Who Are The Real Kooks In Our Society?

It’s hard to judge which is worse—the vulgarity or the stupidity of government officials in dealing with the Chicago conspiracy trial. The U.S. Attorney, Foran, attacks the defendants as “fags”, sneaks and scum. The Cook County Sheriff has them sheared of their long hair in jail and exhibits the photos at a political rally as an example of “how Republicans get things done.” Vice President Agnew calls them “kooks.” If the Administration wants to provoke more student rioting, this is the course to pursue. Nothing could make a sizeable portion of our youth more sympathetic to the defendants than forcible hair-cuts, for their hair is the symbol of their repulsion against a society they see as morally bankrupt. The name-calling will sound all too reminiscent of parents too dense to understand the anguish of youth.

Mitchell Was Warned

Agnew asked that these “kooks . . . demagogues . . . social misfits” be kept off the front pages and the TV screens. If the Administration wanted to keep them off, it should have had more sense than to bring them to trial. An Associated Press dispatch reveals that there were lawyers in the Justice Department who warned that the statute making it a crime to cross state lines to incite a riot was of doubtful constitutionality, that the trial would inevitably become political and that the accused might turn it into a circus which would embarrass the government. Attorney General Mitchell overruled them and now the Vice President seems to want more of the same. He told the Governors Conference in Washington, “Let us react automatically, briskly and effectively to the threat of violent revolution and recognize it for the clear and present danger it constitutes.” To call it “a clear and present danger” is to invoke the Supreme Court’s rationale for justifying the restriction of fundamental liberties in a time of imminent danger. Only the far-out Weatherman faction of the SDS is kooky enough to join Agnew in imagining that a rash of window-breaking by students puts the government of the United States in imminent danger of overthrow. And nothing would do more to foster blind revolutionary rage on the campuses and in the ghettoes than to start filling the jails with more student and radical leaders.

An Agnew at large poses more danger to social stability than the Chicago defendants. One passage in his appeal to the Governors was the authentic voice of repressionist ideology. He called on the Governors “to withstand the criticism of the liberal community, who are presently so blinded by total dedication to individual freedom that they cannot see the steady erosion of collective freedom . . .” To speak of being “blinded by total dedication to individual freedom” is strange language from an American Vice President in the capital of the so-called free world. This is not Jeffersonianism. It is a compote of decayed Leninism and left-overs from the Fascist era. The only meaningful freedom is individual. “Collective freedom” is the jailhouse liberty the Communist bureaucracy imposes on dissidents in Moscow, Warsaw and Prague, and the military junta of Papadapouls on Athens. There are a few wacky Maoists on the fringes of the youth movement who sound in this respect just like Agnew. The Vice President has taken a Great Leap Forward.

The Nixon Administration is exhibiting the classic symptoms of a regime headed for deep trouble. A revolutionary is to a society what a pain is to an organism, a warning that something is wrong. Not to heed the pain is to let the disease proceed until it is too late for remedy. It would be wiser to listen to these “kooks” than to try and suppress them. I know most of the Chicago defendants and their lawyers personally and I regard them—and history will—as among the best of our time. Not many people are willing to risk jail to warn

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The Only Way To Restore Faith In The Courts And In Orderly Change

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society of its perils. However, and to whatever degree, right or wrong, they deserve a thoughtful hearing, because they speak for a better generation. They reflect the despair of younger people who fear atomic annihilation within their lifetime unless the nuclear buildup and all the sheer suicidal institutional folly behind it can somehow be reversed. They see America drifting toward race war at home and abroad unless the conscience of the dominant whites can be raised to a level where equality would make fraternity possible. They have increasingly lost faith in the possibility of peaceful change as they confront the baffling immobility of the establishment, military and civilian.

Agnew Sounds Hysterical

Governments are not overthrown. They overthrow themselves. They see critics as plotters. They over-react and lose their balance. From the Bourbons to Batista one may read this same story. Agnew showed the all too familiar blind

ness. He told the Governors the greatest issue facing the country was “not the war in Vietnam, nor inflation, nor the environment.” It is, he said, “Will the government of this country remain in the hands of its elected officials or will it descend to the streets?” This is topsy-turvy as it is hysterically overwrought. Vietnam, inflation, pollution are major causes of the unrest and major proofs of the government’s incapacity. Without them, there would be little turbulence on the campus and in the streets. With them, the turbulence will grow. Who is Agnew to speak of “kooks”? What could be kookier than continuing a cruel, costly, divisive and unwinnable war? What could be kookier than spending 53 cents of every general revenue dollar on the Pentagon for more overkill and four-tenths of one cent per general revenue dollar (as Nixon proposes in his new budget) on what he himself says is a “now or never” attempt to save the and in orderly change, by going on to reverse the whole
turbulence on the campus and in the streets. With them, the justice of social equality. The cost will not be light but it will be lighter than the cost of injustice. Either we learn from the Chicago prosecution or we compound its follies. The wiser course began in the Seventh Circuit Court of Ap-
peals when it unanimously reversed Judge Hoffman’s refusal to pose this question to my esteemed colleagues. What would your reaction and the reaction of the Capitol Police Force have been if this anti-American display had been carried out by members of the Black Panthers, the SDS, the American Nazi Party or the Communist Party of America and the symbolic weapons they had chosen were toy guns and not ax handles? How many of them would be in jail at this very moment?


inability to control technology. Man himself is obsolete un-
less he can change. That change requires more altruism; more kindness, more—no one need be ashamed to say it—love. It will not come about by calling other people “pigs” instead of liberating ourselves by seeing them with compassion as fellow prisoners of conditioned reflexes and institutional molds. But if there were no handful of the desperate in the ghetto and on the campus to make threats and hurl rocks, who in our smug and complacent established order would begin to listen and to move a little?

I do not think the revolutionaries, black or white, can remake our society but I think they can make it increasingly unliveable. The antidote is justice, justice in the courts and the justice of social equality. The cost will not be light but it will be lighter than the cost of injustice. Either we learn from the Chicago prosecution or we compound its follies. The wiser course began in the Seventh Circuit Court of Ap-
peals when it unanimously reversed Judge Hoffman’s refusal of bail to defendants and counsel. The courts can save their reputation in the eyes of our youth, and restore faith in law and in orderly change, by going on to reverse the whole mess of convictions, the contempt included, and to hold unconstitutional the new statute under which they were reached. In a vast Republic, which prospered by the lack of barriers to free travel and free trade among its many States, this law would make it hazardous to speak freely once a state line had been crossed. It would suspend the First Amend-
ment in interstate travel and set the traps of repression.

Suppose It Were Hammers and Sickles?

As a black woman, I am dismayed by the fact that within the Capitol Restaurant he [Gov. Maddox of Georgia] was allowed to pass out ax handles, his per-
sonal symbol of resistance to the order of the highest court and the laws of this Congress . . . I would like to pose this question to my esteemed colleagues. What would your reaction and the reaction of the Capitol Police Force have been if this anti-American display had been carried out by members of the Black Panthers, the SDS, the American Nazi Party or the Communist Party of America and the symbolic weapons they had chosen were toy guns and not ax handles? How many of them would be in jail at this very moment?