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FEBRUARY 2, 2018

by WILFRED BURCHETT
05.02.2018

Vietnam Will Win: Introduction



Wilfred Burchett interviews Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, 1962.

Introduction by George Burchett

“One man, Wilfred Burchett, alerted Western public opinion to the nature of this war and the struggle of the Vietnamese people. He is the contemporary historian, the meticulous journalist who has chosen to identify himself with the Vietnamese people whom he has served admirably well. It is because he has written in such a moving way and with such conviction that many of us became directly engaged in defending the Vietnamese cause. Burchett has found the correct blend of moral and political commitment. His reporting,

always precise and factual, informs and at the same time mobilizes those who have the good fortune to read him.”

– Bertrand Russell (Introduction to *Hanoi sous les bombes* (Hanoi Under Bombs), Maspero, Paris, 1966

To mark the 50th Anniversary of the 1968 Têt Offensive, CounterPunch will serialize Wilfred Burchett’s *Vietnam Will Win* (Guardian Books, New York, 1968) over the next few weeks.

I chose this quote from Bertrand Russell to introduce the book because it captures the essence of Wilfred Burchett’s reporting from the “the other side” of the Vietnam War – the side fighting for independence, liberty and unity .

Burchett’s original title was *Why The Vietcong Wins?* The Guardian Books editors insisted on a more “triumphalist” title – which also proved prophetic. And no doubt helped turned the book into a best seller in the USA, where it mattered most.

Very often, when I meet visiting Americans in Ha Noi they’ll tell me: I read your father’s *Vietnam Will Win*.

I first read it in Phnom Penh, in French, under its original title *Pourquoi le Vietcong Gagne?* It was the first of my father’s book that I actually read – I was 13 then – by the pool at the *Cercle Sportif* in Phnom Penh, now occupied by the American Embassy.

So why did the Vietcong win? Why did Vietnam win?

Wilfred Burchett gives a sober and logical assessment based on several trips in the jungles of South Vietnam with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Viet Cong) and many visits to the North, to Hanoi under American bombs. He was on the spot, where the action was, talking to the right people: President Ho Chi Minh, General Vo Nguyen Giap, NLF President Nguyen Huu Tho and many others, NLF commanders, student activists, women revolutionaries and guerillas, intellectuals, religious leaders, peasants.

Vietnam Will Win explains in great detail how the war of resistance was fought south of the 17th Parallel. It is well worth reading today because some fundamental facts never change: foreign occupation will always be resisted.

David Dellinger wrote the original introduction to *Vietnam Will Win*. No one can do a better job of re-introducing the book to CounterPunch readers today. And trust me, it’s excellent reading material as Vietnam prepares to celebrate the Lunar New Year and mark the 50th Anniversary of the Têt Offensive.

Happy Têt 1968 and best wishes for the New Year of the Dog!

George Burchett

Hanoi

Introduction

By David Dellinger

This book is automatically assured a large circulation. It will be read by thousands of bewildered experts in the U.S. military, diplomatic and foreign subversion agencies who cannot figure out on their own how the mighty United States, with all that technology, money and destructive power, could be so thoroughly defeated by tiny “backward” Vietnam. Some of them will read it in their office. Others will sneak out and buy it with their beer money, smuggling it home between the pages of *U.S. News & World Report*.

Fortunately it won't do most of them any good – or should I say harm? It won't show them how to be more successful in future aggressions. It won't even teach them how the United States can win the hearts and minds of underdeveloped peoples while clinging with the heroism of George II and Louis XV to exploitative economic exploitative and power relationships. Maybe it will teach a few of them – if they are not careful – that in the long run there are no substitutes for self-determination, justice and truth; that liberation begins at home; and that, like a lot of former supporters of Diem and Ky in Vietnam, they should change sides and values.

