

m — — a closer look



ough blame to go around..."

ious impact on other Asian countries appears to be lost on America.

In support of this interpretation, a U.N. official surveying the situation in Vietnam told an American delegation headed by David Stickney of the (Quaker) American Friends Service Committee that "if Vietnam were to receive sufficient economic aid, the refugee problem would disappear."

New wars produce more refugees

To this list of desperate problems, one must add Vietnam's foolhardy invasion of Kampuchea, which turned out to be a veritable quagmire. This was preceded by three-and-a-half years of Kampuchea's border raids, and an influx of 200,000 Kampuchean refugees from the Pol Pot brand of socialism. Next came China's senseless invasion of Vietnam and its repeated threats to invade again, voiced most prominently by Deng Xiaoping to U.N. secretary-general Kurt Waldheim.

The Chinese invasion also exacerbated Vietnam's historic antiethnic Chinese prejudice and encouraged any wavering Chinese to think that their only hope is to escape to the Western money tree. Undoubtedly it had the same effect on many Vietnamese fed up with hardship, war, and a socialism that holds out no prospect of returning to the lifestyle of the privileged classes under the old regime.

Reliable Washington friends of *Seven Days* report that U.S. intelligence predicts that China will invade Vietnam again, judging by the location and movements of its troops. But the U.S. government is as silent about China's contributions to the refugee problem as it is about its own.

Vietnam's responsibility

How has Vietnam handled the emergency forced on it by the United States and exacerbated by its own invasion and occupation of Kampuchea and by the Chinese invasion? Apparently not as well as one would have hoped, but not nearly as badly as charged by the United States.

Church World Service visitors to Ho Chi Minh City in March report that they visited Chinese friends who are still running small businesses and seemingly feel no pressure to leave for a New Economic Zone or foreign shores. This suggests that those gainfully employed are not pressured to leave but that the estimated three million unemployed in southern cities are being pressured to go where they can scratch out a living and contribute to the desperately needed reconstruction of Vietnam's agriculture-based economy.

On the other hand, Vietnam experts at the independent Center for International Policy in Washington and the Southeast Asia Resource Center in Berkeley believe that in northern provinces affected by Chinese belligerency, all ethnic Chinese are given the option of moving to a New Economic Zone or leaving the country. If one remembers the American confiscation of Japanese-American property on the West Coast during World War II and the internment of the Nisei in concentration camps, this paranoid reaction to China's aggression is not surprising; but it cannot be condoned by those who refuse to justify what the United States did to the Japanese Americans.

In a brutal Catch-22 manner, the government is charging even those people it wants to exile for the privilege of leaving. The price was apparently averaged about \$2,000 per person, payable in gold or hard currency.

So charges *Time* magazine, but Chris Mullin of the Pacific News Service reports that

syndicates based in Los Angeles and Hong Kong are said to be charging around \$2,000 a head for passage. They are assisted by corrupt officials — many of them former servants of the Thieu regime who are now back in their old jobs after a spell in re-education camp.

Apart from the fact that virtually every country in the Orient charges an exit fee to all departing foreigners (including *Time* correspondents) who have been in the country more than a few months, Mullin's account makes more sense. Corruption aside, there are few if any boat owners or brokers who offer free passage. And interviews with a number of the refugees support this version. One refugee told the *Hong Kong Star* that

I owned my own house, had two cars, and my children went to an upper-class French-language school. However the Communists introduced policies for increased production and equality among the people. Before they could assess my property, I sold it and bought gold as I knew there were syndicates operating to get people out of the country illegally.

So what some people consider "Communist Tyranny" may be necessary steps to increase production in a desperately poor country and establish rough "equality among the people."

While laying all the blame on "Hanoi's hardened rulers," and weeping over the refugees' desperate plight, the U.S. government continues cold-bloodedly pursuing the very policies that generate it. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reports:

Growing concern in the United States over the refugee problem is reflected in the administration's urging of international charities, other governments and the World Bank to adopt tough sanctions ... against Hanoi ... One senior official said: ... "We have advised the

World Bank to hold back on further loans to Vietnam, and we expect to be heeded."

A news story in *Le Monde* suggests that there is a specific purpose in the administration's policy. Behind the scenes, the United States is trying to promote a "neutralist solution [in Cambodia] in which Norodom Sihanouk will play a leading role" when the Vietnamese withdraw their troops. Already, according to *Le Monde*, "President Carter has secured assurances" from Brezhnev that the Soviet Union will not establish "bases in Vietnam for military purposes." This is a prime U.S. condition for the U.S.-sponsored resolution of the Kampuchean conflict. From my own conversations with Vietnamese officials, I gather that it was not hard for Brezhnev to give such assurances, since Vietnam has always been adamantly opposed to hosting a Soviet naval base.

What can Americans do?

Americans should demand that their government stop its policy of waging economic warfare against the Vietnamese people in order to advance U.S. interests and designs in Southeast Asia. This will remove the biggest single cause of the refugee crisis. At long last, we should do our part to "heal the wounds of war" by pressuring our government to enter into full diplomatic relations with Vietnam, provide promised reparations and aid, remove all restrictions on trade, and facilitate people-to-people cultural and scientific exchanges.

We should also insist that the government initiate an immediate rescue campaign. Ships and planes can be sent to provide safe passage; processing centers can be opened; food and medicine can be shipped, both to the refugees and to the people of Vietnam; asylum can be offered to as many as want it. Asylum will remove the biggest cause of the unsafe conditions in which refugees leave. For months now, Vietnam has indicated its willingness to let them leave in an orderly fashion, provided only that there is a country willing to accept them.

Finally, Americans have a responsibility to challenge the Cold War manipulation of the refugee problem. The last hysterical anti-Communist propaganda campaign culminated in the McCarthyism of the '50s and military invasions of Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and the Dominican Republic. One wonders what new crusades are being prepared for us now. The Middle East? Africa? Latin America? Asia itself? Within our own country, once again, against those movements that have the temerity to fight corporate control of the economy and government?

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