

Destruction of Rice

To the Editor:

I would like to point out that according to official White House policy the controversial program of spraying herbicides on rice crops in Vietnam has not been discontinued. The Times of June 23 carried a report from Saigon that the program had been temporarily suspended until about July 1.

On the same day, the Federation of American Scientists received a formal response from Dr. Lee DuBridge to the petition of 5,000 scientists presented to President Nixon on April 30, 1969, asking him to terminate the crop destruction program in Vietnam. In his letter, Dr. DuBridge said: "With respect to anticrop chemical weapons in Vietnam, you might be interested in knowing that we have sharply reduced the extent of this program."

In my opinion, even a sharply reduced crop-destruction program is an atrocity. Whether a civilian dies by slow starvation or a quick bullet, is it not an atrocity as long as the cause of death is intentional?

Civilians Affected

Although the Defense Department claims its intention is to deny food to the Vietcong only, the crops are being destroyed in areas where the civilian population is roughly ten times that of the Vietcong forces. Dr. Jean Mayer, President Nixon's own adviser on nutrition, pointed out in a letter to The Times [Feb. 15] that such programs of food denial always affect civilians more adversely than the military who can commandeer food and forage for themselves.

Apparently the recent Federal ban on 2, 4, 5-T has temporarily stopped the defoliation program. However, such defoliants are not strong enough to kill rice. Instead, arsenic compounds are used against the rice in Vietnam. We are intentionally harming civilians whose only crime was to have been born in an area which happens to be under Vietcong control.

Not only is this continuing program immoral, but it is very likely illegal as well. The U.S.

Army Field Manual FM 27-10 (based on a treaty we ratified in 1907) forbids the use of chemicals to destroy crops unless it can be shown that they are "crops intended solely for consumption by the armed forces." Furthermore, the United States Government listed the destruction of crops in Holland as a war crime in the Nuremberg war crimes trials. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was responsible for the flooding of crop-lands in Holland, was executed for this and other war crimes.

Now is an ideal time for the White House to announce a termination of the anticrop program in Vietnam. Instead, President Nixon has knowingly allowed to continue a practice previously recognized by the United States Government as a war crime.

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