

They Are Us, Were We Vietnamese

Theodore Jacqueney

Grim accounts of human rights violations in Vietnam, once fragmentary and unconfirmed, are now increasingly provided by consistent eyewitness accounts. Opponents of the former Saigon regime—some of them victims of its police and prison atrocities—are now in “reeducation” detention centers and prisons throughout Vietnam. Others imprisoned include largely nonpolitical artists, writers, journalists, lawyers, professors, and doctors. Judges and civil servants who once held apolitical jobs are also detained.

Reports of massive detentions with widespread prison misery paint a cruelly different picture from Hanoi’s claims that most Vietnamese “eligible for reeducation have had their full civil liberties restored.” Hanoi says that those still imprisoned are former high ranking military and civilian officials, all of whom are humanely treated. Refugees so desperate they flee Vietnam on barely seaworthy coastal fishing boats or even in rowboats bring out most of the information critical of Hanoi. Other information filters out through clandestine correspondence or comes from recent Western visitors. Some of these sources have helped me prepare this report, including former prisoners with family and friends still in Vietnam.

Gulag-like conditions prevail in many camps, according to ex-prisoners. Many detainees have died. Unlike political prisons under the old Saigon regime, “people now do not perish from torture or beatings, but from overwork and disease,” one detention camp escapee told me. Former internees describe deaths from malnutrition, beriberi, dysentery, malaria, forced-labor-induced exhaustion, required mine-field sweeping, and suicide. Former prisoners say that camp inmates commonly

suffer from limb paralysis, vision loss, and infectious skin diseases like scabies caused by long-term, closely packed, dark living conditions. They also witnessed cases of reeducation camp insanity brought on by a combination of oppressive living conditions and incessant demands for “confessions.” Prisoners are forced to detail page upon page of minute information over and over again until the authorities are satisfied. However, with detention camps scattered throughout Vietnam, conditions may vary, and not all eligible for “reeducation” were detained. Some refugees recall reeducation as nothing more than a few boring classes and “self-criticism” confessions while they lived at home and continued their jobs.

Vietnamese detention camp accounts contrast with those of some former humanitarian relief workers who remained in Vietnam after Hanoi’s victory. They report hearing of no human rights violations and believe none could have occurred without their knowledge. One former Ford Foundation American employee, Jay Scarborough, was even detained with Saigon army soldiers for a few months. He saw nothing worse than “boredom,” he told me, although he noted that he had been imprisoned months before the reeducation program officially began and was released shortly after it went into effect. A few Westerners permitted to visit selected camps near Saigon, Tay Ninh or My Tho, describe adequate treatment, although as one observer of current Vietnam human rights tragedies noted, “Hitler too allowed the Red Cross to visit his model camps.” Other Western visitors to the camps relate dramatically different impressions. Patrice De Beer, a *Le Monde* correspondent once highly sympathetic to the National Liberation Front, reported in December seeing in a detention camp “an atmosphere of misery,” with some inmates obviously “nervous and frightened” and others reciting apparently rote-memorized reeducation lessons for him to the surprise of his official guides.

Western journalists, diplomats, humanitarian and religious organizations were expelled from southern Vietnam as Hanoi consolidated its administration in 1975 and 1976. Curtaining the South from outside view

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signaled a tightening repression, ex-prisoners charge. Reflecting on his most recent Vietnam trip, French journalist Jean Lacouture, long sympathetic to Hanoi's cause, concluded: "It is better for someone trying to preserve intact his admiration for a revolution not to know its victims." One victim I interviewed, a doctor, was detained for two months in reeducation camp in Ninh Hoa district, about thirty kilometers from Nha Trang, and then for eight months more in Nha Trang. "At first," he said, "we were provided 400-500 grams of rice each day for each prisoner. Then suddenly it was cut to 200. Two meals a day, only one bowl of rice each meal. No meat, no *nuoc mam* [a fish sauce staple of Vietnamese diet], no vegetables, no fat. Very rarely there were small amounts of fish, the kind fishermen throw away."

Treatment in the Nha Trang prison was worse, the doctor said, although he never knew why he was transferred and was not permitted to inquire. From a reasonably habitable reeducation camp ward housing eighty people the doctor was put into a crowded jail cell with fifty other people in a small room, about four-by-eight meters. "All doors and windows were closed, opened only twice each day to give us food. There were eight to ten other such rooms in the prison that I saw holding about the same number of people. The lavatory was one small pan per cell, which prisoners were permitted to empty twice each day, and which slopped over onto cell floors.

