The Forgotten Prisoners of Nguyen Van Thieu by a group of French University Professors May 1973
THE FORGOTTEN PRISONERS, in addition to many partisans of the «Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam», include South Vietnamese civilians suspected of neutralist or pacifist leanings, who have been arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned by the Thieu régime. They are only obliquely provided for by the Paris Accords, in Article 11 of the Protocols, which spells out the democratic freedoms that Saigon agreed to restore and has thus far ignored.

This study was prepared by a group of faculty members from several of the thirteen Paris universities that make up the Académie de Paris, under the direction of Madeleine Reberioux, Professor of History at Paris VII. Through close association with the Vietnam conflict over a number of years, Professor Reberioux has established contact not only with the Vietnamese diplomats who, from 1968 to 1973, represented their governments at the Paris peace-talks, but she has been able as well to consult certain Paris-based neutralist and religious groups that have remained in constant touch with events in Vietnam.

The translators wish to express their gratitude to the French authors, to Alexander and Louisa Calder, whose generosity has made it possible, to produce this English version, and to François Maspero, the French publisher, for having kindly consented to make the pamphlet available to English-speaking readers.

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THE FORGOTTEN PRISONERS
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... Oh my country, mountains and rivers so beautiful and so grand,
Land of heroic deeds, flowers of this century the twentieth,
You may be proud, in the very vanguard, facing the United States
A southern land, you have held the line, sublime in your daring
Under the bullets and bombs, radiant in all your light.

To Huu, Le Sud

FOREWORD

By forcing Nixon and Thieu to sign the January 27, 1973 Accords, the victory of the Vietnamese people has given the democratic, revolutionary forces in the South their first official opportunity to speak freely, in a crucial political confrontation, and win over to their cause a public opinion that until then had been the victim of official terror. For the first time, it should now be possible to create the conditions that can lead to reunification of Vietnam and to a socialist economy. Quite evidently, however, enforcement of the Accords requires and will continue to require for a long time to come, great vigilance on the part of all opponents of imperialist dominance. Vigilance is, in fact, already the only possible attitude, in view of the deeply disturbing situation of the hundreds of thousands of men and women incarcerated in Thieu’s jails. The present pamphlet is entirely devoted to this problem.

M.R. (Feb. 1973)
THE PRISONERS AND THE JANUARY 27 ACCORDS

How many are there?

It is very hard to give a precise figure, since one of the principal weapons of the Thieu régime is secrecy. The consequences of this fact are aggravated by the entirely arbitrary classification system set up by the U.S. authorities in 1966 and which has been openly exposed by Alexander Casella (Le Monde, Dec. 9, 1972).

How may one distinguish a political detainee from a prisoner-of-war, in a people’s war in which frequently the combattants are not in uniform, and the partisans live on intimate terms with the entire population? Prisoners captured during a military operation, or a raid, are first sent to a screening center where they are subjected to a preliminary interrogation. When the survivors are not freed (which is very rare) they are temporarily divided into prisoners-of-war and civilian detainees; until they have been interrogated they have no rights and interrogation is usually accompanied by torture. Actually, according to Casella, classification is quite arbitrary. The same prisoner may be classified as a POW or as a CD, according to the interrogator’s whim. After several months spent in one of the five joint interrogation centers, in solitary confinement, with constant interrogation sessions, prisoners are screened a second time, and it is only after this second screening that the survivors are sent either to one of the six POW camps, to a civilian prison or, for the more dangerous ones, to Saigon for further interrogation. The distinction between POW and CD is easier to determine in the case of victims of the provincial security councils, the countless information services, or the numerous police formations that have the right to arrest suspects for what is in fact an undetermined period; there is no chance that they will be classified as POWs.

However, it is comparatively easy for the authorities to consider them as «common criminals». In reality, how does one distinguish between a «political detainee» and a «common criminal»? In the cities, which are closely controlled by the police, where each house is under surveillance and all opposition forbidden by law, offenses leading to arrest as a common criminal may take the form of political opposition to the régime. In fact, Thieu’s present tactic (or technique) seems to be systematic falsification of political prisoners’ records which are transformed into «common criminal» records, as occurs at CHI-HOA, Saigon’s central prison.
One might ask if it would not be easier to find out how many people have been condemned on political charges. According to Newsweek (Dec. 18, 1972) they number about 45,000. This figure, Newsweek comments, is not only misleading because of falsifications and Thieu’s secrecy, but particularly because the very word condemned means nothing in Saigon. For one thing, many who have been condemned are kept in prison after they have served their terms, and people who have been acquitted are sent to prison, as for instance the leaders of the South Vietnamese JOC; or Young Christian Workers (Le Monde, Feb. 6, 1973). In addition, and above all, the prisons are full of people who have never been tried. All this is perfectly «legal», since long before the 1972 decrees, article 19 of the law passed Feb. 15, 1966 stated that all individuals could be held, as a result of an administrative decision, for a period of two years, subject to extension.

