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Ends And Means

JENDERAM, so the official communique tells us, is today "a deserted, soulless place". Its eight square miles have been denuded of population. Jenderam, with its empty and deserted buildings which once housed 1,500 people, has been "scrubbed from the map". When the kampong was being rubbed out, there were, says the official communique, "tears from some of the women". But assures the statement, they were "crocodile tears which did not soften the heart of the authorities."

For the authorities, the destruction of Jenderam was a military necessity. The kampong was one of the main centres of Communist propaganda. There have been some fifty major bandit-inspired incidents in this area and a large number of bandit camps have been discovered in the vicinity.

Militarily, therefore, Jenderam had to be wiped out. The authorities had to remove an obstacle from the path to victory. Once we accept the premise that military necessity should be the overriding consideration then there can be no argument about Jenderam. The grim logic of military necessity must lead us to Jenderam and other Jenderams before this war is over.

The end justifies the means. And having made this profound confession we can turn over and get a good night's rest. But before we can do this we must drug our conscience and put into cold storage our sense of right and wrong.

Once we do this, however, the end becomes meaningless. We begin to uphold the very evils against which we have taken up arms.

In Jenderam we have undoubtedly acted against principles which are cardinal to the democratic way of life.

For the moral assumption behind Jenderam is that it is right to punish the innocent as well as the guilty. This is a long way from the proud and, until now, legitimate boast that our law would rather that 10 guilty men should go free than one innocent man should suffer.



Jenderam is merely the logical outcome of the objectionable principle of collective punishment which we have accepted today. There may be people who may not be in a mood to attempt to resolve this contradiction between our traditional conceptions of justice and military necessity. Collective punishment, they will say, is not a fit subject for moral discourse at the present time. Such a discussion will only serve to confuse the issue and play into the hands of the Communists.

But if it is to "confuse" the issue and "to play into the hands of Communism" by calling attention to the fact that we ourselves are being false to the principles which it is our intention to defend, then we are living in strange times indeed. If we are afraid to have flung at our face the sacred principles which we claim to worship, then is it because our conscience is disturbed?

* * *

WE don't say that it is at all easy to reconcile military necessity with our sense of justice. Sometimes it may be necessary to sacrifice justice to meet a desperate situation. But that must be done only when it is genuinely impossible to do otherwise.

Collective punishment which Sir Henry Gurney admitted as involving "the objectionable principle of punishment of the innocent" is being resorted to far more readily and frequently than we had expected. Collective punishment has been applied in Pusing, Sungkok and Jenderam within the last two months. At the moment of writing the village of Sungei Udang is under the threat of being declared a "bad" village.

It is, of course, silly to compare Jenderam to Lidice and Guernica. The villagers of Jenderam have not been subjected to physical violence. But what we did kill in Jenderam was our sense of justice. It is reported that villagers living near to Jenderam are leaving their homes to seek shelter in neighbouring towns. There may be guilty ones among them but there are also innocent people who are fleeing because they have begun to fear us.

We have waxed indignant whenever the Fascists and the Communists have applied the principle of collective punishment, the punishment of the innocent, in areas which are hostile to them.

But now that we are upholding the same principle can we, without being hypocritical, point a finger of scorn at them? Or are we to come forward and say bluntly that in fighting Communism we should not pay regard to what is right and wrong but that justice is that which helps us to achieve the end we have in view?

We point to Jenderam as a warning that unless we are careful we may finish this war believing that justice is what is convenient to us and that moral values are meaningless aphorisms for school children only. Let us not make the future safe for what the late George Orwell called "double-think."



