

William F. Buckley Jr.

Haldeman-McGovern Row

JAMES RESTON has delivered a most fearful bastinado on Robert Haldeman, the super-assistant to Richard Nixon, for going on the air and saying that some of the President's critics are giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

Mr. Reston was so sorely provoked that he even animadverted on Bob Haldeman's use of English, which was an unfriendly thing to do to begin with, and a strange thing to do under circumstances in which verbal inflections turn out to be the gravamen of Mr. Reston's complaint.

"BOB HALDEMAN," Reston began, ". . . Finally surfaced on NBC's early morning 'Today' show, and even a casual study of his clumsy prose suggests that he should have stayed in bed."

Here is the offending passage of Mr. Haldeman. "Now, after this (the President's) explanation, after the whole activity is on the record and is known, the only conclusion you can draw is that the critics now are consciously aiding and abetting the enemy of the United States."

Mr. Reston is driven to fulminations. "This, essentially, is what the administration is saying: Back the administration on its Vietnam peace terms or you hurt the country, says Secretary of State Rogers. Back us, says Haldeman of the White House staff, or you are giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Dissent, even honest dissent, is unpatriotic . . . (Haldeman) cannot believe that maybe Nixon's Vietnam peace terms for Vietnam are unrealistic."

I happen to think Mr. Haldeman is exactly right, a declarative sentence I struggle to formulate unclumsily. When a George McGovern or whoever takes a set of proposals which, shorn to their essentials, say to the North Vietnamese: submit to a free election in South Vietnam, an election in which you people will freely participate, and we promise to abide by the results—and denounce them as unfair, unworthy, unrealistic, disingenuous, whatever — he is most clearly aiding and abetting the enemy of the United States.

NOW IN ORDER to use that term at all, granted, it becomes necessary to agree that there is an "enemy" of the United States in this picture. George McGovern makes no

such admission, so that by terminological disqualification he is free of Haldeman's indictment. McGovern says that the North Vietnamese are merely engaged in helping their brothers in the South to wage a civil war against South Vietnamese separatists.

But surely Mr. Haldeman is entitled to take the more formal position, namely that the people who are firing their guns at the United States' soldiers are "the enemies of the United States," and if the George McGovern wince at the deduction, why that surely is the terrible price they need to pay for giving aid and comfort to enemy.

Even having established that we are talking about "the enemy" in the accepted sense of the term, are these critics aiding and abetting them? It is hard to see how there is any doubt that they are doing just that.

Intransigence is an aspect of strategy, and the North Vietnamese view the situation in Southeast Asia as sliding towards them because of American irresolution. And if they don't see that several men who aspire to the Presidency would preside quickly over an American evacuation of the area, leaving the South Vietnamese as sitting ducks for a grand orgy, they are blind—which of course they are not.

On the contrary, they no doubt spotted, out of the corner of their eye, James Reston's column as indicative of how the Establishment feels with its intransigence.

Begging the question of the over-all consciousness of George McGovern, which it would be clumsy to dwell upon, the honorable thing is to suppose that he knows what he is doing. What he is doing is fortifying the enemy.

He does so for reasons he believes to be utterly honest—even as some Americans who are utterly honest wished, during the Civil War, that the South would effect its secession.

QUITE CONSISTENTLY, he denounces any condition put by Mr. Nixon on U.S. withdrawal as "unrealistic." Accordingly, if one applies the conventional standard to the George McGoverns, one comes to the conclusion that they are consciously aiding and abetting the enemy of the United States. To think otherwise is unrealistic, not to say clumsy.