

1974: A GOOD YEAR FOR CRISES?

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One year ago, we felt certain that the much talked of "crisis" in medical care would become a major political issue in 1973. But somehow the year has passed and it failed to develop. Medicine's loud and often hysterical critics in press and politics became busy with other problems, and now, with other crises to worry about, the sad state of American medicine has disappeared, at least temporarily, into the category of no news.

One year ago, Vietnam was still a festering issue, but the U.S. pullout and the return of prisoners defused the situation, leaving Jane Fonda and her pacifist army of anti-war demonstrators without a cause. This group has been unusually silent about the recent bloody scenes near Suez and the Golan Heights. The more than 50,000 deaths and the continued fighting in Indochina since the "cease-fire" have not been enough to keep emotional fires blazing among peace lovers. The weekly casualty counts of long-suffering Vietnamese—back page news now, if reported at all—no longer cause any serious anguish. The horrors of war are never so detestable without a bumbling, ugly, capitalistic nation like the United States to blame. George Orwell once wrote concerning intellectuals in Britain whose pacifisms, he felt, was not quite impartial: "[T]here is a minority of intellectual pacifists whose real though unadmitted motive appears to be hatred of western democracy and admiration of totalitarianism . . . they do not condemn violence as such, but only violence in defense of western countries." Notes on Nationalism essay, May 1945

On the other hand, more than enough new crises have developed during the last twelve months to satisfy most sensation seekers and keep us fully occupied. The most popular one of the last half year has been the "crisis in government," promoted and carefully manufactured out of the Watergate affair. This one engulfed Mr. Agnew and is still trying to deal the same fate to Mr. Nixon. But it had better hurry. The Arab Israel War exploded a new Middle East crisis, which in turn, has aggravated our present crisis in gasoline, oil and energy. Undoubtedly, just ahead, a new and major economic crisis is waiting to take over.

So, we look forward to the New Year with some misgivings. It could be a good year for crisis lovers. But even if it all blows over and we return more or less to normal, we can always get back to worrying about our sad state of health and the terrible crisis in medical care.