So how are we to know? The following facts are certain:

-- In the majority of cases it is impossible to distinguish clearly between prisoners-of-war and political prisoners, or between political prisoners and common criminals;

-- there are a great number of prisons in South Vietnam. Beside the six POW camps and the big deportation camps inherited from the French colonial period (the island of Poulo-Condor, today called Con-Son, in the Southern Mekong Delta, to which has now been added the Phu-Quoc prison, in southern Cambodia), there exist several hundred large prisons, in Saigon and in the provinces -- certain of which have a specialized function, as for instance, Thu-Duc, which is for women only -- and several hundred small prisons: district prisons, police depots, family detention centers, etc., their exact location are often more a matter of conjecture than knowledge, and all kinds of crimes may be committed in practically total secrecy:

-- the suddenly increased U.S. financing of Thieu’s prisons that occurred in 1972 was channelled through two agencies: CORDS, which since the 1968 Tet offensive is responsible for the program of development and reinforcement of the prison system, and AID which supplies security equipment in the prison and places at Thieu’s disposal technical advisors to help control population displacement and train new recruits. The cost of this financing rose from 267,000 dollars in 1971 to 627,000 dollars in 1972 (hearings on U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam, 92nd Congress). In other words, it more than doubled;

-- in Thieu’s 1973 prison budget, provision is made for 400,000 prisoners, which represents an important factor of the 18.5% increase in the over-all annual budget;

-- repression did in fact greatly increase during 1972, due a) to the growing opposition to the régime of new religious and political segments of the population; b) to massive raids carried out in the regions that Thieu feared would be liberated by an offensive of the people’s Liberation Army and c) to the decrees that he promulgated and enforced.
Lastly, it must be recalled that on January 22, 1973, a few days before the signature of the accords, Thieu made public his Ten Points, which were published in Tin So ng, generally considered in Saigon to be the official government newspaper:

« The following ten measures are to be enforced as soon as a ceasefire enters into effect:

-- The police and the military are authorized to shoot on sight all persons who urge the population to demonstrate, who create disturbance, or incite others to follow the communists.

-- Persons who spread communist propaganda, distribute handbills, put up posters or wave communist flags will be arrested.

-- Persons who prevent the police from maintaining order will be immediately arrested.

-- Members of the military, civil-service or police who desert or incite others to desert will be immediately shot.

-- Persons who attack others in the street, or attack private homes, will be arrested. If they attempt to escape, they will be shot on sight.

-- Persons who incite the population to create disturbance or to leave or enter communist-controlled areas will be arrested. If they resist arrest, they will be shot.

-- Persons who put into circulation bank-notes of the communist bank will be punished. Persons who hoard supplies in order to create economic difficulties are subject to Court Martial and the death penalty.

-- Persons who favor neutrality or who are frankly communists and take part in militant political activities will be arrested and court-marshalled with the least possible delay.

-- Legislation affecting the press and political parties will be rapidly and strictly enforced, in order to prevent illegal activities on the part of politicians.

-- Militants of groups and organizations that attempt to carry on clandestine activities, as also of the organizations that until today have followed such communist groups as the Trinh Dinh Thao Alliance Front, Lam Van Tet, or Prof. Le Van Hao, in Hué. If the above-named individuals return to the cities, they will face legal prosecution.

These ten points have been strictly enforced in spite of the flagrant contradictions they present to the text of the accords. In Hué alone, between January 29th
and February 4th 1973, the Saigon authorities carried out 500 police operations and arrested thousands of people. People have been arrested for favoring peace, and particularly for trying to obtain the actual text of the accords.

This being the case, the following reasonable, if not rigorous estimate may be made:

-- In 1970, according to official American sources, there were said to be 100,000 detainees in Thieu's prisons (July–August 1971 Session of Congress):

-- during the same year, according to Le Monde (Nov.10,1971), 153,000 arrests were said to have been made and many of those arrested were undoubtedly sent to prison;

-- The fact that the U.S. aid budget doubled in 1972 leads us to think that in all probability the number of prisoners also doubled. The projected figure of the Saigon budget for 1973 strengthens this supposition.

-- tens of thousands of new prisoners were added to the existing number as a result of arrests made in January and February 1973.

Consequently, the information that appeared in certain U.S. newspapers, to the effect that there are 35,000 prisoners in the Saigon jails, is not plausible. On the contrary, the figure provided by the Provisional Revolutionary Government assumes greater credibility: i.e. that, allowing for ten or twenty thousand more or less, THERE ARE ABOUT 400,000 DETAINES IN THIEU'S PRISONS.

What provision do the January 27th accords make for them?

-- The accords make a distinction between military and civilian detainees.

• A period of 60 days dating from the signature of the accords is provided for release of all military detainees. By March 28, 1973 at the latest, all «captured military personnel» was to be returned (art.8,a).

• Regarding Vietnamese civilian personnel captured and detained in South Vietnam, the two South Vietnamese parties pledge themselves to «do their utmost» to resolve this question within 90 days after the cease-fire comes into effect (art.8,c). It is legitimate to ask how Thieu will interpret «do their utmost». But article 11 of the accords takes this point into consideration and provides that immediately after the cease-fire, the two South Vietnamese parties will... ensure the democratic liberties... personal freedom and freedom of political activities.
-- The accords seek to define «civilian internees».

-- They are: «all persons who, having in any way contributed to the political and armed struggle between the two parties, have been arrested for that reason and have been kept in detention by either party during the period of hostilities» (art.7 of the protocol on the prisoners, in the annex to the accords).

This definition is a valuable one, but Thieu has already started to evade it by mixing political prisoners with common criminals, as well as changing their identity papers and records. Article 8 of the protocol anticipates this maneuver by «providing that the detaining parties shall not deny or delay their return for any reason, including the fact that captured persons may, on any grounds, have been prosecuted or sentenced».

