

Whose Violence?

Ever since the massive demonstration at the Pentagon on October 21, the growing anti-war movement in this country has escalated its confrontations with the police and, on occasion, with federal troops. The highly militant and turbulent demonstrations against Dean Rusk at the New York Hilton and at the Oakland Induction Center embody an important and dramatic shift in the strategy and tactics of the anti-war movement: in its phrase, it has shifted “From Protest to Resistance.”

Many Americans have deplored and denounced the “violence” engaged in by the demonstrators. This is a curious and misplaced emphasis on *who* is committing the violence that we see and read about. The troops and the police are armed to the hilt, and they face groups of totally unarmed demonstrators; it is invariably the police and the troops who do the clubbing, the kicking, and, of course, the arresting and incarcerating. How come nobody protests *that* massive violence, against which the “violence” committed by the demonstrators is virtually non-existent?

It is a curious world we live in. Here is the U.S. government, engaging daily in massive and brutal violence against the far less armed people of Vietnam, against virtually the entire civilian population, including the old, the women and children, North and South. Why does not the American populace rise up to denounce *that* violence?

For the first time in history, the American authorities release — deadpan — pictures of our prisoners being systemically tortured by our puppet troops with American troops looking on benignly. These pictures have been widely distributed through the news media. Who protests? Who cares? No, instead American indignation centers on some bearded youngsters who sit in at the entrances of induction centers.

To fully explain this reaction requires someone more expert than I in psychopathology. But one reason is fairly clear: the American public has been conditioned to believe that if the *government* commits violence, it is not really violence. Therefore, it is only when private persons or groups commit violence that indignation wells up.

When government officials — be they federal, state, or local — do anything, they are apparently clothed in such sanctity, such holiness and adoration, that their actions are transmuted automatically into the virtuous, the good, and the noble. All we need do to correct this confusion and to take a hard and accurate look at the government, is simply to apply the same moral standards to the minions of government that we would apply to anyone else.

That alone would be enough to make everyone a libertarian, and to expose the fact that the great source of crime and violence in the world today is the institution of government.