

Motor City Sister in Vietnam, Part 2

Linda Evans

1969

Editors' Note: Linda Evans, from Motor City SDS, was one of 7 Movement people who went to North Vietnam last month to bring back three captured American military men. Along with her were Rennie Davis of the National Mobilization Committee; Grace Paley, writer and pacifist; James Johnson, of the Fort Hood Three, who spent 28 months in the stockade for refusing to go to Vietnam; and three Newsreel photographers, Robert Kramer, Norm Fruchter, and John Douglas.

Their original goal of merely escorting the prisoners back to the U.S. was changed as the Vietnamese realized that most of their visitors represented segments of the movement that were not pacifist, but had actively joined in the struggle of the Vietnamese.

Instead of spending all of their time talking to the released prisoners they traveled around North Vietnam for 18 days, seeing the country and talking with the people. What follows is the second part of her impressions as transcribed by Barbara Healy.

Before the war 80% of the houses were brick, and now, none. But at the same time, before the war, they had eight child care centers. Now they have 22. Before the war they would have one mobile cultural group; now they have several, along with a village orchestra. Before the war they had no film group. Now every village has a group responsible for distributing different kinds of films. They show Cuban films, our films, and of course, the ones made by the Vietnamese government.

Each village now has a reading group. Paper is scarce, so the groups go around to the shelters and read to people during the bombing raids. Before the war they would have one small hospital that could do first aid, now they have a first aid dispensary, in every cooperative of the village, as well as a hospital that is fit for operating, delivery of children, staffed with six or seven doctors.

That's what is so amazing; that during the war they increased their production of the necessities of life. Some villages, which have suffered tremendous destruction and loss of their people, have a House of Hatred, used to turn hatred into energy. In one of these, we saw relics of all the atrocities that were committed, relics of clothes off the twelve babies that were killed from fragmentation wounds, when a nursery was bombed. They had pictures of the people who had been completely maimed by the incredible burns from napalm.

The thing that the North Vietnamese and the Vietnamese people in general are most proud of is the way that women have mobilized themselves. They have formed militia units and trained themselves to use anti-aircraft guns, shore canon, land rifles, all kinds of weaponry. The backbone of the whole militia forces are the women of every age. The only shore artillery unit in the world exists in North Vietnam. They operate 87 millimeter cannon that shoot from the shore to the ships out in the ocean. They have one shore artillery unit which has sunk 47 war ships out of the 7th fleet. The girls in this unit are from 18 to 21 years old. The Commander is 20 years old. Most of them have about a sixth-grade education. To operate the cannon you need to know advanced mathematics, so they've taught themselves. The most amazing instance of self-defense and mobilization of people for defense is not a militia unit,

but the fact that, in one province alone, three planes were shot down by kids from 12 to 14 years old. They wheedled and subverted the army into training them, and then when the militia was away and a bombing raid occurred, they just jumped into the gun emplacements and shot down the planes. They did it about 3 or 4 times.

Everyone is involved, everybody does their part. This people's war helped me understand exactly why the Vietnamese are really winning. Even though North Vietnam is no longer being attacked heavily, they won't consider themselves to have peace until all American 'troops are withdrawn from Vietnam, and until a coalition government is set up in the South.

Pham van Dong explained the need for a coalition government in a way I'd never heard before. In the South, people are united under the leadership of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. They are completely behind it in fighting in its army, the People's Liberation Army. A coalition is necessary -because the South has been so fragmented and so corrupted by the war and the American influence.

Americanization of the war has meant not just bringing in American troops; that's a corruption that all of us understand, which comes from America's involvement anywhere. It's a cultural corruption; a social corruption; a political corruption, certainly.

Their concern in building this coalition government is the necessity to change not only the institutions of society which have been corrupted, but also to involve as many people as possible in a struggle to change those institutions. By struggling to change the institutions of society and get rid of their corruption and make them serve the people of Vietnam, the individuals can be transformed.

It's this emphasis on humanity and the beauty and goodness of all human beings and the necessity to preserve that; this is the really important concept of the coalition government.

The institutions are not only transformed, but the individuals along with them, so they will become, in essence, new men.

In understanding what this victory for the NLF and for the Vietnamese people would mean, we have to look at what Nixon says he wants, what the people that rule this country and perpetuate the war say they're doing. Now, they say they want peace. They say that they're negotiating in Paris for peace, but we have to look very closely at what they've done.

