

Social Progress Key to Victory in Vietnam

By TRAN QUOC BUU

have come here in the name of the workers of Vietnam to bring a message to the workers of the USA. In bringing these greetings to you as the leaders of the American trade union movement, we wish first of all to pay our respects and homage to your great president, George Meany.

I have come to America from a small country towards which the eyes of the world have turned. You here in America are especially concerned and properly anxious about the events now transpiring in Vietnam. Our country is not only small but poor and our people have suffered from foreign invasions for many years. We have fought to gain and to guard our freedom for more than ten centuries against the Chinese, the French, Japanese fascism, and now the Communists, against whom we have been struggling for the last 20 years.

In this fight, it has been the little people who have suffered most. It is they who have been suppressed and have suffered from these invasions and occupations. The majority of these people are peasants, and they, like the workers, are poor and living in misery. It is, therefore, in the name of these poor and suffering workers and peasants that I have come to America to bring their message.

There are all sorts of differences of opinion about Vietnam. There are those who insist that it is a military problem, while others stress the political aspects. For us, the workers, we see it in another way, from the social point of view. We do not deny the political and military nature of the situation, but we insist on the basic economic and social nature of the problem. We would even say that there is a basic trade union element to the problem of Vietnam.

Ever since 1945 when we began the great struggle against French colonialism, there has been this great emphasis on military. The French General, Le Clerc, armed with his armored troops while we fought in the "maquis" (the resistance), with sticks and stones. The French general said he would liquidate the whole affair in weeks. Ten years later we saw how it ended in the disaster of Dien Bien Phu. It led to the division of Vietnam after the Geneva accords of 1954.

After this division of the country, the Americans became interested and involved in Vietnam. They did see the political side as well as the military one. This led quickly to the proclamation of the independence of Vietnam, the creation of a republic, the setting up of a National Assembly, the holding of elections, establishment of an Economic Council and provincial and regional political structures in the country. In a word, the political institutions—the forms—were established in Vietnam.

At the head of the country, President Diem and his brothers, even created a political party—yes, a "labor party." This party had millions of members. A youth organization was established—also with millions of members. A farmers' association with millions of members came into view. And all added to the multitude of political organizations. Here you can see—all of these military and political structures, but these

Remarks by the president of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor to the AFL-CIO Executive Council on May 18, 1964.

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have been ineffective in the struggle against the Communists. Now, we do not deny the necessity of these political institutions, just as we do not deny the necessity of the military measures. But they remain insufficient and inadequate.

The problem of Vietnam persists and the seriousness of the situation mounts each day. You are certainly informed through the newspapers and the radio that each day sees a continuing deterioration. But we have not lost hope, even though there are many who are becoming desperate. For, although the masses are poor and suffering, the actual percentage of Communists among the peasants is very small—perhaps 2 or 3 in a thousand. However, the war of the Vietcong goes on and not with great masses of arms but really with very small and modest means at our disposal.

We have seen—in the light of my exposé—that all the political and military measures have been taken. In a certain sense, we can even say we are over-equipped and we have the best technical and military advice from the American side. Yet, our political and military leaders come up against a wall of indifference and apathy amongst the people. Yes, the people are indifferent to the war.

If we are to win, we must be able to win the masses of the people to an active participation in the war. The question remains: How can we mobilize the masses to fight the Communists? Here is the key to the problem.



Tran Quoc Buu (left) presents gift from Vietnamese Federation of Labor to AFL-CIO Pres. George Meany

Up until the present, the politicians have tried to get to the masses but they have failed. Our people—90 percent of whom are peasants—feel deceived, mistreated. There is a great moral crisis which has set the people apart and even against government leaders. This is a result primarily of their experiences with all the preceding governments. And when McNamara, your Secretary of Defense, talks about a total problem, the essential question remains; namely, by what means are we to mobilize the masses without whom no "total" resistance to the Communists is possible.

In seeking a solution, we must keep in mind that our peasants are a simple and practical people. They do not like speculation—political, theoretical or philosophical. They face practical problems which preoccupy them every hour of the day. They are plagued by debts, lack of fertilizers, inadequate facilities to exploit their land, etc.—in a word, the burdens and worries of everyday life.

It is on the basis of the exploitation of these issues that the Communists gained ground and not on the basis of their acceptance of Marxism or any other ideology. The Communists have used practical approaches, have in a certain sense employed trade union demands in order to be able to sink their roots in the countryside—like the demand for land and the means to exploit that land.

Only through trade union action—organization, agitation and propaganda—can we begin to mobilize the masses. Our trade unions must be permitted to play a bigger role. And for this, we need your support, the backing of the American trade unions, as well as the free trade unions of the world.

We are not in a normal situation where it is customary to say that people in the last analysis must rely on themselves. Here, one cannot ignore the fact that we are up against a colossal mass which is under the control and domination of Communist China with a world-wide Communist movement behind them. This magnifies and distorts the nature of our problem. We are a small people—all of Vietnam does not number more than 22 millions. How can we deal with such a force or how can we resist without your backing and that of the entire world of free labor?

I am strongly convinced that with your support and along the lines of some of the things that I have suggested we can win. It is, therefore, in this spirit that once again I bring you the fraternal greetings of our workers and our thanks to you and your highly respected President George Meany for your help, assistance and continuing support.

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