

Executive Council's Spring Meeting Assesses

America's Role in the World

At its regular Spring meeting in Washington on May 6, the AFL-CIO Executive Council critically assessed various aspects of American foreign and defense policies. The Council's conclusions were expressed in the following resolutions.

Vietnam Refugees

The United States has an inescapable moral responsibility to do all that it can to aid the Vietnamese refugees who are now entering our country, just as we have opened our doors to Hungarians and Cuban refugees from Communist totalitarianism. We cannot turn our backs on those who have fought for freedom without making a mockery of the principles upon which our nation was founded and by which it has served for centuries as a haven for people of all nationalities who seek liberty.

We recognize that the Vietnamese arriving on our shores will face many difficult and unique problems. But we have faith that those problems can be overcome by the goodwill and generosity for which the American people are justly known throughout the world. Recent statements by some politicians suggesting that the Vietnamese refu-

gees are not welcome here bespeak a meanness of spirit unworthy of the American people. It is a meanness in which the American labor movement will not partake.

The AFL-CIO Executive Council calls upon our members to make these refugees of Communist aggression welcome in their communities.

We call upon the Congress to appropriate without delay sufficient funds to facilitate the resettlement of the Vietnamese refugees in the United States without placing an undue burden upon the already hard-pressed resources of our state and local governments.

Finally, we call upon the AFL-CIO Community Services Department, the Human Resources Development Institute, and our International Affairs Department to cooperate fully with government and voluntary programs to assist the refugees to find jobs and housing, to obtain needed social services, and to become integrated into the American way of life.

Indochina

The North Vietnamese conquest of South Vietnam, following on the vic-

tory of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, represents not only the loss of freedom for tens of millions of people but a defeat for the United States of unprecedented magnitude.

Hanoi's massive invasion of South Vietnam in outrageous violation of the Paris peace accords, provides fresh and irrefutable evidence that Communist powers cannot be trusted to live up to international agreements if those agreements stand in the way of their own expansionist designs. This is especially true if those agreements are not enforced by countervailing powers.

The Paris accords negotiated by Dr. Kissinger permitted the United States to replace South Vietnamese arms, and the Soviet Union and China to replace North Vietnamese arms, on a one-to-one basis. The United States did not honor its commitment to South Vietnam, while the Soviet Union and China went beyond the one-to-one limit in resupplying Hanoi. There can be no question but that the strong sentiment in the Congress against aid to South Vietnam helped to demoralize our ally while giving the enemy a green light to go all the way.

It is the considered judgment of the AFL-CIO Executive Council that the tragic events in Indochina only under-





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South Vietnam's Labor Leader Arrives in U.S.

"Nothing to Fight With"

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On May 13, 1975, Tran Quoc Buu, President of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT) was 61 years old. It was also the day he arrived in Fort Chafee, Arkansas, after an arduous trip following his dramatic escape from Vietnam.

The official fall of Saigon occurred on the morning of April 30, when the first North Vietnamese tank crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace. Buu and seven members of his immediate family were picked up by helicopter from the room of the American Embassy just the day before, and airlifted to the USS Blue Ridge in the South China Sea.

Along with thousands of other Vietnamese refugees, this trade unionist, president of the CVT since its founding in 1950, arrived in Subic Naval Base in the Philippines several days later. He was then flown to Guam, where he remained until he arrived in the United States the second week in May.

The guiding light of the trade union movement in Vietnam, Tran Quoc Buu has devoted the major part of his adult life to the interests of the workers. Born to a poor family in central Vietnam, Buu was active in the underground independence movement during the French period of colonization. In 1940, an unsuccessful revolt landed Buu and other rebel leaders in prison on the penal island of Con Son for five years.

His fellow prisoners on Con Son included communists, non-communist nationalists, laborers and farm workers. It was during these five years that Buu first came to understand the problems of the Vietnamese working class.

After his release, Buu joined the Viet Minh, an underground separatist organization. He quickly became dis-

illusioned when he realized the organization had been taken over by the communists and dropped out of the movement. Still refusing to cooperate with the French, Buu sought alternative means to achieve freedom for his people and decided that the most effective way was through trade union organization.

Although under French law membership in trade unions was closed to the Vietnamese, things began to

change in 1947. That year two French labor organizations, The French General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the Confederation of Christian Labor (CFTC) set up offices in Vietnam in order to organize French nationals working in the country. Buu got in touch with the top representative of the CFTC and with his assistance began an organization for Vietnamese workers. That was in 1949, and unions for Vietnamese were still illegal, so the group was called the "Association for the Protection of the Professional Interests of Workers in Craft, Industry, Commerce, Agricultural and the Liberal Professions."



Tran Quoc Buu and Joseph Keenan, International Secretary of the IBEW, shown here upon Buu's arrival in the United States.

