

RIGHT OF PROTEST AND DISSENT

The principle of the free expression of opinion and the right therefore to dissent is the cornerstone of the American democratic process. America was founded by dissenters; our government was born in acts of protest, and free speech is enshrined in the Constitution as a sacred right.

There is ample historical precedent to demonstrate the validity, and even the necessity of dissent with established policies and acts of government. Especially in times of crisis when emotion may suffocate rational consideration of vital issues, and dissent is viewed with suspicion, dissent is most necessary for the decision-making process of a democracy. In its absence the nation suffers by the failure to subject pressing issues to close examination and through the creation of conditions which threaten basic freedom and values.

We are mindful and encouraged that in this period of crisis opposing views on basic issues of war and peace are more freely being expressed than in comparable war-time periods of American history.

We would deplore any action which would threaten expression of dissent, as protected by the Constitution, in connection with any aspect of U.S. foreign policy, including the case of Viet-Nam.

President Johnson only recently stressed the fundamental importance of the right of dissent when he stated:

"No American, young or old, must ever be denied the right to dissent. No minority must be muzzled. Opinion and protest are the life breath of democracy -- even when it blows heavy."

The very fabric of our society is woven on the premise that there is room in this country for the peaceful expression of all viewpoints, no matter how unpopular they may be. Our constitutional freedom is based upon the theory that all ideas shall have full opportunity for expression, and that decision by the majority shall be reached only after full and fair opportunity for minority views to be heard.

If we are to maintain the strength of our democracy, we must never fear to allow persons holding unpopular positions to set forth these opinions in an attempt to convince others of the justness of their cause. As Justice Brandeis has said, "Men may differ widely as to what loyalty to our country demands; and an intolerant majority, swayed by passion or by fear, may be prone in the future, as it has often been in the past, to stamp as disloyal opinions with which it disagrees.!"