That brings us around to the people for whom I presume that the book was written: the growing liberation forces in the United States. These are people with a wide range of commitments and attitudes but sharing an increasing awareness of the interconnections between this country's foreign and domestic policies. It's not just that the violence and hypocrisy of the United States in Vietnam, like fallout, cannot be confined within artificial national boundaries and not increasingly poison domestic affairs as well. It's also a matter of recognizing that poisoned fruits do not grow, by accident, on healthy trees. The contempt for life, the flagrantly antidemocratic policies that have been made so clear to us in U.S. actions in Vietnam are seen to have their roots in domestic institutions and relationships. Having seen the faces of napalmed and tortured Vietnamese, having experienced the insistence of the military industrial complex on continuing an unjustifiable and losing war which has already killed off more than 30,000 Americans, we have taken a fresh look at the liberal corporate economy at home. We are reexamining the system of “representative democracy” which assures the privileges and preserves the power of the power elite. We are questioning the relevance of an antiwar movement which has not

faced up to the causes of war and has been insensitive to the daily institutionalized violence of America's property relationships.

For Americans who believe in human dignity and genuine, democracy-cultural, economic and political-the question is not so much "What went wrong in Vietnam?" as "What went right?" How did the Vietnamese manage to unite as a people, achieve such high morale, work out sound strategy and successful, flexible tactics? It's clearly not a question of making any direct and mechanical application of Vietnamese methods to the vastly different conditions in the United States. In fact, one of the lessons to be learned from the Vietnamese is the importance of local initiatives and the indigenous development of methods that grow out of indigenous conditions. This leads not only to sounder strategies but to the growth of a genuine "people's" movement. The Vietnamese have scored an electrifying victory for man over technology by putting man back at the center of things, not man in the abstract but the living human beings who are the victims of corrupt and unjust systems and must liberate themselves by their own initiatives. This requires national and international solidarity among those who do put man at the center, but it mingles out doctrinaire prescriptions, bureaucratic control, and slavish imitations. Nothing could be more amusing to those who have had contact with the Vietnamese or studied their methods than the charges by befuddled U.S. politicians that American demonstrations are planned in Hanoi. Not even the initiatives of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam are planned in Hanoi. Moscow and Peking have learned to their sorrow that in a genuine people's war, arms and food from outside are welcome, but political control is not.

I first discovered Wilfred Burchett many years ago in the pages of the *New York Times*. Two or three times a year he was quoted as the author of some eminently sensible observations but always in some such context as the following: "Wilfred Burchett, an Australian Communist journalist, claimed today..." How intriguing. A journalist who seemed to have authentic information and genuine insights but was always condemned to appear in public print with a warning. His wares were never presented without the label "Communist," like the bottles on the shelf that must be labeled "Poison," lest they fall into the hands of the unwary.

This practice assumes, in the first place, that the American public lacks the intelligence to make up its own mind on the relative merits of the conflicting claims that are aired on those infrequent occasions when Burchett is allowed to appear at all. A few paragraphs from this dangerous man can upset the mountains of prose that are constructed daily by

ordinary journalists from government handouts, briefings and leaked information. Sewndiy, the .label suggests that, unlike the reporters whose stories fill the overground press, Burchett is committed not to the objective truth but to one side of a partisan conflict. Oddly enough, in view of all this, Burchett's reports and predictions turn out through the years to be remarkably accurate, whereas the American press never seems quite able to catch up with reality.

In actuality, Burchett rarely makes predictions. It's just that his reports conflict, at the time they are issued, with the reports of American politicians and most American newsmen – including those who form the government's loyal opposition. It's only later, when the truth is seen to be as Burchett has claimed all along, that he seems to have made a prediction. I give you as examples his reports of the remarkable rebuilding and economic progress in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, facts that have been confirmed by Dr. Joan Robinson of Cambridge University and William Rose of the *Guardian* and other experts but have not yet reached the consciousness of the general public; his early reports of the disaffection of the people from Syngman Rhee in Korea and Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam, of the high morale and winning battles of the NLF; of the saturation bombing of civilian areas in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; of the widespread use of pellet bombs and other antipersonnel weapons which are useless against military installations but deadly against human flesh. When Burchett first reported the use of pellet bombs, the Pentagon categorically denied that they were being used. More than two years and one International War Crimes Tribunal later, it could not keep up the pretense any longer. It declassified these obscene weapons and released the design for public bidding.

