

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

THE INDOCHINA WAR, TO BE CONTINUED.

Among the most pathetic of insurgencies being waged today is the resistance to the new Socialist orders in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In bitter truth, the resistance in Cambodia has been more than decimated. According to reliable estimates, not one-tenth but as much as one-third of the Cambodian population has been wiped out under the new rulers. Proportionately, it is perhaps the greatest genocidal enormity of the modern era. Vietnam has thousands of troops tied down in battling the surviving Cambodians, who are trying to "rectify" border lines between the two countries. Internally, Hanoi's "security forces" still struggle against a tattered rebellion by Hoa Hao Buddhists, stubborn peasants, and embittered soldiers of the former Saigon regime. In Laos the resistance to the Pathet Lao order seems to have gained even more popular dimensions, having inherited the heroic mantle of earlier fighters against French and American "colonialism."

It is hard to know what to make of all this. Perhaps the new and indigenous regimes, like those that went before them, have yet to learn "the lessons of Indochina." Those Americans who detest the new rulers may be cheered by these signs of continuing resistance. But there is little reason to be encouraged by a resistance, no matter how heroic, that is devoid of external support and, therefore, of any chance of success. A few years ago the conventional wisdom was that the problems of Indochina should be settled by the people of Indochina. It has turned out to be not quite so simple as all that. At this point no serious person proposes U.S. reintervention or even covert aid to the resistance in Indochina. Probably the more effective alternative is to pray for those who continue to suffer—and for the evolution of more human regimes that, at long last, "win the hearts and minds of the people."

JOINING PRAYER TO POLICY. If support of the continuing resistance is definitely out of the question, U.S. policy can do something about human rights in Vietnam. Last December more than a hundred opponents of the U.S. war in Indochina appealed to Hanoi on behalf of thousands of reported political prisoners. The fall-out from that appeal goes on (see "Fighting Among the Doves," *Worldview*, April, 1977). A vocal minority of leaders of the former peace movement remains in Hanoi's good graces and protests any mention of human rights violations. Some admit that there have been "occasional excesses," but these are exceptions to be excused by revolutionary necessity. For this minority reconciliation with Vietnam means good relations with Hanoi rather than concern for those who may be the victims of the new regime.

The reports of American friends of Hanoi returning from guided tours are sometimes so crude as to

make the reporters seem like apologists of the regime. Sometimes the visitors admit they did not even ask about human rights, since, as Americans, they had no "moral right" to raise such questions. The curious implication is that the doves rather than the hawks are responsible for the destruction wrought by U.S. intervention—or at least that there is no distinction between the culpability of doves and hawks. The refusal to press the question of human rights violations seems especially odious in light of the fact that many of those now imprisoned are former Vietnamese "allies" of the American peace movement who, a few years ago, were imprisoned for their resistance to the Thieu regime.

Reliable information suggests that 200,000 or more Vietnamese have been placed under armed guard in "reeducation camps" without anything resembling due process of law. Many have died from disease, starvation, and suicide (see "They Are Us, Were We Vietnamese," *Worldview*, April, 1977). Many thousands more have been forcibly removed from urban centers and sent to "new economic areas" in the countryside. The pattern of coercion does not indicate "occasional excesses" but the systematic and massive violation of elementary human rights.

Among the more ingenuous comments on this situation comes from the executive head of Church World Service, Paul F. McCleary, just returned from Vietnam. According to a National Council of Churches release, McCleary and his delegation were "permitted to visit areas of Vietnam not previously open to Americans," including one of the many reeducation camps. This camp was reserved for "former captains and lieutenants of the South Vietnamese army." McCleary reports that the camp "did not give the impression of a detention or concentration camp" and that it had "no barbed wire, no guard towers and no flood lights." "There was a fence," McCleary admitted, "but that seemed to be to protect the gardens."

Another member of the delegation, Midge Meinertz, reports that the number in reeducation camps "is now down to an estimated 50,000, and most officials predict the camps will be closed within a year or two." So there is no reason to worry; three or four years after it took over the country Hanoi will be able to handle its dissidents through regular channels with no need for camps. Or so "most officials" assured Ms. Meinertz, and so Ms. Meinertz felt reassured. Plus, she says, the reason the prisoners cannot be released immediately is that "unemployment is still very high and what you would have is bored people who are trained in violence and organization, and that means trouble." The rationale for prison camps is suggestive of new approaches to solving the unemployment and gang problems in our American inner cities, but one suspects Ms. Meinertz would resist that inference.

