

probably were Thich Nhat Hanh. In the Times, Jacqueney had written that "...the reports of the missing, detained, and dead, and the stories of reeducation camp privations, although unconfirmed (my emphasis) are deeply disturbing." Similarly, little was made of his comment that "not all former third-force leaders are suffering. A few are members of unified Vietnam's new National Assembly." What then of those Jacqueney did name? Tran Van Tuyen was called by Jacqueney, "the Solzhenitsyn of Vietnam's Gulag Archipelago." In a reply that received little attention, however, Gareth Porter of the Indochina Resource Center noted that Tuyen was "named Deputy Premier in the Phan Huy Quat government in the spring of 1965, at a time when the Saigon government was no more than an appendage of American military power...It was that government which arrested the leadership of the urban-based 'movement for peace' which included Mrs. Ngo Ba Thanh."

Tran Ngoc Chau was, according to Jacqueney, "dragged out of the Assembly building and jailed by Thieu's police in 1969." This is true. But, he neglected to report that Chau was a former province chief and Program Director of Revolutionary Development, a CIA-sponsored pacification program. Nor did Jacqueney quote Chau's words at his own trial in 1970, "At the bottom of my heart I wanted very much to see Mr. Nixon elected because I realized that Mr. Johnson had decided not to increase more troops."

Luong Truong Tuong was identified by Jacqueney simply as "the leader of Vietnam's two million member Hoa Hao Buddhists." This was less than candid, since Tuong and the Hoa Hao were virulently anti-communist, supported the Ky and Thieu governments, called for resistance to the PRG after the Paris Peace Agreements, and, finally, took up armed resistance after liberation.

Father Tran Huu Thanh was in Jacqueney's words, "a popular conservative Catholic priest" who had staged "dramatic protests against Thieu..." Again, Jacqueney failed to mention that Thanh's protests against Thieu were in the waning days of the war and designed to gain more effective leadership in the battle against the PRG. Furthermore, Jacqueney did not mention previous press reports, given little attention at the time, that Thanh had been arrested by the new government for his part in an armed rebellion at the Vinh Son Church on February 15, 1976. Thus, information from credible sources was available at the time that showed that at least four of the five "Third Force" leaders prominently mentioned were far from neutralists; they had, indeed, collaborated with Thieu, the Americans, and even engaged in some armed resistance.

But what about the reeducation camps and the horrendous conditions in them? "Vietnam's 'Gulag Archipelago'" was the headline used by the Times. Earlier in the year, Jean Lacouture had specifically written the opposite, that the camps were "evidently not Gulag." He had passed on, too, an

estimate of 300,000 detainees from a previous Agence-France-Press report since the Vietnamese refused to give a figure. By the time the Vietnamese offered 50,000 as an estimate of those left in reeducation (most Vietnamese who went through the process were there 3-10 days) the "hundreds of thousands" estimates were unshakeable. Tiziano Terzani had also reported earlier that the camps were "model prisons." But by now, no one looked back at his New York Review piece from July to read that the "inmates were not being punished for their 'crimes'; they were doing manual labor--learning how to become carpenters, blacksmiths, farmers--and had lectures and classes several hours a day. From what I could gather, the regime in the other camps is not harsh..." Similarly, Patrice DeBeer, whose LeMonde article was used by Forest as documentation, gave no indication of "Gulags." No one quoted his observations either about the lack of Marxist indoctrination. "The program insists very much on Vietnamese nationalism. There is no course in Marxism-Leninism, nor in class analysis."

