

P.O.W.'s—A False Issue?

To the Editor:

For weeks and months there has been a public clamor by Government officials and private citizens for the North Vietnamese Government officially to name those Americans it holds prisoner and those whom it knows to have died. This the North Vietnamese now have done. Without any certain knowledge that the released list of 339 prisoners and of twenty persons who have died is in error, Secretary of State Rogers calls the releasing of the list a "contemptible maneuver" and "inhumane." The Times [editorial Dec. 27] says he "spoke to the point."

How does the Secretary or The Times know that the list is incorrect? If, as some have charged, the North Vietnamese are holding the prisoners as hostages, what would be the point in listing fewer than they actually hold? I am convinced that the North Vietnamese are acting in compliance with Article 118 of the Geneva Convention which says, "Prisoners of war shall be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of active hostilities."

Secretary Rogers knows that this Administration has no intention of bringing an early end to active hostilities and thus is condemning these men to indefinite incarceration in North Vietnam so far as the Geneva Convention is concerned. Nevertheless, he tries to make it appear that it is the North Vietnamese who are inhumane even when they release officially the very list that he and other members of the Administration have been demanding.

He complains that Hanoi is not complying with the Geneva Convention. But what he really fears is that they will comply; that they will release and repatriate the 339 after the cessation of active hostilities but not before. If the President persists in his refusal to set a date for U. S. withdrawal from Vietnam, this means years more in North Vietnam for the captured pilots.

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Philadelphia, Dec. 28, 1970