

VIETNAM! IT'S OUR WAR, TOO...

An understanding of Canadian involvement in the Vietnam War is a must for all Canadian citizens. Canadian government and corporate complicity with U.S. aggression affects not only the Vietnamese directly, but also has deleterious effects on the average Canadian. It is hoped the facts and analysis which follows will have two major influences. Firstly, a desire by concerned people to exert themselves so that this country will drastically change its policy toward the genocidal war being waged by the U.S. and its allies in Vietnam. Secondly, that Canadians start to give serious consideration to the dire consequences facing Canada due to our past and present relationship with the U.S. The often uttered "interdependence with the U.S.", promoted by our government and business sectors under the guise of military necessity, is not one of equal beneficiaries but rather of a predator and its prey. It is not without justifiable cause that some speak of the rape of Canada. While it is unfortunate that the word imperialism is unpalatable to the average Canadian, it does exist and the large majority of the people of the world today are its victims. We must overcome our non-committal attitude and apathy before we are incapable of saving this country and its people.

Vietnam: French Colonialism and U.S. Imperialism

The history of Vietnam cannot be looked at in a vacuum. The Vietnamese people are facing the same predicament hundreds of millions of people all over the world face. Perhaps Vietnam's peculiarity is that the Vietnamese have chosen to openly confront the highly developed weapons of destruction that the U.S. and its allies have developed. The Vietnamese have had enough and thus have chosen to fight for their liberation. It is no wonder that they have received the attention and moral backing of people all over the world. When a small country, a poor country,



decides to confront an overwhelmingly strong military aggressor relying primarily on the moral commitment of its people, the world must take notice. However, we must not show concern alone, but demonstrate by our actions that we realize the poor people of Vietnam are justified in their struggle and have too long been pillaged by western society.

The period of colonial domination for Vietnam officially started on August 31, 1858. Without declaration of war, without prior negotiation, the French Admiral Rigault de Genouilly backed up by 14 ships and 2,500 men, entered the port of Danang and occupied the city by force. Apparently the justification for this act was protection of Catholic missionaries. This was to be the beginning of the virtual enslavement of the Vietnamese people.

There are many sides to colonialism (neo-colonialism now) but one thing is apparent: all benefits are directed toward the mother country with very little or no concern for the indigenous population. Under French rule, taxation was defined according to the demands of France. Her wants were obviously insatiable. Thus, in the year 1923, although the country was scourged by floods, taxes were increased by 30 percent. However, this was only a land tax and does not take into consideration innumerable other taxes as well as forced purchase of French bonds. The population, 95 percent of whom were peasant since industrialization of colonies was unheard of, was forced to take loans from the benevolent missionaries and government profiteers. Those able to survive the harsh conditions of life were unable to meet the outrageous interest rates on loans and thus were forced to forfeit their land to the mission and feudal lords. In this manner, large tracts of land fell into the hands of a small group of people and the peasants who once occupied villages were now at the short end of a tenant-landlord relationship. It was not uncommon for a peasant to harvest a crop and then have 90 percent of it expropriated. Many of the peasant population took to the mountains in the hope of escaping these unbearable conditions. These people were labelled criminals and hunted down by the authorities.

There was more to colonialism than turning people into economic serfs. With the outbreak of World War I, the Vietnamese people, previously thought of as inferior beings worthy of only toiling for the "civilized", were now given the dubious "opportunity" to fight for justice and liberty in the name of France. Approximately 700,000 natives were conscripted to France - 80,000 never made it back to their country. The ways in which these "volunteers" were rounded up does not need description. Suffice it to say that the quotas were filled. In all wars to date, it is the poor who have borne the brunt and the poor people of Vietnam and the U.S. are the ones suffering the greatest casualties in the present war. Colonialism to the peasant also meant rape of women, assassination of innocent people, the destruction of a culture, unnecessary death from disease, enforced consumption of vast quantities of alcohol and opium, etc. With reference to opium and alcohol, the following is a letter from Mr. Sarraut, the Governor-General of Indochina.

Mr. Resident:

In accordance with instructions from Mr. Director-General of the Excise, I have the honour to beg you to be so kind as to second the efforts of my department in the establishment of new alcohol and opium houses.

