

# Views

Dena Clamage

1966

The possible trial and execution of United States airmen as war criminals by the Hanoi government has been handled by the administration and by the press as a crucial turning point in the war in Vietnam. Partially to justify the bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong, partially to pave the way for bombings of the Red River dikes and, perhaps, China, and partially to silence the peace movement and other dissenters, the administration is conducting an incredibly effective propaganda campaign to project the impression that the trials represent a significant escalation of the war by Hanoi, justifying further escalation on the part of the U.S.

However, this issue is a false one. First, it is clear that this issue is being emphasized out of all proportion to its real significance in order to camouflage the real issues of the war and to obscure the real questions. We must continue asking, what are American airmen doing over North Vietnam in the first place? Who is really responsible for the war in South Vietnam? When we keep the Vietnam situation in its proper perspective, we can see the degree to which the administration is attempting to construct a paper issue to divert attention from the essential injustice of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Second, it is clear that responsibility for escalation of the war in Vietnam can fall on only one party: the United States. The United States has, of course, tried in the past to place this blame on Hanoi, as with the Tonkin Gulf incident. However, the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong took place long before any mention of the trials; it is this bombing which is precipitating an escalation of the war in Vietnam—and nothing else.

Finally, on the level of sheer brutality, it is obscene to hear Johnson, McNamara, Rusk, et. al., bemoan Hanoi's inhumanity in contemplating the possible execution of prisoners of war in light of the accounts of the torture and murder of captured "V.C.s" by the American and South Vietnamese troops, not to mention the napalm, gas, and bomb; reserved for the South Vietnamese population-at-large. Although, it is true, brutality is brutality, the United States has, at this point, by its own actions abdicated its right to complain about any actions of brutality committed by the National Liberation Front or North Vietnam. These actions have become pure self-defense.

Unless we respond, we allow the administration to delegitimize our protest and to prepare the American public for more escalation. Also, we will lose much of the "fringe" support which has helped us in the past, as indicated by the Congressional statement on the projected executions. Most important, we will lose the opportunity to talk about the basic questions of the war by allowing the government to divert attention and emphasis away from these.

Since the second International Days of Protest, we have been progressively isolated from the vehicles of mass communication in the country. But it is important that we now try to utilize them as best as we can and by whatever means possible. So, although we are cut off from most of the media for effective response, I am convinced that we must try at this point to indicate the real significance of this false issue, otherwise, we will be seriously weakened and effectively isolated.

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