"Reeducation meant four lessons. *First*: how to hate the U.S. *Second*: the sins of the U.S. and Thieu governments. *Third*: write self-criticism confessions truthfully and you will be released. *Fourth*: do forced labor, including digging wells and agricultural work," the doctor continued. Prisoners had to discuss each paragraph in a reeducation book of about a hundred pages for days at a time. "In the two months I was in reeducation we only went these four lessons into the book, with each half of the group studying from 8:00 to 11:00 in the morning, 1:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon, and 7:00 to 9:00 in the evening. Half studied while the other half worked," he recalled.

"The reeducation process had three steps," explained another refugee who experienced it and, after release, discussed the program with a Communist official. "The first is the 'confession,' where you write down everything that the Communists want to know about, and every 'crime' they want you to admit. It really is a way to obtain information for some future use against prisoners and to break your spirit. The second step they called 'assimilation'—they measure what you have 'learned' during the reeducation process. The third step they called 'recognition'—they measure the capacity of the prisoner to recognize that everything done before Communist power was wrong, and that everything the new regime will do will be good for the people."

Ex-prisoners report that writing "self-criticism confessions," sometimes called "receptivity papers," was a common reeducation requirement. "You had to write the story of your life, including your father, grandfather and children, describing their fortunes, how everyone died, what they owned, including television, radio,

camera. New ones had to be written twice each month, both in reeducation and in prison. If they found you had left something out that you had included earlier, you were in trouble. You would have to write a whole new one. Some people were forced to write new confessions many times each day. Each confession was about twenty pages, handwritten," one prisoner reported.

"Sometimes people went crazy from these confessions, living under these conditions," said the doctor. "I saw many such cases—screaming, yelling people. I could not treat them with any form of psychotherapy. They would not permit it. We had to keep silent in the camps and in prison; the only thing we were allowed to discuss was the reeducation lessons. I could not even discuss with my fellow prisoners why they were in prison."

HOW MANY DETAINEES?

Estimates vary on the number of prisoners. "More than 200,000" were in the camps, a Vietnamese official announced last spring. "Only about 50,000" continue to be detained, Vietnam's ambassador to Paris said early this year. No recent Vietnamese refugee accepts Hanoi's implicit claim that 75 per cent of those imprisoned last year are now released, however. Some state that while a few prisoners were set free, many new arrests occurred. "Perhaps 40,000" are now held, according to a Corliss Lamont-coordinated *New York Times* political advertisement in January that hailed Hanoi for its "moderation," thus understating even official Vietnamese figures. European journalists Jean Lacouture and Tiziano Terzani, friendly toward the National Liberation Front during the war but troubled now by Hanoi's human rights policies, have estimated that the figure may exceed 300,000, a judgment shared by U.S. analysts.

Although there is some news of executions, there are no reports of "bloodbath" firing squad reprisals. Hanoi's advocates claim this is evidence of Vietnamese Government humanitarianism. Others find reports of prison conditions and the number of prisoners deeply disturbing. The figures are "unprecedented," Lacouture wrote last May in *Le Nouvel Observateur*: "Never have we had such proof of so many detainees" after a civil war. "[Not] in Moscow in 1917, nor in Madrid in 1939, nor in Paris or Rome in 1944, nor in Peking in 1949, nor in Havana in 1959, nor in Santiago in 1973."

When will they be released? Perhaps in two more years, Saigon radio announced last spring. When most reeducation camp detainees were ordered to the camps in June, 1975, they were told to pack food and clothes for only a few weeks.

—T.J.

The doctor observed no instances where the Communists employed the lime-in-the-eyes, electrodes-to-the-genitals physical torture for which the old Nguyen Van Thieu regime was notorious. He charged, however, that he had witnessed beatings "many times," despite official claims "that this would not happen." If prisoners "did not do enough labor to satisfy them, first they talked to you, and then they beat you with their fists and with clubs." The doctor charged that the Communists did "torture," but described psychological examples rather than physical ones, including isolating prisoners

in small hot rooms while providing less than the already inadequate rice ration, and no mosquito net in a malarial mosquito-infested area.

The doctor witnessed many deaths in the camps, mostly by malaria and diseases related to malnutrition and, frequently, by suicide. "Many people hanged themselves," he said. One suicide had "returned to Vietnam on the Thuong Tin ship, the one that came back from Guam when some refugees changed their minds. He hanged himself in his prison cell. His name was Lieutenant Tran Tin Viet. This time they let me try to treat him, and I gave him mouth-to-mouth and first aid. I asked them to let me send him to a hospital. They refused to permit it, although I think I could have saved him in a hospital. He needed oxygen to reanimate. Without it he died the next day."

Another grim experience the doctor recalled from reeducation was forced labor to deactivate mines. "I had no training whatsoever for this. I was a military doctor drafted into the army like other doctors and knew nothing about mines," he said. "Fortunately there were some in our camp who were proficient at disarming the mines, and when we were sent out in groups, they let me be part of their group, and they did the work. But the Communists paid no attention to my lack of expertise at this—I was ordered to do it just like everyone else."