The most recent occurrence, manipulation, trick of Nixon's is the withdrawal of 25,000 American troops from South Vietnam. This is what we call the de-americanization of the war. What it means very simply is that this withdrawal is in the context of the defeat of American forces.

It comes after America had been forced, in March of 1968, into a period of limited bombing in the North, and after it had been forced finally into a complete bombing halt of North Vietnam.

After the devastation of its military strategy, and the brilliant victories of the People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam, the U.S. was forced to negotiate with the NLF, and to recognize the NLF in Paris, and to negotiate with North Vietnam. This withdrawal of 25 thousand troops comes after the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which is supported by a vast majority of the people of South Vietnam, and the recognition of that government by over twenty countries around the world. That's the context in which you have to look at this withdrawal. It is clearly a trick, and must not pacify us. For every American soldier that is withdrawn, 2 or 3 Vietnamese soldiers are being trained. In many ways, this still is a victory for us, because the Vietnamese soldiers are unreliable. The defection rate to the NLF is about 40% to 50%.

The de-americanization of the war doesn't mean that America is getting out of the war, or that it has any real intention of trying to get peace in Vietnam, but rather that Nixon is using his trickery to try to fool us. This was ultimately proved by his visit to Saigon where he tried to bolster up the Thieu-Ky regime, the puppet regime in Saigon, and illustrate to the world that his support of them was continuing and would not stop, even though he was going to withdraw a token number of troops.

Nixon only has a certain number of alternatives left to him: He has certain limitations on his activities to begin with. He cannot put anymore than 500,000 troops, no more than half a million troops into South Vietnam, and that's how many there are now. The American people would not let him. And he couldn't use nuclear weapons in Vietnam - the world would not let him, and to do that would be suicide.

So, given these limitations, there are about three alternatives: one is to keep them as they are now, dispersed in the country-side, losing almost every battle they're engaged in. The U.S. has no support from the people, having

to deal with sabotage from the strategic hamlet concentration camps around every base, and in fact, losing the war in the countryside, faster and faster. The entire countryside, with the exception of the very largest cities and portions of some roads, are liberated. The cities are the bastions of American influence, so that's Nixon's second alternative—to withdraw to the cities. This evidently is what he's doing at the present moment.

In the cities, a political group called the National Alliance of Peace and Democratic Forces has joined together large numbers of people who are classically petit bourgeoisie; the intellectuals, the students, minor government officials, and professionals into a group that's dedicated to smashing the aggression of the U.S. They have been doing political agitation, and have a formal alliance with the NLF.

The Provisional Revolutionary Government consists of representatives elected by the people, most of whom are members of the NLF or the Alliance. The peasants and workers are mainly represented by the NLF. Right now there's incredible turmoil in the cities. So much political agitation is being done that large numbers of government officials are defecting. The students have riots around anti-U.S. politics. They also have an incredible draft resistance movement. On August 10, the NLF illustrated why the second alternative Nixon has is also doomed. They attacked 137 military bases and towns. There was street fighting in all the large cities, and the flag of the PRG flew above 30 buildings in Saigon.

So, there is one alternative left for Nixon, and that is total withdrawal. This is clearly the only basis for free elections in South Vietnam. Nixon's proposal of having elections while American troops are still there is clearly absurd. Immediate withdrawal is what the Vietnamese define as total victory. This is what we are demanding in the National Action that SDS has called on October 8 to 11 in Chicago. To show our complete support and solidarity with the NLF, the PRG, and with the Vietnamese people, to demand the total and immediate withdrawal of all occupation forces not only from Vietnam, but from the black and brown colonies within the U.S., from all foreign countries, from the schools. We're demanding that Huey Newton and all political prisoners be immediately freed. We are expressing support and solidarity with the Conspiracy 8, and support of GI rebellions, all over the country, and especially in Vietnam.

Through the history of the peace movement in this country, we have begun to understand that the peaceful demonstrations and marches that we've had are not enough. The rulers of America have not been affected by our protest, or by our demonstrations, or by our anger. The time has come that they must not be allowed to have peace in this country while the war in Vietnam and while our wars of American aggression continue. By our passivity, by our occasional involvement in some kind of protest against the war, we allow the Vietnamese people to be slaughtered. We allow their country to be devastated. What we have to understand is that this is not some kind of abstract issue that doesn't affect American people. We're directly responsible for letting this war continue. And it is our responsibility to join the struggle of the Vietnamese people, to help them in their fight by opening another battle front here. We should bring the war home to America.



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