

PEACE NEWS LETTER

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For many months we Americans have been informed by Ambassadors, Generals, Cabinet Secretaries and the President that progress was being made in Vietnam. Wrote former Ambassador Lodge: "Today, in Vietnam, it seems clear that the large enemy units are so split up and off-balance that they cannot divide the country or occupy any point against our will . . . Indeed, our military performance has been magnificent." "Military success is giving Vietnam a chance to evolve toward stability and constitutional government . . ." ". . . economic and social programs have advanced . . ." "The picture is thus one of solid achievements behind us . . ." ("We're Winning in Vietnam," Saturday Evening Post, July 29, 1967)

Events in the last week of January and early February belie the official optimism. The New York Times put it succinctly ("The Week in Review," Feb. 4, 1968):

"After five days of savage attacks by the Vietcong the length and breadth of Vietnam, only one thing seems certain. That is, that the facts of life about the war have finally been made unmistakably clear to everyone in the United States from President Johnson on down.

"Swept away in last week's hurricane of fire were the rising piles of glowing reports of progress in pacification, retraining of the South Vietnamese army, and destruction of the enemy's political and military forces."

Despite the solid achievements psychologically and militarily of a numerically smaller force of men with less available fire power (i.e. weapons and munitions), spokesmen for the American government continue to speak of the results as a defeat for the enemy, it being alleged that he did not achieve his objective. This reminds one of the two Australian newspaper men who, on their return hom from Vietnam, talked about the U.S. public information officers who turned battlefield defeats into victories at the mimeograph machine.

The fighting continues in many of the cities of South Vietnam as this is being written. The tremendous destruction of property and life staggers the imagination. The consequences of such destruction on the surviving civilian populations cannot be immediately assessed. Will the Vietcong be blamed for the immense suffering created by this new form of warfare? Or will the Saigon regime? Or the United States?

One headline in the Utica Daily Press (Feb. 8) was ominous: "Necessary to Destroy Town to Save It From V.C." U.S. military commanders decided "that regardless of civilian casualties" they had to destroy Ben Tre, a city of 35,000, in order to rout the Viet Cong. Lt. Col. James Dare said, "We will never know for sure the number of civilians who died." 45% of the city was destroyed, and the Lt. Col. said, "Many families are buried permanently under the rubble." With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Over a long period of time, it seems apparent that the United States -- if not seeking a military victory in Vietnam -- was at least trying to improve its military position so that it might negotiate from a position of strength. And yet, as many observers have suggested (including Harry Brandon in Saturday Review), whatever battlefield successes were obtained did not conceal the fact that the Saigon government was politically weak as compared with its adversaries, the Viet Cong. It has been the latter who have had the widest base of popular support in that unhappy land. Hence Saigon has not wanted to negotiate, even if the U.S. did.

Now recent events suggest that the United States and its Saigon allies are in a much weaker position relative to the adversaries than it was even a few weeks ago. Does this mean that the war will be prolonged with new escalation and more widespread terror and destruction for the people of Vietnam, north and south? Or does it mean that the United States will make a realistic estimate of its position and proceed to extricate itself from an untenable position?

The latter course might demand that some officials acknowledge mistakes. Thus, as Hans Morgenthau suggested some years ago, the problem of "face" which confronts the United States may not be a diminishing respect for the nation's power in the eyes of the world. It may be that some U.S. officials fear a loss of "face" with the American people, and fear the consequences of such admission on their chances of retaining public office.

THE FUEBLO The seizure of the U.S. electronic intelligence vessel by the North Koreans leaves many questions in the minds of people familiar with previous incursions into the airspace or coastal waters of other nations. Of one thing we can be grateful, that the United States chose to try to negotiate the release of the crew and, eventually, of the vessel.

We cannot be certain that the decision to negotiate rather than to try to recapture the vessel was based upon sound instincts of governmental officials, or upon a realistic assessment of the capabilities of the United States. Already one war was going badly. Could the United States afford to open up another front in Asia?

WHAT IT COSTS Prof. Channing B. Richardson, Prof. of International Affairs at Hamilton College has written of the costs and prospects of the Vietnam conflict in The Courier, a weekly paper published in Clinton, New York (Feb. 8). He calls Vietnam a "mad adventure."

"Mad is a strong word -- but what other word realistically describes an involvement which daily threatens us with global war, alienates us from every single one of our major allies, blocks possibilities of livable adjustments with Russia, maddens hundreds of millions of people in the Third World whom we need on our side, does the work of China for her at no cost to her, drives Vietnamese nationalism firmly into the arms of communism, stops our feeble-enough efforts to solve problems at home, and bids fair to brutalize our own society out of all recognition?"

Prof. Richardson explored several possible alternatives open to the United States, and concluded that it is quite probable that Ho Chi Minh "speaks for more Vietnamese than any other person or group."

"A united, highly nationalistic and communist Viet Nam -- probably pursuing a course of neutralism and independence -- is, again, a better risk than the ones we are now taking. The way to stop a 'war of national liberation' is not to destroy a country, not to visit violence on an entire nation, but rather to ally oneself to the hopes and needs of the people of that country. In Viet Nam we have allowed ourselves to appear to be against their nationalist revolution, their anti-colonial revolt, their demands for freedom. We have thus given communism its best weapon: nationalism. We have welded the two together -- a major political error. You do not stop ideas by napalm -- indeed, you sometimes defeat just those ideas and attitudes you hope to win.

LENA GRAY HONORED The Syracuse Peace Council remembered its devoted servant of 25 years, Miss Lena Gray, on her retirement as office secretary. Lena will be missed by those accustomed to seeing her in the Peace Council office, but she will not be forgotten by those to whom she became synonymous with the Peace Council. Here is a letter which she sent:

"I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to the Syracuse Peace Council for its splendid gift to me on the occasion of its thirty-second Birthday party at First Presbyterian Parish House, last Tuesday evening, January 30, 1968.

"The AM-FM Panasonic radio which you presented to me at that time is lovely, and I am sure that I shall derive a great deal of pleasure from it. Its tone is beautiful, and one is afforded the opportunity of reaching many stations. I have always enjoyed music, and your present was a well-chosen one.

"I was surprised and delighted with the handsome symbidium orchid corsage for which I thank the Peace Council; also, many thanks for my dinner ticket.

"May the Syracuse Peace Council continue to find its niche, and may its influence be wide-spread."

(signed)

Lena Gray

ANNUAL INSTITUTE Reserve the dates of April 5th and 6th for our 28th annual Institute of International Affairs. Our luncheon speaker will be Congressman John Dow.

PEACE STIPENDS The Peace Council has a modest sum of money in the Leslie West and Hans Handov Funds which is available for the study of peace. Further information may be obtained from the SPC office.

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