To this effect, I am taking the liberty of sending you a list of the homes which should be installed in the various villages mentioned, most of which are entirely without spirits and opium.

Through the channels of Cambodian governors and village heads, your preponderant influence could be fortunately used to draw the attention of certain native small traders to the advantages of going in for some additional business.

On our side, the agents of the active service, on their rounds, will endeavour to install premises, unless you would prefer, Mr. Resident, that they should wait until you have first acted with the authorities in order that they may second your action, in which case, I beg you to be kind as to inform me.

It is only through complete and constant understanding between your administration and ours that we shall obtain the best results, in the best interests of the Treasury.

To provide the reader with some understanding of what the scale of spirits and opium meant to the French Treasury, the following example is cited. One year a scheme was devised

to water down the alcohol sold to the natives in Indochina, a scheme which increased French profit that year by 4 million francs.

In 1930, progressive people from various regions in Vietnam met and formed a coalition. Its purpose was made explicit: to rid Vietnam of French colonialism and return Vietnam to the Vietnamese people. A Democratic Front was created; however, it was obvious that the chore ahead was not an easy one. As years passed, the Vietnamese people faced more stringent military aggression and even harsher living conditions. The Second World War had severe effects on France and thus she became even more dependent on her colonies. Vietnam was located in an excellent position for further expansion. Japanese occupation did not help the Vietnamese either.

In 1945, the war of liberation started. The Vietnamese people were led by Ho Chi Minh, the leading nationalist and communist in the country. Ho had the support of the overwhelming majority of people including various political parties and religious denominations. The Left and Right threw their support behind him for he represented the highest national aspirations. The U.S., from the very start of this struggle for national liberation, has made illegitimate claims of its being a civil war. Writers, regardless of ideological positions, have repudiated this U.S. allegation and pointed out its perfidious nature.

As early as 1947, the U.S. intervened in Vietnam. Not only were facts falsified, but open support was given to France. A puppet ruler, Bao Dai, was given the backing of France and the U.S. This was an attempt to insure that western interests would be secure. The United States extended billions of its taxpayer's money to the French Bao Dai regime. John Foster Dulles, on two occasions offered the French nuclear bombs for use in Vietnam; however, with the increased amount of military, political and economical aid provided by the U.S., France started to question the actual intentions of the U.S. The contradictions of interests became sharper and sharper as time went on.

Regardless of U.S. involvement, the Viet Minh defeated the odgrench at Dien Bien Phu. With over 400,000 French troops occupying Vietnam, France suffered 172,000 casualties. This no doubt testifies to the moral commitment of the Vietnamese to the control over their own destinies. The 1954 Geneva Conference was convened to settle the situation resulting from the French defeat.

Canadian Complicity

At the peace conference, it was decided that a temporary division of Vietnam would be made at the 17th parallel with the Viet Minh armies withdrawing to the north and the French to the South. This was done mainly to facilitate the exodus of French soldiers without their having to surrender and become prisoners of war. The boundary was explicitly defined as provisional and was not considered as constituting a political or territorial demarcation. In two years time, i.e., July 1956, a national election was to have been held to reunite the country under one central government. Other provisions allowed for freedom of trade and movement across the dividing line. In addition, the agreements clearly prohibited the formation of any foreign military alliances, the construction of military bases, and the entrance of foreign military personnel and war materials.

An International Control Commission (ICC), made up of three countries, including Canada, India, and Poland was set up to insure adherence to the provisions of the Geneva agreements and to supervise the forthcoming national elections. Canada's acceptance of membership on the ICC should have bound her to strict neutrality; however, it soon became apparent that Canada was merely to be a servant of policy decisions made by the United States. Canadian spokesmen began to show acceptance of the concept of two Vietnamese states, a direct contradiction of the Geneva agreements which they were explicitly commissioned to uphold.

The withdrawal of the Viet Minh after the Geneva Conference, left a provisional government in the South headed by Bao Dai, who had served as emperor under both the Japanese and French colonialists and was universally detested. Ngo Dinh Diem, who was living in the United States was persuaded to return to Vietnam with the pledged support of president Eisenhower. In 1955, a referendum was held, which was described as rigged, even by Time Magazine, and Diem took power as Bao Dai's successor. Immediately, the U.S. began sending economic and