

Correspondence

Human Rights in Vietnam

To the Editors: ...I have read all three articles by Messrs. James Finn, Theodore Jacqueney, and Richard John Neuhaus in the April issue on violation of human rights in Vietnam by the Hanoi Government. May I add the following comments.

1. If there is anyone who still thinks, as Mr. David Dellinger does, that the repression of human rights in Vietnam is just "a remotely credible rumor," let him interview the Vietnamese refugee families residing in the United States: Almost every single one of them has at least two or three relatives incarcerated in the "reeducation" camps. If he just makes, by extrapolation, an estimate of the presently imprisoned relatives of these refugee families, he can easily come up with a figure of about 80,000 prisoners. And these are only relatives of families that managed to escape from South Vietnam in April, 1975, i.e., who came mainly from the Saigon area or the coastal provinces of Vung Tau or Rach Gia. If we count all the 43 provinces of what was formerly South Vietnam, the figure would be much higher than the 200,000 prisoners the Vietnamese Communists themselves announced last spring.

2. Nor is it true that "only about 50,000" continue to be detained, as Communist Vietnam's ambassador to Paris stated early this year, or that only 5 per cent of the "utterly deprived" elements of the former Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Armed Forces and administration are still in the camps, as Hanoi radio recently announced in a broadcast quoting an article by Mrs. Ngo Ba Thanh (former opposition agitator in South Vietnam and presently a deputy in the unified Vietnam's National Assembly).

If you ask any refugee who recently fled Vietnam by sea or a refugee in the U.S. who has received news from his family in Vietnam, it would be clear that not only the "utterly deprived" elements (such as the former RVN marines, rangers, paratroopers, policemen..., as enumerated by Mrs. Ngo Ba Thanh), but innocent and useful people too—doctors, pharmacists,

engineers—are still imprisoned after nearly two years in the camps. For example, I know a family of five brothers, all of whom are pharmacists or medical doctors; all but one are still in prison, and the one who is not imprisoned had only recently graduated from the University of Saigon and had not served in the armed forces or administration. These brothers are in their thirties. They had grown up in South Vietnam and were then drafted into the armed forces to serve as medical personnel. What have they done that was "deprived" enough to deserve continued imprisonment? These people, as well as tens of thousands of other young men who were captains, lieutenants, or second lieutenants in the former RVN armed forces, were just children of five or six when the Republic of Vietnam was founded in 1954. These victims of the struggle between the big powers, these pawns of the governments of South Vietnam since 1954, who were drafted, put into machinery of war beyond their control and ordered to serve, deserve a better treatment than prolonged imprisonment.

3. Most of the Vietnamese living abroad (especially those in the U.S.) would not dare to agitate publicly for respect of human rights in Vietnam because they fear their relatives still in Vietnam would be subject to reprisal. They are thankful for the American friends who have enough integrity and honesty to demand the Vietnamese Communist authorities to abide by their declaration during the war, to promote and respect the rights of the common citizens.

4. At the present time respect of human rights is the dominant theme in American foreign policy, not only advanced by the Executive branch but also actively supported by the U.S. Congress. We Vietnamese hope the majority of the American people would extend a helping hand to their former friends who were asked to stand on their side and fight to defend "the bastion of the Free World in Southeast Asia" and who are now under cruel mistreatment by the Vietnamese Communist authorities.

Although many mistakes were made during the Vietnam war, the Americans came to South Vietnam with the best of intentions, i.e., to help the struggle for freedom waged by half of the Viet-

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WORLDVIEW

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs, which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. The Council is independent and nonsectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of the Council's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

Worldview is open to diverse viewpoints and encourages dialogue and debate on issues of public significance. It is edited in the belief that large political questions cannot be considered adequately apart from ethical and religious reflection. The opinions expressed in *Worldview* do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Council. Through *Worldview* the Council aims to advance the national and international exchange without which our understanding will be dangerously limited.

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tionary thought, on the other, is that revolution today is more an end in itself, is less amenable to being checked by any notion of the ideal society. The book uses generous quotations throughout; indeed, it is really a reader of stunning diversity and comprehension. It will be valued less as a theoretical statement than as an anthology. As an anthology, it is uncommonly valuable.

Erratum

An unfortunate error crept into A. James McAdams's response to Neil McCafrey in the May issue. The skewed sentence correctly reads: "But if AH manages to sell ten thousand, even five thousand, of its books (at hardcover prices) every month, I'd say it wasn't doing badly at all." —Ed.

