

Amesty: Should We or Shouldn't We?

"The war is over and peace with honor has been achieved." So we are told by Nixon's image-makers in Washington. At any rate, in the last week or two we have been practically buried by the deluge of news in our media concerning the homecoming of our war criminals from Vietnam. They have bombed and murdered many innocent people and have destroyed a once beautiful country; but I am willing to forgive them. This is a time for compassion and healing of our bitter war wounds. Yes, I am willing to grant amnesty to those criminals but I would expect them to do the same for those who would not go and become war criminals.

The first objection one usually hears concerning the concept of amnesty, is that it would destroy the morale of the armed forces and make it impossible to maintain discipline in future wars (assuming there will be future wars). This argument assumes that amnesty is a new idea in American history, and this is a false assumption. Therefore it is absurd. The fact is that the tradition in America is to grant amnesty, not to deny it. Thomas Jefferson, in 1807, absolutely pardoned all army deserters on the condition that they turn themselves in within four months, and resume their duties. Similar amnesties were granted by President Madison in 1812 and 1814, and Jackson in 1830. Lincoln granted amnesty to all the confederate soldiers; and Andrew Johnson, after finding that three

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The Cease-Fire In Vietnam: Peace?

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For as long as most of us can remember the U.S. government has been trying to impose its will upon the Vietnamese people. For the purpose of subjugating the Vietnamese so that South East Asia can be safe for capitalist investment, the U.S. has waged the most savage and genocidal war in modern history. The Vietnamese revolution has been the most determined and courageous struggle against U.S. imperialism and its pro-capitalist puppet regimes in U.S. history. It has inspired and given confidence to the oppressed colonial peoples throughout the world and to the international anti-war movement, most notably here in the U.S.

What do the accords signed in Paris mean for the struggle of the Vietnamese for self-determination and freedom from the yoke of the capitalist-landlord class represented by Thieu? Will the implementation of the accords achieve the goals that the Vietnamese have been fighting for? Will it mean an end to U.S. intervention in South Vietnam and an end to capitalist exploitation? To answer these questions let's look at what the accords stipulate. There are two parts to the accords, one concerning the cease-fire, and the other the political future of South Vietnam. The "political" aspects, concerning the future of South Vietnam, are outlined, but their implementation is left entirely to negotiations between the Provisional Revolutionary Government and the Saigon dictatorship.

The military aspects of the accords include a cease-fire throughout South Vietnam and a halt to U.S. bombing of the North. The remaining U.S. troops and material will be withdrawn from South Vietnam within 60 days.

North Vietnamese soldiers are permitted to remain in South Vietnam, but no new North Vietnamese troops may be introduced. North Vietnam must withdraw its forces from Laos and Cambodia, ending the use of the supply routes through these countries. North Vietnamese and N.L.F. forces may receive material to keep their supplies at the present level.

Before the truce was signed, the U.S.

turned over many of its bases and much material to the Saigon army. The Saigon air force was built up to be the third largest in the world. The U.S. can keep Thieu's armies supplied at this level. U.S. bombers and other forces remain massed in Thailand, off the coast of Vietnam and throughout Asia. Military prisoners from all sides will be returned within 60 days. The accords recognize that two armies and two administrations exist in South Vietnam, those of the PRG in several areas and of the Thieu government. Each is to remain for now in control of the areas it now holds.

Free Election?

The part of the accords concerning the future of South Vietnam includes provisions calling for free elections, release of political prisoners and recognition of basic democratic rights. But the implementation of these provisions is left entirely to negotiations between the PRG and the Saigon regime. The two sides are to set up a three-part National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, composed of the PRG, the Saigon regime and the "neutralists" appointed by both sides. Each party can veto any decision of the council. The accords state this national council will then hold elections for a new government, which will "determine the future" of South Vietnam.

The accords recognize the historical unity of Vietnam in theory but reunification will supposedly come about by "peaceful means," through negotiations between North and South Vietnam. The agreement also says that the "two South Vietnamese parties undertake to respect the cease-fire and maintain peace in South Vietnam, settle all matters of contention through negotiations and avoid all armed conflict."

What does all this really mean? One might think that the Thieu government that has been propped up by the U.S. couldn't be expected to last very long on its own. But the puppet regime in Saigon is not "on its own." Washington will continue to supply it at its present level and has made very clear its intention to reintervene to protect it, using as a pretext the violation on the part of the Vietnamese of the ceasefire agreement. The Vietnamese signed the ceasefire agreement

under military pressure and have every right to violate it. Anyway, what right does the U.S. have to expect conditions for its withdrawal? What right does the U.S. have to even discuss with the Vietnamese their political future?

Will the implementation of the accords inevitably lead to the successful completion of the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation? The actual course of events in South Vietnam will be determined by the living class struggle in Vietnam and on the world scale. The accords must be seen in this context. The road to victory cannot be that which is outlined in the accords. The two administrations and two armies that face each other represent irreconcilable class forces. The Saigon regime is based on the landlords and the capitalists will defend their interests. The PRG and the NLF are based on the peasants and workers.

This situation is highly explosive. After so many years of war and revolution, the South Vietnamese people face huge social problems. None of the basic questions, including land reform, National liberation, and reunification which have been at the root of the war and which so many courageous Vietnamese died fighting for, have been resolved by the accords.

Washington continues to intervene in the affairs of the Vietnamese through its support to the Saigon regime. The country is still divided. National liberation and reunification remain to be won. Land reform has been one of the central issues impelling the resistance to the Saigon regime since the middle '50s. The peasants will want to assert their ownership of the land throughout the countryside. The landlords and their regime will try to prevent this and collect rents wherever possible. The struggle for the political rights of all organizations Thieu banned, for the release of the hundreds of thousands of political prisoners, and for democratic rights in general cannot be resolved by mere words in favor of democracy in the accords.

These and other issues of the class struggle cannot be settled by the negotiations but only through mass struggle. The landlords will not give up their land peacefully and the Thieu regime will not hand power over to the workers and

peasants without a struggle, election or not election.

National liberation cannot be won through cooperation or reconciliation with the Saigon regime. That regime relies on imperialist support for its continued existence. It must be overthrown before national liberation will be on the agenda. The accords say that reunification of North and South Vietnam will come about "peacefully" through negotiations. This is impossible as long as the Thieu regime remains in power. North Vietnam is a workers' state. Saigon presides over a capitalist state. Reunification is impossible before capitalism is overthrown in South Vietnam.

The Class Struggle Continues

The heart of the issue remains what it always has been in South Vietnam, which class will rule. This question cannot be resolved by elections. No ruling class in history has ever given up its power peacefully. They have always resorted to violence when their rule is threatened. The Thieu regime is no exception.

The peace accords represent a temporary halt in the fighting that is bound to flair up as the Vietnamese resume their struggle. Even though the accords allow the U.S. to continue to maintain a pro-capitalist regime in Saigon, the end to the bombing and the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam are great victories for the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese had every right to agree to the conditions outlined in the accords. Considering the tremendous military pressure that they have withstood it is no reflection on their determination and courage that they conceded to the U.S. on issues concerning South Vietnam's political future. We in the U.S. on the other hand cannot recognize the right of our government to try to determine the political future of Vietnam in any way. The U.S. is still imposing upon the South Vietnamese people the Thieu government and can continue to do so under the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Our demand upon Nixon should be that the U.S. get out of all of South East Asia with no conditions and that it end all support to the Thieu government whether it is permissible under the accords or not.