

# Speak Up, Mr. President

Despite the communiqué tardily issued in Saigon yesterday, the Nixon Administration continues to evade the toughest and most pertinent questions about the massive new United States air assault against North Vietnam.

The communiqué confirms the ferocity of the attacks—more than 1,400 strikes by giant B-52 and other bombers in a week against “military” targets in the heavily populated Hanoi-Haiphong area. But even in this initial limited lifting of the secrecy veil the old White House-imposed policy of evasion and dissembling persists.

The statement details damage to military installations but says nothing of widely reported damage to such places as the Gia Lam International Airport, the Bach Mai Hospital, half a dozen foreign embassies in Hanoi, foreign ships in the harbor at Haiphong, etc. Does anybody imagine that reconnaissance has revealed no such damage?

The command spokesman refused comment on questions concerning civilian casualties. Can anyone believe that carpet-bombing of this magnitude does not take a terrible civilian toll in such a densely peopled region?

The effects of these raids are no secret to the people suffering their terrifying impact. The facts will out—from Hanoi authorities, from foreign diplomats and newsmen stationed in North Vietnam, from Americans visiting there. But the American people are entitled to a prompt and full accounting from the men responsible for these acts committed in their name.

Most disturbing of all is the persisting silence of the Commander in Chief on why this renewed bombardment was ordered and how it is supposed to advance peace. Constitutional as well as moral issues are raised by President Nixon's failure to consult with Congress or confide in the American people about a major escalation of the war that has the gravest national and international implications. The President has yet even to define the issues at the stalled Paris peace talks which are the presumed justification for this retreat into barbarism. As Pope Paul VI has observed with extreme understatement, the reasons for the negotiating breakdown are not “sufficiently apparent.”

Harry Truman, whom the nation mourns today, used to emphasize that “the buck stops here”—at the desk of the President of the United States. It is past time that Mr. Nixon exercised his responsibility to speak up and explain the actions for which 200 million Americans must share responsibility.