

Letters to the Editor

More on the Pentagon Papers

To the Editor:

Tom Wicker's almost savage reply to Dean Acheson's remarks on The Times' publication of the Pentagon papers suggests that Mr. Acheson has struck a nerve when he wonders why the papers weren't returned to their owner as stolen goods.

While this is really a nasty bag to open, I was struck while reading Mr. Wicker's article by the similarities between the action taken by The Times and that taken by the student rioters: Both had grievances and both chose to settle them beyond the law claiming justification in the theory of individual ethics. It would appear that we are in for a lot of chaos if the country's leading newspaper begins to advocate such procedures.

One of the tests to which any action is commonly put is to examine the effect it has had and to see who has gained by it. In the case of publishing the Pentagon papers, while it is clearly premature, it appears that the principal beneficiary is The Times itself. If we are to accept the Machiavellian view of government suggested by The Times in its recent series, it becomes doubly confusing since these papers must then have been released surreptitiously by the Government, which The Times is then aiding while making an issue of its opposition.

Whether The Times is being altruistic or not, it is difficult to see how the people benefit. While the real problems remain unsolved and in many cases untouched, The Times shows us that, contrary to popular thought, the judicial system is not dead and can, in fact, spring to life and respond to the call of The Times in a matter of days. In the meantime the poor rot in jail waiting for years to be heard.

In closing, Mr. Wicker gives us

Samuel Johnson in defense of stealing. This has the distinct odor of Kenneth Galbraith, who suggests quoting Churchill when cornered since Churchill has at one time or another advocated every possible point of view.

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New York, July 10, 1971

To the Editor:

We regard the news media's handling of the Pentagon papers as weak, inconclusive and confusing to the public. Granted, the media have shown courage and solidarity in defending the freedom of the press in America. However, apart from the admirable efforts of The Times, they have displayed, on the whole, little initiative or incisiveness in clarifying for the public the significance of the information contained in the report.

For example, we have found very little discussion so far of the most important and most scandalous disclosure in the archives: namely, that the United States planned and executed an aggressive war against North Vietnam in 1964-65. An informed and truly courageous press would have quickly recognized that such an aggressive war violates the Nuremberg principles and the U.N. Charter and constitutes a crime against peace.

Furthermore, alert journalism would have called attention to the inescapable conclusion that the disclosures of the report eliminate any pretense of a legal basis for our continued presence in Indochina.

The television networks have been particularly negligent and shallow in their discussion of the report. With

instinctive reverence for authority, they have sought out Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Walt Rostow and Dean Rusk, and have afforded these suspect individuals an opportunity to compound their original deceptions and prevarications of 1964-65 with new deceptions and prevarications.

We do not criticize the procedure of the networks in offering these men—whose conduct and reputations have been (or ought to have been) severely damaged by the Pentagon papers—a chance to defend themselves. However, we question whether sheer declarations by discredited officials, without commentary, without comparison with the Pentagon report, and without an opposing viewpoint, can be responsible journalism.

Statements by men of authority and power presented without comment have the effect of network endorsement, and confuse the public about the veracity of the Pentagon papers themselves.

At the same time, the media as a whole and the TV networks in particular have made little effort to consult the other side: the numerous scholars who have long maintained that the war was and is aggressive, illegal and criminal.

The systematic exclusion of a whole range of antiwar scholars from the national networks at this timely juncture suggests that the networks are either surprisingly ignorant, or in unconscious complicity with the Government in its continuing effort to keep the ugly truth about the criminality of the war from the American public.

We call upon all media to educate the public now with a searching and thorough inquiry into the unlawful origins and the ongoing illegitimacy of the war.

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