But what of the reports from Thich Nhat Hanh and the suppression of the Buddhists from the An Quang pagoda? Here again, many signers of the appeal and reporters might have come to similar conclusions anyhow, but what was reported lacked any serious historical context. Nor did reporters probe the political preconceptions and connections of Thich Nhat Hanh. His book, Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire (Hill and Wang, 1967) was influential in establishing the notion of a "Third Force," and along with Saigon, U.S.A. (Baron, 1970)

by Alfred Hassler, then Executive Director of the FOR, established the Unified Buddhists in Thich Nhat Hanh in the minds of some non-communists and pacifists as a possible alternative to the NLF or the repressive South Vietnamese. Nhat Hanh's writing were far from neutral, however, and the saintly monk was quite political. Indeed, he was rather virulently anti-communist, tracing the lineage of his "engaged Buddhism" back to struggles against the Communist Viet Minh on the side of the Chinese Kuomintang. In his book, Nhat Hanh wrote, "Many of the Diem projects were well-conceived in themselves and could have been valuable, but the government became increasingly corrupt and inefficient..." Lotus in a Sea of Fire, in fact, could be seen as a call for a more sophisticated strategy for U.S. victory. The main U.S. mistake, for Nhat Hanh, was in backing the wrong, Catholic, anti-communists. "The essence of the war is this: The American effort could succeed if it could detach nationalism from communism...The only possible way of really weakening Communist influence in Vietnam is to take away from the Communists their claim to be the only defenders of patriotism. Then the course I have suggested would serve to liberate the non-Communist Vietnamese who now follow the Front...and reduce the Communists to depending on their own limited resources."

Thich Nhat Hanh's own ideological bias, though perhaps not an excuse for closing LaBoi press, might have added perspective to the primary source of recent charges against

the new Vietnamese government. Even more disquieting would have been an investigation into Thich Nhat Hanh's role in the "Boat People Project." This Project was proposed by Nhat Hanh at a Conference on World Religion and Peace which he attended in Singapore in December, 1976. Assembled religious leaders of the UN-connected non-governmental group quickly raised an initial \$60,000 for a project to rescue refugees from Vietnam who had fled in small boats and were now reported stranded on the sea. Thich Nhat Hanh was appointed Director. But, by February 18, Dr. Homer A. Jack, Secretary General of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and an early signer of the Jim Forest appeal, had relieved Thich Nhat Hanh of all duties. Although the Washington Post later reported a limited London Times story of the administrative mismanagement and firing of Thich Nhat Hanh, the full facts of Nhat Hanh's involvement were even more damaging. According to an internal report written by Dr. Jack for the Board of the WCRP, Thich Nhat Hanh and his assistant, Dr. Cao Ngoc Phuong, "helped make inevitable the broadcasts of BBC and perhaps others in the Vietnamese language that ACRP/WCRP were virtually in the business of rescuing Boat People. This was almost an invitation for people to leave Vietnam, not unlike the U.S.A. broadcasts to Hungary in 1956." Jack's report also recounted how Nhat Hanh and Cao "jeopardized the lives of 555 people..." and that "they practiced deception, or worse, on colleagues, the refugees, and the

public--all in the name of humanitarianism and religion...as for rescuing Boat People in distress in the deep sea, few if any of the 555 refugees were in that category..."

The lengthy narrative refers to Thich Nhat Hah's "obsession" and relates how \$200,000 or more was spent procuring ships with shady captains who then sold places to refugees. The boats--one of which sported "a crude South Vietnamese flat" until Jack ordered it painted over--carried out "raids" on camps in Thailand and Malaysia to obtain refugees already in the process of being helped by the U.N. After being fired, Nhat Hanh continued to represent himself as in charge, and made promises to carry refugees to Australia where it was clear they could not legally enter, and where he had been ordered by WCRP not to go. He was also, according to the report, "using monies from other accounts (presumably their Indochina Fund in Europe) for those Project activities the treasurer would not authorize."

The Jack report cites Thich Nhat Hanh approvingly as the "source of information available in the West on violations of human rights in Vietnam, especially against Buddhists," but fails to connect Nhat Hanh's disastrous and devious creation and administration of the Boat People's Project and its attendant propoganda with the credibility of his earlier pronouncements on human rights. But there is still the immolation of the twelve Buddhist monks and priests in Can Tho. This information, too, came through the "obsessed" Thich Nhat Hanh. Although it has been accepted as valid by many, and perhaps given even

greater credence by an awkwardly translated explanation offered by the Vietnamese, (other sources have supported the somewhat bizarre story of a promiscuous monk who burned the bodies of nuns he had impregnated and then himself.) In any case, one allegation of Buddhist immolations, however serious, should not have persuaded most signers of the appeal that there had been "grievous and systematic violations of human rights" in Vietnam.

