

CONGRESS - DIALECTICS OF LIBERATION

Thich Nat Han and (poet) - 17th July 1967

Thich Nat Han reads translation of poem chanted in Vietnamese:

"Three thousand greater solar systems are seen through Vietnam, the  
fatherland of the sufferings - At midnight the rain suddenly transformed  
into innumerable fragments of bombs falling on the lake of flames -  
The light (fusee) lets open to all eyes the domain of hatred -  
before me, behind me, on my right, on my left, savage jungle and ferocious  
monsters - <sup>Of</sup> Oh Vietnam the (Nirmanakaya) is just manifested - Let  
me be present in this very moment of existence - In this war of Samsara  
I want to be the first one to engage himself - Nobody can sit when  
the earth is crumbling under his feet - Nobody can ask for his destiny  
from the hands of others - Why do we have to complain when we are  
ourselves the creator of our existence? - Here come the spring of  
magnolias and season of <sup>lotus</sup> lovers - On this land of pains - Do stop  
crying, dear - Let the tears of your eyes become (fears) - and let  
my body (replace) the sword and the gun - Don't expect all flowers  
to bear fruits - All trees are perfuming the earth - As this light  
will which lights the universe - The newly born baby carries in himself  
a Buddha - (whom is alit) with the songs of the birds - which  
awake the world up from this deep sleep of Samsara.

Thich Nat Han

In our country the poets are not allowed to have their poems printed. If they try to circulate copies of their poems, then they will be arrested by the police. Everyone in Vietnam is for peace. Everyone asks for the cessation of the bombing and other kind of military action, but no-one can be allowed to speak up. And the reason why there have been Vietnamese who try to make the sufferings of the Vietnamese understood by the people of the world by burning themselves - a few weeks ago I got news from home that a young girl student in Saigon University burned herself in order to appeal for peace, and she said in the letters she left that since she cannot make known the sufferings of the Vietnamese people by just having some appeal, she had to burn herself. She said that if alive she cannot make herself understood, then she decides to burn herself in order to do so. I know her personally, her name is (Than Ti Mai), I have her picture here - and she never made poetry at all. But when she decides to burn herself, then she left letters, many letters who are in the form of poetry. She has something to tell the world, to tell all of us, and the way she think proper to say it is to join her hands, to kneel down and to let fire consume her body. She said that she would kneel down and (murmur) "Vietnam". This is one of her writings in the form of poetry - my translation is not good but I hope it can give something:

"Why do Americans burn themselves? Why do non-Vietnamese demonstrate all over the world? Why is Vietnam silent, and does not dare to utter the ~~word~~ word Peace? I feel helpless and I suffer. If alive I cannot express myself I will offer my life to have my aspiration known.

Appealing for peace is a crime - acting for peace is communism - I am appealing for peace in the name of man. I join my hands and kneel down - I accept this utmost pain in my body in the hope that the words of my heart be heard - Please stop it, my fellow men - Please stop it, my fellow men - More than twenty years have elapsed - more than twenty years of bloodshed - Do not exterminate my people. I join my hands and

"kneel down to pray.

The one who burned herself for peace - (Than Ti Mai) "

One of the things she said in her letters is that even she feels sorry for the American soldiers in Vietnam who are actually killing the Vietnamese. As many others, (Than Ti Mai) realised that in Vietnam those who are killing each other are not really enemies of each other. We don't believe that the Vietnamese in the National Liberation Front, and the Vietnamese coming from North Vietnam, are having any kind of hatred and anger toward the Americans who have come there to fight. Many of us realise that both sides in Vietnam are victims of the war, victims of the poison of the American policy in Vietnam.

In fact we realise that the struggle in Vietnam is a struggle between Westerners and Westerners. Because, consider, Communism and Anti-communism, both things come from the West. We think that the western civilisation and culture have led to the tragedy of Vietnam.

