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MISSION
TO
HANOI

by HERBERT APTHEKER

With Prefaces by

TOM HAYDEN and STAUGHTON LYND



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Prefaces

by Tom Hayden

Herbert Aptheker's report on Vietnam should be printed in our country's largest news magazines. Instead it may well be a comparatively little read obituary for the Vietnamese people if the war last as long as seven years, as is projected. As these words are written, we may have "tied one arm of the Administration behind its back," as pro-war advocates often say of the peace movement, but it now seems clear that the one free hand is enough to smash the war into Indochina and China itself. How far toward this kind of war we have traveled in the last few months is indicated in this simple fact: We now have more troops in Thailand than we did one year ago in Vietnam, yet almost no Americans see that the location of the war is drastically widening.

Strangely, our Administration agrees with many of the facts that Herbert Aptheker presents. There are ample statements from Senators, generals, intelligence and technical assistance experts, and journalists to prove the point which James Reston reported from Saigon last September 1: "Even Premier Ky told this reporter that the communists were closer to the people's yearnings for social justice and an independent life than his own government." That the Hanoi government and the National Liberation Front are competent, even representative, is not really in doubt despite regular propaganda blasts from

Washington to the contrary. It has been said that our government holds to a devil-theory of communism that makes it paranoid and violent. But what if our government has most of the facts, and still is paranoid and violent? What if knowing the facts heightens our government's need to escalate the war? Then what are we who treasure facts to conclude?

Look at it this way: Vietnam has emerged from the wings of history to become the stage for the greatest social drama of the twentieth century. For decades the "great powers," including communist powers, have placed their national interests above those of the Vietnamese, the result being a distortion of the Vietnamese revolution. The "great powers" have been unsuccessful in even ending the struggle in a way satisfactory to themselves; the Geneva Agreements of 1954, for example, merely delayed and irritated the conflict. From those agreements the Vietnamese learned that the West could not be trusted to keep its treaties, and the great communist societies could not be counted on as the main force guaranteeing national independence. "The Soviet Union and China are both our friends and we welcome their assistance," we were told again and again, "but we Vietnamese make the final decisions."

The United States is killing Vietnamese, I think, to serve notice that revolutions upsetting the world power balance will not be tolerated. Against the idea of a revolutionary war with popular support, which they understand the Vietnamese are fighting, the American government sets the idea of the hydrogen bomb. We are determined to show that no human force is greater than our technological power; as Secretary McNamara considerately put it to a House Committee January 25, 1966, the Pentagon today could wreak "an unacceptable degree of destruction on both the Soviet Union and Communist China simultaneously." Only at this point, when the enemy is "rooted

out" and "warned," will the United States be ready to go ahead fully with its blueprint for a Great Society in Asia.

The war in Vietnam once was a gash, but now threatens to split the world. The Vietnamese did not ask for it. What they ask is that the citizens of all the Great Societies look at Vietnam as the majority of Vietnamese do, not as various national interests demand. This is why they are so deeply, touchingly moved by the courage of Norman Morrison, the American Quaker who burned himself outside McNamara's windows. Morrison, says a Vietnamese poem, was "a man of this century," one who could act from an identification with the Vietnamese even though he was American and far away.

I think Herbert Aptheker, the human being, was moved deeply by his experience with the Vietnamese. So was Staughton Lynd, and so was I. The times in this book that Herbert goes beyond the facts to give something of the sense of life in that exciting country, are the times when Herbert writes too as a "man of this century." In our own ways, and the ways will be many, all the rest of us must act as men of this century, saying: "Let Vietnam be for the Vietnamese. We do not want to tell them what they should do. We want to learn from what they do, and in learning together move out of the impasse that crushes us all. Our government will do what it will, but our words and deeds will show that we ourselves are not at war with Vietnam."

Newark, New Jersey

March 6, 1966

by Staughton Lynd

Tom Hayden speaks for me but I will add a few words.

Our Christmas journey clarified somewhat the negotiating position of the National Liberation Front and the government of North Vietnam, just as we hoped.

Beyond this it represented two things:

1. *Unity on the Left.* We three—aged 50, 36, 26—represented three different experiences of socialist politics in America. Just as we spent hours together around tea tables attempting to understand our Vietnamese friends, so we spent other hours around breakfast and supper tables attempting to understand each other. Nor did we merely talk: *we did this thing together.*

2. *Internationalism.* The most serious danger to the world socialist movement in the twentieth century, I believe, has been, is, and will continue to be not attack from without, but a tendency toward national self-sufficiency within. The behavior of the Second International in 1914 illustrates this classically but the same spirit has appeared in the Communist parties, too.

Our trip sought to exemplify these words of C. Wright Mills: "We must become internationalists again. For us, today, this means that we, personally, must refuse to fight the Cold War; that we, personally, must attempt to get in touch with our opposite numbers in all countries of the world—above all, those in the Sino-Soviet zone of nations. With them we should make our own separate peace."

New Haven, Conn.

March 13, 1966

MISSION TO HANOI

Prologue

I was one of about one hundred Americans who participated in the Peace Congress held in Helsinki in July 1965. While there, a member of the Peace Committee of North Vietnam asked if it would be possible for me to visit his country and investigate first-hand conditions, ideas and prospects there. He added that the Peace Committee would be especially pleased if I found it possible to come as one of a party of three and that the Committee would prefer that my companions be people whose views and politics were different from my own. I said I would try.

