

FEB 22 1973

NYTimes

Letters to the Editor

Of Amnesty and Clemency

To the Editor:

The President of the United States granted "amnesty" to Mr. Hoffa. The President opposes, with vigor, any amnesty to the young men who left the country rather than go to war.

Let us look at that a moment. Mr. Hoffa was indicted, found guilty and imprisoned for his criminal acts. But now, by Presidential clemency, he is out, is being wined and dined lavishly and is effectively staging an obvious comeback to power. His corruption and conviction were there for all to see. But Mr. Nixon thinks he deserved clemency.

As for the young men, mistaken or not, who simply refused to fight in a war that they regarded as immoral (as did millions of their fellow citizens), they are considered as quite unworthy of any amnesty or clemency. Perhaps they were mistaken, but they were sincere in their repugnance to an undeclared war. They were not corrupt, convicted criminals.

The President's moral judgments are plainly distorted.

DAVID K. BARNWELL
Millington, N. J., Feb. 15, 1973

To the Editor:

Your editorial (Feb. 12) presents an appealing case for across-the-board amnesty to all those who refused to serve in Vietnam. This could be justified by the ample precedent in history and in ethics that you cite, although the internecine American Civil War is probably not an appropriate conflict from which to draw applicable precedent.

Yet surely there is an important distinction to be made between those who according to the highest dictates of conscience faithfully bore witness to the revulsion they felt by accepting jail terms as the legal consequence of their refusal to serve, and those who fled the country.

Without question, anyone of induction age confronted with going to jail

or fleeing faced an unpalatable choice —perhaps no real choice at all as he saw it. The acceptance of jail, however, is in the highest tradition of civil disobedience. It is a statement of unassailable sincerity and of fundamental faith in the perfectability of our policies and institutions. The steadfastness of these men represents allegiance to principle of the highest caliber; as shepherds of precept they demand first call on our sympathies.

Those who fled responded in an eminently practical way, but in a way which is more a testament to expediency than to principle. Those who took jail paid for their crises of conscience by the interruption of their liberty; those who fled should pay some meaningful form of national service as the price of amnesty, not to slake a national thirst for retribution, but so that the vigil of conscience maintained by their incarcerated brothers shall not have been in vain.

NICHOLAS W. PUNER
Pleasantville, N. Y., Feb. 13, 1973

To the Editor:

During the cruel, unjust Vietnam war, I, among many others, protested against it by speaking, writing, marching, distributing leaflets; contributing to acts of civil disobedience to obstruct the war effort and to informing young men of their rights to resist the draft.

What could be more subversive?

Why then shall a young man who because of his moral and human convictions refused to throw napalm on innocent people or participate in a savage My Lai, who already has paid his stint by exile or jail, be denied amnesty and receive extra punishment for what he sincerely believed while we who shared his belief and demonstrated it by acts which could be considered seditious be allowed to get off scot-free?

ELSIE K. BELMONT
Member, Women Strike for Peace
Lincoln Square Group
New York, Feb. 16, 1973