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namese population. The cycle of violence did not begin with the American entrance in force into the Indochinese peninsula in 1954. In 1945-46 Vo Nguyen Giap, then Minister of the Interior, liquidated many Vietnamese nationalists. Later this systematic murder policy was applied even to those who were willing to cooperate with the Communists to fight against the French (such as Huynh Phu So, leader of the Hoa Hao Buddhists, who was killed at a meeting to which the Communists invited him). Concentration camps, such as the infamous Ly Ba So camp in North Vietnam, dated back to the very beginning of the first Indochina war. All this happened before any great power involvement in Vietnam and prior to any "collaboration" of the nationalists with the French and the Americans. Later similar camps were set up to imprison those who never collaborated with foreigners and whose only crime was being a landowner. I will give the names and addresses (in the U.S.) of some former victims of these earliest concentration camps to whomever wishes to interview them for fact-finding purposes.

To those Americans who do not dare to defend the unjustly punished Vietnamese because they are Americans, we would like to send this message: "You

should avoid publicizing your failure of nerve. If you continue in this failure, the peace you have advocated for your country is a peace with dishonor indeed."

Nguyen Ngoc Huy

Cambridge, Mass.

To the Editors: I have hesitated to make any response to "Fighting Among the Doves," knowing that making a response puts one in a position to receive one of several labels that seem to be thrown around so readily these days. How much better if we could simply relate our various experiences to each other as Christian brothers and sisters rather than feeling it necessary to try to destroy those we disagree with.

I am one of those people who had the experience of living in Vietnam under the old and the new authorities, and who also had the opportunity to return to Vietnam for a visit in January of this year. When we visited Vietnam, we went with the knowledge that we would probably be given a tour that would not allow us to see absolutely everything the new situation had created. We attempted to interpret our experiences in that light. I trust that those who are listening for the negative side of the situation remember that they too can be given a tour through the situation that is just as misleading and false. One might keep in mind that the 4 per cent of the Americans who fled America after the 1776 revolution probably wrote an account of that revolution that would make one shudder with horror.

The article mentions a letter written to Jim Forest by a longtime pacifist who now lives in Hong Kong. I too have read that letter, and feel that the quote mentioned in the article is rather taken out of context. As I understand what this particular pacifist is trying to say, unless we are seriously trying to clean up the mess we left in someone's house, our criticisms of the mess they *might* be creating in their house rings rather hollow and could seem downright ridiculous. The question of human rights is a very serious one, and one the Christian cannot ignore. But unless we accept the fact that we too are violating human rights in Vietnam and strive to correct that, we lose our basis for speaking about others' possible violation of human rights. It is a well-known fact that when America withdrew from Vietnam, it left behind thousands of tons of

unexploded munitions. These mines, grenades, bombs, etc. continue to kill and maim Vietnamese who are trying to return to their land to farm. Is it not the right of a human being to be able to return to his/her farm and till the soil without the threat of being blown to bits by an M-79 grenade or a Claymore mine?

An elderly member of a small congregation I occasionally attended returned to his farm after many years of living as a refugee. He had only begun to turn over the fallow soil when his hoe hit an M-79 grenade and he was instantly killed. We heard many reports of similar deaths. If we produced the munitions and put them there, do we not have a moral responsibility to take them out so the farmers can live? It is not only the Vietnamese who are saying "If you really believe in human rights, then give our farmers the right to farm."

Similar things can be said about the food and medical situation in Vietnam. The South was extremely dependent on the U.S. for food and medical supplies. Since the U.S. has refused to give any kind of aid to the Vietnamese people, the people must suffer serious shortages of these commodities. An unknown number of houses, schools, hospitals, factories, and churches were destroyed by bombings. I was told on several occasions by young Vietnamese students that it is common knowledge that those who destroy something have a responsibility at least to help rebuild it. Is it not the right of the Vietnamese to be able to have homes to live in, hospitals to receive care in, and schools to send their children to? If we helped destroy those structures, are we not violating the rights of the Vietnamese people if we refuse to help them rebuild those structures?

It seems to me that a constructive appeal for human rights requires many things. One is looking seriously for one's own involvement in the violation of human rights. Another is to know clearly that there is, in fact, a violation of human rights to make an appeal about. A third, perhaps, is to recognize that no government is 100 per cent good, but neither is any government 100 per cent bad. We can gain a lot of respect if we seek out, affirm, and lend support to those positive aspects of a people or a government. Not only might this encourage that people or government to strive for more positive actions