

Vietnam Will Win

Henry Peters

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a review of

Vietnam Will Win by Wilfred Burchett (New York: Guardian Books, 1968)

Everyone should read *Vietnam Will Win*—including those who have already read Burchett's earlier books, *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerrilla War* (1965) and *Vietnam North* (1966).

These two works, especially the first, are important as the first successful attempt to introduce the Vietnamese struggle to Americans in human terms. Burchett's unpretentious accounts of what he saw in NLF territory in late 1964, and his interviews with the people who live and fight there, continue to be more meaningful than all the abstract legal, political and moral arguments put forth by the U.S. left.

This is not to say that Burchett failed to draw conclusions from what he saw and heard. His analysis of the military situation at the end of 1964, which pointed to the failure of the Lansdale-Kennedy-McNamara strategy of "special warfare" (getting Asians to fight Asians), and his predictions of continued and more serious defeats if large contingents of U.S. troops were sent to take over the fighting, were something of a revelation at the time.

Today, all of Burchett's predictions have come true.

The Battle of Dak To, the Tet Offensive, the withdrawal from Khe Sanh, the establishment of "Vietcong" mortar bases in the suburbs of all the major cities and around the large U.S. bases, the almost complete loss of initiative by U.S. forces, the humiliating failure of the pacification program, and the Front's continuing consolidation of the countryside all point to one irrefutable fact: the Vietnamese are winning the war.

After 15 years of manipulation and 3 years of open military intervention (including every ugly stratagem and device short of nuclear weapons at its disposal), the United States has shot its wad and been forced to the peace table.

Vietnam Will Win tells how it was done, and how it can be done again...and again. Burchett goes into greater detail than ever before about where the NLF came from, how it was built, and how the men and women of the Front organize and fight. For his discussion of political-military theory, he relies heavily on previously untranslated documents by Vo Nguyen Giap, the man who led the Vietminh to victory over the French.

His analysis of events, however, once again depends primarily on interviews with people directly involved in the fighting. What emerges is the clearest explanation yet of why the mightiest empire in world history is beginning to crumble.

It is easy to imagine Pentagon and State Department "experts" combing this book as they prepare for future Vietnams. There are also lessons, for us, however, not because our situation is so similar to that of the Vietnamese but because the book poses some universals of struggle.

The most important of these is the fact that "political" work (educating and organizing ourselves and others) is more basic than military action. The latter is only an outgrowth of the first and cannot succeed without it.

According to the NLF people Burchett talked with, even military actions are judged in part as "political" work, that is, according to the educative effect they have on the people.

Insofar as the movement engages in military action and “political” work, we tend to see them as distinct realms of activity. In fact, we usually behave as though one were a substitute for the other.

This is not surprising when we remember that we have been trained by white America, where gadgets and gimmicks and instant this and that are the measures of “progress” (our most important product). The idea that in addition to street activities we should be relating to people slowly and patiently, often on a one to one basis, does not come easily in Instant Gratification Land.

Instead, we look for the trick, the gimmick (“tools” and “issues”) that will “radicalize” people. And when one of our tricks doesn’t work (which is usually the case), we get demoralized and wallow in self-pity until we can think up a new gimmick.

If the Front had time to talk to us, they would probably suggest that we do more thinking about things like patience, permanence, continuous hard work (like every day), talking with (not to) people, and planning for the future. The Front doesn’t have the time, but the next best thing is Vietnam Will Win.

This was supposed to be a book review and it turned into a sermon. But that’s what reading it does to you. It makes you think about all the stuff you and your brothers and sisters are into and whether or not it’s going anywhere. If what you’re into is going somewhere, there are still plenty of things in the book that will be of interest, like the chapter on “Leadership and Democracy” which is about how decisions are made and carried out.

In short, read *Vietnam Will Win*. At the very least, you’ll get a new feeling of confidence.

The beast may be powerful, but it can be beaten.

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