The doctor escaped to the Philippines on a fifteen-by-three-meter boat packed with three families, twenty-three people in all. The boat was "just big enough," he laughed. He refused to discuss his release from prison lest he compromise others.

Even worse reeducation camp conditions were described to me by a former civilian merchant marine professional who was detained in a reeducation facility in Tan Mai village in Bien Hoa province for four months in late 1975. He did not know the doctor. "The Vietnamese Communists call these 'reeducation' camps, but they are really just prisons. There were eighty of us kept in a room thirty-by-six meters. We slept on the floor, no mattress, no blanket, just flat on concrete. There were two air holes, but no sun ever shined into the room," he said.

"There was no reeducation class, nothing but prison. We were let out of the room for only two reasons. Once per week they let prisoners out of the cells, one cell at a time, to get some daylight for fifteen-minute periods. Once every two weeks they made us come to an office and write confessions for about two hours. If you left something out, they would make you start over so it could be longer. Besides that there was nothing. We woke up at 5:00 in the morning and went to bed at 10:00 at night. The cell was so crowded there was no room to move. Our day was spent sitting up, laying back, sitting up, and laying back. All day long was like that—that is all we did."

"In four months there was never enough to eat—even one kilo of fish all together. No meat, no vegetables, no *nuoc mam*. Just two bowls of rice with salt," the same sailor said. About sixteen hundred people were detained at the Tan Mai camp with him, all packed approximately eighty to a room in twenty rooms. Other

prisoners included soldiers, from privates to full colonels, and a few civilians such as himself, including judges, former deputies in Saigon's National Assembly, lawyers, and local government officials. None of the others were attending reeducation classes either, he said.

"Under these conditions many got sick, many died. People developed paralysis, caught malaria, or their whole skin turned yellow and swelled so that you could poke your finger deep into their skin, which may have

RESCUE REFUGEE "BOAT PEOPLE"

Desperately overcrowded Vietnamese refugee escape boats are now "drifting on the high seas," reports the Boat People's Project sponsored by the World Conference on Religion and Peace. The Boat People's Project, headquartered in Singapore with support groups in New York, Tokyo, New Delhi, and Bonn, has chartered vessels to ply the escape routes to try to rescue the estimated sixteen hundred people currently in peril. Refugees reportedly are ignored by passing merchant ships, which have had difficulty getting permission to disembark them in nearby Southeast Asian countries and must assume financial responsibilities for the rescued people.

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees believes that more than eight thousand, many of them children, have already perished in the stormy seas.

The longtime leader of an An Quang Buddhist office in Paris, Thich Nhat Hanh, now also directs the Boat People's Project from Southeast Asia. His American assistant, Moberly Warren of Austin, Texas, told me in a telephone interview from Singapore that the project is short of funds to continue this work. Checks may be sent to Boat People's Project, World Conference on Religion and Peace, 777 U.N. Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Evidently there is also a need for an international fund guaranteeing reimbursement for expenses incurred by merchant ships that rescue refugees—not just Vietnamese—to end the financial disincentive for humanitarian concern.

Once these refugees are rescued from immediate dangers on the seas, where will they go? Often refugees are not permitted to land in nearby Asian countries for other than brief reprovisioning, the Boat People's Project reports, while those permitted to land exist in barely subsistence-level refugee camps as they wait for permanent resettlement permission from other countries. Although the "Boat People" are political refugees as genuine as those who fled Hungary, Cuba, or Czechoslovakia, the U.S. Government has restricted entry of new Vietnamese refugees who left after the April, 1975, rout. America could open immigration doors wider and encourage other nations to do likewise.

—T.J.

been a form of beriberi. Every day many died. The Communists would try to hide these deaths from people in other cells. In my cell alone, in four months, three out of the eighty died, another two or three developed paralysis. Many people went crazy under these conditions—you could hear them screaming in the other cells. Fortunately no one in our cell went insane like this."

Lavatory facilities for the eighty men was one hole in the floor, "the size of a rice bowl," the sailor recalled. The cells were infested with flies, mosquitoes, lice, and

rats. Prisoners wore standard peasant black-and-brown pajamas. "After you were in for six months they would issue you a second set." Many prisoners made shorts out of sandbags and wore them.

Unlike the doctor and other former prisoners, this man said that in his camp no labor was required. "They just put you in the cells until you died. The Communists did not want to kill or beat people, only to keep people in jail until they died or were driven crazy. People kept under these conditions will die, be driven mad, or be paralyzed." But he never saw beatings or physical torture, he said. He estimated that perhaps two or three people in each cell were paralyzed. "To eat, they were spoon-fed by others in their cell. I saw many such people. They could not use their arms or legs or get up. They had to be carried even to use the toilet."

