

Saigon, Nov.8, 1965

Dear Wesley,

I should have replied to your letter earlier, but I did not know how to go about it. You seem so convinced of the righteousness of what your government is doing here, and you are such a good American that I was afraid of hurting your feelings.

But you are also a political scientist, and I have chosen to write to you as a historian. Now, if you substitute USA for France and transpose the history of Vietnam from 1945 to 1954 to the present period, then you have a very clear picture of what I had in mind. Amazing as it may seem, you are walking on the tracks of the French: what with puppetry and all the rest. Only you add one more thing to it: the stinking smell of money.

If I have offended you by being so frank and blunt, forgive me. I know that in writing the above I may lose you as a friend. But I have decided to be honest, with myself and with others, as I have been honest so far.

As far as I am concerned, I have resumed the position I had held before the President took over in 1954. I shall wait to do the right things, with the right man, according to the right principles, for I am not a man of expedients, but of principles. Perhaps in the US there will emerge another Mr Dulles. I hope so. I shall wait as long as that will be necessary: five, ten, twenty years. If I die before things change, then my children and disciples will do what I have not been able to do.

I have spent the best years of my life toiling 14 to 16 hours a day, at 14,000 piastres a month, and ending up without a penny. But I was happy. Now I will not give any illegal and puppet government one minute of my time, even if they paid me twice as much, or even six times as much - which still less than what I am earning now. But if there is another president Diem, a man who loves his country and his people, is not obsessed with ~~money~~ and money, ^{and women} I would go back to my 14,000 piastres job without a second thought.

With regard to the piece on the French cultural mission, I do not wish to trespass on Nivolon's ground, for he is the correspondent of the FEER. I only deal with sociological and philosophical subjects! And if that may interest you, I am writing a book entitled 'The Counsellor', which I want to be a complementary one to Morris West's 'The Ambassador'.

Once more, I hope I have not offended you. Some well meaning people here say I should change and become more 'practical'. Then I shall be another Thien, and shall despise myself, and shall be despised by my friends, too.

Sincerely

Wm Hallen

November 23, 1965

Mr. Ton That Thien
Saigon Daily News
Saigon, Viet Nam

Dear Thien:

C
Of course you haven't offended me with your letter of November 8. I assume that when you say "you", you are speaking of "Americans", rather than of me personally. That being the case, we remain friends. If I have misunderstood you, the friendship has ended!

O
P
I think you misunderstand me when you assume that I am "so convinced of the righteousness" of what my government is doing in Viet Nam. I recognize as well as you, I think, the temptation and the tendency on the part of many Americans to want to call all the signals in Viet Nam. I recognize also that as the American human (as well as financial) stake grows larger, this temptation and this tendency grow commensurately stronger. To me this is a critical problem, and I am well aware that when I speak to many involved Americans of this problem and they reassure me as to the purity of their motives, I am receiving what in many cases is lip-service rather than completely honest professions.

Y
At the same time, the impatience many Americans reel about the seeming inability of Vietnamese to pull together in concerted fashion for the common good, while perhaps an evidence of American immaturity and possibly even naivete, is also a manifestation of the American desire to see the hostilities terminated successfully at an early date and with the integrity of South Viet Nam fully preserved.

Surely, you do not quarrel with those objectived. Why then do you insist on attributing to Americans generally the emotional feelings of a few of their number? Are we not perhaps equally at fault when we ascribe to Vietnamese politicians, generals, and officials as a whole the faults and sins of a few?

Those of us in this country who, like me, have devoted a major portion of their adult lives to the struggle for a free and democratic republication of Viet Nam, are as concerned as you and our other friends in Saigon with the problems of which you have written to me. Yet, you must realize also that we are 10,000 miles divorced from the men and events, and while we might wish to act to minimize the "puppetry and all the rest" to which you

allude, we cannot do so without some hard facts. For, as I indicated above, when we do criticize and protest against our sometimes bureaucratic and frequently arbitrary and high-handed approach and actions, we are reassured that such reports are highly exaggerated and that in truth we are both mindful of the niceties of Vietnamese sovereignty and careful to avoid the mistakes of the French. In an article which I wrote (and have enclosed) for the Washington Post on December 27, 1964, I made quite a point of this with respect to General Taylor, Alexis Johnson, and their associates. If, despite the arrival of Ed Lansdale and his crew, and the substitution of Lodge for Taylor, we are still guilty of abusing our position, I should like to know this -- with enough details to enable me to do another article. For there is reason to think that the article of December 27 had considerable impact, and I should hate to think that it has now gone for naught.

C
O
P
Y

Apropos of your relations with your government, I understand and I am not unsympathetic. The resignation of Vu Van Mau does not make me feel better either. But, at the same time, the re-entry of Vu Van Thia into the picture as ambassador in Washington is heartening. I must say that I do not share all of Thai's enthusiasm and hope, but his motivations are good and his presence in the Embassy in Washington will strengthen at least that portion of the official representation.

Very best wished to Hai, Lau, and all. Take care of yourself, and keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Wesley R. Fishel
Professor

WRF/tjs

Enclosure