

# Son of Credibility Gap

by FRANK MANKIEWICZ  
and TOM BRADEN

When Richard Nixon took office, his aides, including particularly his communications director Herbert Klein, made it clear that the new President regarded the major legacy left him by his predecessor as "the credibility gap."

Mr. Nixon set out to restore the confidence of Americans in the truth of what their officials told them, particularly about the war. For a while he seemed to be making progress, but after last week's exercise in deception and counterdeception, we appear to be right back where we started.

It all began with something called "protective reaction strikes" — that is to say, bombing. The American people understood that we had agreed not to bomb North Vietnam, and when the news of the

"protective reaction strikes" was announced by the Defense Department last week, officials hastened to deny that we had bombed above the 19th parallel.

But in Paris, Hanoi's spokesman insisted that we had. They even identified the missiles we used. When our representatives dutifully asserted that the enemy was confusing our bombing with their own missiles falling to earth, Hanoi's men asked scornfully, "Where would we get Shrikes?" It was only a day or so later that the Defense Department revealed that, indeed, we had bombed above the 19th parallel and indeed we had fired Shrike missiles.

That admission came about because the President told some of the servicemen he invited to Thanksgiving dinner that there had been bombing in connection with the abortive

raid on the prison. The announcement that we had made an abortive raid on a prison was in turn — as a Defense Department spokesman remarked — made necessary by the enemy's announcement that bombs had been dropped. "Our credibility was at stake," said the Defense Department.

Indeed it was. And still is. What, for example, is a "purposeful crash landing" of a helicopter? Helicopters are not crash-landed, even in prison courtyards. They either land, or they crash. Surely a people who can be told of the failure of a mission can be told of the crashing of a helicopter.

What seems to be at work here is that the crashed helicopter was the Shrike of Sontay — that is, the enemy had film of it, so something had to be said about it.

And what about the

President's statement that all the men who participated in the raid on the prison had volunteered for the mission. It turned out that indeed they had volunteered, but were not aware of what the mission would be. It would not have diminished their heroism one bit if the President had spoken about their heroism with exactness.

And as for the bombing which took place south of the 19th parallel, and which was all Mr. Nixon's countrymen were told when the week began, it was explained as "retaliation" for a breach by the enemy of an "understanding" that it would not shoot down unarmed reconnaissance planes. But those officials who negotiated the bombing halt say there never was such an "understanding."

"We knew better than to ask for it," one explained recently.

"No nation which calls itself sovereign could ever agree to permit free access to reconnaissance planes."

Finally, there is Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's statement that the North Vietnamese have violated the Geneva Convention in respect to prisoners of war. To the horror of civilization, they have. But so — to the equal civilized world which gets its information about the war from other sources than Mr. Laird — have we. We not only don't keep prisoners, we turn them over to the South Vietnamese for "interrogation" as well as incarceration.

Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) lamented those lapses from truth the other day, recalling the statement of President Kennedy's Pentagon that the government had "the right to lie." An unpopular war seems to have forced the Nixon Administration to concur.

## Our man hoppe

# Jud Joad's soul is saved

by ARTHUR HOPPE

Word that President Nixon's welfare reform bill has been deathly ill in the Senate was slow in reaching Appalachia Corners.

That veteran poverty fighter, Jud Joad, who's been fighting poverty man and boy for nigh on to 60 years, heard it down at the feed store from Owly Peterman, who keeps up on such things.

After buying a penny licorice for his wife, Maude, Jud headed slowly back up the muddy road to break the news to her.

"Don't look like you'll be getting them gingham curtains soon, Maude," he said, scraping his boots on the ramshackle steps.

"More bad tidings, Jud?" "I RECKON. You know how the President finally figured out what us poor folks need to lick poverty?"

"You told me, Jud. Money. Of all the ideas our Presidents have thought up over the years to help us out, I still think that's the soundest. Don't tell me he's changed his mind about giving us some."

"Oh, he still wants to. But a lot of Senators don't want to let him."

"How come they're mad at us, Jud?"

"They ain't mad at us, Maude. They're doing it for our own good."

"SET YOU DOWN a spell in the rocker by me, Jud, and explain all about it."

"Well, it's like this. The Senators figure if'n the President gives us money, I won't want to go out and work."

"But, Jud, honey, you ain't worked since back last spring."

"Now, hold on, Maude, I ain't worked cause I been fighting

inflation. Like I told you when Old Man Morgan laid me off. Them economist fellows up in Washington figure we got to have more unemployment to lick inflation. See, if'n I'd gone on working, I'd of bought you them gingham curtains you're always wanting and the price of gingham curtains would go sky-high to where we couldn't afford them."

"But I'd of had my gingham curtains."

"We got to think of others less fortunate. By not working, I'm keeping the price of gingham curtains down to where we could afford them, if'n we had any money."

"WHOA UP THERE, Jud. If'n the Government don't want you to work so's you'll fight inflation, how come the Senators are worried you won't work?"

Jud frowned. "I reckon it's my immortal soul they're worried about. If'n they give me money, I wouldn't keep on looking for a job I can't find nohow. I'd destroy my get up and go."

"Well, I don't know, Jud. If'n you had a job, we wouldn't be needing the money. And if'n we had the money, you wouldn't be needing a job. Seems like they're just aiming to keep us needy."

"That ain't so, Maude. You womenfolk don't understand these things."

"They won't give you the money 'cause you wouldn't get a job you can't get and they don't want you to have nohow which, if'n you got, would mean you wouldn't need the money in the first place. It don't make sense to me."

"LOOK AT IT this way, Maude. The economists is worried about the prices we can't afford, the President's

worried about the money we ain't got, and the Senate's worried about our spiritual salvation."

He reached across and

squeezed her arm. "Now don't you feel a sight better knowing everybody up there in Washington's deep down concerned about our welfare?"

"If I had my druthers," said Maude, rocking slowly, her hands folded in her lap, "I'd druther have a set of gingham curtains."



Good-bye, Old Paint