Besides the lack of protein, vitamins, vegetables, exercise, daylight, and room to move in the cell, he suggested other factors that may have contributed to paralysis and disease: "We had to lie on the bare cement floors, which were always wet from our sweat during the hot days, and damp and cool at night."

The lack of light also caused vision problems, the sailor charged. He wears glasses now, although he said he never needed them before his internment, and is troubled with other eyesight disorders. "Everyone had a problem seeing. When they let us out of the dark room for our fifteen minutes of weekly daylight, it was like we were all blind. We could see nothing. It felt like someone had put a big spotlight on your face."

The camp authorities permitted no medical treatment for any of these problems, he said. "The Communists did not even permit us to talk to each other in the cells. If they saw three people whispering together in the cell, they would put them in special 'dark rooms.' These were very small, for one person, with no light at all, no air holes like in our cell. One time every day they would throw in some food for you. There was no toilet. You went right on the floor. Once a week they would throw two buckets of water on you to bathe. If you were caught talking, the first time they would put you in the dark room for one week, the second time for two weeks, and so on. These were little concrete rooms with a steel door."

The only exception to the no-talk rule seemed to be the people who went insane. "They would let people scream because they knew they were crazy. You could hear them screaming all over the prison, although I only saw four or five people whom I knew to be crazy from observing them, because of the way the Communists kept each cell isolated from the others."

He said that he saw no mail, no packages, no relatives; nor was he permitted to communicate with his family. He was released from reeducation after four months, probably, he thought, because he was unpolitical and had not been involved in the war. His reeducation camp experience, however, impressed him negatively, and he escaped to Thailand in a small boat with four other men.

Most other civilian prisoners held in Bien Hoa were not kept with the sailor but in a onetime orphanage called Lang Co Nhi (literally "orphan village") now reportedly housing about three thousand people in fifteen

buildings, located in Long Thanh district, near the city of Bien Hoa. Other eyewitness accounts describe conditions in this camp as milder than in the sailor's nearby facility. As in most other reeducation detention camps both men and women were held, kept in separate sections of the camps. Another major civilian detention center is reportedly in Long Khanh province, where there are said to be at least eight separate camps. For some civilian prisoners Lang Co Nhi and Long Khanh were only brief "screening" centers before they were sent to harsher institutions, including once-notorious Chi Hoa prison and Thu Duc women's prison. The two prisons now hold both male and female inmates, some reported desperately ill.

Some of my friends in Vietnam were former "tiger cage" inmates and other victims of the old Saigon regime, and I feel strongly that those responsible should be punished. (I also know people dismembered—literally!—and otherwise tortured during wartime interrogation by Vietnamese Communists, and I believe that those responsible deserve punishment too.) However, many in the camps not only were not responsible for Saigon's police state practices; they were the tormented prey. Vietnam's detention camps and prisons are full of onetime Thieu opponents of the left, center, and right, many of whom were once victimized by the old regime for advocating democratic liberties and accommodation with the Communists to end the war.

Tran Van Tuyen, the elected chairman of the South Vietnamese National Assembly's opposition bloc, has been repeatedly identified as a prisoner. Now sixty-four years old, he is reportedly gravely ill. Tuyen was officially classified as "obstinate" by reeducation authorities. When ordered to write a lengthy confession, the fearless lawyer is said to have turned in two sentences: "I have committed no crime against the Vietnamese fatherland or the Vietnamese people. If I have done anything wrong, it is only in the eyes of the Communist Party of Vietnam."

Tuyen was once chairman of the Vietnam chapter of the International League for Human Rights. The chapter has ceased to function since Hanoi's victory, League executive director Roberta Cohen observed in a December, 1976, press conference calling for Tuyen's release. He was once imprisoned on Con Son island prison—famous for its "tiger cages"—after he helped draft the 1960 "Caravelle Manifesto," which attacked the dictatorship of Ngo Dinh Diem and demanded a new government with civil liberties, free political parties, fair elections, and a social democratic economic program. Released after Diem was overthrown in 1963, Tuyen was a deputy prime minister in the three-month Phan Huy Quat government in 1965, the last civilian government, which was ousted by Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky. Sometimes attacked as a "pacifist" by rightist Saigon newspapers on issues such as his opposition to the introduction of U.S. troops in Vietnam, he later became a forceful critic of Thieu government repression and corruption and a tough-minded advocate of negotiating Communist participation in a new government to end the war. He was regularly harassed for his efforts.

Among Third Force leaders there used to be countless pictures of him leading demonstrations to free political prisoners, to open closed newspapers, or to negotiate an end to the war. Many of these pictures survive, as do his outspoken published protests calling for Thieu's resignation.

