

STATEMENT OF JAMES RESTON, JR.

IN FOUR DAYS THE FORD CLEMENCY PROGRAM IS DUE TO EXPIRE. THIS SIX MONTH EXPERIMENT IN CONDITIONED FORGIVENESS HAS PROVED TO BE A DREADFUL MISTAKE. LESS THAN ONE % OF THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR IT HAVE PARTICIPATED. THE PROGRAM WAS DESIGNED LAST FALL AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT, AND THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT, WITH A GOOD DEAL OF PARTICIPATION BY THE PRESIDENT ~~INXTMEXXIXNAL~~ ADDING THE FINAL REFINEMENTS. IT IS ENDING WITH THE WELL-PAID CLEMENCY BOARD MEMBERS, TRAVELING THE COUNTRY APPEARING ON TELEVISION SHOWS AND RUNNING PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS NATIONWIDE, BEGGING DESERTERS AND DRAFT DODGERS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR PROGRAM.

THE PROGRAM HAS FAILED FOR SEVERAL SIMPLE REASONS. THE MOST IMPORTANT IS THAT THE GOV'T NEVER TOOK SERIOUSLY THE DEEPLY HELD PRINCIPLES OF THOSE WHO HAVE HAD TO SUFFER THROUGH LONG EXILE. THERE WAS NO CONSIDERATION FOR THE DELICATE MATTER OF PRIDE THAT EXISTS AMONG MEN WHO HAVE PAID DEARLY FOR THEIR BELIEFS. THERE WAS MUCH TALK FROM THE GOV'T ABOUT CLEMENCY BEING METED OUT ACCORDING TO THE "SEVERITY OF THE MISTAKE" THAT WAS MADE. BUT NOWHERE WAS THERE A SUGGESTION THAT THE GOV'T ITSELF MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ALL-WISE IN ITS DECISIONS THROUGHOUT THE VIETNAM WAR. INDEED, TODAY ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS, THE PRESIDENT'S POSTURE IS STILL THAT HE WILL NOT "RULE OUT AMERICAN AIR SUPPORT FOR THE SOUTH VIETNAM ARMY.

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THE FORD CLEMENCY PROGRAM MUST BE ALLOWED TO DIE. IT IS NOT AMNESTY, FOR RATHER THAN ALLOWING US TO FORGET THE PAST WOUNDS, IT HAS PRICKED AND RUBBED THOSE WOUNDS. IT IS NOT EVEN FORGIVENESS AS THE CLEMENCY BOARD MEMBERS INSIST FOR IT IS PUNITIVE IN NATURE. IT WAS AN EFFORT TO TANTALIZE DESPERATE MEN INTO A COMPROMISE OF THEIR PRINCIPLES. THEIR REFUSAL ONLY DEMONSTRATES AGAIN THE DEPTH OF THEIR FEELING.

NOW THAT THE IMPRACTICALITY OF CONDITIONAL AMNESTY HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED, THE MATTER IS BACK TO WHERE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN. THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE GENUINE AMNESTY AFTER THE MOST DIVISIVE WAR OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. NO MORE GOV'T BOARDS WHO HAVE NO STANDING TO JUDGE THE VIETNAM GENERATION IN THE FIRST PLACE. NO MORE HIGH STACKS OF DOSSIERS POURED OVER BY WASHINGTON BUREAUCRATS. THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE AMNESTY NOW , AND THAT IS THE AMNESTY OF THE CLEAN SLATE.