

September, 1969

To the Editor:\*

Le Van Nghia, the author of the following letter, is a 24-year-old, third year student of the Faculty of Letters, Saigon University, and editor of the school newspaper. The previous editor, Nguyen Truong Con, is now serving five years hard labor on the notorious prison island of Con Son, as a result of his involvement with the paper last year. One senses that to Nghia, who is a cripple, courage comes naturally. He is a native of Ben Tre, the southern town made famous during the Tet offensive when an American commander delivered the epitaph "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it." As I talked to Nghia and to some of the paper's staff, I became forcibly aware that the one thing that matters to these students is to bring an end to the war. I asked, "How would you feel if a greater power than the U.S. occupied your land?"

They face huge obstacles in their efforts to seek peace. Government suppression of their activities and persecution for their views is a grim threat to live with. Since Law 10-68 was passed last year prohibiting assemblies of more than three people, says one student, "No one knows exactly how many students have been arrested, but there have been very many." Hundreds of students now in prison never hope to see a trial. Many of them are moved from prison to prison to prevent them from forming any contacts with the outside world. To their families and friends they often simply cease to exist. A casual discussion about friends can go like this: "Tong, Kiet, and Long were arrested a year ago and are still in prison ... Loc is still in prison ..." But one student adds, "These are just the ones we know - people from our families or friends." I am told that it is not uncommon to have "some families with 4 or 5 sons and daughters in prison." Two men are pointed out to me on the street outside the office, "They follow us when we go anywhere." They consider it a matter of time before "the government decides that something we have printed is too strong and comes and arrests us." A special problem is "the police informers who pose as students."

The game they are playing is as real as the violence of the war that is going on around them, and the stakes they are putting up against the price of peace can include their lives. Le Van Nghia's letter to the American students is a sincere and truthful representation of the feelings and hopes of the Vietnamese student community.

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\*Received from an American student who has maintained communication with the Dayton Regional Office of the American Friends Service Committee. Additional copies may be obtained from 1414 Hill Street (directly behind 1416 Hill).

Viet Nam, september 14, 1969

To Our American Student Friends

Dear friends,

I am writing these lines from southern Viet Nam, from a land which is like a furnace resounding with bullets and bombs, blood, fire, and sudden death.

The frightening circumstances of war are with us daily, but we know we still have some American friends, the brothers of these who are forced to come here and shed their blood and meet a tragic death. If the warfare does not end, I worry about the fate of my people and I also endlessly have painful thoughts about you - maybe you will be forced to come over here, following the steps of your older friends. What will happen? I am moved and I want to cry.

My American student friends!

Vietnamese students look upon you with affection and full of hopefulness. The students of southern Viet Nam admire your work. You have dared to struggle, to demonstrate, and call upon the American Government to end the war in Viet Nam. You have requested the government to bring home your beloved American youth to end the useless sacrifice of blood, to avoid the destruction of a friendly country by sowing the seeds of racial extermination on your friends who were born in this century, and are of the same generation as you. The whole world looks in your direction with faith and appreciation.

Friends, you have intelligence and compassion for humanity in this the dehumanized 20th century - the age of the machine.

It pains me to talk of these things with you. Surely, you have asked yourself many times why you and the young people of the world are demonstrating, appealing for an end to the war, calling for peace, while we, the Vietnamese students, are quiet and passive. If you understand us, you will know how painful it is for us - we have spent many long tearful nights. Here, we have suffered under the law, from armed terror, and experience harsh oppression, and we have not been able to do anything. Meetings and demonstrations end in arrest, detentions, and ruthless beatings. How many of our young Vietnamese student friends are now lying buried in the prisons . . . ?

As the school year begins, I and my Vietnamese student friends send to you, the American students, our faith and hope. We are confident that your compassion for humanity will urge you to continue the struggle to force the American Government to truly want to end this war. We hope that you will play a big part in bringing peace back to Viet Nam, so that we, your friends, can avoid the unjust destruction of our young people, and we hope that in the future you will not have to come here with guns in hatred. But certainly you will never do so willingly. We are ready to welcome you in the days of peace in our homeland with all our affection.

We send to you many good wishes, hopes, and our complete, heartfelt admiration.

In friendship,  
L.V.N., Representative for  
Vietnamese Students

Dear American Friends,

Permit us to address this appeal to you at a time when the American escalation is accelerating its pace, gravely threatening peace in South-east Asia and the whole world. We are certain that we voice the sentiments of thousands of Vietnamese students, scientists and engineers living in France when we affirm our solidarity with all of our people who are struggling for the sacred cause of freedom and independence.

No one could be more attached to the cause of peace than the Vietnamese people, who for more than a quarter of a century have experienced the sufferings of war. But, just as for the American people during the Revolutionary War, for our people there can be no peace if they are denied their independence. Moreover, our rights to independence and national unity were solemnly recognized in the Geneva Agreements of 1954 in Vietnam.

It goes without saying that we feel no hatred for you or for the American people. We would prefer to discuss with you our studies and the concerns shared by all youth. In the 1960's, a natural topic for our discussions might be, for example, how living standards and human welfare could be improved in the whole world through the development of science and technology.

