

TO THE END OF THE WAR AND BEYOND



SOME NOTES ON THE F.O.R.'s PART IN THE COMING PEACE IN VIETNAM

The Senate Resolution for Peace

Beyond and behind the upsurge of popular peace action that reflects a quantitative change in public opinion about America's part in the war in Vietnam, there is a largely unknown story of faithful and constant effort that has gone on for years between an important element in South Vietnam and the American Fellowship of Reconciliation.

On October 8, Senators Harold Hughes of Iowa and Thomas Eagleton of Missouri introduced Resolution 268 in the United States Senate. In brief, SR-268 asks our government to urge that of South Vietnam to take the following steps within a two-month period: (1) grant liberty and amnesty to all political prisoners; (2) lift censorship of all communications media; (3) permit political parties to organize and operate without governmental controls; (4) present a plan for a broadly representative coalition that could maintain government effectively during the transition from war to peace. The resolution proposes further that if these conditions are not satisfied, the United States declare its commitment to the present South Vietnamese government at an

*The Release of
Thich Thien Minh*

end and terminate its military, political and economic assistance to that government "with all responsible haste."

On October 28, three weeks after SR-268 was introduced, the Thieu government, showing plainly the effects of U.S. and world pressure, announced the release of the Buddhist monk, Thich Thien Minh, together with a few hundred other political prisoners.

Both of these actions—the Hughes-Eagleton resolution and the Thieu government's release of prisoners (although only in token numbers)—follow closely proposals that the FOR has been urging for some years. Our proposals, in turn, reflect our understanding of what the Vietnamese people themselves consider necessary prerequisites for an enduring peace. They are based on in-depth discussions with Vietnamese "third force" leaders, initiated in 1965 by FOR Executive Secretary Alfred Hassler and carried on at intervals, here in Europe and in Vietnam, ever since.

*The Genesis of
U.S. Study Team*

It was because of our connections with the Buddhist and Catholic peace struggle in Vietnam that a group of churchmen, concerned over the continuing war and reports of increasing religious and political suppression by the Vietnamese government, asked for the participation of the Fellowship in 1968 in an interfaith peace committee, the Hoa Binh Ad Hoc. In June of 1969, the Hoa Binh Committee sent a team (the U.S. Study Team on Religious and Political Freedom in Vietnam), composed of prestigious community and religious leaders, to Vietnam to investigate these reports. When the team, which was under the direction of Allan Brick, associate secretary of the FOR, returned to the United States, it corroborated earlier Fellowship findings about the existence of a third force and the imprisonment and torture to which its supporters are subjected. The team's report and subsequent statements and newspaper and magazine articles by its members have received wide attention and have helped to make the matter of political imprisonment and its implications concerning the legitimacy of the Saigon

*Behind the Hughes-
Eagleton Resolution*

government an important tissue in the rising crescendo of debate on the war.

Early in February of 1969, the FOR arranged conversations between Senators Hughes and Eagleton and the secretary-general of the Overseas Vietnamese Buddhist Association, Vo Van Ai, on the subject of the third force and its political and religious suppression. It seems obvious that these conversations, together with the U.S. Study Team's report, provided strong impetus for the Hughes-Eagleton resolution and, indirectly, for Thieu's announcement of the release of some political prisoners.

Clearly, the Fellowship, as one of the earliest and most resolute opponents of the Vietnamese war, can claim its share of responsibility for the rising wave of peace sentiment, here and abroad. But, gratified as we are by recent developments, our gratitude is tempered by the realization that there are still scores of thousands of political prisoners held in Vietnam, that the significance of the November amnesty has yet to be assessed, and that the war has not ended. Until it does end, we cannot relax our efforts for peace. When peace finally comes, Americans will have a moral obligation to aid in the rehabilitation of the country we have ravaged not only physically but in its social and religious functions and in all the fabric of its life.

*To the End of
the War and Beyond*

The American government should and doubtless will spend massive sums of money on the work of rehabilitation, but it is already evident that more will be needed—more money, more understanding, more brotherhood. The Fellowship, because of its warm and close ties in Vietnam, particularly among the Buddhists, is in a position to make a meaningful contribution to this effort. Such an effort must have three aspects: insistence that economic aid be given for the real benefit of the Vietnamese people, not as a form of masked colonialism; identification and publication of the needs of Vietnam; direct contributions toward and encouragement of projects initiated by the Vietnamese themselves. One such project is the School of Youth for Social Service, which FOR members here and in Europe have supported throughout

*After the War:
Rehabilitation in Vietnam*

the war. At a recent meeting in Copenhagen, Thich Nhat Hanh, who helped to found the school, spoke movingly of his hopes for its future—the training of cadres of young Vietnamese to go into the devastated villages of their country to help the inhabitants reconstruct their lives. “We cannot wait for a good government,” Nhat Hanh said. “We must begin the planning now.”

A further consequence of the Fellowship’s peace initiatives—one not clearly foreseen at the beginning—is the moving together of the religious communities of the world. A result of the 1965 Vietnam trip by members of the Clergymen’s Emergency Committee (organized by the FOR) was the formation a year later of the International Committee of Conscience on Vietnam. The ICCV, numbering some 10,000 clergymen from forty countries, has continued in existence; last June ICCV members met with exiled Buddhist monks in Paris to form a committee to unite Eastern and Western religious leaders in a world peace effort directed not only toward Vietnam but wherever peace is threatened or destroyed. Thich The Thinh and Alfred Hassler were appointed co-secretaries of the new committee. This movement can be significant in rebuilding Vietnam and has almost incalculable implications for future world peace.

*Peacemaking
in the 1970’s*

Meanwhile other Fellowship work continues. As this is written, we are engaged in plans for a large pacifist and church-oriented center in Washington during the November 12-15 Mobilization, to be staffed by the FOR. In the months ahead we shall be involved in work on college campuses, developing programs to deepen the anti-Vietnam war sentiment into a more comprehensive anti-war movement and in seeking non-violent ways to end the militaristic influence within the academic community. Later this winter, we expect to bring the young Vietnamese university professor, Miss Cao Ngoc Phuong to America for a lecture tour. Cao Ngoc Phuong has been a leader in the student struggle for peace in Vietnam and is an articulate and eloquent speaker. She is now living in exile in Paris.

On Commitment

These are the dramatic aspects of Fellowship work. Most of our peace-making efforts get little publicity—only once in a while does a report about them get into the papers. Recently, however, *The New York Times*, printed a story illustrative of the day-to-day activities of the FOR. The story concerned Mrs. Mary Lennon Fleege, a Duluth housewife, whose interest in the peace movement had been stirred by the example of her parish priest, Father Philip Solem, but who had been reluctant to join peace demonstrations. "Then," *The Times* reported, "she attended a talk by a Protestant clergyman from the Fellowship of Reconciliation. [The speaker was Stauffer Curry, our interfaith director.] She was impressed by 'his gentleness, his peace, his openness to people,' " and felt that what he said about Vietnam was realistic and "not just emotionalism." So on Moratorium Day, Mrs. Fleege tied a white band around her arm as a sign of mourning and joined Father Solem and several thousand other demonstrators in a silent street vigil in downtown Duluth.

"I prayed some," said Mrs. Fleege, "and I said some Hail Marys. But really the prayer itself was all of us, being silent together."

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