AID TO VIETNAM. Hanoi continues to insist that in some sense the U.S. owes it economic and humanitarian aid and should also establish normal trade relations. This, it is suggested, is the price for "normalization" of relations. Some American business interests also propose that we should put the war and its consequences behind us and get on with the business of doing business with Vietnam. A few "peace leaders" agree but are determined that aid and trade be viewed as "reparations," a sign of American repentance. The Congress, however, has by resolution made it perfectly clear that it will have nothing to do with anything smacking of reparations, and will countenance no aid at all without a definitive settlement of the "Missing in Action" issue. Others in the Congress are at least equally concerned about human rights violations in Vietnam. Donald Fraser, chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, has held hearings on the human rights question, and that may create a stronger desire for "linkage" of that issue with any discussion of aid to Vietnam.

Those who signed the December appeal to Hanoi declared themselves in favor of U.S. recognition, U.N. admission, and aid for Vietnam. The nonsigners, who wish to separate the question of "reconciliation" from human rights violations, find themselves in something of a quandary. It has been urged that a coalition be formed of all those supporting aid to Vietnam. Such a coalition might include, for example, Don Luce of Clergy and Laity Concerned, who has been effusive in praise of Hanoi, and former CIA director William Colby, who has declared himself for aid on quite different grounds. If the Congress is to change its position on aid to Vietnam, such a broad-based coalition is probably necessary. Yet the American friends of Hanoi who want to mute the human rights issue know that congressional procedure on economic aid now mandates an airing of human rights violations. The quandary, then, is that there is no way effectively to press for aid to Vietnam without also raising awkward questions about the nature of the Hanoi regime. And that, one might argue, is exactly the way it should be.

One disappointment to date is President Carter's failure to mention human rights violations in Vietnam. He has mentioned Vietnam and Cuba as two examples where new U.S. initiatives might win countries away from complete subservience to America's opponents. He has several times mentioned human rights violations in Cuba, especially the thousands of political prisoners, as an obstacle to better relations. But he has been silent about the same problems on a more massive scale in Vietnam. Nor, we are told, has the human rights issue been brought up in the formal Vietnamese-American discussion in Paris. Nor has it been raised by the U.S. in the forum of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. Admittedly, the last is less disappointing, since one has long since ceased expecting much honesty about

human rights in the councils of the United Nations. Vietnam poses a peculiar case to the administration's human rights policy. George McGovern criticizes Carter for exempting allies from human rights censure. Ronald Reagan scores Carter for focusing too much on friendly or potentially friendly nations and neglecting human rights violations by professed opponents. Vietnam is at this point neither friend nor enemy. It is a clear instance of U.S. policy in formation. So far Carter has given little evidence that human rights is relevant to that process.

SHIPS OF DEATH. Since the collapse in the spring of 1975 as many as 300,000 refugees have fled Indochina. Thousands are still huddled in refugee camps or being shunted from port to port, while thousands more are reported to have drowned on the high seas. Because it means costly delays, commercial vessels have generally declined to answer distress signals or to pluck survivors from the pitifully small fishing craft on which they fled. The plight of these people is widely known, especially through the admirable reporting of Henry Kamm of the *New York Times*, but still little is done. True, Israel, remembering the similar plight of Jews almost forty years ago, granted admission to sixty-six Vietnamese who had been rescued by an Israeli freighter in the South China Sea. It was an important gesture, but only a gesture.

Above all, the U.S. should set an international example by relaxing its presently severe limitations on the admission of Indochinese refugees. At the same time, the U.S. should use what influence it has with Japan and other friendly nations to follow suit. The U.S. can and should also readily grant permanent resident status to those refugees already in this country and, again, press Hanoi on the question of free emigration, especially when the reunification of families is involved. Unless these and other steps are taken the U.S. will be adding a morally shabby postscript to the horror of its history in Indochina.

MILITARY ECONOMY. Lisk Inc., a Southern company, has developed a weapon that looks like something out of Buck Rogers. It is a neat little gun that fires two thousand .22 cartridges per minute, about twenty-five per second. Not very economical, but deadly efficient, says the Pentagon. There may not be much demand for the new gimmick from Third World countries strapped for funds. The military junta in Ethiopia, for example, is trying to save ammunition. In March, 120 dissident students were rounded up in a stadium, tied together, and dynamited to death. The dictatorship admitted executing 655 young people in May. They were found laid out in neat rows with their throats cut....Lord have mercy.

Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.