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Wieland Case Position Defended

CPYRGHT

BY MORRIE RYSKIND

Pontius Pilate is not the only one to be troubled by the question, "What is truth?" A juror hears a prosecution witness testify he saw the defendant running out of the bank, his revolver still clutched in his hand; but the defense produces another who swears the accused was at the ball game with him at the time of the crime. This is one you can't split down the middle.

My last column accused the Associated Press of highly questionable omission in its summation of the hearings on the William Wieland case, just released by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

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It reported that Wieland, head of State Department's office of Caribbean affairs when Castro rose to power (and charged with being an active apologist for Fidel), "has been fully cleared and his security case closed."

And it went on—quoting the testimony of a State official — "the decision to close the case was made in concurrence with the Justice Department, the FBI, a special personnel advisory board and the then attorney general, Robert F. Kennedy." All of which appeared locally under the headline, "Wieland Fully Cleared for Judgment of Castro."

I wrote—and now repeat—that such a selective presentation gave the average reader a totally false impression: he would think that "once again a devoted public servant had been pilloried by some self-righteous vigilantes, but had happily emerged victorious against the witch-hunters."

And, in rebuttal, I quoted some of the previous testimony and the committee's own evaluation of Wieland, made in the 1962 report and included in the current one.

The Times, in running my piece, inserted a note signed by the editor, which hinted at my own lack of objectivity in the matter: I had quoted from previous hearings held in 1962, whereas the new report covered the later hearings of 1963, 1964 and 1965.

Now that clearly implies—or I don't understand English at all—that the newer testimony refutes any doubts that may have arisen from the previous hearings and that I was



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unfair in bringing up the latter at all.

But, as a matter of simple intelligibility, I submit it is impossible to make head or tail out of the new stuff without referring to the old, to which it alludes often. This is not a brand new book, with a completely different plot and cast of characters: this is just another chapter in the main story.

So I read both reports carefully, and I cannot

find one cotton-pickin' sentence in the new material that lessens the damaging evidence offered by five—count 'em, five—former ambassadors against Wieland; or anything to refute the testimony of intelligence officers that he substituted his own judgment of Castro in disregard of FBI, CIA and G-2 reports, all of which he had access to, linking Fidel with communism.

If I'm proved wrong on this, I promise to eat the offending column at high noon in the office of either the AP or The Times. Come one, come all.

The new report does offer, on the other hand, at least one more instance where Wieland's testimony was of questionable accuracy. For the rest, it is simply a matter of State employes evading committee questioning about how come Wieland is doing all right while Otto Otepka, who was first asked to evaluate the Wieland file and then to forget it—which he didn't—is in the doghouse.

(Incidentally, two of State's staff have resigned since being caught making misstatements before the committee. One of them couldn't remember having bugged Otepka's office till it was pointed out to him.)

And I think it significant that the committee's own evaluation of Wieland in 1962 (it did not impugn his loyalty, but questioned his general suitability for a sensitive post) appears in the 1965 report. Had the new testimony changed the committee's mind, surely it would have noted so.

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Fully cleared, indeed! State may have cleared

Wieland for State—but hardly for the ambassadors and the intelligence officers. And apparently not for the committee, either.

And—no matter what the AP story says—I do not believe the FBI concurred in the clearance. J. Edgar Hoover has refused consistently to let his department act as both investigator and judge. Just it be turned into a Gestapo. I doubt he has changed at this late date.

Well, I've faulted the AP; The Times has faulted me; and I in turn fault The Times for not sticking to the nub of the issue. Somebody's wrong. The jury must decide.

I suggest you write the Senate Judiciary Committee, 3234 New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., for copies of both the 1962 and 1965 reports so you can render a fair verdict.

The Times in the note to which Morrie Ryskind refers, hinted at nothing. It did give the date of the report that Mr. Ryskind was in fact quoting.—Ed