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**The Camden Acquittal**

The acquittal of seventeen members of the "Camden 28" and the prosecution's recommendation for dismissal of charges against the remaining eleven defendants is clearly part of a growing revulsion against abuse of governmental power. The anti-war protesters had been arrested in 1971 while breaking into a Federal building and destroying draft records. Since they subsequently admitted their action in court, their acquittal constitutes something of a legal landmark: it was based on the jury's finding that—though the defendants were guilty—their offense was dwarfed by the Government's deliberate use of an *agent provocateur* to assure the commission rather than the prevention of a crime.

The trial showed that Robert W. Hardy, who had acted as informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had in fact provided the tools and the training without which the break-in could not have been accomplished. More important, at the Government's urging, Mr. Hardy actually reactivated the illegal foray after the protesters had all but abandoned it.

Under such circumstances, the Government's game plan could only be interpreted as a deliberate political maneuver to use the protesters as dupes in the Administration's design to discredit foes of its Vietnam policy. Federal District Judge Clarkson S. Fisher, recognizing the danger inherent in such perversion of police power, told the jury that it could acquit the defendants if it concluded that the Government's participation in setting up the crime had gone to lengths "offensive to the basic standards of decency and shocking to the universal sense of justice."

It is precisely such revulsion against governmental scheming and deception that offers hope for a broad-based return to elementary decency. A particularly affirmative sign is the assumption of leadership by the courts in this new drive to restore the balance between the Government's power and the people's rights. The reprimands to the Government, administered so recently by Judge William Matthew Byrne Jr. in the Ellsberg trial and now by Judge Fisher in the case of the Camden 28, are part of the essential process of curbing governmental arrogance.