

Tales from the Planet

Fifth Estate Collective

1997

The Saigon Times reports work will begin next year on a north-south expressway along the route of the old Ho Chi Minh Trail. Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet has called for a mass labor program to build the 1,125-mile road. This was a retreat from his original plan to build a trunk road down the west side of the Truong Son Mountains, which would have cost \$6 billion, half the country's annual national income.

According to a February 26 Reuters report, "both local and foreign experts have questioned the economic sense of drafting millions of workers to build the new road." Hanoi, which has a compulsory labor program for young people to work ten days a year or pay an exemption fee, recently announced plans to expand the age group subject to the program and allowing provincial and city authorities to set their own exemption fees.

Apparently, *The Auto Free Times* (P.O. Box 4347, Arcata CA 95518) has not made it to Vietnam. A twentieth century version of the ancient tyrant's ziggurat, the modern expressway is a society's ultimate status symbol and promise of technotopian progress. The Vietnamese commissars want to get on the treadmill, following the industrialized/industrializing world to automobility. Perhaps they'll build rest stops with McDonald's golden arches, or, build a ziggurat-shaped casino at the end of their highway.

Speaking of Vietnam, we missed mentioning the death last fall of one of Presidents Kennedy's and Johnson's key foreign policy advisers, McGeorge Bundy. Bundy continued the tradition of the U.S. war criminals dying of natural causes at a ripe old age.

High-born and groomed for rule in the nation's most elite schools, Bundy personified what journalist David Halberstam described as "the best and the brightest"—the aggressive and intellectual policy-makers who became the central architects of the U.S. war in Vietnam. After leaving the government in 1965, Bundy worked in other ruling class institutions such as the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation.

As national security adviser, Bundy was considered to be, as Halberstam called him, "perhaps the brightest star in the galaxy of brilliant young men who were going to change the course of the country." It was this "bright star" who recommended a policy of "sustained reprisal against North Vietnam" for resistance to the U.S. invasion and puppet regime in the south.

"We cannot assert that the policy of sustained reprisal will succeed in changing the course of the contest in Vietnam," wrote Bundy in a now-famous memorandum dated February 7, 1965. "What we can say is that even if it fails, the policy will be worth it. At a minimum it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own. Beyond that, a reprisal policy—to the extent that it demonstrates U.S. willingness to employ this new norm in counter-insurgency—will set a higher price for the future upon all adventures of guerrilla warfare, and it should therefore somewhat increase our ability to deter such adventures."

According to the memoirs of that other war criminal, former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, Bundy also recommended "graduated and sustained bombing" (Indochina soon became the most intensely bombed region on earth) and even suggested at one point that the U.S. threaten to use nuclear weapons to achieve its objectives in negotiations.

Bundy's policy—essentially one of “destroying the country to save it”—was followed to the bitter end. If Vietnam could not be “pacified” and reconquered, it would serve just as well as an object lesson for any upstart nationalist or radical movements in the third world trying to break out of the imperialist harness.

As Noam Chomsky has noted (particularly in an excellent essay written in 1985, “Forgotten History of the War in Vietnam”), it could be argued that the U.S. thus gained a “partial victory, and a very significant one,” and achieved its central aims.

The prime worry of planners was not Vietnam itself, Chomsky writes, “but the rot would spread”—the “rot” of nationalist revolt and independence from U.S. global strategic and corporate control. “It was feared that this might have a demonstration effect,” he points out, which meant the need for the U.S. to create its own “demonstration effect.”

Thus, control over surrounding regions was extended while the U.S. war machine pulverized Indochina. The year Bundy's memorandum was written, the CIA fomented a military coup against the independent nationalist government of Sukarno in Indonesia, in which a million people were killed. Chomsky notes that the strategy worked, and it was reused throughout the 1980s when the U.S. used its Big Stick on Nicaragua to send a message to Latin American independentistas of all stripes.

Bundy was therefore the chief strategist not only for the U.S. genocide in Indochina, but of an ongoing policy of massacre and mayhem carried out since then against any small country daring to bolt from the flock. In later years, Bundy became an arms control advocate, piously posing as an elder statesman for peace.

Of course, he called for a Nuclear Freeze only to argue for a more streamlined, better managed war machine. He was the same bureaucrat who had argued in the 1960s, “As important as having strength is knowing how to use it.” McGeorge Bundy was not just following orders, he conceptualized them. Millions paid the price.

In January 1996, four editors of *Green Anarchist*, the editor of the *Animal Liberation Front Supporters Group Newsletter* and ALF press officer Robin Webb were arrested by Special Branch, the British secret police, for conspiracy to incite criminal damage. According to *StateWatch*, “Britain has the most repressive conspiracy laws in Europe.”

Gandalf defendants (from GA and ALF) could face ten years in jail; yet in order to be convicted, no damage need have been done or anyone proven to be “incited” to cause damage. The people charged need not know anyone doing actual damage or even each other. The defendants have to prove they did not intend to incite damage, a difficult task for anyone writing about and acting on animal liberation or doing support for animal liberation militants and jailed animal advocates.

After a preliminary hearing in December, charges against Webb were dropped, since prosecutors conceded he was essentially being tried on evidence presented at a 1995 trial for charges on which he was acquitted. The state's case was severely damaged by this blow, but charges against the other five remain in effect as we go to press.

The Gandalf Five need support, including cash donations. Cash or blank postal orders are preferred, and checks should be payable to “Gandalf Defendants Campaign.” For materials about the case, contact Gandalf Defendants Campaign, P.O. Box 66, Stevenage SG1 2TR, England.

State governments in the U.S. exercise their right to legal murder by executing prisoners. When one is scheduled, the New York City-based Living Theater organizes a protest in Times Square to object to them. For forty years in the U.S. and abroad, the Living Theatre has combined artistic communication and social activism to promote the anarchist ideals of its members. Founders of the theater were Judith Malina and Julian Beck. Judith has repeatedly asserted that her lifelong goal is to spread information about the “wondrous anarchist revolution.”

In Times Square, not surprisingly, the protesters, often few in number, encounter people highly antagonistic to their position questioning state authority. Judith reports that “these aggressive types hurl sexual epithets (often not very original ones); and those who just want us to disappear shout: ‘Go back to Russia!’”

When an open-minded individual inquires about getting out of this circle of violence, solutions different from those offered by the hierarchy's power brokers are offered. Living Theatre members advocate a commitment between individuals. They propose that the protester and the passerby make a mutual pledge they “will never kill each other.”

Judith's eyes light up as she points out the implications of such a pledge. “It means you can never use a gun, can never serve in an army. Or be a prison guard. After all, there could be a riot in a prison where I'm held and you could be required to use weapons to put it down.”

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