

623 South 20th Street
Murphysboro, Illinois
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Dear Sir:

It has been almost four years since I went to Vietnam. In 1967 I already knew enough about the war to refuse to fight in it, but I wanted to go there, to see what it was all about with my own eyes. So I joined the International Voluntary Services and travelled, lived, and worked for a year with many different Americans and Vietnamese.

For a good part of that year I lived in a village of peasant farmers on a large island in the Mekong River. Although fighting sometimes broke out on both sides of the river, the island itself was a peaceful sanctuary from the war. The Vietnamese helped me build a small thatch house, and I spent my days working in their fields, fishing the canals with them, and struggling to relate to them through a language I could barely understand.

At times I felt more accepted among those people than I did among my own. It was ironic, because at the same time I was beginning to feel a great sense of guilt for what my country and my people were doing to them. The wanton destruction of towns and villages, the racism and brutality of the GI's, the corrupting power of our wealth, the cynicism, opportunism, and repressed despair—these things filled me with a kind of sick outrage. But whenever I cursed the Americans for what they had done, I heard the Vietnamese cursing me. I began to see that the soldier who pulls the trigger is not the only one who kills; I was implicated, too, for in merely doing "my thing" I had unwittingly become a minor but useful cog in the machinery of a war fought on many different levels. Many of us in IVS were fiercely idealistic, and all of us wore, I think, supremely well-intentioned. But our effective purpose was to make the Vietnamese and the folks back home complacent about the American presence in Vietnam. A fellow volunteer, who died because he spoke his mind, put it best of all: regardless of what each of us hoped to accomplish by coming to Vietnam, he said, we were all together little more than a "sugar-coating on American genocide."

I left Vietnam because I could not in good conscience stay. When I returned home, I found many people who could understand why I left, but very few who could appreciate the intense longing I had to return. For six months I travelled around describing what I had seen and come to believe about Vietnam. I met lots of people distressed, resentful, and passionately opposed to the killing. But few of them took more than passing interest in the life of the Vietnamese.

This was natural, I told myself, since Americans' exposure to things Vietnamese is limited mainly to the 6 o'clock news. Whether hawk or dove, Americans tend to reduce the Vietnamese to two stereotypes: the corrupt, cynical politician epitomized by Nguyen Cao Ky, and the terrified refugee scrambling from the ruins of his burned-out home.

But I knew individuals in Vietnam. The old carpenter who helped me build a house and taught me Chinese chess; the priest who had fought with the Vietminh;

the farmer who refused to talk to me; the man who cried when I left; the old woman singing a nonsense lullaby to her granddaughter in the hammock next door. ---these were the Vietnamese in my mind. Preoccupied with their world, I could not tune in to what was happening here. And I realized that, once one has lived in Vietnam, there is no satisfactory way of relating to it except by going back to live again.

Going back, however, would have to wait until after the war. I knew I wouldn't return as long as Americans were there in force. But in 1963 there was still hope (now abandoned) that some Americans would be allowed back in, even if the NLF were to gain complete control. In the meantime, then, I decided to go back to school to study agriculture and community development.

About a year after I came to SIU, the Vietnam Center appeared on campus. I was invited to sit in on some of the initial "task force" committee meetings. Although a couple of people seemed to share my concerns, it was clear that the Center's main inspiration was coming from men more interested in what Vietnam could do for SIU than what SIU could do for Vietnam. Ostensibly, they were looking for ways to help the Vietnamese. In fact they were looking for ways to capitalize on eight years of technical assistance programs in Vietnam---no small edge when it comes to competing with other universities for lucrative government contracts.

With this as their starting point, Center promoters were not about to raise any serious moral or political issues. No one thought it necessary to ask whether or not Americans had a right, or even a capacity, to do anything for the Vietnamese, considering what we had already done to them. No one bothered to ask how the University could develop a respectable or independent relationship with a country embroiled in civil war, where no authority had a clear claim to act in behalf of the country as a whole. No one seemed to think any additional problems were raised by the fact that our Government has intervened massively in support of one of the warring factions. Did the Vietnamese even accept the idea of such a relationship? No one even knew how to begin asking such a question, and no one had any idea of what would constitute a meaningful answer. What about North Vietnam? The NLF? Because these questions were thought irrelevant, it was reasonable to conclude, as I did, that the Center's functioning presupposed and depended upon preservation of American influence in Vietnam.

