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current U.S. involvement in Vietnam. I do not think this is true but I for one will willingly admit that I speak from a definite view-point. Personally, I am both a Christian and a Republican, and make no bones about it. I suspect that anyone who is a serious disciple of both Jesus Christ and Abraham Lincoln really is a "radical." Add to this the fact that I grew up on the "frontiers" where my parents taught me that I was a free man in a free country with a right to speak, be heard, take seriously and, if need be, peacefully in dissent, and it is not difficult to understand why I am a wild-eyed, fire-breathing, radical practicing radical!

Secondly, I have been asked why I am willing to speak out on this issue. After all, I am not getting paid for it. Neither am I a Southeast Asia expert. On the other hand, I have tried to take my responsibilities as an American citizen seriously and have read as much as possible on the subject of Vietnam past and present. Also, I am a historian and I think I can bring some of the perspectives and insights of history to bear upon the matter.

But the real reasons I am willing to speak out on the issue are several fold. First, it should be obvious that Vietnam is now the central issue of U.S. foreign policy. Even more important, it is the central issue of most of our lives, especially those of you of draft age. It is to you and it soon may be to all Americans literally a "matter of life and death." Second, I feel I have a deep stake in this nation, otherwise I would not be here. My people have been here for a long time and have given their blood in more noble enterprises than Vietnam; my father, brothers and I have served in the U.S. Army; and last July, my nineteen year-old cousin was killed in action in the jungles of Vietnam.

Third, I am speaking for conscience sake. There are times when men of conviction and ideals must speak out on issues no matter what the consequences. Fourth, I think I am speaking for a large minority of Americans who have serious doubts about what we are doing in Vietnam. I am speaking in opposition to another minority which at the present has control of the policy there and which apparently has no intention of changing its mind. I am speaking to what I believe to be the majority of Americans who are honestly confused and bewildered over the whole matter. Finally, I accepted this invitation to speak because this may be one of the last opportunities for this kind of free exchange of ideas on the subject. Next fall may be too late, and by that time I may not have the courage to speak out against a policy which it may well be by then treason to question.

My third observation is a plea to keep some kind of rein on our emotions during this meeting. *The Colophon* (our university newspaper) had suggested a riot tonight might prove that we are really involved in the Vietnam problem. However, my feeling is that, although some emotion is inevitable, we should try our best to remember that we are civilized human beings and not students at Wichita East High School. Furthermore, please do not confuse this as a personal attack on the average GI now fighting in Vietnam. Those doing the actual fighting have my deepest understanding and concern. Most of them, faced with a choice of Leavenworth or Vietnam, have chosen Vietnam and are doing exactly what I would do in the same situation: trying to stay alive and counting the days until they get home. And let me remind you that attacking me for not kicking the troops in Vietnam is like blaming me for bringing your children into the world. I really didn't have much to say about other overt deed which led to the conclusion of the act.

The main question: What are the implications of our massive presence in Southeast Asia? What are we really looking about there?

Before I go too much further, I would like to make it clear that I personally doubt if the real issue in Vietnam is that of a direct showdown between Communism and Western Democracy. I do not believe that the current leading Vietnamese aspect of an ultimate confrontation between the "Free World" and "World Communism" "Why do you think? There are several reasons:

In the first place, I would like to see evidence of the old claim that all the world and monolithic Communism in North and South West and East are basically the same. None of the other major democracies have rushed to our side (e.g. Great Britain, France, Italy or India). And it is hard to believe that the war in Vietnam is being run by either Peking or Moscow.

In fact, it is not even clear that we are really fighting Communism at all in Southeast Asia. The majority of experts on Far Eastern affairs see the beginning of the trouble in Vietnam stemming from a civil war in the south. Although the facts are not altogether clear, many responsible observers point out that North Vietnam did not send troops south until after the American build-up began.

At this juncture we might note that there are basically only two nationalities involved in the fighting in Vietnam: Americans and Vietnamese. It should be pointed out here that Vietnamese are Vietnamese and not even CIA agents can call "northerners" from "southerners". To be sure, some Vietnamese are fighting on our side, but the rank-and-file is doing so only reluctantly, if not at all. And most of these officers had fought with the French against their own people previously.