I visited Tuyen once after he had returned from a court battle for the freedom of four fellow opposition deputies. Thieu's police had beaten them and charged them with being Communists because the deputies led a peaceful march on behalf of families of imprisoned journalists. Tuyen himself had been at the demonstration, hoping that his presence could deter the Saigon police from assaulting the families and deputies. I had just come from the hospital room where three of the beaten deputies were being treated, and I told Tuyen about their severe injuries, which I had photographed.

"Please tell the American people who want to be 'friends' of the Vietnamese people what you saw," he responded. "Tell them it is not so 'friendly' to provide dollars and ammunition to the Thieu regime. It is a police state regime, and worse."

French governor-general to leave a Vietnamese cabinet meeting. The French governor in turn ordered Tuyen into exile the next day. Tuyen responded with a celebrated public letter saying that no Frenchman could expel a Vietnamese from Vietnam, and escaped to Tay Ninh. There he became a colonel in the army of the Cao Dai Buddhists, who fought both the French and the Communists.

A democrat and a Socialist, Tuyen was a leader of the Sun Yat-Sen-inspired Vietnamese Nationalist Party. He frequently displayed his progressive social and economic views, attacking forms of monopoly, speculation, and other instruments of peasant exploitation, and called for jobs programs to reduce unemployment "in an atmosphere of freedom and democracy."

Bui Tung Huan, a former prominent antiwar senator, Hue University president, law school dean, and economics professor, was a leading Third Force leftist. Huan is a secular leader of Vietnam's majority An Quang Buddhists and personally close to top Buddhist leader Thich Tri Quang, who is himself report-



Tran Van Tuyen, center, protesting Thieu Government policies, 1974. Banner reads: "The People's Socialist Party. We Demand Justice and Freedom."

Tuyen commanded an entire province in the anti-French colonial resistance and held the second-ranking position in the foreign ministry of Ho Chi Minh's 1945 coalition government. He had to flee after the Communists started assassinating non-Communist leaders or betraying them to the French for arrest. "The Communists were not interested in sharing coalition power democratically. They simply wanted to dominate," Tuyen told me. Later, when the French proposed to grant independence to a Vietnamese state under Emperor Bao Dai, Tuyen agreed to join this cabinet too. But Tuyen insisted that the French permit the new state to be as independent as they had proposed, and ordered the

edly confined to his pagoda, permitted to leave rarely and under obvious police escort. According to relatives, Huan was sent to reeducation camp in the fall of 1975, months after the first wave of reeducation camp arrests in June. His arrest coincided with communications released by an An Quang Buddhist delegation office in Paris describing the self-immolations of twelve Buddhist monks and nuns in Can Tho protesting Communist persecution in November, 1975. Vietnamese Buddhists smuggled photographs of the Can Tho Twelve and their touching appeals for religious tolerance to the West, and last fall many former American peace activists expressed their concern to the Vietnamese Government. In Febru-

ary many of them received Hanoi's reply in an "aide-mémoire" containing preposterously lurid charges that the chief monk of Can Tho was actually a sexually promiscuous monster who impregnated and then murdered his nuns, housed prostitutes in his pagoda, killed them all, and then burned his temple.

In the elliptical style Vietnamese Buddhists can use to impart information, news from Vietnam is that Huan has "lost weight" in detention camp, is "tanned" and "more sinewy," and is "practicing yoga." He was quite thin already when I last saw him in Saigon in 1975. Huan was elected a senator in 1970 on the Buddhist-endorsed "Lotus" peace slate, whose political slogan was "national reconciliation." Shortly after the election he was instrumental in creating a political movement called the National Reconciliation Force, which actively promoted an end to the war. He strongly opposed further U.S. aid to the Thieu government, Huan told me during my visits to his Cong Ly Street apartment.

Gentle, peaceful Huan was jailed repeatedly by various Saigon governments, including the Ngo Dinh Diem dictatorship in 1963 and the Nguyen Cao Ky regime in 1966, largely for his leadership role in Buddhist mass demonstrations protesting religious and political oppression. Invited to join a 1964 coalition government headed by General Nguyen Khanh as a Buddhist representative in the post of Minister of Education, he resigned almost immediately protesting Khanh's attempted power grabs. He refused to leave Vietnam at the time of the Communist triumph because he believed that he and other Buddhist leaders could help reconcile the warring sides, a hope encouraged personally by the then French ambassador during the last, tragic days of the war, according to those who participated in these contacts.

