

Government By Terror



Arthur Hoppe

IT'S TIME. Ever since Patricia Hearst was kidnaped, I've been afraid to write what I felt about the Symbionese Liberation Army.

Like most newsmen, I was afraid that anything I said might somehow impede Miss Hearst's release.

Ever since the kidnaping, the free American press has printed whatever the small band of self-righteous radicals in the SLA ordered us to print.

We printed their frightening emblem, as they ordered us too. We printed their hate-filled diatribes in full, as they ordered us to. And we withheld our comments. We, the free American press, have been walking on eggs.

But now, I think, it's time.

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IN THE SOUTH last week, a small band of self-righteous radicals, calling themselves the American Revolutionary Army, kidnaped Reg Murphy, editor of the Atlanta Constitution. Mr. Murphy happens to be a friend of mine. He's a fellow newsman I highly respect.

The ARA, Mr. Murphy said in a tape-recorded message, believes "the American news media have been too leftist and liberal. They intend to do something about that. That's the cause of my abduction."

The ARA is a right-wing group. The SLA is a left-wing group. But they have much in common.

The ARA seemingly wants money to buy guns with which to kill people. The SLA, which already boasts of one murder, wants money to feed the poor.

Both say they are acting for "the good of the people." Both, "for the good of the people," would kidnap, murder and terrorize the innocent to achieve their ends. Both, "for the good of the people," would

overthrow our duly-elected government and impose one of their own choosing. And both, as a first step, would intimidate the press.

So it's time.

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THE ONLY weapon of change allowable in a democracy is persuasion. If you can persuade a majority of the people to join your cause, the changes you seek will follow. I am sure the members of both groups have tried persuasion. It's obvious they failed.

And now, having failed, they have turned in their bitterness and frustration to kidnaping, murder and terror.

How positive they must be they are right. How positive they must be the people are wrong. How self-righteous they must be to impose their will on the people for the people's own good — because they know better what's good for the people than the people do.

I keep thinking of how many of these embittered, frustrated, self-righteous saviors of the people there must be. I keep thinking how tempting it will be for them to turn to kidnaping, murder and terror now that the SLA and the ARA have shown how easily we yield.

God knows I am afraid for Miss Hearst. God knows I was afraid for my friend, Reg Murphy. But now I fear for our democracy more.

For these self-righteous saviors would impose their new governments through kidnaping, murder and terror.

I firmly believe that any government created by kidnaping, murder and terror can endure only through kidnaping, murder and terror. And an essential condition to any such government is a press that fears to speak out.

Therefore, it's time.