It is a mark of what we owe to Wilfred Burchett and the *Guardian* that the real purpose behind the government's denials is not "military security," as is sometimes claimed, but to deceive the American people. After all, the Vietnamese knew that their homes, schools, churches and hospitals were being blanketed by pellet bombs.

I finally met Burchett in person in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in August of 1966 and I have met him on a number of occasions since. Meanwhile I have traveled in many of the countries he writes about: North and South Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and China. I have learned that Burchett does not adjust his eyesight to his political views (whatever they may be). I have never caught him in an exaggeration, distortion or significant omission. Because he has a remarkable sensitivity to the finest aspirations of human beings – for dignity, social solidarity, self determination and economic justice – he is able to understand and interpret people like the Vietnamese who are dedicated to these same

goals. In writing not only from his own observations but from extensive interviews with the Vietnamese he communicates to Americans how activities that are described one way in the American press (even when they are not consciously distorted) appear quite different to the Vietnamese. Thus the Americans think that they “build a base.” Huynh Minh makes clear, in Chapter One, what they really do. The Americans think they can surround it with friendly Vietnamese who will warn against possible attacks. Huynh Minh and others make it inescapably clear why this scheme and all schemes for a continued U.S. presence in Vietnam are doomed to failure.

David Dillinger

Author’s Introduction to First Edition

When some 2,000 journalists from all over the world converged in Paris in early May 1968 for the start of the Washington-Hanoi preliminary “peace talks,” a major question in the minds of the more thoughtful of them was “How come?”

Having followed the course of the war from the DRV-NLF side more intimately than any other non-Vietnamese, I was on the receiving end of the perplexities of many of them “How come” the mightiest ever of the Western giants, at the apex of its nuclear-muscle power, had to sit down with a small, backward, truncated nation to discuss affairs of war or peace between them? History had scarcely a parallel for such high-tension dealings between two such unevenly matched opponents.

A superficial reply came easily enough from the lips of William Jorden, the official spokesman of the U.S. delegation headed by W. Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance. In the South, the “Vietcong” were at their last gasp, the Têt offensive having been a great catastrophe. The North was cracking under the weight of bombs. Taken together, the DRV-NLF were on the point of collapse, which is why they had so swiftly grabbed – as a drowning man at a straw – at President Johnson’s offer of talks. It sounded plausible at first to many. But not to the few veteran correspondents who had just come from Saigon. And not to certain realistic souls who thought: “If it’s true that we’ve got them cornered, why don’t we go for the knockout? How come we are in Paris?”

Answering this “How come?” is the real purpose of this book. Obviously the reason given by Jorden was a fraud of Hitlerian proportions. Had it been true, there would have been no offer of talks. Had it been true, or even nearly true, General Westmoreland would not have been removed and dragged upstairs still shouting: “We’ve never had it so good. I was just about to win.” Had it been true, he would have been allowed the “glory” of dealing the final blow.

The fact is that by May 1968, U.S. military-political strategies in Vietnam had been driven into bankruptcy. Even President Johnson realized that the 206,000 more troops demanded earlier by Westmoreland could not change the situation. The Paris talks could serve as a means of diverting Public opinion from the real situation they could serve to gain time to develop new strategies and also to defuse the halt-the bombing, end-the war agitation inside and outside the United States. This latter very important calculation worked out for a time. But it was more than offset by something that did not enter Johnson's planning: the extreme panic reaction of the leaders of the shaky Saigon regime to the mighty United States sitting down and talking on equal terms with Hanoi.

Johnson could not have expected this latter reaction because there was a high-powered apparatus to shield him from the military-political facts of life in South Vietnam. His July 20-21 conference with General Thieu in Honolulu and subsequent hawkish promises not to end the bombing were an attempt to repair the damage in Saigon caused by the Paris talks and to put some spunk into Thieu and Ky. It was a measure of the spiraling political crisis in Saigon caused by the mere fact of the Paris talks.