It is not the American (warriors) who are killing, who are really killing the Vietnamese. <sup>It is Plato, Aristotle, Descartes</sup> ~~(These ----- are just ordered, they out -----)~~ and others who are responsible for the tragedy in Vietnam. You have your own ~~your~~ way of thinking and of conceiving things, and sometimes from the East we try to tell you something, and you think of us, of our ideas, as nonsense. You have been teaching us, you have been teaching our children to follow you. Even Buddhism in the East is trying to modernise, to take the shape and the appearance of a western religion. Many easterners have learned to think and to act like you. And we notice that since the West has come to the end of its way, it is about to return. And this seems to us something that is very encouraging.

In Buddhism , when we say something that needs to be interpreted so that the western mind can understand, we have to try to do it in a way that sometimes we have to destroy the meaning, the content of what we want to say.

I would like to bring to you an example concerning Zen Buddhism. When a disciple, a Zen disciple, asks his teacher, his master, how to realise the Buddhahood in himself, how to see the Buddha; and the answer

is that in order to attain Buddhahood, the only way to do it is to be determined to kill the Buddha. If you meet the Buddha on your way and if you have to kill him, there is no other way for you to see the Buddha at all. When we try to tell you something about that, we won't ask to explain to you what is the deep signification of such a statement, and you try to conceptualise something from this. You believe that there must be something behind it, some philosophical meaning behind it, in order to satisfy you. Many of us have been trying to destroy the meaning of the statement itself.

Well, to us, in order, for many of us, in order to look for truth, to search for ultimate reality we have to deny all the time what we think to be - everything that can be stated in words. And that is why there is our belief that reality cannot be conceived, cannot be conceptualised. Between black and white there are many colours, and the tendency to distinguish black and white and to conceptualise things, for us is the origin of so many sufferings.

I would like to bring to you an example. The Americans are contending that they are trying to stop Communism in Vietnam - they are fighting the communists and killing communists in Vietnam. But in reality no communist is killed in Vietnam at all. But those who are being killed in Vietnam are not communists. Instead of containing Communism in Vietnam, The Americans have been helping Communism to grow, and it is known to many Vietnamese that the communists in Vietnam are created by the United States themselves. And when the Press reports that 500 VietCong communists were killed, for instance, yesterday, the Vietnamese could understand at once that it's not 500 communists at all, but the innocent peasants have been the victims.

I think the tragedy in Vietnam should have helped the westerners to realise that the very structure of the western society is the real cause of the tragedy in Vietnam and ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> sufferings in the war. And I know that humanists and intellectuals in the west have suffered a lot because of the tragedy in Vietnam. And the struggle in order to stop the tragedy in Vietnam, by the Vietnamese and by those in the west who realise the

fact that every member of the human family is responsible for that tragedy, these efforts must be oriented towards the changing of the present structure of our world.

The Vietnamese want to be free in order to realise what they want, what they (aspire). But Vietnam is now a problem, an international problem. Vietnam can no more remain as a separate entity, and that is why we hope that more understanding of the Vietnam problem is possible, so that our efforts can lead to a quicker result.

I will ask Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ to read to you a poem by \_\_\_\_\_ about what he thinks to be the cause of the sufferings in Vietnam. It's called "Don't Kill Him":

(English translation after reading in Vietnamese:)

"In the name of civilisation you are killing - In the name of culture you are destroying - You say for the sake of civilisation - You say for the sake of culture - But where is culture and where is civilisation? - In the name of the Gods you are manifesting your anger - In the name of your Gods you are shouting out your hatred - You say for the sake of freedom and for the sake of the Gods - But where is freedom and where are the Gods? - One thing is evident, Man exists, do not kill him."

In Vietnam there are children, in Saigon, there are children in Vietnam who - if you go to Vietnam you hear children singing something along that line. They sing like this:

"Men are not our enemies - If we kill men, with whom shall we live?"

And the song is known to everyone. (Poet sings song) "Men are not our enemies. If we kill men, with whom shall we live." And they are pursued by the police.

