WHY VOTE?  
THE VIETNAMESE AND US  
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(Note: This article does not necessarily represent Resist's editorial position. ed.)

The chronicle of the Nixon years is grisly: 4.5 million Indochinese civilians killed, wounded, or refuged. 1.5 million soldiers on all sides killed or wounded. 40,000 Vietnamese civilians executed without trial under the Phoenix program. 3.7 million tons of bombs dropped, 60 seconds. 13 million bomb craters. 750,000 acres of crop and forest land bulldoed over. $59 billion expended.

The Nixon-Thieu partnership, especially since the resumption of heavy, saturation bombing in April, has wreaked an incredible degree of human and physical destruction on Indochina. It could be inexcusable if we did not take and fight for every chance we get to end the war on the terms of the Vietnamese people. We cannot afford the luxury of the unthreatened.

George McGovern is the nominee of the Democratic Party. And McGovern, if he is elected, has it in his power to end the war. He has promised to stop all bombing of Indochina on inauguration day, to cease all support for the Thieu regime, and to withdraw all American troops and war materiel from Southeast Asia within 90 days. Politicians, as a breed, make promises they don’t keep; McGovern is no exception. But those are exceptional promises. They are the linchpin, the heart and soul, of the McGovern candidacy. They mean the difference between life and death for millions of Indochinese people. The viability of those promises now critically needs analyzing and understanding.

McGovern has repeatedly claimed that his defense budget, while slashing more than $30 billion in waste and excess baggage from the current budget, would still leave the US "second to none" in military power. If he is thus committed to maintaining the US's hegemonic international influence, why would he grant self-determination to the Vietnamese? The answer lies in the changing attitudes of military and civilian decision-makers throughout the war. First, they have never questioned Indochina's critical importance to US interests. It is important not primarily because of its economic exploitability, its trade potential, or its wealth of natural resources, but because it forms the keystone of America's defensive strategy in Asia; it is a vital link in the US's chain of allied client states encircling China. Its loss would threaten the stability of the US's world system. As Richard Duboff says, in the Gravel edition of the Pentagon Papers, "(Already by 1954), South Vietnam was held to be vital to American security, its future was not to be subject to negotiation of any sort, and it had to be defended by military action - including US intervention - if need be. (This has remained the hard core of... continued on page 4.

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The Red River Delta is North Vietnam's heartland. Here most of its people live - some 12.5 million. Here is where most of its farmland is located and most of its food produced. Here too is where the danger of floods during the rainy season is greatest, and where the dike system has been painfully constructed over a thousand years. The region's dependence on its flood control system - the drainage ditches, pumping stations, dams, but most especially the dikes - is absolute. Without these great earthwork fortifications nearly two thirds of the plain's farm land would be inundated every summer. Without the dike system to impound water, the dry season would be frustrating:

The Red River must be surrounded by embankments in order for the delta to be protected from its floods. Indeed... (without them) it would block all attempts at agriculture. Every year, on the average, the fifth month crop, (harvested in June) would be lost. Now are out of three, the Red has been destroyed, ... so late in the season that they could not be replaced in time to get an acceptable crop. Rice culture is only possible if the Red River is contained by dikes. It is impossible to obtain a harvest from October to May. The most important crop, that of the tenth month, is reaped in November: the rice thrives on the heavy summer rainfall; it ripens during the dry and sunny weather from October to December. The fifth month crop feeds on the high humidity and periods of rain (during the dry season) and ripens during the heat of early Summer. There is no way to schedule a crop so that it could be entirely protected from the seasonal floods. A crop replanted in late October would suffer from dry and cracked soil because November and December are the driest months of the year. Should it survive, it would stagnate during the cold and sunless periods of mists and fine rains. Then, its stay in the soil useless, lengthened to six months, it would ripen in early May. The present agricultural rhythm is demanded by the climate. One could not imagine it any other way.