After a year of talks the "How come?" was more pertinent than ever. The DRV delegation, joined by their NLF colleagues when the bilateral talks became quadrilateral, showed no signs of weakening. During the first five and a half months, for representatives of a country about to "collapse" under the weight of U.S. bombs, the DRV delegation displayed elaborate indifference to Johnson's



demand for some sort of "payment" for a total end to the bombings of the North. On passing, one must note that this symbolic "payment," stripped to its essentials, was that

under the guise of “reciprocity” the DRV should agree to abandon the NLF and allow the United States under some form or other to seal off all contacts between North and South.) During the first few months of the talks, Westmoreland’s aggressive “Search and Destroy” strategy had been replaced by Abrams’*^[1] “Clear and Hold”-which quickly degenerated into what could be called a “Hold What We Can” strategy. And there was no possibility of changing this for the better-from the U.S. view-point. “How come?”

At the end of the first five and a half months, President Johnson finally decided to halt the bombings “unconditionally” or “without conditions,” as the Americans preferred the text should be worded. Nothing had changed except perhaps that Johnson and his negotiators in Paris discovered that the DRV delegates meant what they said and that their stand was fully justified by the political-military situation in the South.

Simultaneous with the agreement to end the bombings of the North was the announcement that a four-party conference would start on November 6, 1968, with delegates from the NLF and the Saigon administration joining the DRV and U.S. negotiators. The NLF delegation arrived in Paris on November 4. But the Saigon regime, overtly backed by the more hawkish elements within the Johnson administration, refused to send a delegation until Washington signed a secret pledge never to recognize the NLF.

After two and a half months of bargaining over what seemed to be the innocent question of the shape of the conference table – the real issue was whether the NLF was an independent, home-grown product of the South or a mere agent of the North, as the U.S.-Saigon delegates pretended-the DRV concept of a round table was accepted. The four delegations would sit down as separate entities each with the right to speak independently. The U.S.-Saigon position was for a rectangular table, or at least a table divided w two to suit their “your-side our-side” formula under which they would later demand the DRV-NLF “side” to withdraw all their armed forces from the South. U.S.-Saigon maneuvering to deport all resistance forces to North Vietnam was the ultimate significance of the debate over the shape of the table.

Two days before President Johnson was to leave office the four delegations announced the agreement to hold their first meeting. What coincidence in timing! The announcement to halt the bombings five days before the presidential elections and the date set for the first meeting came just in time for Johnson to claim that he had got the real peace talks started! Eight months had been lost while tens of thousands of Vietnamese and Americans became casualties of Johnson’s showmanship.

By January 20, 1969, when Nixon took over at the White House, there were about 550,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam, not counting navy and naval-air personnel, nor troops and pilots at American bases in Thailand, from where the main air attacks were being made. South Koreans, Australians, Thais and other “non-Vietnamese allies” accounted for another 70,000, plus another 800,000 in various branches of the Saigon regime’s armed forces: a total of over 1,400,000 troops. There was one soldier to every 10 men, women and children in the whole of South Vietnam. The United States had more divisions committed than against Japan w World War II, more than were used in the Korean War.

If one accepted official figures available to Saigon correspondents at the end of 1967, this enormous force was deployed to bring two million people in the NLF-controlled areas [2] under Saigon control – two soldiers for every three men, women and children.

Just half of the total U.S. standing armed forces as units and far more than half the combat-trained troops have already been committed in South Vietnam. The four reserve divisions stationed in the U.S. for home defense are below strength, their effectives having been quietly transferred to units in Vietnam to replace combat losses.[3] All elite units specially trained w jungle and counterinsurgency warfare had already been committed, as had the two airborne divisions also earmarked for defense of the U.S. itself.

More than half of all the U.S. Air Force’s fighter-bomber squadrons were also engaged and many of those remaining existed only on paper because planes and pilots had been switched to Vietnam. At the time of the North Korean seizure of the electronic espionage ship U.S.S Pueblo, the ardor of U.S. senators demanding immediate air-sea action cooled down somewhat when the press revealed that total U.S. air strength in South Korea at the time was just eight nuclear bombers, not a single fighter-bomber, and that the two U.S. infantry divisions there were much under strength, their effectives having been sent as replacements to South Vietnam.

Even before the sharp rise in casualties from the Tet offensive on, announced U.S. casualties were running at a higher monthly average than during the Korean war and real casualties were known by correspondents on the spot to be far higher than those announced total official casualty figures exceeding those of the Korean war were released as the Paris talks ended their third month.

As for the U.S. Navy, one third of all major combat vessels, including aircraft carriers, were already in Vietnamese waters and the latter had aboard virtually all the modern carrier-borne aircraft that the U.S. possessed.

U.S. planes were dropping a greater tonnage of bombs every month on North Vietnam than on Germany at the peak of World War II, a greater tonnage per year than the total dropped on North Korea during three years of war. (This latter was by no means negligible. It was enough to destroy every town, village, factory and virtually every building in North Korea except those that had been placed underground.) But despite all this, the war in Vietnam, the question of bringing those “two million” people under control – ten million if one accepts the NLF figure which is certainly more nearly correct – the question of forcing the 17 million Vietnamese in the North to abandon the cause of their compatriots in the South had plunged the U.S. into a national crisis of unheard-of proportions – illustrated by the scenes which shocked the world at the Chicago convention of the Democratic Party in August 1968. Not only a political crisis and not only a moral crisis, but something of a financial crisis as well.

Never in the history of any nation had so many with so much been arrayed against so few with so little. In comparison with the U.S. versus the Vietnamese people, the story of David and Goliath seems like a combat between near equals. But miracle of miracles, despite all the laws of averages and statistics, it is the Vietnamese people who are winning on all fronts.

One of the most convincing illustrations of this was the feat, absolutely unprecedented in military history, of the NLF forces on January 30-31, 1968, in launching a generalized offensive along a front of well over 600 miles. The NLF simultaneously attacked and for the most part seized 140 towns and cities from the 17th parallel in the north to the Ca Mau peninsula in the extreme south, including 37 of South Vietnam’s 40 provincial capitals and about a hundred district centers. For any classical army, an offensive of such dimensions would pose insoluble problems of supply, communications and coordination. The NLF forces, without any modern transport or communications and with supplies carried on their backs, pulled it off. In complete secrecy, under the noses of the most sophisticated military machine that has ever taken the field equipped with the most modern electronic detection devices, they attacked the heart of every major military and administrative installation in South Vietnam. Among the objectives attacked were all four zonal headquarters of the Saigon army, eight out of 11 divisional headquarters, 15 regimental headquarters and two American army field headquarters. Among 18 major targets attacked in Saigon itself was the U.S. Embassy, the joint U.S.-Saigon armed forces headquarters, the South Vietnam naval headquarters and the Saigon radio station (which was completely destroyed). Thirty airfields were attacked, including 11 of South Vietnam’s 14 major air bases, with the

destruction of 1,500 planes and helicopters, according to NLF sources. The latter figure may be disputed, but in the weeks that followed there was a drastic reduction in U.S. combat air activity over South Vietnam.

The ease with which the NLF forces implanted themselves in every major city dealt a mortal blow to the Saigon government of General Nguyen Van Thieu and Air Vice-Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky and caused an upheaval of cosmic proportions in Washington. The Saigon administration literally faded away in Saigon and many other cities; it had been practically nonexistent in the countryside long before the coup. The armed attacks were accompanied by simultaneous uprisings by urban dwellers, armed with weapons the NLF took when they seized arsenals and munitions depots as priority targets.

The 1968 Lunar New Year attacks were indeed the most striking illustration of the fact that despite the unprecedented weight of men and materials arrayed against the NLF in South Vietnam and the three years' bombing onslaught against North Vietnam, it is the administrations of Ho Chi Minh in the North and Nguyen Huu Tho (president of the National Liberation Front in the South) that remain strong and stable, while the regime in Saigon, in spite of the prodigious investment of human, material and financial resources to keep it viable, has been in a state of permanent crisis for nearly ten years. Ho Chi Minh's administration has been in power longer than almost any other government in the world, with most cabinet members serving for the past 23 years, since the August 1945 revolution. The NLF administration in the South remains the same as on the day of its formation on December 20, 1960, with Nguyen Huu Tho as its elected president and effectively at the helm from the time he was rescued from a Diem prison by NLF guerrillas in October 1961. With all the fantastic military power at their disposal, U.S. forces have never succeeded in penetrating the strongholds of the NLF, have never succeeded in capturing a single member of its central committee.

One of the most ironic spectacles played out in Saigon every year is the November 1 parade at which white clad U.S. diplomats solemnly mount the tribunal on Thong Nhat Boulevard to take part in the annual celebration of the murder of Ngo Dinh Diem, whose "invitation" for U.S. help still remains the official basis for American military intervention in South Vietnam. All the rest – the bombings of the North, the threatened extension of the war to Cambodia, Laos and Thailand and perhaps elsewhere – is based on the commitment to Diem. The repudiation of those "solemn engagements," according to Dean Rusk, would mean the end of U.S. prestige throughout the world. That it was U.S. Ambassador Lodge

who masterminded the coup that ended in the overthrow and murder of Diem lends added savor to the November 1 ceremonies.

A timetable of the political merry-go-round that followed the overthrow of the Diem regime on November 1, 1963, gives some idea of the formidable difficulties that Washington has had in order to maintain somebody in place in Saigon to perform the unpopular task of periodically renewing the original “invitation” to intervene. The “intervention” fable is one that Harriman constantly tries to perpetuate at the Paris talks; another is that the Thieu-Ky regime is constitutionally elected and represents the will and aspirations of the South Vietnamese people. A question I have often been asked is whether the fact that Thieu and Ky have remained in power since June 1965 does not mean that the political situation has been stabilized. After all, there have been no new coups d'état.

The real reason is that by June 1965 the U.S. had completely taken over the running of the war. U.S. combat troops were pouring in. No new coup could take place without the coup-makers having to deal with U.S. troops. When Lodge turned up for his second tour as ambassador in 1965, his instructions were just the opposite to those he had received in 1963 when he had played the major role in unseating Diem and unwittingly provoking the series of coups that followed. In 1965 he brought with him “no more coups” instructions. By then Washington had given up hope of finding a South Vietnamese “strong man” who could win the war.

If it was not immediately an all-American war, it became at least a mainly American war in which the South Vietnamese generals and politicians were assigned a secondary role. But the U.S. forces needed a stable political rear, and so “No more coups!” And there were no more. As far as the Vietnamese people were concerned, their energies were switched to the main enemy, the U.S. invasion forces. The U.S.-Saigon command was the supreme symbol of repression, not the Saigon regime. It was clear to all, including nationalist and patriotic elements within the Saigon army and administration, that it would be a waste of time and blood trying to replace one clique of generals for another in Saigon as long as a foreign expeditionary force held the real power. The defeat of that force became the primary task, that of unseating the Saigon regime could wait.^[4]

By the time the Thieu-Ky combination had consolidated its takeover, some 20 of South Vietnam's 60 generals were in jail or in exile; in some cases, like Nguyen Khanh in a vaguely defined roving diplomatic status. Khanh prudently stayed abroad when summoned from his “diplomatic post” to return to face charges of corruption.

If the casualties among South Vietnamese generals and politicians have been considerable, the United States also has its modest list, headed by the country's most famous soldier and one of its most famous diplomats, General Maxwell Taylor, who gave up his post as chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff to go to Saigon to run the war as an "ambassador-general" with exceptional powers to run military and diplomatic affairs. He failed and was withdrawn. Henry Cabot Lodge, former U.S. chief delegate at the United Nations, one-time vice-presidential candidate and considered a very promising Republican presidential candidate for the 1964 elections, ruined his political prospects for all time when he went and failed twice in South Vietnam. Under-Secretary of State Alexei Johnson as Maxwell Taylor's deputy ambassador (a rare thing indeed for an ambassador to have an under-secretary of state as an aide) shared Maxwell Taylor's failure. General Paul Harking is another who tried and failed. Deputy commander-in-chief and chief of staff of the U.S. Army in the Pacific area when he took the job of heading the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Saigon in February 1962, even the operations Harking personally directed in the field were failures. In June 1964 he was relieved of his command and replaced by General William C. Westmoreland.