I'm not going to describe to you the sufferings in Vietnam any more, because you are all aware of these sufferings. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about the hope of the Vietnamese, the ways by which they think they can get out of the situation. Maybe

something about the nature of the war in Vietnam will be needed.

We all believe that at least the war in Vietnam has three aspects. And the first aspect, which is the most important one, is the effort by the Vietnamese to gain independence, national independence. It is the most important aspect because engaged in this struggle there is a majority of the Vietnamese. The second aspect of it is a struggle between Communism and Anti-communism, which is not important because those people who engage themselves in this struggle consist only a minority. The majority of the Vietnamese are not for an ideological struggle - they are peasants, 90% of them are peasants, and what they aspire for is national independence and peace. But there are anti-communist people and communist people who have been trying to make use of them, of their uprising for national independence, in order to realise their idea. That is why the problem has become complicated. And we do believe also that the struggle in Vietnam is an international struggle in which China and the U.S. are involved. Although China has no troops in Vietnam, we believe that these two powers are afraid of each other and are trying to fight out their fear of each other. Both of them believe that if it cannot prevent the other to be in Vietnam, then the other will try to do the same thing in other parts of the world.

The U.S. have been surrounding mainland China with military bases, and this has led to this kind of <sup>feeling</sup> ~~killing~~ among the Chinese, that kind of complex, that has been translated in the way of talking, of behaving, of behaviour that the U.S. and western people consider to be very aggressive. In fact the fear by the U.S. of China has been based very much on imagination rather than on reality. And I think that if we are to work for a long lasting peace in the world we have to pay attention to that kind of fear and to fight that fear away. And in order to realise that manifestations are not enough, we have to use many other means - education for instance.

One of the things I would like to tell you concerning that war is that the U.S. have failed to prevent in Vietnam the growing of the communists. The present policy of the U.S. can only destroy the Vietnamese people, without being able to help the non-communists against the

communists at all. The presence of so many U.S. troops in Vietnam has led the Vietnamese to think that the claim by the National Liberation Front of fighting for national independence is true, and that is why more and more people join the National Liberation Front in order to fight against the U.S. Another reason why the people oppose the U.S. is that in order to go on with the war in Vietnam the U.S. has to control everything in the country. That is why the N.L.F. is able to justify their claim of fighting for national independence.

But in Vietnam still many people have not joined the N.L.F. because of many reasons. One of the reasons is that they are told by their leaders that there are communist elements within the leadership of the Front, which will lead the country to Communism if they allow the Front. And another reason is that these people do not believe that in joining the Front they can put the U.S. out of the country, in order to have peace. The fact is that we believe that the problem of Vietnam cannot be solved by military means. The U.S. ~~should~~<sup>- to</sup> be realistic, We think that the U.S. will never - cannot afford to ~~lose~~ the war in Vietnam. They have never lost a war and they are not going to let themselves be defeated by a nation they call very tiny, an insignificant nation. So they are going to use, to do anything in order to prevent such a defeat. Among the means may be the use of atomic weapons. And the same reason is applies for the communist block - for the sake of prestige, the communist block is not going to let the N.L.F. to be crushed.

So for most of us, the Vietnamese peasants, we believe that a military victory in Vietnam only means the destruction of the whole country. So we do not wish to have a victory at all. The real kind of victory is peace established in Vietnam. And for them, they think there is one way out of the situation. For negotiations - they think negotiations are difficult, because any kind of concessions by one side of the war risks to be looked upon by the other side as a sign of weakness, and the other side would try to continue the war in the hope of winning a total victory. That is why we need something in between in order to offer a chance for negotiations, and that is why, in S. Vietnam, we are trying to struggle for the coming into existence of a government that can negotiate with the