Soon after my return to the United States, I sought out Professor Staughton Lynd, whom I had met two or three times before, whose reputation as a fellow-historian was, of course, well known to me, and whose courageous participation in civil rights, civil liberties and peace activities had long gained my great respect. Professor Lynd said he wanted to go and together we asked Mr. Tom Hayden, founding President of the Students for a Democratic Society, if he would join us. He said he would and then it was only a matter of finding the period most suitable for all three of us. That period proved to be the weeks just prior to, during and after Christmas 1965.

We took the long journey then. So much of the "factual" reporting in the U.S. press concerning matters of dissent and challenge is inaccurate that it did not surprise me that even so elementary a thing as our route was everywhere misrepre-

sented—probably because the FBI supplied information about our original routing which, due to plane cancellation, had to be altered. At any rate, we flew from London to Prague to Moscow to Peking and to Hanoi, and returned via Peking, Moscow, Prague, Zurich, Paris, to New York. Our stay in North Vietnam lasted ten full days; we left on the eleventh day. In our visits to Prague, Moscow and Peking—a total of perhaps another ten days—we also visited and had long conversations with leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

Shortly before we left New York City, we had read President Johnson's statement that he desired his representatives to "knock on any door" in what Mr. Johnson announced as a new and intense peace-seeking campaign. While none of us saw himself as the President's representative, we did feel encouraged that the President announced the positive seeking for an end to the fighting in Vietnam as his top-priority concern, at that time.

We knew that the possibility of retribution existed and that what we were doing might be viewed as violating certain statutes; this was especially true of the so-called Logan Act, but we knew, too, that such legislation was of highly dubious constitutionality and that the Logan Act itself—though about 170 years old—had never been enforced and that Mr. Logan himself had not been prosecuted!

Further, in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965, Houghton Mifflin Co.), issued just as we were leaving, was to be found this highly relevant paragraph (p. 700):

"The Attorney-General [Robert Kennedy] also strongly supported the move [in 1962] within the executive branch to lift restrictions on American travel to China, Albania and

other forbidden lands. Within the State Department [Abba] Schwartz, Averell Harriman and George Ball had recommended that restrictions be removed for all countries save Cuba; and the President several times gave instructions that this be done. But the Secretary of State always felt it was the wrong time to do it, whether because a bill was pending in Congress or a negotiation pending in Moscow; and as a result nothing ever happened. The Attorney-General went even further than the internal State Department proposal and favored lifting restrictions on travel to Cuba as well. It seemed to him preposterous to prosecute students who had a desire to see the Castro regime in action: 'Why shouldn't they go?' he once said. 'If I were twenty-one years old, that's what I would like to do this summer.'

In any case, I expressed my motivation at the time; prior to departing I prepared a written statement which was to be released when our presence in North Vietnam had become a matter of public knowledge, and this statement was then published. It follows:

There may be some interest in the fact that I have decided to visit the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

I find the Vietnam war to be among the worst activities in the history of the U.S. government; since that government once was the citadel of chattel slavery, this is no minor criticism!

It is clear—it is repeatedly admitted, even in the American press—that the reportage available to American readers may be aptly characterized, to speak with restraint, as exceedingly one-sided. As Secretary-General U Thant said, "With war, the first casualty is truth." This is doubly so with atrocious and utterly unjust war.

The opportunity to visit the country being mercilessly bombed—with no declaration of war—by forces of the United States and to see for myself what has been done and is being done, and to hear for myself the viewpoint or viewpoints from that other side, therefore, is one that I could not forego. Perhaps I shall be of some service, no matter how modest, in removing the layers of falsehood weighing like an albatross about the necks of most Americans. Certainly, I shall try; I shall exercise my right as an American to "go see for myself," and having seen, I plan to tell and write about what I have seen.

My objective is to do whatever I can to *help stop the killing in Vietnam*; each mite helps and no person must refuse to do whatever his conscience bids toward this absolutely indispensable goal.

I am a writer; in Vietnam is the story of stories and I am going to examine it, first-hand, and then I am going to tell that story to as many of my fellow-Americans as I can.

Now before the reader is that story. Part One contains impressions written down fresh during the days spent in North Vietnam. In Part Two is stated the case against the Administration policy, as I see it after the trip and on my return to the United States. In Part Three is gathered documentary material presenting the viewpoint of the DRV and the NLF, including some data until now unavailable in the United States. Finally, there is appended a selected bibliography on the Vietnam war.

Not least among the values of this journey was the companionship it offered with Staughton and Tom. It was not possible to visit the lands we did without learning; and it was not possible to spend hundreds of hours with those men without

learning—in many ways a great deal more. We never hid our differences; on the contrary. But at no single moment in those hundreds of hours was there anything but good-will and, I believe, mutual affection. Our differences were not small but our agreements were overwhelming: We despised the war in Vietnam, we hoped that our journey might make some contribution, however small, to stopping the slaughter, and we planned to give of our energies to that sacred purpose.

PART ONE

In North Vietnam

On arrival in Hanoi, Tom Hayden, Staughton Lynd and Herbert Aptheker (left to right, center) are greeted by representatives of the Vietnam Peace Committee.



