

December 15, 1960

Dear Friends,

I know you have been waiting to hear from me ever since the events of Saigon last November. Let me tell you at the outset that my long silence was due not to lack of time but to two more serious reasons. The first one was lack of information. If I could tell you only what you can read in the newspapers, there would be no point in my writing to you. The second reason was an unwillingness to say anything at all as long as certain expected effects of the drama had not materialized. This reason is still valid. It means that I write this letter very reluctantly. But I do plan to go on our Christmas vacation the end of this week and I am afraid between my return and our departure for Europe in January I will have too much to do to get my lengthy reactions on Vietnam on paper. In regard to the second point I shall later on be more explicit, so that you understand why I still am hesitant about writing.

As you know, a group of paratroopers, allegedly numbering 3000, occupied Saigon during the night of November 10th to 11th and surrounded the Presidential Palace. As far as one could learn from the American press reports, there ensued a brief battle between parts of the paratroopers and the palace guard, leading to negotiations between the besieged government and the leaders of the revolt. After about 36 hours, the government was able to bring in troupes from the provinces

[draft of letter written by Joseph Buttinger]
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which quickly ~~disbanded~~ ^{dispersed} the already disintegrating units of the paratroopers. The President was again master of the situation. The leaders of the rebels were partly arrested, but the chief men apparently escaped to Cambodia. The number of officers who fled the country is said to be eighteen.

While the rebellion went on, the leaders made statements designed to justify their action in the eyes of the Vietnamese people; but even more they aimed to justify their action in the eyes of the world. They said, briefly, that they wanted to strengthen, liberalize and clean^{up} the government which they accused of inefficiency in the fight against the Communists, and of nepotism. There were other charges, but they contained ~~all~~ together nothing new. The rebel charges were interesting only for their emphasis on the need for a more vigorous fight against the Communists. I shall later on discuss the accusations concerned with the problem of civil liberties, corruption and nepotism, but these are not nearly as significant for the attempt to justify the coup ^{as} ~~than~~ the proclaimed wish to strengthen South Vietnam against the Communists. In view of the internal crisis in Vietnam due to a systematic communist campaign of sabotage and assassination, this was the obvious step for the rebels to take. The question how to fight communist terrorism more effectively is indeed the most burning question in the Republic of Vietnam.

Let me note here the reaction of the regime soon after the coup about the manner in which the events of the 11th of November were reported abroad. There have been many complaints by high officials made in private conversations against foreign correspondents who supposedly reported the events in a light much too favorable for the rebels. On ^{NOVEMBER} February 17th, 1960, in a press conference held in Saigon by the new Director General of Information and the Secretary of State at the Presidency, Mr. Nguyen Dinh Thuan, these accusations were given an official character and extended even to cover the reporting prior to the uprising. Mr. Thuan said no more nor less than that the manner in which some correspondents wrote about Vietnam was partly responsible for the uprising. What is even more significant is a distinction he made among the foreign press, to the disadvantage of the U.S. press. This was done at the end of his press conference in an expression of thanks, especially for the British and French press, for their attempts to be fair. The U.S. press was left out, which meant that Vietnamese complaints about the foreign press were really only directed against the American press. About this press conference I will have to say a little more later on. Now I shall ^{TRY TO} ~~with the description of the events as published in the~~ ^{DESCRIBE WHAT REACTION} ~~reporting and the reactions outside of Vietnam.~~ ^{OF NOVEMBER 11 HAD IN THE UNITED STATES}

From a fairly complete collection of reports and editorials in the U.S. press two impressions arise. The first one, more limited both in number of papers and in the time span of their appearance, is a great deal of sympathy with the political aims of the rebels. As long as it was unclear who would be the winner, many papers revealed an underground feeling ranging from discomfort about to hostility against the President. There can be no doubt that the wish that the rebels may somehow succeed was widespread. No one actually said this openly, but it came out in the comments, most of which showed clearly a widespread desire that the President may be forced to compromise with the rebels. I am fairly sure that this was a feeling strong even among those who condemned the coup and hoped that the President would get the better of the rebels, ^{but} also hoped that he should continue in office only at the price of agreeing to some of the rebels' demands.

