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Von Hoffman's View

The Viet Lesson Many Can't Learn

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Washington

Wouldn't you know it? They did it with lawyers, broke the First Amendment, and poured the gore of flackery over the act of censoring the Times.

They did it in the name of security. Not your security, not the nation's — there are no military secrets here but the security of the politicians, civilian and military, who traduced America, not to another nation but to pride. For that's what they've got, a coriolanus complex.

Analysis and Opinion

Like Shakespeare's proud, Roman politican, they refuse to bend their knee to the popular will. They know better and they are better, and the Times caught them at it, these, superior men of the realpolitik that would be too much for an ordinary American to keep on his stomach.

The Times, however, has nailed them, done it so thoroughly that these men who grant interviews like popes grant audiences are having to come out and answer the hard questions. And when they do, how they substantiate everything that appeared in the Times before the censors got to the editor's desk.

Thus we saw a different General Maxwell Taylor on CBS the other night. The same Taylor who was our ambassador to Saigon in 1964 and '65, who was President Johnson's special adviser through the rest of his term. this well-tailored Taylor, so handsome and hawkishly gray, distinguished man, a fine soldier once, now compromised by his own words on the pages of the Times.

Bernard Kalb and John Hart interviewed him, but on television the words enter the brain so fast you can't be sure what you've heard. In print, even in excerpt form, they sink in.

Q: You would like to see the remaining documents in the hands of the New York Times not be published?

A: I say this not because of what's in them ... it's the principle of the thing, that we have here deliberate betrayal of government secrets, and I obviously have to be against that as a citizen.

Q: Well, what do you make, general, of the principle of the people's right to know when steps of this dimension are taken?

A: I don't believe in that as a general principle. You have to talk about cases. What is a citizen going to do after reading these documents that he wouldn't have done othewise? A citizen should know those things he needs to know to be a good citizen and discharge his function ...

Q: How do you assess the morality of the Johnson administration ... leading the United States covertly into war?

A: Of course, when you get the word morality, or moral, that's a very tricky term. Do you mean that the intentins were immoral, that the exception was immoral, or that the consequences were immoral. You see, you open up a whole philosophical questin.

Q: One columnist has assessed it in these terms. That in reading that report you get the sickening feeling of deception and betrayal. Now, do you accept that, reject it, or how would you comment on it?

A: Are they referring to the government or the people who published the papers?

Q: The reading of the Pentagon history, the reading of that tragedy, without being overtaken by that sickening feeling of deception and betrayal.

A: I wouldn't know, of curse. If someone says that, that presumably is his subjective attitude ... this is doing ... three bad things: one, it's laying thefoundaton for bad history; secondly, it's initiating a practice of officials betraying their government secrets and a distinguished newspaper printing them; and third, it's ruinous to relatins within our government and our internatinal relatins abroad ...

Q: What you think went wrong?

A : ... I'm writing a bo I'm going to have a couple of misleading chapters on the subject ...

Q: Could you very briefly, eneral, do a quick anthology of the right and wrong as you review them now?

A: One of the most serius wrongs ... in my judgment was our connivance at the overthrow of President Diem, because, regardless of what you thought of President Diem, we had absolutely nothing but chaos which followed ... (Diem, you will remember, was the chap who John Foster Dulles, Mike Mansfield and Cardinal Spellman set up in power. He ruled and looted South Vietnam with Dragon Lady, his wife, and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, an opium junkie — shades of things to come. They were driven from power with the help of the CIA hence Taylor's reference to "our connivance.") ... the place would have disintegrated had not President Johnson made his two, very tough, courageous decisions to go ahead ... so that's a case of one place I thought we were very badly wrong and secondly, one place where I think we were right.

Q: General ... in retrospect, was it worth it?

A: It certainly has been a very heavy price to pay in many ways ... the saddest things ... are the indicatins of apparently fundamental weaknesses within the United States. It could just be that this price is worth paying to discover our weaknesses in time to correct them before we're faced with a major crisis.

Q: What weaknesses?

A: Division in the minorities, loss of patriotism, degradation and defamation of all the virtues which madeus a great country in the past, the use of our own media to destroy us internally ..."

There you have Taylor, doubtless courageous, having served better in better wars, by his obsolete lights a good man, oblivious to his racism, still bemoaning the loss of order conferred on a helpless South Vietnam by two tyrannical brothers, one a madman, theother a dope addict.

A smart politician would flee this whole crew exposed by the Times, yet Nixon-¾Mitchell¾Agnew don't. They don't because they need them. They need them todefend the continuance of Mr. Johnson's foreign policy.

Once they had everybody believing it. Once, just before the Bay of Pigs, they got the New York Times, which had the story of the upcoming invasin to kill it. If that story had run, there might not have been a bay of pigs, and the Times learned from that; it learned that he who serves truth, serves his country. But Taylor, he learned nothing, nor did Mr. Nixon, nor any of them ... nothing, nothing, nothing.

Ellsberg Calls--From Somewhere

Cambridge, Mass.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technilogy said it heard yesterday from Daniel Ellsberg, the man alleged to have given classifiel documents of the Vietnam war to the New York Times.

Robert Byers, head of the MIT news office, said Ellsberg called an employee of MIT to say that there should be no cause for alarm over his disappearance.

Byers said there was no way of telling from where the call was placed. Byers said MIT WOULD NOT REVEAL THE NAME OF THE EMPLOYEE who received the call.

Associated Press