

# Napalm Photos Spark Vietnam Dialogue

Peter Werbe

1966

No matter what his choice of words, every newspaper editor is aware that he is bound to offend someone. The arrest and trial of Peter Zenger two hundred years ago and the bombing of the office of the WORKER in New York 4 weeks ago bear witness to this. The FIFTH ESTATE has not made everyone happy, nor would this be realistically possible. Some kind of people we displease send us threatening letters and make anonymous phone calls. Even our friends have had bitter words for us at times, as evidenced by our Letters to the Editor column, but this is to be expected and is a welcome indication that we are being read and thought about.

A few days ago a protest to one of our articles came in another form which, in turn, inspired this article. While I was reading copy at our Plum Street office, I noticed a member of Breakthrough (a local right-wing hate group) and two other men in our hallway. I wasn't particularly eager to talk to them, and as they attempted to enter our office, I told them we were closed to the public. One of them, a tall angry man of 28 or so, jammed his way past the other two and thrust three pictures into my hand. He asked why we had not printed them along with the picture in the September 15<sup>th</sup> issue of the FIFTH ESTATE showing the results of U.S. napalming on Vietnamese children. The photos were ghastly shots of villagers disemboweled by Communists. The photo credits were from a recent issue of the American Legion magazine. He grabbed a copy of the FIFTH ESTATE and turned to our picture of the horribly burned child and said, "I'm not a member of Breakthrough, I'm a member of the United States Army and you are calling my friends and me murderers." With this he stalked from our office.

What does that say for the FIFTH ESTATE? How can we condemn the violence of the United States and not that of the National Liberation Front?

First and foremost, we are Americans. The Army man is correct, the implication of our photo is murder, and all of us stand accused because our policies in Vietnam, with its napalm, chemical warfare, and saturation bombing of civilian population, are being carried out in the name of the American people.

Secondly, the implication that the Communists kill innocent people and so it is all right if we do the same is moral nonsense. If we commit acts of the same nature as our "enemies," are we not then the same?

Thirdly, the acts are NOT the same. The burned child was an innocent victim of the U.S. policy of indiscriminate terror against the Vietnamese people ("if it moves, shoot it"). The villagers shown were victims of discriminate terror. They were men who were the local agents of the Saigon government, men who are cooperating with the foreign invaders (or "aggressors," as Senator Gruening of Alaska calls the U.S. forces in Vietnam).

I do not mean to say that I condone these acts of terror, but as Carl Oglesby said at the March on Washington last November, "In revolutions, nuns will be raped and bureaucrats disemboweled." That is what happens in revolutions. They are violent and filled with acts of excess, and ours in 1776 (remember) was not much different. The situation in Vietnam today is one of revolution and the process is severely exacerbated by the U.S. presence there. The killing and atrocities on both sides could not continue without our troops being there.

Further, the violence of the oppressed cannot be equated with the violence of the oppressor. When Negroes pick up guns to defend themselves in the South, it is a qualitatively different act than when racists pick up guns to attack them. The same holds true in Vietnam—even the colors are the same.

The United States forces in Vietnam have taken the place of the French, and the Vietnamese are continuing their 20 year fight to throw off Western domination of their country.

The United States is fighting there to maintain the domestic prestige of Johnson and our world-wide commercial empire. So God is not on our side—he is on the side of the men in the black pajamas. The only good the U.S. can do in Vietnam is to leave immediately and by so doing, as Tuli Kupferberg says, “bring joy to the Universe.”

I thought we could run the pictures that the Army man brought to us along with this article, but they lacked the quality to make them able to be reproduced. The pictures looked as if they were already reproductions, and sure enough, when I turned them over, written on their backs was a section of a leaflet that read: “MARTIN LUTHER KING is either a FOOL or a TRAITOR and he certainly is not a FOOL! For further information write: BREAK-THROUGH, P.O. Box 3061, Detroit, Michigan 48231.”

Well?

# fifth Estate

Peter Werbe  
Napalm Photos Spark Vietnam Dialogue  
1966

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/16-october-16-31-1966/napalm-photos-spark-vietnam-dialogue>  
Fifth Estate #16, October 16-31, 1966

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**