Reflections on Calley

Has the sense of guilt, the guilt of a society in which massacres and killing and body counts have become part of the normal mental equipment, become so strong that it can no longer be contained by the traditional, civilized defense mechanisms? (individual defense mechanisms?) Does the sense of guilt turn into its opposite: into the proud, sado-masochistic identification with the crime and the criminal?

BY HERBERT MARCUSE

The old Super Ego still stuck to the memory of this prohibition even in war. The new Super Ego is up to date. It says: you can kill. Now you can waste and destroy. Calley never used the word "kill." He told a psychiatrist that the military avoided the word "kill" because it "caused a very negative reaction among the men who had been taught the commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.' In said, Lieutenant Calley employed the word "destroy" or the phrase "waste 'em." A pardon for Calley, who did not kill but only destroyed and wasted 'em would, according to some, be a "constructive step to restore the moral rule of our armed forces and the public at large."

The mass rush away from individual responsibility, the easy-going effort to vest guilt in anonymity is the destructive reaction against a guilt which threatens to become unbearable. Infantile regression: Billy cannot be punished because Maxie and Charlie and many others did the same thing; they did it daily, and they are not punished. People incapable of the simplest adult logic: if Maxie and Charlie did the same thing, then Billy is guilty; if Maxie and Charlie did not kill, then Billy is not innocent.

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LA JOLLA, Calif.—The obscene haste with which a large part of the American people rushed to proclaim a convicted multiple promiscuous murder of men, women and children, the obscene pride with which they then identified themselves as "Americans," is one of those rare historical events which reveal a hidden dimension of the commercials appear the real people: men and women madly in love with death; violence and destruction.

behind the television faces of the leaders, behind the tolerant politeness of the discussions, the business, the games, the decisions of the commercials appears the real people: madly in love with death; violence and destruction.

reflection on Calley

The crimes of war are crimes of society. What Calley did was widespread and it is not eliminated by a military tribunal of his peers, of whom it may be said "he is not a killer." This majority has killed "humans," a killer in whose defense it was said the Very Rev. Francis B. Sayre Jr. Blatantly false, and a great injustice to the very people who have, at the risk of their life and their only, open and active resistance.

To be sure, in a "metaphysical" sense, everyone who partakes of this society is indeed guilty—but the Calley case is not a case study in mean behavior. The framework (restrictive enough) of individual responsibility there are deep-seated psychological and social conditions of specific responsibility. If it is true that Calley's action was beyond the law, then it is an occurrence in Vietnam (which would corroborate the findings of the Russell War Crime Tribunal and call for the prosecution of all cases recorded there), then responsibility would rest with the field commanders, and, in the last analysis, with the Supreme Command itself. The power, the rules of the man appetite to kill the "organism," become illegal to others, (a disobedience which, as the hearings showed, was actually practiced by other American soldiers at My Lai).

"What Calley did was widespread proof," friends of the defendants denounced themselves as having done the same Calley did. Now the fact that one murderer was caught and brought to trial while others were not, does not mean that the guilt was brought to trial. On the contrary, the others, having voluntarily confessed, should also be brought to trial. People with the guilt in death, with their own.

Everyone is a "civilian," everyone is a "new genuine civilians in Vietnam today." A most revealing statement, which admits that the United States is no longer the "American" society.

Is society at war? This is the "metaphysical" argument. It moves on several levels:

(a) If society alone is to blame, nothing is to be expected. Calley is an abstract which cannot be brought to trial. It is society itself which is (and must be) training its young citizens to kill. But if society

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