The source of the Delta's great vulnerability lies in a combination of the given topography and climate. As in the lowlands to the South, the region's rainfall is not evenly distributed throughout the year. At Hanoi something like two thirds of it falls during the three months of June through September and only about one seventh during the December to April dry season. The further South one goes in North Vietnam the longer and shorter is the rainy season. Most of the precipitation during the wet season is accounted for by thunderstorms and by the one or two typhoons which grace the coast every year. As for the typhoons, the quantity of rain they bring in their wake is enormous. Oddly enough the delta is not part of the Red River's watershed. The river's drainage basin lies to the North and Northwest, in the mountains of North Vietnam and in the plateau of treeless. As a result a very large proportion of the region's rainfall - something like 50 percent - eventually finds its way to the sea.

The river that is fed by this watershed is extraordinary. During the Winter it is a mere stream scarcely 2.5 meters deep at Hanoi, with a flow rate of 700 cubic meters per second. Barely five months later it is a raging torrent which upon occasion has stood more than twelve meters high at Hanoi and discharged more than 23,000 cubic meters a second. Upstream, where the Red River enters the delta at Viet Tri, its flow rate can reach 30,000 cubic meters a second. The flood season begins in June and extends through October. About half the time the river crests above 7 meters at Hanoi at least once before June 30; in two years out of three it crests above this level at least three times after September 1. In most years the high water mark will exceed 9.5 meters at Hanoi at least once. Still higher crests are fairly common.

Such is the might of this great river whose peak discharge rate during the rainy season is twice that of the Nile and the Indus put together and equal to the maximum discharge rate of the Danube. The flooding of nearly two fifths of the delta's farmland lowered its water level less than ten cent.

The plain over which these enormous masses of water roll every summer is flat, low and among the most densely populated rural areas in the world with an average density of 621 people per square kilometre (1580 people per square mile). In the Northwest, including all of the delta above the Red River and west of a line drawn parallel to the western side of Hai Duong province, the main rivers ride on a kind of "alluvial cushion" which spills over their banks for some way. These natural dikes are broken in many places and they stand two or three metres high above the surrounding plain. Because of their modest elevation, the ridges have long been favored as village sites. When they intersect they form enormous basins within which water tends to collect. It is upon this network of or alluvium that the dike system in the Northwest is superimposed. Dikes are less frequent here than in other parts of the delta. In the main they are confined to the banks of the major rivers. But they are higher and more massive than to the east, where the river's maximum stages become progressively lower. Though less densely peopled than other parts of the delta, densities are still very high.

The land abruptly changes character as one moves eastward along the northern bank of the Red River in contrast to the northwest, where the rivers meander across the plain on top of alluvial ridges, stream beds are now usually lower than the surrounding plain. In the area mentioned above the four fingers of land between the alluvial ridges of the "Canal des Rapides", the Cau River, the Thuong River, the Luc Nam River and the hills of the "Sept Pagodes". This is an area mantled by serious flooding. If the three rivers rise simultaneously the lowlying basins are invaded and can only drain themselves slowly.

To the south of the Red River and extending all the way from Viet Tri to the sea is the lower delta. It is the mostly densely populated part of the plain and probably the part which is most vulnerable to serious flooding should the dikes be destroyed. The land is low, but no lower on the average than in the eastern delta north of the Red River. But the area is criss-crossed by alluvial ridges and drainage is poor. As a result, when there is flooding here, the water pools because it has no place to go. The land is vast, covering about 5000 square kilometers in the province of Ha Dong. Some 880,000 people live within its bounds, cultivating 107,000 hectares. The ridges of the Red River, the Phu Ly Canal, and
hectares as the amount of rice the war metric tons of rice - we can derive 160,000 to 685,000. Sometimes in villages at the same level as their sometimes in villages built on low alluvial destruction. Using this figure 220,000 t o 920,000 planners envisioned flooding. Now, bearing in mind collect. In 1960 some 1,740,000 people lived in Day and the mountains which mark the western border of rice which it would have to import were its dikes and irrigation dams specifically targeted for drainage in this area is much better than in the great basins to the south. Some 1,171,400 people in the two provinces in 1960. The number is closer to one and a half million today.