National Liberation Front. The fact is that the government in S. Vietnam which has been supported by the U.S. cannot do the job, because they have no support from the population. The Government of Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky for instance, represents nothing, represents only the American policy - it has no popular support. That is why we need a government with the support of the people, in order to negotiate. And such a government would need to fulfill two things in order to be supported. The first condition of such a government is the ability to prove that it is independent from U.S. policy - because the anti-American feeling is very strong by now - so it has to demonstrate that. The second condition is that it must proclaim that it is going to solve the Vietnam problem by negotiating directly with the N.L.F. But the present policy of the U.S. is not for such a government. That is why the struggle in South Vietnam has been suppressed, very violently, by the government of Marshall Ky. Those who have been trying to work out a peaceful solution in Vietnam have been suppressed, liquidated. They don't have weapons and military means like the N.L.F., and that is why many many of them have been liquidated, suppressed, exiled, imprisoned. And one of the things I would like to tell you is that there are people who are trying to - in the world, who are trying to help the movement of peace in Vietnam have neglected that movement of peace in Vietnam itself. They are trying to realize peace in Vietnam either by supporting the N.L.F. or the U.S. policy, and they leave these Vietnamese alone and to be suppressed by the S. Vietnamese government.

But in order to have a government like that to come into existence to solve the problem in Vietnam, we need the backing of the people of the world, for the U.S. to change its policy. We need first a cessation of the bombing over Vietnam, which is destroying so much of our people. And then we need the removal of the control by the U.S. and of the government of Marshall Ky, over the non-communist and non-N.L.F. blocks of people in S. Vietnam: For these blocks to be free to organize themselves, to have their leadership, in order to be able to talk to the Front concerning a cease-fire, and then a coalition government, and then the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam as well as the withdrawal of



Hanoi troops from ~~Six Vietnam~~ the South. That is the only way we think to be more realistic in order to solve the problem of the conflict. And we need your effort to look into the problem, to see clearly these things in order to help us.

The struggle of man against violence is going to be very hard and very long. And we Vietnamese, we would like to be present in the struggle, to contribute into the struggle - but first of all we have to be alive. We are very happy to be able to come to this Congress, of which we think very highly. We thank you for organising the Congress. I think something very important might start from this beginning. Although I have been only here for a few days, I feel that I am very - I feel that I am totally at home - the spirit of dialogue, and the spirit - the effort, and the courage to deny things in order to open something new - the attitude, which is not something strange for us at all, the attempt to destroy (dristis) as they're called in Buddhism, means "views", As far as we still cling to views we cannot liberate ourselves. The liberation of the world should follow the liberation of the mind. And the attempt of the Congress to liberate the human mind from the old way of thinking, of conceiving things, is what would seem to be the most important in the work to contribute to the building of a new and better world.

Concerning Vietnam, I have somany things to say, but I think I will stop here, and let the few minutes left for some questions you may have concerning Vietnam.

We thank you for your attention and your concern.

Discussion - 1.

Q. ~~THESE~~ I would like to know what part the Buddhist monks play in the struggle against the Americans in Vietnam, please.

Thich The Buddhist monks in Vietnam have been engaging in a struggle for peace, because we know that in order to be a real spiritual leader of the peasants for instance, they have to be aware of the suffering endured by the people, otherwise they cannot be accepted as a spiritual leader. That is why many of them have been engaging in the struggle for peace. And as we realise that the problem, the sufferings in Vietnam come from the understanding and the policy of the U.S. concerning Vietnam, we have been working in order to oppose that kind of policy. What I can say concerning it is that they are not struggling within the lines of the N.L.F., because they have their own method and concept in order to realise peace in Vietnam, and most of them have been very active in the struggle.

Q. I wonder if you would say whether the diplomatic relationships between Peking and Hanoi have any bearing on the setting up of a neutralist government in S. Vietnam, by negotiating with the Americans - Hanoi - the N.L.F. and Peking.

