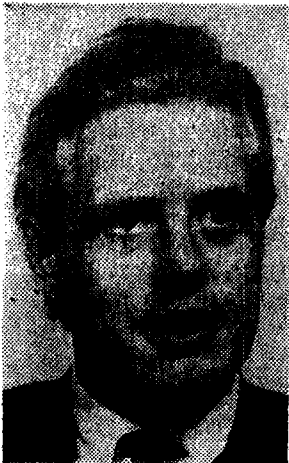


# Von Hoffman

## On the 'Treason' Column

A VERY FEW YEARS ago you could never read the words lie, liar, lying applied to your government in a newspaper. Nobody any newspaper would hire would dream of using such words in connection with the President; no editor would countenance their being set in type and printed. It was unthinkable.



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Then as the deaths and killing went on the unthinkable began to be thought, but expressed only obliquely. We began to read that maybe the government wasn't telling us the whole truth, that maybe the President was being less than candid . . . Oh, there were so many euphemisms!

The most famous was the credibility gap. That was a nice way of putting it without being rude, without being dis-

respectful. You may read this and snort at the very idea of respect for them, the perfidious polls who've sent so many to their deaths in the name of this mysterious, undefinable, unmentionable cause. If you do snort, you've forgotten it was only a couple of years ago that people were shocked to see Viet Cong flags at demonstrations; it was only a couple of years ago that people on the TV interview shows would recount with thrilled voice the special moment in their lives when they were invited to the White House and actually met the President, shook his hand.

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BUT NO MORE. There are many Americans you couldn't pay enough to go to dinner at the White House, and if they did, their friends wouldn't talk to them. So also, expressions like credibility gap don't say what we mean.

Now it is no longer a few young crazies with VC flags who're saying unimaginable things. It's sane and prudent and respected men like Arthur Hoppe, the delightful and superbly gifted columnist of the San Francisco Chronicle. The other day he wrote, and about 60 American newspapers printed these words:

"The radio this morning said the Allied invasion of Laos had bogged down. Without thinking, I nodded and said, 'Good.' And having said it, I realized the bitter truth: Now I root against my own country.

"This is how far we have come in this hated and endless war. This is the nadir I have reached in this winter of my discontent. This is how close I border on treason. Now I root against my own country . . . I don't root for the enemy. I doubt they are any better than we. I don't give a damn any more who wins the war. But because I hate what my country is doing in Vietnam, I emotionally and often irrationally hope that it fails.

"It is a terrible thing to root against your own country. If I were alone, it wouldn't matter. But I don't think I am alone. I think many Americans must feel these same sickening emotions I feel."

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SINCE HOPPE wrote that column a few days ago, he has gotten 941 letters. That's a lot of mail, and that doesn't count the letters sent to the papers his column appears in around the country. Nine hundred and twenty-three of those letters agreed with what he'd said; 18 didn't.

They weren't from young people. As Hoppe says, younger people have felt this way so long, they don't see anything remarkable in such thoughts appearing in the metropolitan press of Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia and Seattle. No, these letters came from older people, from ex-Navy colonels, from a policeman, from a construction worker.

"What they said," Hoppe wrote in a subsequent column, "most of them, was that they, too, had seen their love for their country eroded by this endless war. And they too mourned it. And they signed their names."

Hoppe had the macho to sit down and write a piece of truth that might have got him fired, and he found out he wasn't alone. About half of the 120 papers that normally print his column had the guts to run this one and they found out that they weren't alone.

This treason is rampant and it has never been stronger than since the Laos invasion. Our men aren't in there — or so the government assures us — so we feel perfectly free to root for the visiting team. The belief is everywhere that an American victory would be almost as bad for us as it would be for the people of South Vietnam.

So each day, each lie, each death, each maiming, each dollar detaches more people from their old trust and faith in the men who run this country. Yet at the same time a strange, unlooked-for thing is beginning to happen. The public proclamation of Hoppe's brand of treason isn't polarizing America; it isn't splitting us into hateful disunion. No, it's unifying us in a vast, national conspiracy against the incompetently sordid office holders and a new pledge of fidelity to the republic.

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