It was not until the AID grant was announced that I realized the reverse of this was also true: the preservation and strengthening of American influence in Vietnam depended in part upon setting up Centers like the one at SIU. My own experience with AID was enough to assure me that the funding reeked of ulterior motive. And it was clear from the task force meetings I attended that the Center originally planned to involve itself in "technical assistance," and that only when the Center's critics complained did it retreat back into a "strictly academic" role. But the dispute over the Center's exact function obscured the real significance of the AID grant. The Center may stick to academics, as its spokesmen insist, but the AID grant continues to symbolize a willingness on the part of the University to as a whole to cooperate with the Government in the manipulation and exploitation of the Vietnamese people. While the Center tends to its studies, other parts of the University will carry out programs and fulfill contracts that might not have come their way if the Center were not here.

As for the Center itself, I can have little confidence in its scholarly or academic "integrity." Language and culture courses may be taught fairly and critically, but the value of the knowledge they impart depends in part upon the uses to which the knowledge is put. If, as I believe, the Vietnam Center is part of a University-wide plan to cash in on the American presence in Vietnam, then the uses are both reprehensible and pre-determined.

No / This is why I am not impressed by the Center's alleged efforts to recruit scholars with varying points of view. It is interesting to recall that Center promoters were not overly concerned about "balance" until after critics began complaining about the lack of "anti-war" scholars on its staff. After it became apparent that the Center's composition jeopardized its standing with the University community, the Center made some attempts to recruit "anti-war" scholars. But in my opinion such attempts were motivated by a desire to appease critics, rather than a genuine concern for political or intellectual balance.

Under these circumstances I am not surprised that anti-war scholars are boycotting the Vietnam Center. The Center's promoters claim that this is due to "sabotage". But that is not the problem. The problem is that the Center is so lacking in credibility that it cannot escape the stigma of complacency and expediency that marks its earliest days on campus. The Center has sabotaged itself. And how could it be otherwise? From the very beginning its main support has come from Government bureaucrats, educational entrepreneurs, professional anti-communists, and self-seeking attentists who cultivate their careers while America tears their homeland to pieces. No wonder the Center can generate so little enthusiasm among the rest of us.

I have wanted to say these things for a long time, but once again I find myself pointing an accusing finger in the mirror. Nine months ago the Center offered me a fellowship with a monthly stipend of \$300. At the time I was broke, and it was too late to seek funds elsewhere in the University. Because I knew which side I was on, I felt that I could use the Center more than it would be able to use me. As for "technical assistance," I told myself that the Vietcong would take care of any more of our efforts to "help" the Vietnamese. So I accepted the fellowship and went back to my studies.

In the months that followed, I regretted that decision more and more. As the protests increased, people I admired joined the struggle, and a lot of students went to jail. I found it harder and harder to reconcile taking money from the Center with the sympathy I felt for their cause. But my financial problems had increased, and I had come to rely on the fellowship even more. Since I was unwilling to give it up, I simply withdrew from the conflict and tried to avoid thinking about the implications it had for me.

That has not worked very well. The recent Conference on Scholarly Integrity and University Complicity told me very little I did not already know about the Center and the system of which it is a part. But it reminded me that once again I have implicated myself in the perpetuation of something I abhor. I am not willing to ignore that fact any longer. I have contemplated merely renouncing the fellowship, but that is not enough; there were many times when I could have helped the struggle but kept silent; but I have not merely abstained from the solution, I have been part of the problem, to use Eldridge Cleaver's words. To compensate for this, therefore, I intend to keep the fellowship and, until it is either terminated or expires, contribute all proceeds from it to the Southern Illinois Peace Committee—with the sole stipulation that the money be used exclusively to help get the Center removed from

this campus. If the SIPC chooses not to accept, I will look for a suitable substitute. In the event that none can be found, I will notify you, and you may then consider this as my letter of resignation.

Many times in the past year Doug Allen has served as an example of courage and dedication for a great many students. The decision of the Board of Trustees to remove him from the University merely underlines the corruption that infects our educational system at its core. Until now, my own actions have not been consistent with my beliefs, but only with the conflicts I have felt inside. I have used the fellowship to pursue my own interests. Now I am putting it to the only use that justifies retaining it. I only wish that I had had the strength to do this before.

Sincerely yours,



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Graduate Student
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cc: Southern Illinois Peace Committee
SIU Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars