

Capitol Punishment

Grounded Toys

By Art Buchwald

No one believes in the separation of powers more than I do. But when Congress voted last week to cut off funds used to bomb Cambodia I think they went too far.

It has been one of the traditions of the government for the past 10 years that a President has the authority to bomb where and when he wants to regardless of race, creed or color.

This has worked very well and the United States has dropped more bombs on Indochina than it did during World Wars I, II, III, IV and V.

Not only was Congress wrong in refusing to vote the funds for the future bombing of Cambodia but it couldn't have picked a more inopportune time to have done it. President Nixon is beset with tremendous problems at home and abroad. He has lost his White House staff; the Senate committee keeps probing into his role in the Watergate affair; men he trusted have been lying through their teeth about administration cover-ups; the CIA refuses to play ball with the President's version of what happened after Watergate; and the FBI, after a slow start, is uncovering massive violations of the law.

The only solace the President could take during this period is that he could bomb Cambodia whenever he wanted to. He could pick up the phone at any time, day or night, and say, "Henry, I've had a bad day. I want six squadrons of B52s to dump 2 million tons of bombs on the suburbs of Pnomh Penh."

Even while the press was zeroing in on the so-called "plumbers'" operation in the White House, even while John Dean was spilling the beans to Newsweek and Time, even though John Mitchell was telling reporters he had no intention of being a scapegoat, the President could survive because he knew if things really got rough he could always kick the hell out of Indochina.

It seems to me that Congress should have taken this into consideration when it overwhelmingly voted to cut off this presidential option. While they certainly have the right to look into Watergate, and while no one disputes their sincerity in getting us out of Indochina once and for all, bombing is still the President's business.

Many times we have been told that only Presidents really know what it is to be President. It is the loneliest job in the world with very few satisfactions. One of the big pluses was that as Commander-in-Chief you could send Air Force and Navy planes against any target you felt threatened the security of the United States.

By cutting off funds to bomb Cambodia, Congress has tied the President's hands behind his back. They have made it impossible for him to use the weapons that he has at his disposal for whatever purposes he deems necessary to teach the North Vietnamese a lesson. It is a dastardly move that could only depress the President more than he is right now.

I am not just thinking of President Nixon when I protest this congressional action. I am thinking of future Presidents of the United States.

One of the great inducements for becoming President is being able to bomb targets at will without consulting Congress. It is probably the greatest fringe benefit the American people can offer the holder of the most important position in this land.

My fear is that Congress, in taking this prerogative away from the President, may have discouraged many qualified people from running for this office.

Countless presidential candidates have told me personally, "If I can't bomb Cambodia when I want to, I'm not interested in the job."

So the question I pose today is: Can we afford to lose this caliber of men just because Congress has thrown out the baby with the bath water?