Referring to that first, thinly-disguised trade union organization, Buu dwells on the ethics of trade unionism and the importance of the brotherhood of man. Buu, a Buddhist, discusses the basis of the Vietnamese labor movement in terms of the Buddhist/Confucian ideas of good works and social obligation linked up to the Christian ideal of brotherhood.

The association gained in strength and in the early fifties, because of continued pressure on the government, a labor code was instituted which permitted Vietnamese to join unions. In 1952 the association became known as

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NEW POLICY

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country should be cultivating not antagonizing.

This brings us to the basic question: What kind of Hemisphere do we really want? Will our policy eventually lead the peoples of the Hemisphere to well-being plus freedom? This is the paramount question which we must face, as part of our national and hemispheric destiny. And it arises, awesomely, at a time when democracy itself in Latin America is at its lowest ebb. Only three, or perhaps four, of the hemisphere's peoples are living under democratic governments.

In a recent article, Dr. Arthur Schlesinger criticized the Report of the Linowitz Committee, because it fails even to approach this question. But this omission is symptomatic of the present unwillingness of many of our Latin Americanists to see the Hemisphere situation as it is. The recommendations of the Commission—entirely acceptable, but hardly original—never reflect the perilous emergency in which our people and the peoples of Latin America find themselves. As a result, therefore, it becomes a mere discussion manual. But there is no dynamic evocation of the new commitments and sacrifices required of us all if our Hemisphere is to be salvaged for democracy.

Democracy, as such, does not always have to be mentioned, where it exists. I have a hypothesis that democracy in our Hemisphere runs from North to South. In periods of our own democratic strength, the waves of freedom also move southward and, at least for a time bring an upsurge of fervor for free institutions and human liberty. These have faded almost always for lack of sustained support.

Now, at this moment, we must deal with governments of force and even find rationalizations for doing so in the OAS prescriptions for a "pluralistic" organization. But it will be disastrous if we do not recognize that our true allies for the future remain the hemisphere forces of democratic strength. Embattled as they may be, they alone provide the hope of bringing their peoples to well-being with freedom. Self-preservation counsels us to follow a course which allies us with these forces and acts to strengthen them.

Today democracy and freedom may have to be attained in ways other than the purely political ways of the past—through enlightened social and economic levers which raise the level of human life. Provided with a resilient strength and well-being, I believe

the peoples will be able to seize the political weapons necessary to conquer their democracy and their freedom. But for this great end we must formulate policies for Latin America based not on expedience but on the statesmanship which our hemispheric position demands. ■



Ben Sharman

MULTINATIONALS

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as in most of the developing countries, is drastically eroded by inflation and the ever increasing cost of food.

Similar conditions prevailed in S.E.L.A.L.U., a German-owned rubber company in Liberia. It would seem that if multinational corporations are really concerned with improving conditions in the developing countries, they could do so in this instance with little effort or expense. The fact that the Firestone Company has been in operation in Liberia for many years without making improvements for employees underscores that profit-making is the only concern of multinational corporations operating in this area of the world. When conditions of work are at such a low level, all discussions about employee relations become meaningless. The power relationship in this case is completely in favor of the multinational corporation with no legitimate unions to deal with, no government support for workers, and no alternate possibilities of work for the poor exploited worker. ■

BUU

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the Confederation Vietnamienne du Travail (CVT).

In the summer of 1954, the country was partitioned as a result of the Geneva Agreement and although CVT organizers remained in North Vietnam at first, eventually conditions became so negative that this effort was abandoned. However, in the South, the years following independence from the French and partition were favorable to organized labor, and the CVT continued to grow.

In recent years the AFL-CIO has provided support to the CVT through the Asian American Free Labor Institute in the form of training seminars for union leaders, cooperative organization and management and impact projects. It was natural then for Buu to turn to the AFL-CIO for assistance during the last agonizing months before the collapse of South Vietnam.

In March, Buu came to the United States to seek economic assistance (*Free Trade Union News*, March-April, 1975). During the visit he spoke with AFL-CIO President George Meany, requesting economic assistance for the CVT refugees who were fleeing the advancing North Vietnamese forces and pouring into the then still "free" southern provinces. The AFL-CIO Impact Project Fund at that time approved an initial \$5,000 grant to be used to feed and clothe these homeless refugees.

Shortly thereafter, a rushing chain of events resulted in the take-over of the South by North Vietnam, culminating in the fall of Saigon on April 30.

Strongly anti-communist, Buu and the CVT were an important element of support in the struggle against the communist government in the North. Because of his active role against the communists, Buu was forced to flee his country in face of almost certain imprisonment and probable death by execution.

And so, Buu and some 40 CVT leaders and their families—for a total of nearly 200 persons—found themselves in Ft. Chafee, Arkansas. A nucleus of Vietnamese trade unionists gathered in the "heart" of America to begin a new life.