Similarly the closing of the service projects of the Unified Buddhist Church might have been perceived differently if the press had pursued reports from other sources in Vietnam who were reporting that, despite the nationalization of church service agencies and schools, freedom of worship in general was being maintained. As only one example, a response to Jim Forest was circulated at the time by Bill Herod of the Disciples of Christ. Herod had written a report for the Disciple magazine. It described religious freedom for the Christian community and quoted Archbishop Paul Nguyen Van Binj of Saigon as saying "...for one year now this freedom of religion has really been respected. Liturgical ceremonies are going on as before and conversions to Catholicism are taking place..." But Herod, Archbishop Binh, and a lengthy report on religious freedom in Vietnam by Mennonite James Klassen, were all ignored by the press.

The Forest appeal flap was kept alive by a Village Voice piece by Nat Hentoff on February 28. It was a rehash of the

Forest charges with scathing references to peace activists like Dave Dellinger and Dick Fernandez who refused to sign. Mentoff did explain that the Berrigan brothers had removed their names from the Appeal because they "had received fresh information from Quakers and Mennonites lately in Vietnam." But the fresh information that was persuasive enough for Phil and Dan Berrigan was no where to be found.

Two widely respected anti-war leaders had responded to the Forest appeal and its use by the press: Dave Dellinger in Seven Days and Noam Chomsky in In These Times. But the pieces were short and angry and appeared in fledgling radical publications with as yet little impact. But in any case, they were buried when a new avalanche of press attention to Vietnam greeted the next damaging report. It was by Father Andre Gelinis in The New York Review of Books. A French Canadian Catholic priest who had worked out of the Alexandre-de-Rhodes school in Saigon, Gelinis had been expelled by the Vietnamese in 1975. His charges were sensational: "15-20,000 suicides," and "Fisherman no longer allowed to go out to sea because people used the boats to escape." Gelinis told horror stories of reeducation camps for ex-commandos where "4 or 5 a day were killed" and of "coup against the PRG by the North on July 19-20, 1975." He claimed 400-500,000 political prisoners, dogs and cats eaten out of desperation in Saigon, "Russian influence" --the works. The press had a field day. Under the sarcastic

heading "'Liberation' Comes to Vietnam" the New York Times led the way explaining that Gelinas' observations were "in accord with Hannah Arendt's observation, based largely on the experience of Stalinism, that 'terror is the essence of totalitarian domination.' In the list of countries that are today suffering...Vietnam must rank high." Lesser publications followed suit in gloating over the conversion of The New York Review and the expose, however belated, of the horrors of socialist revolution. Nevertheless, some simple digging into the Gelinas report would have revealed that his most serious charges were very old news and, for the most part, untrue. The Gelinas story had been carried by L'Express in France in the fall. After it appeared there, it was carried as a minor item by the Associated Press on December 16, the same date that the Washington Star was breaking the Jim Forest charges. But the atmosphere had not yet changed, and AP reported properly that "there was no independent confirmation of the estimate, which the priest said he calculated from figures he got from dozens of hospital officials...Western diplomatic sources said, '...we cannot verify these rather startling figures.'" Similarly, the New York Times itself had carried a version of the Gelinas account from AP December 16 on the obituary page. Half of the 30column inch story was taken up with a categorical denial of mass suicides by Dick Hughes, head of the Shoeshine Boy Foundation, who was carrying out his relief work all over Saigon at the time.