-- The accords stipulate precisely the way civilian detainees are to be treated.

«All Vietnamese civilian personnel captured and detained in South Vietnam shall be treated humanely at all times, and in accordance with international practice. They shall be protected against all violence to life and person...» (art.8 of the protocol).

Actually, as we shall show, the violence that has always existed in Saigon prisons since the beginning of French colonialism, increased considerably as the cease-fire approached. It could hardly be expected that prison guards or those who specialize in torture, having acquired the habit of these practices, should abandon them when their crimes are about to be found out. It is on the contrary «in their interest» to do away with embarrassing witnesses.

--The accords propose an investigation of the detention centers.

«To contribute to improving the living conditions of the captured and detained Vietnamese civilian personnel, the two South Vietnamese parties shall, within fifteen days after the cease-fire comes into effect, agree upon the designation of two or more national Red Cross Societies to visit all places where the captured and detained Vietnamese civilian personnel are held» (art.9 of the protocol).

Article 11 is, in fact, the only article that provides any sort of protection for so-called «Third-Force» prisoners, who are very numerous. The fact, therefore, that it is not being applied constitutes an increasing threat to their safety.

(Translator's note)
Application of this text will be difficult. Many detention sites are secret. And past performance has made us somewhat sceptical of investigations carried out by the Red Cross which, for instance, had never seen the Con-Son «tiger-cages» that were discovered by two American Congressmen in 1970.

--- The accords stipulate conditions for release of POWs.

« All captured Vietnamese military personnel, whether belonging to regular or irregular armed forces, shall be returned to the two South Vietnamese parties: they shall be returned to that South Vietnamese party under whose command they served » (art.1 of the protocol).

Saigon had already begun to violate the accord when it declared that it has «released» 10,600 prisoners, who were not turned over to representatives of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. What did Thieu do with them?

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On the whole, particularly as regards the prisoners, the guarantees contained in the accords will only achieve their purpose if, to use a favorite Vietnamese expression, the texts are applied «seriously and in good faith». Already, however,

- Thiệu has begun to violate the accords
- The prisoners’ lives are officially threatened

Since October 1972, when the negotiations entered a new phase, Thiệu has never ceased publicly to call for massacre of communists and neutralists whom he describes as «pro-communists». It is hardly necessary to ask, therefore if, in the prisons, orders have not been given to this effect.

--- October 24, 1972 :

«As of today all rascals, deserters and other undesirable elements must be exterminated.»

--- January 22, 1973

« We must do away with every last communist.»

--- January 28, 1973

« We are still the bosses... All communists caught inside the governmental zones must be shot on sight... communists are accustomed to every form of treason and crime; don’t be so imprudent as to believe in reconciliation and concord. »
For Thieu and his henchmen, the political prisoners are not only the (still) living proof of their crimes. They are also the political heads of tomorrow's South Vietnam. The French prisons in Indochina were the universities that trained many leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, such heroic men and women as: Pham Van Dong, Le Duc Tho, Tran Nam Trung, Mme. Nguyen Thi Dinh, etc. Thieu is afraid of the militants that are still in prison, and the revolution in Indochina has immediate need of them.

Their safety is in our hands

We are therefore honor bound to rescue them before the crimes now in preparation can be consummated; we must see that these people are released NOW. And we must do this, first of all, out of the merest humane concern for the broken families, the tortured women and children, the sick and infirm for whom prompt release can still save their lives. But we must also do it in a spirit of militant unity with the Vietnam of tomorrow, which will need all its supporters; to begin with, the ablest among them, those who have suffered, those who, as prisoners, have added a new dimension to human dignity and political awareness: the unconquered and the unconquerable.

WE MUST DEMAND THEIR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.
THIEU AND THE SAIGON POLITICAL SYSTEM

The threats that impend for the prisoners are only comprehensible in the context of Thieu's own personality and of the «legal» political system that he has built up with the encouragement, money and military protection of the U.S.A.

Nguyen Van Thieu

The Saigon administration is not only Thieu; in his immediate entourage, his closest adviser is Hoang Duc Nha; Nguyen Phu Duc is his minister of foreign affairs; Dang Van Quant is «security» specialist, etc....

But it is no doubt first and foremost Nguyen Van Thieu, and he has always been a hard-shelled anti-communist. At one time he was a member of a pro-Japanese organization called the Dai Viet, then he became a devoted servant of the French. In 1954, he joined Ngo Dinh Diem, and from 1960 to 1962 he was head of Diem's repression forces in the northern part of South Vietnam. In 1963, as Commander of the Fifth Division, which was charged with defence of Saigon on the north, while enjoying Diem's total confidence, he joined the group of military who, on November 2, executed Diem and his brother, in complete agreement with the U.S. authorities, as later revealed by the Mac Namara report..

Until then, Thieu had been a rather colorless, moderately-off individual whose only assets were 20,000 dollars deposited in a Saigon bank. Later he was literally «manufactured» into a political figure by his American advisers, in the confused atmosphere of military coups d'etat into which Saigon was plunged after 1963. In June 1965 he shared leadership of the National Council with Hitler's admirer, General Ky, and by 1967, he had already salted away a million dollars. In 1969, he set up his own political party machine, and on the occasion of the October 1971 electoral farce, he obtained 94.3 percent of the votes, at the cost of a campaign characterized by unprecedented terror and corruption.

This, then is the man. A puppet in the literal sense of the word, that is, made to order by the CIA and U.S. imperialism. But he is also a dishonest General and
a visceral anti-communist, who hates «reds» and hardly less, «neutralists»; a murderer who shrinks from neither the techniques nor the treacheries of his profession.

A murderer... but having at his disposal a magnificent political machine

1965 - 1966: a wave of repressive decrees signed Nguyen Van Thieu

When the U.S. began to massively participate in the war, this triggered promulgation of a first wave of repressive decrees signed by America's faithful servant, Thieu, who until then was merely a «major-general». Following are the most important among them:

--- Decree 004.65 (July 19, 1965): is aimed particularly at

- those who having reached the age to «fulfil their military obligations..... resort to trickery to avoid answering when summoned» and, particularly, those who make themselves either temporarily or definitively «physically unfit». They, together with their accomplices, are condemned to terms of hard labor that differ in length (art.10)

- those who «join a communist organization or collaborate with the communists» are subject to the death penalty and confiscation of their property (art.14).

- those who «rebel or incite others to armed rebellion» are subject to the death penalty (art.15)

- those who «arouse the populace by organizing meetings or demonstrations with the intention of undermining national security» are condemned to hard labor for life (art.17).

--- Decree oo4/66 (February 15, 1966): «completes» the preceding decree and provides for further situations that are characterized especially by the possibilities of totally arbitrary action that they offer: for instance, it becomes legal immediately to imprison «persons who are considered to constitute a threat to national defence and public security» for a period of two years, which can be extended (art.19).

--- Decree 015/66 of April 21, 1966, this stipulates the penalties for deserters (according to the individual case, hard labor for a stated period, for life, or the death penalty) and for those who encouraged desertion, or helped deserters (five years of hard labor).

1967: a curious constitution

--- The Constitution dated April 1, 1967 proclaims a certain number of principles that are apparently in agreement with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the so-called liberal constitutions.
• «The law protects the freedom, life, property and honor of each citizen» (art.6).

• «No one shall be arrested or incarcerated without a legal order issued by a legally authorized body, except in the case of flagrant offence. The terms of indictment must be communicated to the accused and to his family within the time limit stipulated by the law .... No one will be forced to confess crimes under torture, threat or restraint. All confessions made as a result of torture, threat or restraint will be dismissed as proof of guilt. The defendant shall be judged publicly and quickly» (art.7).

• «The President of the Republic is elected for four years by universal suffrage» (art.52).

• «The government recognizes that political parties play an essential role in a democratic régime. Parties are free to organize and act according to the rules and conditions sanctioned by law » (art.99).

-- But the crime of holding anti-governmental opinions (délit d’opinion) is also one of principle. The anti-communist struggle is the basis of the Constitution: «The Republic of Vietnam is opposed to communism in all its forms. All acts that have as their goal propaganda for, or application of, communist doctrine are strictly forbidden» (art.4).

This constitutional anti-communism makes an absurdity of the liberal articles of the Constitution. It is responsible for development of the system of repression that already existed, but which has become increasingly iniquitous as a result, first, of the policy of «Vietnamisation» imposed by the United States in order to facilitate partial withdrawal of their troops, then, of the offensive of the Liberation Forces that took place in 1972. In order to re-group his army, Thieu was obliged to force a people who didn’t want it, to accept conscription.

1972: absolute power and fascist decrees

After his «election» in October 1971, Thieu was already in complete control of the executive. Then, on May 11, 1972, he proclaimed martial law. Faced with the Liberation Front's military offensive, he next obtained absolute power for six months in an effort to increase political oppression. This demand was first rejected by the senate on June 12. Two weeks later, however, in the night of June 27, Thieu's men hastily rounded up 26 senators (31 were absent) who voted in favor of it. This law gives Thieu the right to «decide and promulgate by decree all necessary measures with regard to national security, defense, the economy and finance.» Most of these decrees, issued in July, August and September 1972, are aimed at political repression. For the first time, they were directed not only against the National Liberation Front, but also against the neutralists (the Third Force) who were beginning to make themselves known to the public. Their objectives may be classified under four headings:
-- to block the demands of workers, which were naturally increasing in the face of fast-rising prices: not only all strikes, but also any disputes about working conditions are prohibited and violations are punishable by prison sentences of six days to six months with penalties doubled for strikes against public services. If the strike causes «difficulties for the country», or if it is for «demands other than wages or working conditions», the penalties range from six months to two years imprisonment (decree of July 15, 1972);

-- to strangle the press: every newspaper must make a deposit of twenty million piastres (47,000 dollars) to pay the fines that may be levied against it (decree of August 5, 1972). The Dien Tin, which called itself General Minh's «call to arms», and which had a circulation of 80,000 decided to close down. The editors then changed their minds, but found that their issues were continually being confiscated. Ngo Cong Duc's paper, Tin Song, was banned in Saigon;

-- to place political parties under control: party offices must be open to the police, who can enter either in the case of open violation of any law or simply to ensure «order and security» (decree of September 17, 1972);

-- to reinforce repression of individuals: military tribunals now have jurisdiction over «civilians whose activities endanger national security» (decree of September 17, 1972). In this way, the legal guarantees of civilian courts have been abolished. The most speedy repression is taken care of by rural military tribunals, successors to the system of special tribunals initiated by Diem and which were widely known as «touring guillotines». The special task of these tribunals was to condemn young men who tried to evade the draft by desertion, self-mutilation, or by falsification of their identity papers.

December 27, 1972: a decree which in fact prohibits opposition on the part of the parties

When Thieu came to power there existed in the Parliament a number of mini-parties (25 in all), most often simple shadow groups supported either by certain Buddhist pagodas and certain representatives of the Caodaists and Hoa Hoa sects, or by Catholic splinter-groups. All these groups were united by the fact that they were anti-communist. Among the mini-parties there were also several organizations of the so-called «legal opposition» grouped in «coalitions», such as the «Nation-Society» coalition (32 representatives), which included a part of the southern upper middle-class close to Duong Van Minh («Big Minh»), or to Ngo Cong Duc, who is now in exile.

Under the pretext of «pushing the parties to unite for the political struggle against the communists» and to oppose communism which, «by using a legal party as a front, would be able to take over a majority of the governmental institutions in the name of nationalism» (Tin Song, December 28, 1972), Thieu has dissolved all parties that are not represented in half the towns, administrative districts and provinces, and which have not as parties (thus eliminating coalitions)
presented candidates to the legislative elections, or obtained one-fifth of the seats in the House and 20 percent of the votes for the Senate. Enforcement of these orders reduced the number of authorized political parties to three. The principal one — this was to be expected — being the new Dan Chu ("Democracy") Party, created by Thieu in early December 1972, which was announced in a blaze of advance publicity as having 182,000 members, and proclaimed to be "the government party for a strong, anti-communist South Vietnam".

This decision legalized what was already a reality, that is, elimination of any possibility of free political expression.

Enormous corruption

...Prostitution and drug traffic assumed immense proportions with the arrival of American troops, as also in the entire "Golden Triangle" which includes Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

...For people who hold even the slightest administrative or political power, everything they touch is a potential source of profit. This includes especially gifts for "refugees" who, at times, have been driven from their villages by the war but, more often, have been forced to live in the "strategic hamlets" inherited from Diem, or in special camps, in order to destroy the traditional structures of Vietnamese society. Gifts intended for these refugees are pocketed by officials, who sell them for large sums of money. Many administrative positions, in fact, are for sale (often for a high price), such as the position of tax-collector of the exorbitant duties imposed on homes, furniture, household appliances, vehicles, etc. In the prisons, anyone with money can easily buy off both guards and director. (Cf. the report on CHI HOA in Hostages of War, pp. 53-56).

...Ever since the start of "Vietnamization" military and police positions have been excellent sources of income. In a "Letter to American Bishops", the chaplains of the Young Christian Workers and the Young Christian Student associations describe how draft evaders buy visas to leave the country, or faked identity papers that give a different age, or illegal deferments; in the same document it is also stated that a position in the Air Force, which is considered to be less dangerous than the Army, can be bought for 100,000 to 300,000 piastres. When ARVN soldiers go AWOL temporarily, in order to visit their families, their officers pocket their pay checks. A particularly large sum must be paid for positions in the police force, since they afford the most frequent opportunities for graft. Actually, there are some 300,000 police in South Vietnam (as many as there are political prisoners). Given the many repressive laws they are supposed to enforce, there are countless "favors" to be "granted",... for a price.

...Thieu has personally organized widespread political corruption. Representative Nguyen Da Dan stated on July 1, 1971, that Thieu had given between...
300,000 and 500,000 piastres to each representative who agreed to vote for the law in favor of the October presidential elections and it was revealed in the American press, on July 10, 1972, that each senator who agreed to grant Thieu absolute powers, had been offered 12,200 dollars cash and a round-the-world plane ticket.

In such an atmosphere, denunciation by informers, followed by arrest, has become a method of government, and today Thieu's system is nothing else but organized terror and assassination. «Woe to the man who hasn't the means to satisfy the demands of the local big-shots, the «Intelligence» agents, the Military Security agents, the police, the «Pacification» agents, etc.» (Ngo Con Duc, Le Monde, January 3, 1972).
SOUTH VIETNAM'S REPRESSIVE APPARATUS

Financed, set up and advised by American government services, the system of repression in South Vietnam has attained a degree of extension, organization and efficiency which needs only the gas-chambers to equal that of Nazi Germany. Systematic repression is in fact a necessary condition of survival for a régime whose only base of support is a maffia of racketeers living off a widespread network of extortion, corruption, the black market and other shady deals, and which, at the same time, fulfills -- whether officially or not -- an important role in police control of the population.

Individual police files, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, deportation, torture and assassination are not aimed only at revolutionaries, but are now used against all the formerly legal opposition. These methods have been greatly reinforced since the declaration of a state of emergency in May 1972. Every South Vietnamese is considered a potential opponent of this police-state dictatorship and thus lives under constant threat of arrest. Indeed, in this vast common undertaking, virtually the only task of the South Vietnamese government apparatus, the police play the key role.

