

VIETNAM VIEWPOINTS In the February issue of The Progressive, Margaret Hofmann complains that many copies of her recent book, Vietnam Viewpoints, are not arriving at their destinations. Although "packed properly, addressed correctly," with return postage guaranteed, "They vanish" in Uncle Sam's mails.

Subtitled "A Handbook for Concerned Citizens," Vietnam Viewpoints is an unusual volume. Its author writes:

"So much has already been written about Vietnam... But.....It appeared to me that there is still a need for an authoritative reference work, one which presents the opinions of very many well known and respected sources....."

The volume is actually a 186 page compilation of quotations from speeches, magazine articles, books, and official governmental documents on Vietnam. The book went "to press on the day of the opening of the peace talks in Paris." Margaret Hofmann says that nothing would please her "more than to learn that the book has become superfluous even before it is published."

In the light of its publication date, two things can be noted:  
1) the material is up to date through the spring of 1968, and  
2) as the Paris peace talks drag on, there will be a continuing need for citizens to familiarize themselves again with the background of the war, its effects on the United States and on the Vietnamese people, the conduct of the war (bombing, chemicals, torture, napalm, etc.), and the outlook for the future. Mrs. Hofmann deals with the questions: "Are We Containing Communism?" "What Are our Aims in Asia?" and "Is Anti-Communism Always Synonymous with Freedom?" She does not overlook China, the Munich Analogy, nor the Domino Theory.

Mrs. Hofmann deals with a variety of questions and topics by a balanced and judicious selection of quotations, many of them lengthy, which are very well organized and integrated into a grand design.

That the war was a consequence of gross miscalculation is demonstrated in the familiar series of quotes from Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara:

"Progress in the last eight to ten weeks has been great. The government/of South Vietnam/ has asked only for logistical support." --May 1962.

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"The corner has been definitely turned toward victory in South Vietnam." -- May 1963.

"The major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965, although there may be a continuing requirement for a limited number of U.S. military personnel." -- October 1963.

"We have every reason to believe that U.S. military/ plans will be successful in 1964." --Dec. 1963.

"The U.S. hopes to withdraw most of its troops from South Vietnam before the end of 1965." --Feb.19, 1964.

"It will be a long war." -- December 1965.

One of the most interesting sections of the book bears the title, "Reversing the Arguments." In it, Margaret Hoffman demonstrates her own imaginative capacities, and helps us see the limitations of official rationalizations for American involvement.

A Chinese infantryman participated in a landing at Charleston, South Carolina, to protect "the poor exploited minorities" from "war mongers from North Carolina," many of whom infiltrated into the South via the Dan K. Moore (Governor of N.C. at the time) trail through Georgia; If South Carolina is not protected, there is danger that Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee might fall.

Unfortunately the natives of South Carolina do not fully appreciate the civilized blessings being brought them by the rapidly increasing troop concentrations from China and its allies. Moreover, Liang and his cohorts are confused:

"The line between enemy and friend isn't clearly drawn. The general gave us a big lecture.., and he clarified things ...a little: Our friends, that is clear, are the poor colored people of South Carolina. Our enemies are those who exploit them. But those Negroes, who make common cause with the whites, are also our enemies, while some whites, who truly try to help the blacks, are our friends. The problem is: How to tell one from the other?...."

This reviewer once had a letter from a ranking Texas Congressman in early 1965 in which he said that the problem was, we couldn't distinguish our enemies from our allies in Vietnam. But just as soon as we could, the war would progress nicely!

As one born in Nazi Germany (now a naturalized U.S. citizen), Mrs. Hofmann says,

"Whatever faults our society may have, I will never cease to marvel at the readiness with which...the hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are held and even televised, how openly films from North Vietnam are presented, and how many number of speeches critical of our policies may be made! And I know that I may publish this book without fear of imprisonment."

The second part of her book, "The Loyal Opposition," begins with "The Philosophy of Constructive Criticism." This four page section alone is worthwhile with quotes from President Kennedy, The Progressive, Prof. Henry Steele Commager, and Norman Cousins. It will help members of the peace movement recognize that theirs is a valuable role in a democratic society. Mrs. Hofmann follows this with quotations from military figures, Congressmen, and other critics of the war, and with a sampling of the petitions--too long ignored--to the Government requesting steps to end the war. (One is reminded of Hubert Humphrey's statement to the effect that people have a right to petition, but those petitioned have a right not to listen. That attitude may be one reason that Mr. Nixon, rather than Mr. Humphrey, now occupies The White House.)

There may be a bit of irony in Mrs. Hoffman's quoting of Isaiah 1:18-20. A famous Texan, who has returned to his native state after more than three decades in Washington, was fond of quoting the first part, "Come now, let us reason together," but neglected the stern warning, "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword...." There is a sense in which that famous Texan was devoured by the sword, for Vietnam proved to be his nemesis.

Mrs. Hofmann earlier wrote a widely circulated pamphlet based on her experiences in Germany during the heavy allied bombing raids when she was one of the intended victims. She alludes to those experiences in her conclusion:

"In spite of all my honest efforts to remain objective, I seem to have compiled a 'Doves' Handbook .....One explanation may be a feeling of a greater responsibility for the action of my own government, rather than for the actions of others inasmuch as I am convinced that one side cannot excuse its excesses by pointing to the wrongful acts of the other side, nor can individuals excuse crimes by saying they were

only carrying out orders. Here again, my background and the lessons learned from the Nuremberg Trials are guiding factors."

She rightly asks:

"What happened to the meaning of the word 'mission'? How could we allow it to change from being identified with the bringing of hope, to meaning the inflicting of misery? A 'successful mission' once meant the establishment of schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. A mission was synonymous with the bringing of life. Today, in Vietnam, the term has come to mean the opposite. This seems to me symbolic of the changes in our moral values during wartime."

If there is any criticism of the volume, it is that of the scholar who wishes that every quotation had been fully documented as to its source. There is an unevenness about this which, however, should not disturb the general reader at all.

The volume may be ordered in paperback either from the author, or from the Syracuse Peace Council.

Margaret Hofmann, Vietnam Viewpoints, Austin, Texas (610 Cardinal Lane, Zip 78701), 1969. \$1.50.

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