

abuses of corporate power. But inflation may pose a greater challenge. History teaches, warns Ross, that when a country struggles through inflation at an annual rate of 15 per cent or more for three successive years, "the result is a change in its form of government."

Oil-importing nations, Ross laments, "have pusillanimously engaged in the greatest peaceful transfer of wealth in recorded history." Their power as refiners, distributors, and consumers should be used to counter the OPEC cartel. His vision of international economics, however, tends to emphasize cooperation, not confrontation. East-West trade should be vigorously promoted, he feels, accompanied by "drastic reductions" in armaments of all kinds.

Although less cogent politically than economically, Ross's essays are thoughtful and well-informed. His rational problem-solving approach deserves the attention of analysts and policymakers in both the public and private sectors.

—Ernest H. Schell

For Capital Punishment: Crime and the Morality of the Death Penalty by Walter Berns

(Basic Books; x + 214 pp.; \$10.95)

This is a book that deserves careful reading and argument. Berns, a distinguished political scientist at the University of Toronto, contends that "a country worthy of heroes" requires a transcendent sense of justice that, when egregiously violated, calls for the ultimate punishment, just as its defense rightly requires that citizens be ready to risk their own lives. There is much that is appealing in such an argument, especially as it challenges the sterile positivism and doctrines of calculated self-interest that dominate so much of contemporary jurisprudence. Berns is especially skillful in his appeal to Albert Camus's argument against capital punishment. Camus contended that the state has no right to impose death precisely because there is no value in the world higher than man. Berns suggests that this is the strongest argument against capital punishment, but it is fatally dependent upon the assumption that there is no such higher value, and Berns believes there is. Finally, howev-

er, Berns's contention is a poetic, dramatic, and morally intuitive abstraction that cannot overcome the healthy repugnance toward government killing felt by those who believe the primary purpose of the state is to protect all who are part of an expansive understanding of human community. In short, it is the conviction of the sanctity of human life—a conviction based upon precisely the sense of transcendent value which Berns would affirm—that militates against capital punishment. The author does make a powerful argument for the importance of punishment in society, but not for *capital* punishment. His efforts to draw parallels between capital punishment and the readiness to kill in justified war are unconvincing, since, as he concedes, the evidence for capital punishment as a deterrent that saves other human lives is inconclusive. The book is an elegantly written and reasoned case in a bad cause.

Correspondence [from p. 2]

being worse than McNaughton or his boss McNamara, whom I supported without knowledge of that telling memorandum.

As I've said, the objective of the sensitive prowar and antiwar supporter should have been to bring ends and means into proportion on the basis of political and social issues involved. Instead, after 1971, when the U.S. signed the peace treaty, we escalated the bombing in Cambodia and reduced social and political programs in South Vietnam. In the end, the U.S. was humiliated and our reputation scarred forever.

Robert McNamara, despite his efforts at the World Bank, has not yet paid his debt to those of us who believed his lies while he was secretary of defense. I supported the war, yet I condemn him. I believe that the people of Vietnam were worth our best efforts, even as I now decry the kind of efforts the U.S. did make. The name of McNamara will forever be one of infamy. For it is he who betrayed America's ideals—not the antiwar movement as a whole.

Anyone care to go back to Vietnam and do it right this time? I do.

Jeremiah Novak

The Asia Mail
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Appeal

To the Editors: It is with much humility that I bring to your kind attention the need for books in English in many underdeveloped lands. A new general public library has just been completed in the Dehiwala-Mt. Lavinia township in Sri Lanka.

May I appeal to your reading public through your columns to send all their unwanted used and new books to this public library. They may be sent by boat as book post in packages containing up to 18 pounds each, with an open top for postal inspection. Large quantities may be sent in special packages by ship.

These packages or shipments should be addressed to the Chief Librarian, The General Public Library, Frazer Avenue, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka.

The books that are most needed are encyclopedias and books on accounting, statistics, mathematics, management, social studies, biology, medicine, and science, as well as any other books of general interest to the reading public.

All contributions of books will be promptly acknowledged by the library.

Dr. Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe
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