elected in 1952 largely on his “I will go to Korea” pledge, which led to the ending of the Korean holocaust.

Even harder-hitting was the address to the businessmen’s group by Marriner S. Eccles, San Francisco and Utah businessman and former head of the Federal Reserve Board. Eccles stressed that the Vietnam war was causing a huge federal deficit, an increase in income taxes, and higher costs of living. On the Vietcong, Eccles declared: “They are fighting for national liberation and unity of South Vietnam: the causes for which others, including Americans; have fought.” He added:

To withdraw is sanity. [Applause] The consequences of withdrawing cannot possibly be as disastrous for this nation as pursuing our present course. [Applause] The greatest service we could render the Vietnamese is to withdraw from their country, leaving them to negotiate a conclusion to the war, which is their right. [Applause]

And Admiral Arnold True (Ret.) warned the businessmen that unless American foreign policy was completely changed and stopped supporting dictatorships everywhere, we’d be faced with many “Vietnams” in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

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