Beginning the time-consuming task of being processed and cleared, Buu, his family and colleagues moved into wooden Army barracks constructed prior to World War II and renovated in anticipation of the arrival of the South Vietnamese refugees. In this case, renovation really meant putting

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The Transformation of Eldridge Cleaver

By **BAYARD RUSTIN**

Not long ago Eldridge Cleaver was hailed as an articulate prophet of black revolution. His principal work, "Soul on Ice," was widely praised, and there is no question that Cleaver's prose was compelling, even moving, as it conveyed the bitterness and rage of the black dispossessed. When we remember that Cleaver was an uneducated man who had spent much of his life behind prison bars, his accomplishments as a writer become even more impressive.

But Cleaver's imposing style camouflaged the shallowness of his political thought. It was clear that behind the articulations of anger and frustration was a conception of society which had little relation to the concrete situation of the majority of black people. He shared a sense of rage with many black people, but he did not understand their aspirations. Indeed, he could not have, since his was a voice of hopelessness: the fulfillment of his political vision required the collapse of race relations. Thus when Cleaver asked blacks to support him for the Presidency in 1968 as a protest against a "corrupt and racist political system," they ignored him to support Hubert Humphrey. Many suspect that Cleaver received more support from guilty whites than from blacks.

Creature of Liberals' Guilt

This leads to an interesting point: it was white liberals, and not blacks, who were most outspoken in their praise of Cleaver! Cleaver found himself in the ironical position of railing against the injustices of white society, while finding his most receptive, even worshipful audience among affluent white socialites, influential white academics and journalists, and the children of the white middle and upper classes. Indeed, Cleaver the revolutionary would never have existed had it not been for the masochistic orgy of white guilt which absorbed many well-known liberals. The most shallow pop journalist and the most irresponsible social critics created his image, accepting unquestioningly Cleaver's most bizarre ideas.

Six years ago Cleaver fled the United States, fearful of being returned to prison for parole violation. Little was heard from him until, in a recent "Newsweek" interview, he expressed a number of political judgments which not only revise his previous doctrines, but totally contradict the very ideas which secured him fame and notoriety.

Instead of his once unbridled contempt for American society, Cleaver now asserts that the impulse of the American people is "anti-colonialist." The man who once declared that a "dead pig is the best pig of all" now favors "closely controlled police forces to guarantee public safety." The stri-



Bayard Rustin addresses AFL-CIO Executive Council

dency of his anti-Israeli rhetoric has been moderated: Cleaver now says that the Middle East conflict is "more complicated than we thought it was." While he is still convinced that the police acted illegally in suppressing the Black Panthers, he personally rejects the use of political violence.

A principal reason for the transformation of Cleaver's thought seems to be his experience in Communist and Third World countries. After travelling in the Soviet Union, China and several East European countries, he has lost all illusions about Communism's revolutionary potential. Even more striking are his views of the Third World: A "cultural chasm" separated him from the people of Algeria, where he lived for several years, and he appears to have given up on the possibilities of Pan-Africanism.

Predestined Alternatives

To those of us who rejected the proposition that black liberation could be won through the barrel of a gun, who failed to see a foaming racist behind every policeman's shield, and who believed that underneath the appearances of dislocation racial progress was in fact being made, Cleaver's transformation is hardly surprising. For it was predestined that Cleaver, like all others whose philosophies were rooted in extremism and hatred, would either alter his views to conform with socio-political realities, embrace an opposite or equally-as-extremist doctrine, or, refusing to change, suffer that worst of fates—to be ignored. It

is to Cleaver's credit that he is open-minded and honest enough to have learned from his experiences in exile.

One cannot be as generous to those whites responsible for molding the mystique of the black revolutionary. They really never believed in what Cleaver preached; he represented, for these voyeurs, a distorted image of black America through which they could enjoy a perverse, second-hand participation in an orgy of violence. In a different sense, with nothing to gain from the restructuring of society, they encouraged Cleaver because they knew he was doomed. Their principal contribution to the racial struggle was to elevate and legitimize political irresponsibility; they left a tragic legacy from which we have still not recovered. ■

BUU

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up partitions to accommodate family groups.

True to form, one of the first things the trade union group did after their arrival was to organize. Regular meetings were held to air problems and find solutions, clean-up crews were organized to help camp authorities, and all children were enrolled in language training. The group, despite their own desperate straits, have offered assistance to their less fortunate countrymen as all wait for sponsorship and job offers.

Buu left the camp briefly to meet with AFL-CIO President Meany who personally reiterated his promise to assist the refugees through the federation's Community Services Department. While in Washington, Buu also met with members of a Domei delegation who promised to ask their government to attempt to find out what has happened to those trade unionists who were unable to escape. Buu was asked by the delegates why his country fell to the communists. The CVT leader responded that corruption in his country was rampant, that generals and other officers had all become rich and lost their desire for combat. The soldiers, he added had been exploited. "The government," he continued, "had monopolized all the means to fight so that the people and democratic organizations had nothing to fight with, and therefore, were not really involved in the struggle."

Buu will remain in the refugee camp leading what remains of his organization until all the families have been released to build new lives. ■