Taylor and Harkins faded in the application of "special war," a strategy invented by Taylor while serving as special adviser to President John F. Kennedy. Westmoreland was sent out to direct a "limited war" with the very best U.S. Army and Marine combat divisions at his disposal. But he too failed and by the end of 1967 he had been effectively replaced as operational commander by his "deputy," General Creighton Abrams, considered an expert in tank warfare. Westmoreland is the greatest failure of them all until now because of the scope of his defeat. To fail against armed forces developed from peasant guerrillas, with an army of well over a million superbly armed troops at your disposal, plus the world's most modern air force and unlimited artillery, is a failure of monumental dimensions.

If one were to add to the list a couple of generals relieved of their commands on the battlefield, others lolling or wounded in action, then the high-level casualty list becomes impressive. Especially when it is topped by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, whose nine visits to South Vietnam, each followed by optimistic "progress reports," failed to produce any real changes in favor of the United States up to the time that President Johnson unceremoniously relieved him. That other important heads would roll after the military-political disaster that the Tet offensive represented for U.S. strategies and prestige was certain. That Westmoreland would finally get his marching orders was a foregone

conclusion. That the supreme commander-in-chief, President Johnson, would add his name to the casualty list could not have been foreseen. But there it is!

How come?

Possibly no single question is agitating the minds of so many people at this moment in world history-not only the minds of generals and diplomats, of journalists and the general public, but the minds of those all over the world, especially those in the “third world” who are involved in or are planning struggles of national liberation similar to that w which the Vietnamese people are engaged.

It is to supply some of the answers that the chapters which follow are devoted. The answers are far from complete. It will only be when the leaders of the struggle in the jungles, mountains and rice fields of South Vietnam have time to lay aside their guns for their pens that we will have the elements of a complete answer.

Wilfred Burchett,

Paris, September 1968

Revised August 1969

Notes.

[1] General Creighton Abrams succeeded General William C. Westmoreland as U.S. Commander in South Vietnam on June 10, 1968.

[2] These figures are based on those given by Hanson Baldwin, military editor of the *New York Times*, usually quoted as America’s most authoritative writer on military affairs. He was reporting from Saigon on December 26, 1967, after a series of top-level briefings at the U.S. high command in Saigon. “Statistics,” wrote Baldwin, “show that the Vietcong control almost 40 percent of the territory, mostly jungle and 13.5 percent of the population as compared with 51 percent and 19 percent on October I 1966...” (The population of South Vietnam before the B-52s set to work on the densely populated areas around Saigon and in the Mekong Delta is usually given as 14 million.) The results of the 1968 Têt (Lunar New Year) offensive, launched just one month after Baldwin’s article appeared, show to what extent even authoritative analysts allowed themselves to be hypnotized by plausible incompetents like Westmoreland.

[3] The U.S. standing armed forces consist of 24 divisions. Those committed to South Vietnam by October 1968 include the 1st, 4th, 9th and 25th Infantry Divisions, the 101st and 58th Airborne Divisions (the latter only partly), the Americal and First Cavalry

(Airmobile) Divisions, the 1st, 3rd and 5th Marine Divisions (the latter two of its three regiments). The missing elements in the 82nd Airborne and 5th Marine Divisions are more than made up for by independent units such as the 199th Infantry Brigade, the 173rd Airborne Brigade and others.

[4] The situation is very different today. The U.S. command has been forced into a passive, defensive posture. The Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace forces, formed just after the Têt offensive, has great influence an ally of the NLF in the cities and among the middle class and the intellectuals. It has close links with patriotic elements within the Saigon army and administration. In the past, the NLF could never throw its weight behind one set of generals struggling for power against another. But it is possible to envisage a new type of coup in the future behind which the NLF could throw its weight, including its armed forces, its political organizations, its prestige. The fact that the United States has had to sit down and talk in Paris has greatly stimulated an upsurge of nationalist forces that had hitherto remained passive and hopeless in the face of the U.S.-Saigon regime and its power structure.

This upsurge reached its highest point thus far with the formation on June 8, 1969 of the Provisional Revolutionary Government headed by Huynh Tan Phat, to which the NLF handed over all of its administrative functions and which represents the last stage before formation of a provisional coalition government that win replace the Saigon puppet regime. The NLF and Alliance comprise the major components of the new government, but places were left open for a third element-authentic, patriotic national forces, whose inclusion would ensure the broadest possible government of national union which the NLF has always advocated.