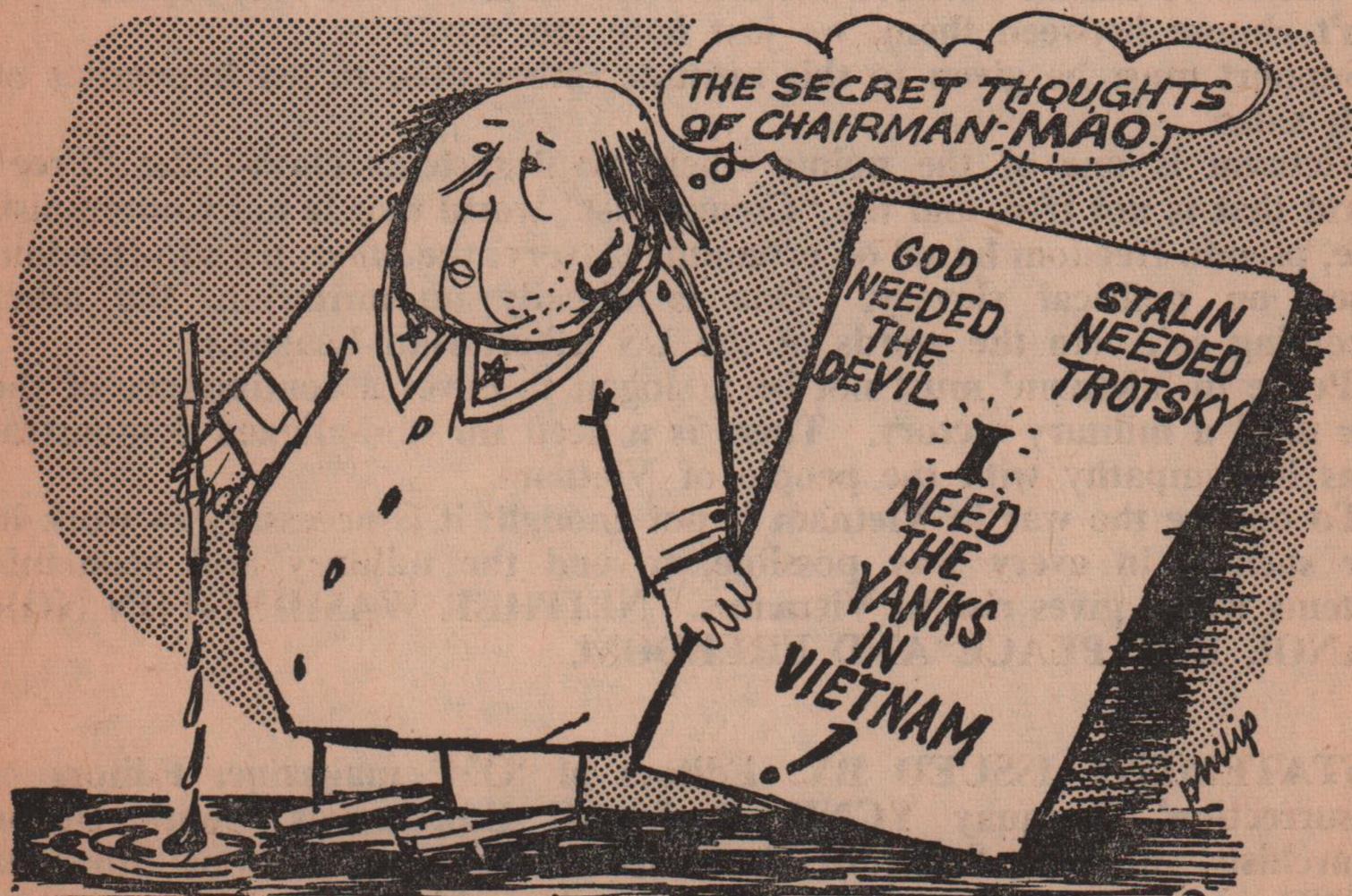


Neither Washington Nor Hanoi

IN VIETNAM 623,000 people have been robbed of their homes and livings by guerilla forces and regular troops since the beginning of January, 1968. 72,000 homes have been destroyed since the start of the New Year fighting. However, not to worry, since both sides assure the victims it's for their own good.

The Americans are fighting there to abet a government whose support is by no means a majority one, whose corruption is well known, and which is essentially authoritarian and militaristic. Not even the Americans are able to suggest that the régime derives its authority from the people.



Looking at the North in an equally critical manner reveals that the support for the régime at the moment is derived less from an appreciation of its policies than from the fear of invasion. The power of Ho Chi Minh is derived from feelings of Nationalism amongst the masses of the people

of both Vietnams. He became leader of this movement by eliminating other candidates—betraying the major figures to the French and using his 'fee' to build up his following and influence in the movement; and by the murder of all independent leftist groups, Pacifists, Trotskyists and Syndicalists. Pursuing a misplaced Marxism in a predominantly peasant society, he divided the population into rigid categories and classes and severely crushed opposition (such as the 1956 peasant insurrection in which reports give 10,000-15,000 killed and up to 12,000 sent to forced labour camps).

The National Libertarian Front is a continued use of nationalism to the aims of a small guiding elite. The 'official' leadership covers the real directors of the movement. It undoubtedly has much support among sections of the population. Its triumph, however, would mean the 'unification' of the country under the Hanoi régime.

The majority of the Vietnamese are not committed in the present struggle, but bow to whoever is the master. In the recent offensive the Southern régime showed its 'concern' for the people by indiscriminate bombing and artillery fire in heavily populated areas. Similarly the 'liberators' executed anyone at all involved in the administration of social life—there are reports from Hué of people being shot for listening to the BBC, which was forbidden ('Panorama', March 5—interview with students in Hué). A measure of the popular support for the two combatants is found in the reaction to the recent New Year offensive—the South Vietnam Government got no warning of NLF concentration of troops near the cities, and, equally revealing, there was no evidence of the spontaneous insurrection in the cities which the NLF expected and which the NLF units in the attack were promised. (In the 'Panorama' interview mentioned above, the student was asked whether the destruction of Hué had made it harder for him and his friends to choose between the Government and NLF. He replied, 'We don't choose between them, we just hate the war.')

Support must be given to this attitude rather than to the hypocrites of both sides.

Vietnam is one of the points where rival systems clash—the "Free" world that is not free, and the "Communist" world that is not Communist. One, pseudo-freedom based on economic slavery; the other, pseudo-freedom based on political slavery. One is already authoritarian, the other becoming so'. (In the words of the US Libertarian League.)

'Peace in Vietnam' must not be a slogan to cover a continuance of the war until a military victory. There is a need for non-aligned demonstrations in sympathy with the people of Vietnam.

To oppose the war in Vietnam is not enough; it is necessary to work in our society, in every way possible, to end the military and economic systems which gives rise to Vietnams. **NEITHER WASHINGTON NOR HANOI, BUT PEACE AND FREEDOM.**

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