Unfortunately, our country has been invaded by American troops who came to sow death and desolation. Unfortunately, you, too, can be required at any moment by the Johnson Administration to journey to our homeland, on the pretext that you would be fighting for the cause of liberty and for humanity.

The Johnson Administration repeats day in and day out that American troops are in Vietnam "to help the South Vietnamese people defend themselves against aggression from the North." In reality, they are there to support people--yesterday Ngo dinh Diem, today Nguyen cao Ky--who, to say the least, have no popular support whatever.

If our compatriots in the South were led to take up arms, it is because they were subjected, in the name of anti-communism, to the dictatorial puppet regime of Ngo dinh Diem, who refused to hold the elections which were supposed to take place in 1956 in order to reunify the country, and who declared in May 1957 in Washington that "the frontier of the United States passes through the 17th parallel." Until 1960 our people fought with all the legal means possible against the bloody dictatorship of Diem, which was supported and aided by the United States. But confronted with the massacres, the deportations and the large-scale use of American material and methods of war, the people of South Vietnam had no choice left but to take up arms in self-defense.

Today President Johnson has engaged in South Vietnam, a country slightly larger than the state of Ohio, "more than one half of (U.S.) air power, more than one third of (its) ground forces ready for combat, and one third of (its) Navy." . . . According to Mr. McNamara, in 1966 American aircraft alone dropped 637,000 tons of bombs on North and South Vietnam. Our entire country numbers around 30 million inhabitants, which means that last year, more than 40 pounds of bombs were used for every Vietnamese, not counting an enormous quantity of other projectiles fired by ground and naval forces. . . .

And how can one believe today the myth of an "invasion" of the South by our Northern compatriots, when the Vietnamese of the North and South are one people, engaged in a single struggle against the same aggressor? Do not the people of North Vietnam have the right to render assistance to the people of the South, when a foreign army has invaded South Vietnam? At the heart of this question of a northern "invasion" is the undeniable fact that the war arose out of the American-imposed dictatorship of Ngo dinh Diem. . . . Even according to U.S. government figures, South Vietnamese comprised the overwhelming majority of the forces com-

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batting American troops in South Vietnam. In reality this is an American war, carried out by Americans to conquer the Vietnamese people who are defending their right to independence and national unity. Perhaps it is surprising to you that "anti-americanism in Vietnam, particularly in the cities, is growing and becoming a matter of increasing debate in the American mission. The argument is over the effects of what one observer called the new colonialism." The Washington Post, January 25, 1967)

It is not for us to judge the value of the "American way of life." You belong to the most prosperous nation in the world and your country has made many contributions to the scientific and technological heritage of humanity . . . . But what would you say if someone imposed on you . . . the dictatorship of a George Lincoln Rockwell who, like Gen. Nguyen cao Ky, is an admirer of Hitler? It is so difficult for you to understand that the National Liberation Front encompasses all the democratic forces of South Vietnam in opposition to the worst sort of fascist regime, imposed from abroad? How would you feel about an attempt to impose on you a way of life different from your own, by killing your family and bombing your cities and villages? . . . .

The Vietnamese problem cannot and will not be settled through some sort of political deal which would leave our country divided forever and sacrifice the inalienable rights of our people. A settlement must be based on US respect for the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam. That is the essential content of the four-point position of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Declaration in five points of the National Liberation Front. The US must definitively and unconditionally halt the bombings of North Vietnam; recognize the NLF the sole genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people; and withdraw all its troops and those of its satellites from South Vietnam. . . . To claim that they are merely pawns (NLF) in a conflict among the great world powers is to do them a great wrong. The program of the NLF clearly shows that it intends to establish democratic institutions in South Vietnam with a government of national union, capable of grouping all the political and the religious organizations and eminent individuals, regardless of their past activities, this government will have a foreign policy of strict neutrality and will establish relations with all countries.

President Johnson has proclaimed . . . the US is ready to undertake "unconditional discussions of peace--anywhere, anytime" . . . .

If he sincerely desires peace, if he really wants discussions, he can easily prove it by unconditionally ceasing the bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Only then could conversations be held between the DRV and the US as was recently declared by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nguyen Duy Trinh. The bombing of territory of DRV, a sovereign and independent country, constitutes an intolerable violation of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and of the basic rules of international law, and provokes the unanimous condemnation of the entire world. . . . The United States has no right to require from the victim . . . any counterpart whatever to the cessation of bombing. . . .

Student friends, the US has to give up its policy of force and of blackmail by force. . . . Our aim in writing to you is. . . . to help you understand us, so that you will see why we refuse to live in slavery or to allow our fate to be dictated by a foreign government. . . . . we hope that you will answer us. . . as soon and as fully as possible . . . .

Paris, April 3, 1967

Union of Vietnamese Students in  
France - The Secy Gen.,  
Nguyen Ngoc Giao

The President,  
Huynh Huu Nghiep  
Member of the Exec. Comm in charge of International Relations,  
Nguyen Van Bon