Father Tran Huu Thanh, a popular Catholic priest whose dramatic protests against Thieu government tyranny and thievery included mass demonstrations and ringing public manifestoes, now has the distinction of being one of the few prominent Thieu opponents to have his incarceration publicly confirmed to Westerners by Hanoi. Americans who signed a November petition expressing humanitarian concern for Vietnamese political prisoners have received, in the same aide-mémoire that sensationalized sex-and-murder charges against a martyred Buddhist abbot, accusations that the Catholic priest participated in an alleged insurrection plot. The plot is said to have culminated in a shooting incident at Saigon's Vinh Son Church in February, 1976, during which one government soldier was reported killed. The charge is viewed skeptically by recent refugees with whom I have talked, who lived in the Saigon area and escaped Vietnam after the gunfire occurred. The sixty-two-year-old Father Thanh may already have been in confinement when the incident took place, and the names of Thanh's alleged co-conspirators were not among his former associates or friends, according to close confidants of Thanh now in exile. Thanh is only one of a growing number of Catholic priests and even prelates now reportedly in detention, including the bishops of Danang and Nha Trang.

Sometimes termed a "rightist" because he publicly

opposed Communists sharing power after many other former Third Force leaders had advocated coalition. Thanh modified his views in 1974, when he changed the name of his anti-Thieu protest organization to "The People's Anti-Corruption Movement to Save the Nation and Build Peace in Vietnam." Thanh also preached a vivid "social gospel" comparable to that of Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara or Martin Luther King, Jr. "I do not agree with the 'anti-Communist' position of the Thieu government. I want to fight against the Communists by making social reforms, by bettering the conditions of society," he told me once in his church rooms.

Father Thanh lectured widely on his social gospel anticommunism: to officers of the Saigon army psychological warfare section and, many years ago, to dictator Ngo Dinh Diem. "Diem never really listened to me, or to anyone. I tried to give him two important bits of advice. The first had to do with social reform, social justice, land for the people. The second was when I advised that a road be built from Danang through Laos. He followed my suggestions about neither one," the priest said, chuckling inside his usual conversational cloud of cigarette smoke.

Thieu considered Father Thanh dangerous. "In this church where we sit now there are three gates, and at each gate there are two secret policemen who follow me wherever I go," Father Thanh told me at the height of his movement activities. "I consider myself to be a member of the Third Force," Thanh related to me once. "But...the only reason there is a Third Force at all is because the U.S. Government has provided a military dictatorship with the means to repress the people. So the popular forces—the large religions and important political leaders—were driven out of the first element and became an opposition, against both Thieu and the Communists. The Third Force was once a French creation, forcing the people to create a third choice between colonialism and communism, and now it is an American creation, because you have forced people to make a third choice between a corrupt dictatorship and communism.

"If you had only Communists or a military dictator in America, I think most Americans would be in the Third Force too, don't you?" he asked.

Tran Ngoc Chau, rumored to have been killed last year, has more recently been seen alive and in detention. Once elected third-ranking member of the Saigon National Assembly, Chau had been a Viet Minh officer. Ho Chi Minh had "dissolved" the Indochinese Communist Party to prove the good faith of his nationalism in the early 1940's, but when the Party was publicly revived and placed in control of the anticolonial resistance after a few years of fighting, Chau and others quit. Later, despite Saigon regime bias against former Viet Minh, Chau became a celebrated progressive mayor of Danang, South Vietnam's second largest city, province chief of Kien Hoa, the largest province in the Mekong Delta, and head of the CIA-sponsored Revolutionary Development training school at Vung Tau, resigning after one year to run successfully for the lower house in 1967.

In 1965, after years of separation, Chau was contacted by his brother, Tran Ngoc Hien, then a ranking official in Hanoi's intelligence network. Hien asked Chau to introduce him to American officials to promote peace negotiations, which Chau did. Chau and Hien met frequently, each trying to convince the other to join the opposite side in the war, and Hien's stated interests in reaching a peaceful settlement made a deep personal impression on Chau. Once a strong supporter of the Saigon government's hard-line positions, Chau grew to become an advocate of a peace settlement that included political representation for the National Liberation Front, and attacked one of Thieu's closest collaborators for paying bribes to subvert National Assembly peace initiatives. As a result, in 1969 Chau was arrested and literally dragged out of the lower house building on charges of being in contact with his brother Hien. The contacts had been dutifully reported and encouraged all along; only after Chau became a peace advocate was he arrested.

Chau is a charismatic leader with strong convictions about constitutional democracy, free elections, and social justice. In February, 1975, I interviewed him in his home in a remote Saigon suburb. Recently released from Thieu's prisons, Chau was under house arrest, his home surrounded by secret police during the day. The person who arranged the meeting drove me to Chau's residence late at night, close to curfew, when lazy secret policemen would go home after taking for granted that Chau was tucked in for the evening.

