

Clark's Charade in Hanoi

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON—During two hours in Hanoi with 10 carefully selected prisoners-of-war, Ramsey Clark lectured on American politics — indicating to the prisoners their early freedom depends on electing George McGovern, who he said “can win by a big vote.”

These pronouncements, previously unpublished, reflect the bizarre flavor of Clark's full meetings with the POWs. While the prisoners were ominously uncomplaining about their treatment and harshly critical of their own government, Clark delivered repeated homilies of the virtues of North Vietnam.

SIMPLY PUT, the Aug. 10 meeting was a charade, giving the dubious impression of American POWs splendidly treated by their captors and infuriated by U.S. war policies. Clark has not publicized how Hanoi rebuffed his efforts to see a wider cross-section of prisoners. Indeed, the full two-hour tape leaves no doubt Clark was meeting a small, cohesive group of POWs actively opposing U.S. policy.

Clark revealed his problems in contacting prisoners only during private meetings in Washington with families of POWs. He told them he asked to see specific prisoners believed in North Vietnamese hands but was refused.

“I wanted to go into Laos and into the South (Vietnam) to see what they had there.” He was refused. He requested a list of POWs and was refused. Reducing his request to 20 prisoners, he finally got to see 10.

The Communist officials “told me

there was a war going on,” he explained to prisoners' relatives.

When one relative noted the same prisoners are repeatedly “trotted out” for visitors, Clark bristled with indignation. But, he was asked, “Why aren't the North Vietnamese showing the rest?” Clark's reply: “I asked for new faces, and you take what they give you because they have the power.”

The 30-minute segment of the Clark-POW meeting broadcast by ABC Radio is dominated by the prisoners' testimony of their humane treatment. It does not contain Clark's gushing interjections. Devotion to “freedom,” he told the POWs, “is written deep in the hearts of the North Vietnamese people” who “believe that their cause is just.”

Once the prisoners related their experiences, they asked about American politics. Clark's answer, also omitted from the ABC segment, contained the hope for a “big” McGovern victory. When a prisoner referred to President Nixon's bombing policy as “idiotic,” Clark delivered a denunciation of bombing.

“**IF McGOVERN** were elected,” Clark told the POWs, “the war would end on the day he came into office . . . There can be no question that the prisoners would be returned immediately.”

Why didn't Clark publicly announce he talked to only a select handful of prisoners, learning nothing about the hundreds of others? His explanation to POW relatives: “You're not going to be successful if you offend them (the North Vietnamese).”