The capital city of Hanoi and the provinces of Hung Yen and Bac Ninh on the north bank of the Red River occupy intermediary positions. Both Hung Yan and Bac Ninh are quite low. Elevations range from 1 to 4 meters above sea level and 5 to 2 meters above sea level respectively. The southern part of Hung Yan is especially vulnerable to destruction of its dikes. Here the land is only 1 to 2 meters above sea level and the Red River can rise above 7 meters in the rainy season. Still, natural drainage in this area is much better than in the great basins to the south. Some 1,171,400 people lived in the two provinces in 1960. The number is closer to one and a half million today.

Hanoi itself stands on an alluvial ridge 6 meters above sea level. But parts of it are only 4 meters above sea level. As noted above the Red River often crests here during the rainy season at 10 or 11 meters. Were the dikes to give way at their base during one of these periods, a wall of water 15 feet high could roar through the streets of Hanoi. Its population in 1960 was 643,000. According to recent reports, 80 percent of its people have been evacuated. One or two hundred thousand have remained behind.

Perhaps the best clue of all about the effects of an all-out attack on the dikes and dams comes from the Pentagon Papers. Buried in a discussion of North Vietnam's probable import capacity after the mining of its ports is an estimate of the amount of rice which it would have to import were its dikes and irrigation dams specifically targeted for destruction. Using this figure - 220,000 to 900,000 metric tons of rice - we can derive 160,000 to 685,000 hectares as the amount of rice land which the war planners envisioned flooding. Now, bearing in mind that the farmers who till this land live nearby - sometimes in villages built on low alluvial ridges, sometimes in villages at the same level as their fields - we can make a rough estimate of the number of people who stand in danger of drowning if the dikes were destroyed without warning. For all we need to do is multiply the average population density of the delta - 621 per square kilometre - by the area of the land affected by flooding. To be sure, when we do this, the high end of our estimate must include areas in which the river level is not great enough to threaten human life (for the high estimate involved about half the arable land of the delta). Still, it is a sobering exercise. For when we do this, we see that the war planners had in mind flooding an area containing approximately 1 million to 4.25 million people. This is over and beyond the hundreds of thousands of people who would be affected if the Red River dikes protecting Hanoi were destroyed.

But, of course, as the President said on April 30, 1972, the system of the dikes and dams is "a strategic target and indirectly a military target".
US policy in Vietnam ever since." What has wa­
vered is not America's strategic goal, but our
leaders' confidence that the goal could be reached.
This is evident in Kennedy's and Johnson's hesi­
tant, stop-and-go escalations. In contrast, McGovern's condemnation of the war in 1963, his
vote for the Tonkin Gulf resolution in August,
1964, his public support for Johnson's policy of
strafing North Vietnam in early 1965, and his all­
out opposition to the war now. And it was evident
when Johnson stopped bombing northern Vietnam,
began the Paris talks, and retired from public
life after building US troop strength up to an
unprecedented 560,000.