Chau believed that Thieu jailed him because he spoke out publicly for a negotiated coalition settlement to the war. "See the papers I introduced into the lower house in 1968. They called for a meeting with representatives of the North. Remember at that time the official policy of the South Vietnamese government was to refuse to talk to the National Liberation Front. At that time I got 76 out of 135 lower house deputies to sign a petition to form a delegation to meet with the National Liberation Front and the government of North Vietnam to make arrangements for a peaceful settlement. That is the beginning of the story of my arrest.

"I personally am willing to forget the past. I do not hate Thieu now, or anyone else, even the people who treated me so badly. I am a true Buddhist in that sense," Chau said in his living room, which was filled with Buddhist religious pictures and shrines. "But I believe that we must adapt ourselves to the realistic situation," he continued, calling for a compromise peace and a neutralist government with a freely elected legislature.

Published statements by Chau's brother Hien corroborate Chau's statement that Hanoi had invited him to join the Front. From the outset Hien urged the Front "to forbid the guerrillas to assassinate Chau," and reported back in late 1967 that Chau remained a "potential target who deserved to be won over in a long process." In 1968, well after Chau had left Vung Tau and was serving in the legislature, Hien was still reporting to superiors that as per "instructions from above" he was continuing attempts to persuade Chau to "understand and sympathize with the policies and programs of the Front" and to recruit him to "participate in" Hanoi-sponsored political groups supporting the Front. Failing in this,

Hien's further reports centered on Chau's proposals for a parliamentary delegation visiting the North to discuss peace with Hanoi and the Front. According to Chau's formula, the Front would be "considered a political party," Hien reported, "and adjustments could be made for it to have deputies." Hien was seeking to assess the strength of Chau's following when he was arrested in April, 1969, with Chau seized shortly thereafter.

If Hanoi wanted to recruit Chau or possibly negotiate with him up until he was arrested by Thieu in 1969, what justifies his current detention, since after 1969 he was either in a Saigon regime prison or under house arrest? There is one possible cause of Hanoi's annoyance: In 1973, after nearly four years in jail, the Thieu government tried to turn Chau over to the Front's Provisional Revolutionary Government as a grotesque demonstration of Saigon's charge that Chau was a Communist. Although acceptance would have meant his release from the notorious Chi Hoa prison, Chau refused. Thieu's cynical propaganda gesture and Chau's courageous response were widely reported in the Western press. In 1975 Chau recalled to me: "They told me that to get out of prison I had to either go over to the Communist side or come back to the government side as a *Chieu Hoi* (literally "a defector from the Communist forces"). I responded that I wanted to come back to the non-Communist side, but as a free citizen." And so Chau stayed in prison until late 1974, when he was released to house arrest.

Word comes out of Vietnam about Tran Van Tuyen, Bui Tung Huan, Father Tranh Huu Thanh, and Tran Ngoc Chau because they were well-known. Other former well-known Third Force figures are not suffering. About half a dozen sit in unified Vietnam's new 492-seat National Assembly. Those who have been detained appear to lack legal representation, specific charges lodged against them, reasonable family contacts, factual information on release prospects, and other basic human rights. Some well-known detainees are:

- Luong Truong Tuong—leader of Vietnam's two million-member Hoa Hao Buddhists. Tuong's daughter published a letter in French newspapers last spring pleading for the release of her seventy-three-year-old father from Chi Hoa prison. Also arrested with Tuong on July 2, 1975, were his brother, Luong Truong Dau; his son, Luong Truong Lo; and his son-in-law, Ly Trang. The entire Hoa Hao leadership, and tens of thousands of followers, have been arrested since June, 1975, his daughter said. Through March, 1976, only one letter has been received from any jailed family member, sent the previous November.

Tuong and his followers were periodically repressed by various Saigon regimes. Hoa Hao leaders complained bitterly to me in early 1975 about Saigon government soldiers oppressing their followers, and charged that Hoa Hao leaders were jailed and tortured by Thieu's police in Can Tho. Some of the same leaders are imprisoned now, it is charged.

Communist officials have accused Tuong of helping lead Hoa Hao to join antigovernment resistance groups operating in Mekong Delta areas. Tuong's relatives and followers in Vietnam deny this and say that Tuong has begged Hoa Hao members "not to allow Vietnamese blood to be shed again," threatening to "shorten my life by cutting open a vein in my body" if they did not throw down their arms.

- Phan Huy Quat—the last civilian prime minister of South Vietnam before Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky seized full control from a short-lived government that the military never permitted to function. Quat and his son-in-law are reportedly in Chi Hoa prison too, accused of trying to escape the country. Quat was a member of the Vietnam affiliate of the International League for Human Rights. Like Luong Truong Tuong, Tran Van Tuyen, and others now jailed, Quat was imprisoned in 1960 for signing the Caravelle Manifesto demanding release of political prisoners, civil liberties, freely functioning opposition parties, a free press, open elections, and social justice.

