

# LBJ Nightmare - NLF and Americans Meet

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EDITOR'S NOTE: (Dave Dellinger, editor of LIBERATION magazine, arranged in Hanoi last spring for a group of Americans to meet with the North Vietnamese and members of the NLF in a midway meeting point - which developed to be Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. The Americans were drawn from the peace movement, the black liberation movement, university professors from Yale, Harvard, Washington University, and University of Chicago, community organizers, clergy, artists, and filmmakers. Raymond Mungo, former editor of the Boston University News, participated and spoke on behalf of the LIBERATION News Service.)

BRATISLAVA, Czechoslovakia (CUP-INS) - "Lyndon Johnson will have a nightmare when he hears about this meeting," said Tom Hayden to 40 Americans and an equal number of North Vietnamese and members of the National Liberation Front (NLF). "He will have a nightmare because he has sent 500,000 men to your land to find the Vietcong.

"We will tell him he'd better leave some men at home. Because, like Spartacus, whose fellow slaves in Rome protected his hiding-place by each claiming to be Spartacus himself, I am the Vietcong. We are everywhere! We are all the Vietcong!"

And on that note, the first major meeting between Americans and the "enemies" of their government ended on Sept. 13 after 10 days of cultural shock, political programs, and fraternal exchanges. The American delegation, led by Dave Dellinger, which included blacks, community organizers, American Friends, artists, clergymen, and full-time peace movement workers, was moved and at times incredulous at the Vietnamese morale and willingness to resist in face of monstrous military force. The Vietnamese, for their part, recognize the relative smallness of the anti-war movement but foresee its growth as the ultimate solution to the U.S. intervention in their affairs.

"We can speak to you, dear friends, as brothers," began Nguyen Ninh Vy, chairman of the Northern delegation, as he threw his arms around Dellinger. Gifts were exchanged, or more properly lavished, as each side delighted in pleasing the other. Books, sketches of South Vietnam produced on elaborate underground "liberation presses", phonograph records, pins, rings made of debris of downed U.S. planes, clothing, letters from captured U.S. pilots for delivery to their families on one side; on the other, anti-war pins, books, pamphlets, and little black dolls from Freedom House. A wizened sixtyish Vietnamese woman (who kept asking "when the women will all get together") grins broadly, pointing to her SDS badge. Those of us who could, spoke in French, but the Vietnamese also brought six excellent interpreters, and the Czech Peace Committee added two more.

Time and again the Vietnamese overcame American embarrassment at the apparent impotence of the conference to affect U.S. policy by insisting they were talking to the real people of America - the blacks, the community organizers, the students, the poor. These Americans, our war-torn friends said, will some day lead their people in brotherhood and peace with all the world. They said they knew the struggle may be long, but the Vietnamese will wait and watch - they have waited thousands of years already - and we must be strong and return the good fight.

One Vietnamese girl had literally 200 tiny wounds from American fragmentation bombs which exploded on her elementary school while she was teaching a class. Another teacher died from a similar bombing, her 26-year-old body sheltering one of her students.

Much singing and dancing went on nonetheless, for the Vietnamese are a cultured people, proud of their arts. A North Vietnamese friend told me on our return from La Traviata at the Bratislava Opera House that opera goes on in Hanoi still, as well as dance. Astounded, I asked if the poets and writers continue to publish.

"Oh, yes," he laughed, "but when the bombs fall their writing tends to become a little - shall we say - insipid?" Hysterical laughter all around.

The Dom Rekreachie ROH, our hotel, is normally a refuge for trade-unionists and overlooks the Danube; beer and wine here were plentiful and superb. The Vietnamese and Americans alike were apologetic for indulging in such unaccustomed luxury. The former, convinced that Americans "dress very well," bought expensive suits and raincoats in Europe; they were surprised that we wore dungaree jackets and tattered sandals and complimented our "humanity as well as courage."

Despite surface similarities, however, the Americans differed from their Vietnamese brothers most prominently in the extent to which their internal squabbles persisted and long, closed meetings were necessary. On the final day of the conference, Sol Stern of RAMHARTS heatedly refused to sign a statement which all but two others thought was relatively mild (explaining that it would implicate him if he didn't sign it) and insisted one veto should cancel the statement. It did, and a statement ultimately went out over the signatures of Dellinger, Hayden and Nick Egelson, the organizers of the conference.

At the end, 10 Americans were selected to go to Hanoi, but others may follow later. (The reasons for their selections were not made public). Rightfully proud of their strength under duress, the Vietnamese were anxious that their new friends see their homeland for themselves. They understand frustration, had no difficulty encompassing the frustrations that Americans feel at so simple a task as ending the war, and attempted to comfort us. We were at an understandable loss to offer them tangible comfort, but Ross Flanagan of the Quaker Action Group persevered with small packages of medical supplies which were seized by Royal Canadian Mounted Police last month as they were be-

brought into Canada for shipment to Hanoi.

