

SF CHRONICLE

JUN 10 1970

World of Books



**U.S. Octopus--
The Pentagon**

John Barkham

William Hogan's column does not appear on Wednesdays

ALTHOUGH we still think of the Pentagon as a "military-industrial complex," the whole concept is strictly passe. If we are to believe Professor Seymour Melman of Columbia, the Pentagon has long since expanded into a para-state or state-within-a-state. It is already far bigger than our largest corporations; its "gross national product" in fact exceeds that of many industrial nations. This, charges Professor Melman in "Pentagon Capitalism: The Political Economy of War," makes the Pentagon an example of out-and-out state management and in effect fundamentally alters the governing institutions of the United States.

He goes on to analyze the magnitude of the Pentagon's operations, painting a picture of a huge industrial octopus with tentacles reaching directly or indirectly into virtually every branch of American business enterprise.

★ ★ ★

THE NEW industrial empire was created to defend America from its external enemies, but every year, usually at budget time, it confronts the nation with a list of ever greater perils demanding ever greater expenditures.

Melman also offers caustic comments on our Vietnam expenditures, which so far have failed to produce victory. By 1969 the U.S. had dropped 3 million tons of high explosives on the jungles of Vietnam,

which compares with the 2 million tons dropped in all of World War II in Europe and the Pacific.

"The U.S. forces," he remarks, "have spent about \$400,000 per enemy killed, including 75 bombs and 150 artillery shells per corpse." At the peak U.S. contractors operated enough earth-moving machinery in Vietnam to dig the Suez Canal in 18 months.

★ ★ ★

THIS gargantuan expenditure, Melman points out, has been achieved at the cost of denying funds to essential domestic services. Everyone knows of the money that should have been (but wasn't) spent on social services, but Melman is equally concerned at the industrial depletion caused by the concentration on military technology. By 1968, he tells us, no U.S. railroad had anything to compare with Japan or France, our merchant fleet ranked 23rd in the age of vessels, and in 1967 for the first time the U.S. imported more machine tools than it exported.

The Pentagon octopus is now so monstrous in size that any tampering with it affects national employment and produces serious political fallout. In other words, it is growing too big, too powerful for Washington to control. Nonetheless, Melman believes the effect should be made a prime cause of war crises." (McGraw-Hill, \$8.50) *Saturday Review*