- La Thanh Nghe—a liberal Catholic former Third Force senator. Nghe was known for advocating reconciliation with the National Liberation Front, and was repeatedly accused of "neutrality," then a criminal offense, by the Saigon regime.

- Dr. Nguyen Van Ai—former director of the Pasteur Institute of Microbiology and leader of Catholic welfare projects. Dr. Ai is a well-known apolitical scientist and religious charities worker. He is reportedly held in a detention camp on Phu Quoc island that was once a prison under Thieu and is accused of trying to flee Vietnam.

- Professor Le Van Hoa—a professor of sociology at the Buddhist Van Hanh University in Saigon and also nonpolitical. Professor Hoa is reportedly in a reeducation camp, perhaps because his doctorate was earned in the U.S.

Other arrests said to have occurred before the April 25, 1976, elections institutionalizing Vietnam's unification included a roundup of journalists and novelists. Reportedly detained were Nguyen Van Minh, former chief editor of *Con Ong*, who used the pen name Minh Vo; Hong Duong, a writer for *Song Than*, and three authors of serialized novels that were once widely read in South Vietnam's popular press; Tran Thi Thu Van, who wrote more than twenty-five novels under the pen name Nha Ca, including at least one translated into English; Nguyen Dang Quy, who wrote about forty novels using the pen name Mai Thao; and novelist Hong Hai Thuy.

Still more reportedly imprisoned people include writers Don Quoc Sy, actor Hoang Giang, Dr. Pham Ha Thanh (chief of the Cong Hoa military hospital and detained with most of his medical staff), Professors Vu Quoc Thong, Vu Quoc Thuc, and Nguyen Van Luong, Judges Tran Minh Tiet and Vu Tien Tuan, dentists Nguyen Tu Mo and Hoang Co Binh (who also engaged in anti-Thieu political activities), and others too numerous to list.

People allegedly dead from detention-related causes include poet Vu Hoang Chuong; children's storywriter Vu Mong Long, who used the pen name Duyen Anh; Judges Nguyen Ngoc Loi and Ngo Van Vu; and Dr.

Pham Van Luong, who once carried a hand grenade to the front of Saigon's National Assembly and threatened to blow himself up in protest against Thieu's dictatorial rule.

One had to believe that if North Vietnam ever took over, it was not going to be any picnic, but that does not mean they should escape international pressure, or censure, if we can build an adequate case," Representative Donald Fraser (D-Minn.) told me in an interview. A leader of the old Congressional peace forces and the current Capitol Hill human rights movement, Fraser chairs a key international affairs subcommittee that frequently publicizes human rights violations. He and Representative Millicent Fenwick (R-N.J.) sent a letter to Hanoi last year expressing humanitarian interest in some of the people in Vietnam's detention camps, co-signed by more than twenty former leaders of the antiwar movement in the House of Representatives. A number of other onetime peace activists, including the board of SANE, have expressed similar concern in letters to Vietnam's U.N. observer office.

Another human rights petition has been sent to Hanoi, signed by about ninety former peace movement leaders including Joan Baez, Roger Baldwin, Daniel Ellsberg, and Paul O'Dwyer, spearheaded by International Fellowship of Reconciliation Coordinator James H. Forest, who once served thirteen months in prison for destroying draft records during the Indochina war. Hanoi's aide-mémoire response to petition signers in February rejected all expressions of inquiry and concern on human rights violations. Other former opponents of U.S. Vietnam policies strongly defend Hanoi's human rights practices, arguing that critics of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam are misinformed, are premature in publicizing their concerns, and do not understand the subtleties of the reeducation process.

A few American religious leaders, some associated with Clergy and Laity Concerned, have invited five Hanoi-approved Vietnamese religious figures to tour the U.S. They complain that the State Department has to date refused permission. The invitation did not mention the very many other Vietnamese religious and lay figures in detention and prisons who ought to be invited here too; not necessarily to speak, but because such public invitations could help secure their future health and safety by letting Hanoi know that, as in the case of Soviet dissidents or Chilean political prisoners, there is humanitarian concern for these people in the democracies.

"Your people should consider who we are," Tran Van Tuyen once said to me. "We, the 'third segment,' represent what would be the democratic majority in your country—the people who want freedom, [the right] to vote, social justice. Where would Americans be if their country was torn by a battlefield of contesting Communists, with a massive army supported by mighty foreign powers; opposed by a corrupt, ruthless military dictatorship, also armed and supplied by a mighty outside power. What could the majority do, what could democratic leaders do, unarmed and empty-handed?"

They are us, were we Vietnamese.