Two or three days later, Amy Hirsch, producer of the "Good Morning, America" show on ABC called in Father Gelinas for a possible interview on the air. She sat him down with Dick Hughes and listened to the two argue and discuss for over two hours. She decided there was not enough to his story to even put Gelinas on the air. "He wouldn't name the hospitals... he was very sweet, but he just hadn't seen very much. There wasn't enough substance to put him on." During their conversation in the studio, confirmed by both Hirsch and Hughes, Fr. Gelinas explained the "15-20,000 suicides," He told the story of a young woman, an attempted suicide, who woke up in a hospital corridor surrounded by "hundreds" of bodies. As it turned out, according to his source, these were attempted suicides, too, though it was unclear why she claimed the bodies were "piled." In any case, Gelinas explained, "From that, I took the number of hospitals in Saigon...I multiplied it times the number of hospitals..." Thus, the mass suicides in Vietnam turn out to be, after all, an extrapolation of attempted suicides from a single source in a hospital that Fr. Gelinas would not name.

When I asked Robert Silvers, editor of the New York Review of Books, in May why he ran the Gelinas story, he explained that a friend in Paris whom he would not name suggested he reprint the L'Express article. Silvers admitted that he had not had any of the allegations in the story checked, nor had he consulted any other expert opinion on Vietnam. In fact, even the tag on the article which claimed that Gelinas had been in

Vietnam for the past 28 years proved to be faulty. He had been in Vietnam less than half of that time, with periods of years in Taiwan and the U.S. When asked whether he was aware that the Gelinas piece had had an impact on Capitol Hill, Silvers did not know. But Holmes Brown, an aide to Sen. Floyd Haskell (D-Col.) reported that a number of liberals in Congress were swayed by the piece, given its publication in the New York Review and reprinting in the Washington Post. Silvers did point out that the Gelinas piece could be read as "confounding the expectations of a bloodbath in Vietnam" and that "taken together with the Terzani piece of July and a lengthy reply by Mennonite Earl Martin in May," the perceptive reader could piece together a fair picture."

Unfortunately, Silvers' ideal readers were not in evidence. The New York Review story appeared just at the time a Presidential Commission headed by Leonard Woodcock was testing the waters of reconciliation with the Vietnamese. It set the tone for press coverage of the Woodcock findings, and also helped bury a Congressional report on post-war issues, including the 100,000 signers for the Appeal for Reconciliation, provided by Sen. George McGovern (D.-S.D.) (Congressional Record, March 29). By the end of March, the Washington Post was editorializing as fact that, "by Mr. Carter's own human rights standards, Vietnam probably could not qualify for a nickel in aid. The Communist regime there appears to be in a repressive and vindictive stage all too familiar..."

Yes it is all too familiar. By April, another round had

begun. An article by James Finn (similar to Nat Hentoff's) attacking peace activists who refused to sign the Forest appeal appeared in Worldview magazine along with a longer version of Ted Jacqueney's charges. By the time this all hit the Wall Street Journal, Father Gelinus had become "Father Gelin" and the story of the Jim Forest appeal and Ted Jacqueney's charges were repeated--as fresh news via Worldview magazine. Perhaps, as Noam Chomsky has written, this is all to be expected. He points out that reports of a bad reform "bloodbath" in North Vietnam in 1954 which had long been shown to be fabrications of the South Vietnamese Psychological Warfare section were still circulating years later, even in careful, sensitive reports such as Frances Fitzgerald's Fire in the Lake.

The same phenomenon seems to be happening now with the liberation of Vietnam. There is plenty of evidence, much of it first hand, that I have reported on elsewhere, to refute and to soften, the charges against revolutionary Vietnam. There have been reports and articles in lesser-known publications, films, and slide shows from various American Friends Service Committee staff, Don Luce, Dick Hughes, Bill Herod, James Klassen, Claudia Krich and many more who have been ignored or relegated to letters-to-the-editor and selected quotes. Reports from widely respected "Third Force" Vietnamese like Mdme. Ngo Ba Thanh, have been ignored because they are carried on Radio Hanoi.

After assessing all the facts, the reports, and rumors, and the politics of the observers, including the press, the ideal reader might yet decide that Vietnam, despite peace and independence, has taken a turn for the worse. But, in probing the minefield of Vietnam reporting, it is unlikely that such a reader could push on safely across the field to a balanced picture. At present, the American press has laid too many mines for any but the most experienced and diligent to safely pass through.