Considering the difficult political tasks ahead, though, some comforts seemed justifiable, and so both delegations joined in singing "We Shall Over Come" with locked arms - the first time in years that "We Shall Over Come" has been sung without embarrassment - and we joined in a snake-dance version of the Unity Song.

The final evening, a formal Czech reception at Bratislava's oldest and most elegant castle turned into a New York-style frug, Slovak violinists notwithstanding, and Vietnamese brothers laughed and clapped uninhibitedly - recognizing a cultural tradition when they see one - while the heads of state stood by, powerless to stop what obviously seemed to them a desecration of socialist realism and diplomatic protocol.

## RELEASE OF NLF PROGRAM

Perhaps the major event at the conference was the release of the first NLF political program since 1960, printed in English and distributed to the American delegates. The document invites all forces, Communist and non-Communist, to join the NLF's nationalist revolution; protects "the right of ownership to the means of production and other property of the citizens"; encourages "the capitalists in industry and trade to help develop industry, small industries, and handicrafts"; respects the "legitimate right to ownership of land by the churches, pagodas, and holy seas of religious sects"; promises free general elections toward eventual reunification of both Vietnams "in accordance with the principle of universal, equal, direct, suffrage"; and bars military alliances with all other nations.

"You will notice that there is nothing here which mentions socialism," said Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the 50-year-old foreign secretary for the NLF, who also headed the Southern delegation, Mrs. Binh added that the NLF's program insists on five points: peace, neutrality, democracy, independence, and eventual national reunification.

Most Americans were surprised at the wording of the NLF program, which seems much too pro-capitalist in its outlook; however, the program may be a transitional step toward a socialist economy for South Vietnam, dependent on the outcome of a democratic election.

There, the NLF is confident of its ability to maintain the widespread support it now enjoys, and seems entirely honest in its insistence that the people of Vietnam be given, at last, the opportunity to decide for themselves which form of government they will have. The current program, with its assurance of private property rights, may be a compromise with the many non-socialist elements active in the body and leadership of the Front, but the ultimate program would be dictated by the populace as far as possible.

Even among Thieu and Ky's top military officers, the NLF maintains secret sympathizers, Mrs. Binh added. The Front includes at least three major political parties (Democratic, Radical Socialist, and People's Revolutionary), four major religions, and many ethnic groups.

According to Southern journalist Kuyuh Van Ly, from Ben Tre, the NLF is now in control of over 80 per cent of the Southern countryside - excluding the major cities of Saigon, Danang, and Hue, which are governed with varying degrees of stability by the "puppet government" sanctioned by the U.S. Maps and films were presented showing life in these liberated zones, which Mr. Ly maintained include 3.5 million hectares of land, over two million of it privately owned by peasants, producing enough rice for the fighting troops without the major rice-import problem of the Southern government. (Saigon is expected to import a million tons of rice this year, and reports from Boston University NEWS correspondent Alex Jack in Saigon said that nightclubs there had taken to a version of "greenfields" which reads "Once there were rice-fields . . . now there are none.")

## LIFE GOES ON IN VIETNAM

Obviously, the necessary functions of society continue, with difficulty, in spite of the bombing; otherwise the Vietnamese would have had to give in long ago. But despite bombing heavier to date than the total bombing in the European and African theatres of the Second World War, Mr. Vy documented that even the cultural life continues. He showed films of dances and theatre performances. School enrollment is up 130 per cent this year. Newspapers, magazines, even art books, continue to be published.

Vy's explanation for this phenomenon is as follows: Industry, and now schools, are scattered in small centres in the countryside, Mr. Vy said, adding that an urban economy could not have withstood the bombing so long as the North has. "When the radio says the U.S. has destroyed a factory, we assure you it was only four walls in the first place when they say they destroyed an army barracks, it was only a building."

The DRV's four-point program for peace remains as before Tran Con Tuong, a Hanoi lawyer, reiterated the stand; (1) The U.S. must put an end to aggression against the DRV (at which point negotiations could begin immediately). (2) Strict attention must be paid to the Geneva accords (3) A solution to the problems of South Vietnam must come from the South Vietnamese themselves (4) The two Vietnams must be allowed to achieve peaceful reunification between themselves.

"Our people are determined not to submit to force, not to talk to the U.S. imperialists under the threat of (resumed) bombing," Mr. Tuong emphasized; Hanoi "has not reason to escalate the war" (as Washington has charged); its

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