ORGANIZATION OF THE VIETNAMESE POLICE

Swollen beyond measure into a multiform, ubiquitous and essentially secret organization, Thieu's police forces have never ceased growing. The official police budget -- sixteen billion piastres -- is greater than the budget for education in the entire country. This pays the salaries of the 122,000 police agents officially recognized by Saigon, but actually this is less than half of the real number.
Besides this national budget, the Saigon police receive massive «United States Security Aid». Technically, this aid is considered to be «civilian», not military, and for this reason it has continued and will continue to be furnished in spite of the January 27, 1973 Accords. For 1972 it amounted to 533 million piastres. In addition, the Saigon police benefit— and will continue to benefit— from the virtually unlimited budget of the C.I.A., which in essence controls this entire police apparatus. The full strength, therefore, of Thieu's police is some 300,000 men, a figure that breaks down into a number of different, more or less secret, services that work in close collaboration. The task of political repression is not restricted to a specialized corps, but is the work of all the different services. Given the nature of the South Vietnamese régime, all the police are «political», and all are responsible to the President and to the U.S. services. However, to simplify our description, it is possible to make several distinctions.

The National Police

This is the official police, a division of the Ministry of the interior, which receives its orders from the President. Since Diem's fall, it has increased considerably: from 16,000 men in 1963, it numbered 90,000 in 1971, according to the June 1971 Military Review (magazine of the U.S. Armed Forces). The New York Times of April 14, 1972, reported that there were 120,000 police, and that the number was expected to reach 147,000 by the end of 1972. It had already been increased in 1969 by a transfer to the police of some 13,000 military. In fact, interpenetration of the police and the army is evident not only at the decision level, which is under direct executive control, but also at the personnel level.

The National Police are the «regular» police. It is their duty to maintain law and order as well as to ensure the safety of citizens which, in South Vietnam, also means arresting deserters and other persons whose identity papers do not appear to comply with the regulations. In practice, this amounted to some 14,000 arrests per month during the Spring 1972 offensive. It can also mean intervening in labor disputes, and it was the National Police who arrested striking workers of the Eagle Battery Factory, in October 1971. In December of the same year, they arrested workers at the Cholon Song Ho factory, who were about to strike for higher wages. Basically, the National Police are responsible for all civilian aspects of counter-insurgency activities.

To meet these responsibilities, in 1965 the National Police Field Force (NPFF) was created. This service is composed of highly mobile teams whose role, according to Military Review, is not confined to that of merely policing the countryside: they are para-military formations, usually trained by U.S. advisers based in Malaysia, and in August 1970, they numbered some 16,000 men. They are divided into units according to province, equipped with light armament and grenades, and are responsible for the struggle against local «Vietcong» whom they track down.
through information furnished by the Special Police (see below). The NPFF help with the pacification and development programs and are used especially to put down local uprisings and demonstrations.

Since 1969, the National Police have sought to extend their activity in the countryside, but they remain most active in the cities, and especially in Saigon, where their General Headquarters (Nha Giam Doc Canh Sat Do Thanh) is located, on Vo Tanh Street. They are in liaison with the nine National Police Stations in Saigon, and have local branches in the country’s six autonomous cities, 44 provinces and 250 districts. These provincial stations are placed under the orders of the province and district chiefs. Today, it just happens that «all province chiefs and most district chiefs are soldiers» (Military Review).

The National Police uses uniformed policemen, but plain-clothesmen as well, both of whom have an unrestricted right of arrest. This right, which is necessary to prevent any opposition to the régime, is also one of the methods that the South Vietnamese government uses to guarantee the loyalty of its police: since police salaries are fairly low (about 12,000 piastres) abuse of authority, corruption and blackmail (such as the racket used against Saigon taxi-drivers) are thus encouraged in two ways: negatively, in that very few cases of corruption have actually been brought to trial by Saigon, and positively, in that this corruption is a means of obtaining information, as also of keeping the population afraid of the all-powerful police.

But the National Police do more than merely arrest people; they also «interrogate» them: each police station has special rooms for unofficial interrogation, detention and torture, the most popular method in this service being water torture. People prefer, nevertheless, to fall into the hands of the National Police since, as an official branch of the government, there are limitations to what they can do; thus, they often hand over their captives to other branches that are more specialized and, above all, more secretive.

The Special Police (Khoi Canh Sac Dac Biét)

The Special Police is a branch of the National Police, with headquarters in the same building. It functions as a civilian espionage service for the Thieu government. Each province has its own Special Police Force, but it operates mainly in the cities, where its agents can arrest anyone they suspect. It is rare that they carry out arrests in the country districts, except when a military campaign is in progress.

Being an espionage service, the Special Police has been equipped with the latest American espionage technology. It therefore operates the Central Research Office (Trung Tam Than Van), which is a kind of Vietnamese-American F.B.I. This is a huge organization that has kept records concerning government opponents since the beginning of U.S. involvement. These records have now been computerized. The Special Police
furnishes other branches of the police with this information which has been obtained by the most effective means at their disposal, including, for agents of the Central Research Office, a number of torture instruments for use during interrogations. They can also have recourse to some eight to ten special interrogation chambers in the Special Police headquarters in Saigon -- five agents «operate» in each chamber -- as well as three detention centers and one prison.

The «experience» and «competence» of the Special Police seem to be highly regarded by the prison administration. In the prisons, there are Special Police agents whose task it is to repress prisoners who «infringe upon prison rules». Special Police agents are also much in demand among other branches of the police, and all Saigon political prisoners, as well as the more important prisoners from the provinces, are sent to the Central Research Office.

The decision concerning their future is made there.