Thich We don't know much about that, because from S. Vietnam it is forbidden to have relations with N. Vietnam, even if you try to listen to the Hanoi radio you will be arrested. But the relation between Peking and Hanoi, although it can be an obstacle for the realisation of the neutrality of Vietnam, I don't think that it isn't possible for the Vietnamese to overcome. Because we believe that the Vietnamese, North and South, aspire very much for independence from China. We have had some experience with China, with the Chinese; and the fact that Hanoi did not invite Chinese troops in N. Vietnam proves that that experience is still very fresh in themselves. Now I think with international efforts in order to help to establish and to guarantee neutrality in Vietnam, and then the Vietnamese can overcome that kind of obstacle.

Discussion - 2.

Q. Do you think the concept of parliamentary democracy has any meaning whatsoever in/South Vietnam? I mean, do the peasants - do they desire this?

Thich .... western democracy?

Q. Well I don't know, just parliamentary democracy. This is what ostensibly the Americans are fighting for.

Thich For the peasants in Vietnam the most important is to live in peace. This is very clear to me since I - when I was in Vietnam, I tried to be in contact as much as possible with the peasants. I am a social worker, that is why we had changes to be with the peasants in the countryside. In early '66 I was up in the (Toowon) River in (Guatnam) to bring some help to the peasants who - a very remote place, nobody there to come up there in order to help them. So we came to that place and we learn about the sufferings of the peasants who were caught under the two sides. And after talking to them I asked them this question: "Whom do you follow - the people in the National Liberation Front or the people of the government?" And their answer is like this: "We don't follow anyone. If anyone can give us a chance to live, then we follow that one." And then concerning communism, we asked: whether they would like to have democracy and freedom rather than to be under the communist rule. And the answer is like this: "Well, if you are not alive, what is the use of democracy and freedom. We ~~are~~ have to be alive first." So the point of view of the peasants is very simple and clear. In this state of sufferings, the most important they need is peace.

Q. I'd like to know what Thich Nat Han thinks of the U.S. Government Aid programmes for the villages in S. Vietnam.

Thich Well, that programme does not work at all. I know it by experience, because I have been - in Vietnam we have a school, we call the School of Youth for Social Service, of which I am the Director. We train people for two years to send them in the countryside to help the peasants build their villages, and that is why I have had so many experiences with that type of work. The so-called Pacification Workers, when they come to a village they carry guns, many of them, and they are hated by the peasants. And then they are to be protected by the troops, and that is why they cannot do much. And people do not believe them. In some of the villages, we come to work, we have to try our best in order to be accepted by the peasants, We work very hard. In the first ten days they don't speak to us, and when our hard work convinced them that we are not government agents, or CIA or things like that, they begin to talk to us. But the first thing they ask is "How much money do you get from the government?" And when we tell them that we get nothing from the government, we are supported only by villages, and Vietnamese families, they become very happy. They cooperate with us in a way that we can see very clearly the way to success. But now things have become more and more difficult. We realise that nothing can be built in Vietnam unless we stop the war. Many of the villages where we worked have been bombed, and the war destroys everything we built. And now, for the Pacification Workers, financed by the U.S., the Vietnamese Government - well the programme becomes one thousand times more difficult. Because nobody believes them and everybody is afraid of them, and that is why the programme does not work.

Q. I'd like to make a few comments. First of all, the pamphlet that was handed out before, 2 pages, is a translation of an article written by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ in French, it was translated into English by Helen Meyer and the reason we started a bit late was because we were trying to get it ready in time. After this meeting, those of you who wish to say and .....I'd like to thank Thich Nat Han and .....

CONGRESS ON THE DIALECTICS OF LIBERATION

28 JULY 1967

David Cooper introduces Herbert Marcuse

Cooper: It's my great honour today to introduce to you one of the greatest figures of our age, Herbert Marcuse. Herbert Marcuse is a very modest man - he really doesn't believe he's very important at all, but, I think every word he's written - one goes through the catalogue of his work here, Birth of Civilisation, One Dimensional Man - disproves the modesty that he protests. I think every sentence he utters today will also disprove that. I'd like to introduce to you Herbert Marcuse.

(Applause)