

Von Hoffman

And Next... The Bomb

Washington

ANYTHING SHORT of 500,000 people with brickbats and red flags surrounding the White House is regarded by the President as a ringing vote of confidence. By this standard the country has taken Laos very well.



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No member of the administration has been spat at or caned and except for the hippies and the hardhats ganging up in Iowa to throw snowballs at the embodiment-of-the-free-world-determination-to-resist-aggression, the only ontoward incident was the blowing up of the men's room in the Senate wing of the Capitol. This act of criminal insanity wasn't so

much a gesture of protest, as something touchingly optimistic and naive . . . imagine thinking that twenty pounds of dynamite could get those guys off their duffs.

But the country isn't indifferent or approving as the polls show. Never before has the opposition to the war been deeper or wider.

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ALL OVER people are saying to themselves that whatever I did before, it wasn't enough, I must begin again, I must do more. We see it in Tom Wicker, associate editor and columnist of the New York Times. No man is more honored or respected in American journalism and rightly so.

In the last few weeks, Wicker has twice broken what used to be the newspaperman's code and gone out and given a couple of smashingly good political speeches about the war and what we

ought to do about it. When men like Wicker take to the stump, you know things are in a bad way, doubly bad when you read his so-very-un-New-York-Times-like language:

"I want to say that, in the interests of saving America, moderation is no virtue and extremism is no vice. And I stand behind that.

"We've got to have a political movement in America, a political movement that will be at least of the courage and foresightedness of the consumer movement under Ralph Nader."

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HE SAID those words in January and followed them up with a speech a few days ago at Harvard where again he used words of unqualified passion: "It's become a war to preserve American vanity, a war to preserve American self-regard and to preserve American delusions of grandeur; it's become a war of war crimes for those purposes . . . the war is the sickest fruit of what's wrong in our country."

Later in that same speech, Wicker, the twinkly-eyed, chucklesome North Carolinian, this man of thought-out honesty and troubled judgment, spoke of withholding taxes, resisting the draft and civil disobedience. He didn't advocate breaking any laws, but he listed these among many other more ordinary measures like voting as things one might do. His import was that, while he might not agree, he could understand.

If calm and solid men contemplate unparalleled acts, they have reason. What may come next is catastrophically scary. Hans J. Morgenthau, the University of Chicago professor, who is to the peace party what Henry Kissinger is to the anti-Bolshevik Paladin, lays it out in the New Republic.

What he says is that the administration is trapping itself into a situation in which it may feel it has to shoot its way out with tactical nuclear weapons, and "note," the professor adds, "that Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs are now categorized as 'tactical.'" Morgenthau argues this calamity will be visited upon us as a result of the South Vietnamese in Laos, the policy of only spilling the blood of Asian infantrymen, the inability of American aviation to make up for the absence of American foot soldiers.

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THE MOMENT the administration acknowledges to itself the bind it's in, it must either make peace on the terms it can get, or go for the bomb, and Morgenthau thinks it'll be the bomb.

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