The Active Police (Hoat Vu)

The Active Police is a branch of the Special Police, administered by the National Police, in whose headquarters its offices are located. This police force is headed by Nguyen Ngoc Trac. It has many secret ramifications, with eight stations in the Saigon area alone, each one of which employs 80 to 120 civilians, and 200 to 300 «secret agents», in addition to offices in all the major cities. It operates in total secrecy and the buildings of the Hoat Vu are guarded by armed civilians with dogs. It is thus a very important part of the repressive government machinery. Its specialty is mass arrest, but its basic task is twofold: elimination of the National Liberation Front's secret bases in the cities, and repression of all popular movements that call for peace and neutrality or otherwise oppose the government. It operates under direct orders from the President, the U.S. espionage services, the General Staff of the South Vietnamese Army, and often from U.S. Special Forces.

The Secret Police (Mat Vu)

This police force is completely independent of the official branches of the government, and is thus unrestricted in its activities. It receives its orders directly from Thieu, who has packed it with bureaucrats devoted to his regime. Its task is «definitive» repression, or «liquidation», which, because of its unofficial capacity, it is in a better position to undertake than other services. This branch operates in total secrecy and constantly changes the location of its headquarters. It has been known to operate from a building on Cong Ly Street (near the Tan Son Nut airport) and from different villas in the first and third zones of Saigon.

All of these different government police can make arrests. The specialty of the Secret Police, however, is physical «liquidation» of opposition leaders. For
this, murder specialists are recruited among Saigon gangsters who are paid «by the job». The Secret Police prefer to work with juvenile delinquents of draft age, who are furnished with false identity papers that permit them to circulate freely without danger of being arrested or drafted. But to make sure of their loyalty, frequently these papers are furnished for only two weeks at a time. In this way, the police are assured of a number of devoted «workers».

Secret Police Inspectors and their deputies operate above the law and with complete impunity. It is generally believed that the Secret Police was responsible for the numerous attempts to assassinate opposition leaders who refused to be silenced by bribes; such men as Representative Tran Van Van, who was shot on a Saigon Street, in December 1967 (during his campaign to bring the House to vote the Military out of power). The Secret Police also takes care of Thieu supporters who are beginning to reconsider their politics, in view of the increasingly corrupt and fascist nature of the régime. A right-wing student leader for instance, who had been in contact with the opposition, was murdered during the summer of 1971.

The Security Police (An Ninh Quan Doi)

The Army’s repressive role is of prime importance. It has its own espionage service which operates in the most absolute secrecy and with complete freedom. It also has its own police, a kind of (Vietnamese) military F.B.I., known as the «Second Bureau», which is a branch of the General Staff and commanded by a colonel. There are, in every army unit, operatives of the Second Bureau, who in fact constitute a parallel organization. Arrested soldiers, together with civilians considered to be their accomplices, are immediately tried by military tribunals.

But the jurisdiction of the Security Police is not limited to the army. They also operate in areas bordering on military barracks and bases, where they are free to make arrests and issue search warrants. They can also move against «anti-militarists», with the result that intellectuals, students, teachers and journalists can be arrested by the Security Police and handed over to the Central Research Bureau.

Actually, the Security Police cooperate closely with the civilian police services, with which they constantly exchange both information and prisoners. Many Saigon police agents work for the military as well as for the civilian police, and in every army unit there are to be found so-called «Security Soldiers» (Quan Nhan Cong an) who, because they hang out in Saigon, pay informers and double agents in the bars and bordels, and are themselves usually thugs or pimps, can supply valuable information.

The Security Police has detention cells and torture chambers not only in its headquarters but also in all its stations. It has the reputation of being the branch that is the most feared, not only by the general population, but even by the National Police and the Hoat Vu, who do not enter the zones it controls. Suspects arrested by the Security Police are always horribly tortured and when they manage to escape its clutches alive, are usually maimed for life.
THE OTHER VIETNAM FORCES OF REPRESSION

But the police is not alone in carrying out this task, which is virtually the only occupation of the administration machinery, as well as of Thieu's government apparatus. The police is assisted by a whole series of other «departments»:

- **the village authorities** to begin with; they also have the right of arrest and constitute a valuable auxiliary force since the entire administration right down to the level of the commune, is now named by Thieu;

- **the people's militia** as well, which recruits its members in the villages principally among idle children of 12-16 years; they are provided with automatic firearms and have orders to repress student demonstrations and meetings (cf. *Thoi Bao Ga*, a publication of the «Vietnam Resource Center», Cambridge, Mass. March-April 1972);

- **the army**, which has every right to make arrests and plays an important police role in the countryside where the different police services are less fully implanted than in the towns. Any soldier can arrest and interrogate anybody he pleases; there being no local government representative, every form of pressure can be exerted to make arrested peasants confess that they belong to the most recent unit of the NLF to pass through the area, that they are collecting for the Front, or simply that they are «in contact with the enemy». The «Committee for Reform of the Penitentiary System» in South Vietnam, which had opened a hostel for liberated prisoners, testifies to the identity of these «suspects» arrested by the army: «They are private citizens arrested during search-and-destroy missions carried out jointly by the U.S. and Saigon armies. Others have been rounded up during the pacification campaigns entit­led «Phoenix» or «Swan», because they were suspected of being NLF sympathizers;

- **the civilian guards (Dan Ve)**, these are volunteers who are even more dreaded than the regular soldiers. They receive only half the salary paid the soldiers, as well as light weapons and grenades, and since they are so badly paid, they live by exploiting and pillaging the country areas they patrol. They function under the direction of the province chief (a military appointee) and possess their own prisons and torture chambers. Once their prisoners have been interrogated, they are handed over to the National Police stationed in the small towns or in the provincial capitals.