What evidence there is points to the fact that the vast majority of Vietnamese, for a variety of reasons, favor either the government of North Vietnam or the National Liberation Front in the South. President Eisenhower himself in his memoirs admitted that if free elections for a chief of state had been held in all of Vietnam in the mid-1950's, Ho Chi Minh would have received at least 60 per cent of the vote. A leading Buddhist monk in South Vietnam Thich Nhat Hanh stated in July of 1966:

"Genuine Communists make up only a small portion of the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong), though they may dominate its leadership. The hold of the NLF on the peasants does not derive from their belief in communism, but from the Front's constant reiteration that it is fighting only the American imperialists and their South Vietnamese lackeys." The 80 per cent of the population who are peasants speak only Vietnamese and have no understanding of differences between the French and American motivations. They see white Westerners (more Americans than they ever saw French) apparently occupying their country, controlling their politicians, bombing their villages, and killing their people. Even when the American claim to be defending them against aggression (by other Vietnamese) is heard, it is much less convincing than the NLF's arguments. Every day that the war continues, therefore, is devastating to the

* David Schoenbrun, "Vietnam: the Case for Extrication," *The Columbia University Forum*, Fall, 1966, vol. IX, no. 2, (reprint), p. 3, and Thich Nhat Hanh, *Vietnam: Lotus In a Sea of Fire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 102.

* Schoenbrun, p. 4, Robert Scheer and Warren Hinckle, "The Vietnam Lobby," in *The Vietnam Reader*, M. G. Kassin and Bernard Fen (eds.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 31, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Man for Change* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 372-373.

Front so far as winning the support of the peasants is concerned."¹

A recent CBS news public opinion poll in South Vietnam appeared to confirm this assessment of the situation by Thich Nhat Hanh.² Well may be that the reason 500,000 of the best armed and equipped troops in the world are having trouble in South Vietnam is that they are fighting against the majority of the people there.

This situation is compounded by the fact that we have been deceived so often by the present administration about Vietnam, that it is increasingly difficult for Americans to believe official statements concerning the war. The latest instance of this propensity of the administration to prevaricate came only last week just three days before U.S. planes bombed MiG bases in the North for the first time Senator Charles Percy had been assured by both the State and Defense departments that they would not be touched.³

Even admitting a lack of conclusive facts to prove either my point here or that to the contrary should tell us something of major importance. Can it be that 500,000 U.S. combat troops and several hundred billion dollars of American money have been committed to a country of 17 million people in the name of a "cause" for the existence of which there is only sketchy evidence?

One might, in addition, also ask if there is any really hard evidence that any kind of democracy will come to South Vietnam in the foreseeable future? The average Vietnamese peasant seems little interested in anything but survival. Such concepts as "Freedom" and "Democracy" apparently have little meaning for the average Vietnamese in the South. And what of the present government of South Vietnam and the prospects of the future? It still takes a considerable stretch of the imagination to classify Premier Ky and his crew as "democrats" in any sense of the word.

Furthermore, we might ask how others than Americans view the intentions of the United States in Vietnam? Most of the rest of the world believe that the Americans have imperialistic intentions there. Many, if not most, Vietnamese believe that we are really only concerned with scorning South Vietnam for use as a base against Red China.⁴ To test this thesis, you might ask the foreign students on our campus for the general opinion of their respective countries concerning the reason for our intervention in Vietnam. I think their answers to the question of why we are in Vietnam will be quite enlightening.

Maybe all of this boils down to the basic question of whether or not Vietnam is really worth it and whether or not America's vital interests have ever been at stake in Vietnam. The value of fighting for the South Vietnamese has been seriously questioned by most of the returning veterans with whom I have talked lately. And many knowledgeable on-the-spot observers would deny that Vietnam is crucial to the security or vital interests of the United States.⁵

Perhaps we need to look elsewhere for the real reasons for our continuing presence in Vietnam. Some have suggested that the real issue is the prestige, honor and status quo of the present administration. Others have emphasized that the Pentagon has made any alternative to a complete and clean-cut military victory in Vietnam.

What then are the real issues arising out of the present U.S. involvement in Vietnam? I think that they are three in number. Let me briefly sketch each for you.

¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, pp. 102-103.

² CBS News TV Special on Vietnam, March 21, 1967.

³ Time Magazine, May 5, 1967, p. 19.

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, p. 103.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For example, David Schoenbrun, George F. Kennan, Don R. Larson, Arthur Larson and Marcus G. Kassin.