

December 23, 1960

Miss Louise Polk Huger
Letters Editor
The New York Times
Times Square
New York 36, New York

Dear Miss Huger:

Presumably because of the combination of bad weather and heavy Christmas mail, your letter of December 12 did not arrive until yesterday.

I have condensed my letter as stringently as I was able. It is still slightly more than five hundred words, but I hope you will be able to use it.

I appreciate very much your courtesy and thoughtfulness in giving me this opportunity to revise it.

Very truly yours,

Wesley R. Fishel
Professor of Political Science
Chairman, Asian Studies Group

WRF/dld

(The writer of the following letter is Professor of Political Science at Michigan State University. Between 1954 and 1959 he served in Vietnam in various advisory and administrative capacities.)

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

In the New York Times of November 18, 1960, Mr. Huynh Sanh Thong has written a highly emotional defense of Dr. Phan Quang Dan, a leader in the unsuccessful rebellion in Saigon earlier in November.

I share Mr. Thong's hope that democratic institutions and behavior will eventually become firmly rooted in that Southeast Asian republic. It is unfortunate that, perhaps because he has been studying in this country for the past ten years, he is not aware of the many fundamental changes accomplished by Ngo Dinh Diem and his government since 1954.

For adequate prospective one should recall that Diem took office with extensive "paper powers." In reality he had none of the normal police powers of a head of government: in July 1954, he was a Prime Minister who controlled neither the National Army nor the National Police services. He was in addition opposed by the Communists, by dissident sect armies totaling some 50,000 men, and by the French, who still considered Vietnam as within their colonial empire.

Since 1954, the Ngo government has consolidated its power, resettled 860,000 refugees from the Communist North, effectively eliminated the last vestiges of colonialism, begun building a new administration, established a National Bank, and developed, with American assistance, an increasingly viable economy, including greatly expanded rice production resulting in a 1960 exportable surplus of some 350,000 tons.

Furthermore, the second-largest land reform program in Free Asia was inaugurated in Vietnam three years ago, and over 1,000,000 acres of land already have been transferred to their new owners. Equally progressive measures have been carried out in the areas of education, health, and social welfare.

In 1956, the Republic of Vietnam adopted a Constitution modeled after those of the West, and since 1955 three national elections have been held. As Mr. Thong correctly observes, the disqualification of Dr. Phan Quang Dan from membership in the National Assembly in 1959 for violating electoral laws brought sharp criticism of the Vietnamese Government from American and other observers. Even the most stalwart friend of the Government in Saigon will admit it has faults. With all the impressive evidence of achievement, Vietnam today still has serious problems and is not a parliamentary democracy on the Western order. However, can such a development reasonably be expected in the short space of five years, in a new state just emerged from nearly a century of colonialism and eight years of bloody civil war?

Throughout this period, the Communist menace has never been absent. The Communists in North Vietnam have proclaimed that the Ngo government is to be overthrown, and have resorted to widespread terror and assassination in the South, with perhaps 500 victims of their terror recorded monthly this fall. Indeed, Communist armed incursions into Free Vietnam through the

undefended territory of southern Laos reached a new peak shortly before the aborted uprising in Saigon. And on the very night of the revolt, a band of Communist guerillas attacked a police post on the outskirts of the capital city itself. These are the facts, and either they have never been communicated to Mr. Thong in New Haven, or he has ignored them. When terror and subversion on this scale are the rule of life in a country, it is the Communists who are lawless, not the government which is trying to repress this terror and bring security to the people.

It goes without saying that the political figures involved in the coup are "nationalists" in the sense that they favor an independent Vietnam. But they are among those men -- many of them former large landowners and/or members of former Emperor Bao Dai's cabinet -- who publicly called last April for the abolition of the land reform program, and lamented the elimination of the feudal and bandit sects, calling for their return to positions in the Government of Vietnam. By any yardstick that considers the interests of the Vietnamese people of primary importance, there is no evidence to conclude that those who attempted the recent coup would have improved the situation.

The importance of ideals and principle in the formulation of ultimate goals is unarguable, but let us not be so visionary in our attachment to those ultimate goals that we are blinded to the practical limitations imposed by reality.

WESLEY R. FISHEL

East Lansing, Michigan
November 22, 1960