THE AMERICAN SET - UP

The Central Intelligence Service (So Trung Uong Tinh Bao)

This service is different from the Central Research Bureau of the South Vietnam special police force, which is headed by U.S. experts. The C.I.S. is directly controlled by the C.I.A. -- it is in fact believed to be the center of U.S. secret agents in Vietnam-- and headed, in South Vietnam, by Col. Nguyen Khac Binh, who is also
commander-in-chief of the National Police. All the most important cases are referred to him, particularly arrested student leaders, and it was in his office, for instance, that Huynh Tan Mam, president of the General Association of Saigon Students, who was arrested January 5, 1972, was interrogated and tortured.

The Central Intelligence Service coordinates the activities of the three key sectors of the South Vietnam régime's repressive apparatus: the active police, the military security force, and the intelligence services. Information provided by former detainees who have escaped, suggests that the headquarters of this service is located near the Bach Dang wharf near the Military Justice building. However, very little information gets through; prisoners are taken there blindfolded and absolute secrecy is the rule.

The U.S. Special Forces (Luc Luong Dac Biêt)

The «Green Bérets», the shock troops of the U.S. Army, whose crimes have been outlined by Robin Moore in an account published with the agreement of the Pentagon (entitled The Green Bérets), form part of these special forces. Their headquarters is in Saigon but so far nobody has found out exactly where it is located. Little is known about their activities, but testimony furnished by survivors of the Central Research Bureau's interrogations gives reason to believe that these specialized torturers often operate in person.

The Special Forces in fact control the entire police force of repression. Their orders are transmitted to the administrative centers in the provinces and to branches of the National Police and of the Special Police; but also to the special South Vietnamese Forces and to the provincial reconnaissance units of the C.I.A., who arrest and torture suspects on the spot, then hand over the survivors to the Special Police.

Funding

The American apparatus, which is a parallel hierarchy of repression, is thus the brain behind the entire system of repression in South Vietnam. In fact U.S. responsibility is enormous, if only at the funding level. The U.S. «civilian» aid program, A.I.D., one of whose branches, the O.P.S., is an organization for financing and support of public security operations in «friendly» countries of the Third World has, among other missions, been charged since 1968, in liaison with the C.I.A., with executing the Phaëlix Plan for liquidation of the village «cadres» of the NLF. C.I.A. aid is of course kept secret, but «official» facts already available speak volumes, even if they only concern the National Police Force, which is the only service mentioned in U.S. documents. A spokesman for A.I.D. told Congress a year ago:

«A.I.D. and the services that preceded it have supported the security programs in Vietnam since 1955. The work of A.I.D. has been to help the National Police recruit, train and organize a force for the maintenance of law and order.»

(«Hearings on U.S. Assistance Programs in Vietnam», July-August 1971. 92nd Congress.)
A.I.D. has supplied more than 200 specialized police officers to help in the training and organization of the National Police Force, at every level; and all told, over 7,000 Americans are taking part in the «Public Security» programs.

But U.S. A.I.D. is not the only organization interested in the S.V.N. police. Since 1967 especially, the U.S. Defense Department has been financing the public security program that was transferred to C.O.R.D.S. (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support). Thus, from 1968 to 1971, more than one hundred million dollars have been allocated for the «security» of South Vietnam, two-thirds of this amount furnished by A.I.D. and one-third by the Department of Defense. Then there is always of course, the massive aid furnished by the C.I.A.

The United States is not content to «assist» a régime for which it claims it is not responsible, nor is the policy of terror enforced by Thieu just a regrettable «blunder» on the part of a friendly but not yet quite «civilized» country. It is the direct implementation of a repressive system conceived and headed by Americans, who plan but also carry out the repressive measures of the Thieu Government.

THE WORKINGS OF THE REPRESSIVE SYSTEM:
DEPORTATION AND ARREST

A policy of systematic terror: deportation

The repressive apparatus in South Vietnam does not merely arrest members of opposition organizations, it also extends its control over an entire population, whose support or even neutrality the régime is incapable of winning. Deportation is therefore a weapon with which to uproot the populations, who are herded into refugee camps where they cannot work, are cut off from their families, under permanent police control and entirely dependent on the whims of Saigon. Pursuing the policy of «strategic hamlets» instituted by Diem, today a veritable system of pupulation «parking» has been adopted by the Thieu régime. This policy of displacement has been strengthened with extension of the fighting in the South, and it has particularly affected the Central and Eastern provinces of Vietnam. Thus, at the time of the offensive by the People's Liberation Armed Forces against Quang Tri, the communal leaders in central Vietnam summoned about 1500 inhabitants to come and «settle certain matters»; when they entered the office, they were arrested, then deported to Con-Son. The guard in the Con-Son prison camp, who recounted this to the religious authorities, in order that they might do something about it, specified that the prisoners were mainly old people, women and children, who did not know why they had been deported; they had simply been told that they were suspected of having contacts with the enemy. Their boat arrived in Con-Son on May 11, 1972. They are still there.