When Johnson was forced to halt the war's escala­
tion temporarily in 1968, he was on the defensive
on several fronts. His popularity on several fronts. His popula­
tory was at the lowest level of his Administration,
while the anti-war movement was growing daily. He
had just weathered the NLF's politically and tacti­
cally effective, aggressive, and massive use of air
power have failed to bring Vietnam to its knees,
and make no mistake. He is the kind of
President McGovern's compelling influences would
be somewhat different. First, the current NLF
offensive has been militarily and politically
therates were at the lowest level of his Administration,
disastrous for the Thieu regime. The offensive's
goal was not to capture large cities, where both
the liberation forces and the people could be de­
troyed systematically by massive terror bombing.
Instead, the goal was to draw the ARVN into several
defensive enclaves, where they could be harassed
and decimated - while local NLF forces in the pro­
vinces, in the absence of Government soldiers, de­
troyed pacification programs which had taken years
to build. And the strategy is working - in Quangtri,
Kontum, Anloc, Binh Dinh, Quangnai, the populous
Mekong Delta - the NLF-NRF is stronger than ever.
Thieu's army is increasingly being confined to the
cities, and the Americans have already been con­
fined to the air, leaving most of the countryside
to the liberation forces. In January, McGovern
would face an untenable military situation, the
absolute hatred of the Saigon regime, which has
called him "an insane, lying dog, a raving, filthy
pig," and he would face Americans people, their newly encouraged hopes for peace. McGovern's
candidate has been largely predicated on his
strong opposition to the war. He would have little
option other than to carry out his pledge to peace,
on the terms of the PRG-NLF.

McGovern would not and the war because the Amer­
ican people trust him to, or hope he will, but be­
cause his political survival depends on it. The
impatience and disillusionment of the American
people, and the current liberation offensive in
Vietnam have put the American war effort in a
strategic position which must be defended at all
costs. The election offers an auspicious op­
portunity for the final success of the movement
against the Vietnam war, and it also has in it
the seeds of a truce, long-term defeat. Nixon's
July 17 press conference reminds us of the seri­
ousness of our effort. He said, "We do not con­
template using tactical nuclear weapons at this
point." After invasions of Cambodia and Laos, bomb­
ing sites, mining harbors, and massive use of air
power have failed to bring Vietnam to its knees,
Nixon has only one further terrible weapon in his
arsenal. And make no mistake. He is the kind of
President who could very well use it.

We should understand clearly who McGovern is, his
limitations, his capacity for opportunism and bet­
trayal of principles, his need to accommodate and
cultivate people like Richard Daley and George Wal­
lace. And we should understand that George McGovern
is a qualitative improvement over Richard Nixon.
We must beware McGovern's weaknesses, and support
McGovern.

"Boston Legal Aid, A Reference Booklet", a guide
to legal aid services in Boston is now available.
Edited by Kent Jarrell, a Boston University
senior, the booklet offers information on 25
Boston agencies that give assistance in the areas
of criminal, civil, discrimination, prisoner,
consumer protection, housing and military legal
problems.

Information supplied about each group includes
addresses, contacts, phone numbers, staffing,
types of cases accepted, eligibility requirements,
funding, history and breakdown of cases.
Copies may be ordered from Sensory Press, 45
Warren Avenue, Newton, Mass. plus .08
Mass. sales tax and .23 for postage.

SEPTEMBER GRANTS

Indiana Peace and Freedom Party, Muncie, Indiana;
A small grant to encourage them in their work of
organizing high school students, women and pub­
lishing a newsletter.

Ohio, St. Petersburg, Florida; Help with pro­
blems they have had over the Summer. Ujamaa
is an independent black restaurateur whose funtion is
to raise money for the Black Movement.

Next Chicago Workers' Centre: For rent and office
equipment to establish a meeting place, produce
leaflets and newspaper and provide a centre where
workers can gather to discuss their situation.

Jackson Human Rights Project, Jackson, Miss.:
Aid in purchasing a house for their school.
The school was started in '68 to provide
meaningful education for black children.

Charleston Community Project, Charleston, S.C.;
Seed money toward their general running costs
The project consists of 4 men and 1 woman who
live together and work with servicemen, women
and veterans.

VFW, Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Assistance in
paying off the debt on their newsletter. They
have been actively organizing in the Alabama
region with considerable success.

Selma Project, Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Help
with purchasing a movie projector to be used by
them and other people in Alabama.

Hope Centre, Tucson, Arizona; For costs in
running a methadone centre which works mainly
with Chicanos but also with Indians in the area.

Prison Law Collective, San Francisco; Toward an
ongoing program working with prisoners in Folsom
and San Quentin and helping build consciousness
of prisons and their function in society.