This seems to me an important point and I emphasize it because it is the key to much that has happened since then and will happen in the future. I would like to give you a personal reason for my belief that a wish for a partial success of the rebels was the real American reaction. I heard the news of the coup while I was in the Virgin Islands. When the New York Times arrived, I was, in spite of some knowledge I have of Vietnam and its political personnel, not at all clear about the political nature of the event. I did not

hesitate to accept as honest the rebels' claim of being anti-communist. There was no temptation on my part to liken this new affair to the paratrooper coup in Laos. It disappointed me to hear the name of Dr. Dan as political advisor of the rebels because I have a rather poor opinion of the political talents of this man. (This does not mean that I approved of his ejection from Parliament after his election in Saigon last year). I base my judgment on various documents from Dr. Dan's pen which I had occasion to read during the last few years. (Since then I have learned that the leaders of the paratroopers denied in a press conference that Dr. Dan was their political advisor.) About the other names mentioned in the first dispatches I knew virtually nothing, and yet, I kept my mind open and hoped for a solution ^{through which} ~~that~~ some of the political demands of ~~parties had been seen~~ ^{would have been met.} ~~between~~ the rebel leadership ~~and the government.~~ This feeling of course must be placed exactly in time. It arose in me at the moment when I knew that the President was besieged and when there were as yet no signs that army units from outside Saigon would rescue him. The alternative to his complete defeat which I contemplated with genuine horror, ^{would have been some sort of} ~~was such a~~ compromise. ~~The political meaning of my wish of that day was discontent, accumulated over a long time, with some of the conditions in Vietnam. Perhaps I should express myself on this point more precisely. I was not so much concerned with the generally deplored lack of~~

~~certain liberties as rather with the absence of a permanent and live contact between government and people. ~~I should like have to say more about this later.~~ If I had been under a compulsion to write an editorial during the first day of this rebellion, my writing would probably have reflected these feelings.~~

Now let me make this point perfectly clear. What I am trying to do here is to describe why this reaction of sympathy for the rebel cause came about in the United States. If a man of my known position toward Vietnam and the President was subject to such a reaction, you cannot be surprised by the picture we now have when we assemble everything that has been said and written here about the Saigon coup. Concerning myself, it is perfectly clear to me that my feelings were politically not very mature. This is common with political feelings which so often dominate political thinking. The thinking behind this reaction was mere wishful thinking. As so often, I and others would have liked to eat the cake and keep it. I suppose I should here reiterate that at no time did I wish the President to fall and this not only because I had immediate doubts about the leadership qualities of the rebels. South Vietnam's political health may be impaired by the President's ideas and personality, but I believe that the continued existence of the country requires this man.

When the rebels were routed, I had a feeling which I can best describe as disappointment over a lost opportunity.

Of course, I tried to comfort myself with the thought that the uprising must have been a lesson for Diem. But this was a weak comfort in view of my knowledge of the man. The last word in respect to the so-called reforms apparently already promised before the coup has not been said; we must await the steps that are being discussed and the measures supposedly in preparation before pronouncing a final judgment on this point; but I am not very hopeful.

One reason for my pessimism is the manner in which the President and leading members of the government reacted to the coup. A statement given to the representatives of the foreign powers in Saigon which I received from the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, can be described only as ridiculous. I will not dwell on this document of uninspired propaganda but rather judge the government by what has been said officially and unofficially during the last two weeks. Private reports, which are of course hard to verify, agree on the prevalence of a strong anti-U.S. sentiment among the government people. I have already mentioned Mr. Thuan's conspicuous avoidance of praise for the American press. This is sad because not much political gain from this bitter experience can be expected of people who seek the blame for it in others. There was in all reports from Americans in Saigon a definite emphasis on the absence of Vietnamese governmental self-criticism. This, by the way, is one of the reasons why in respect to the promised reforms my fears are so strong.

I am not unwilling to make allowances for people who have gone through what must have been a terrible political ordeal. It is also understandable that criticism from abroad of which they of course hear a great deal, must be irritating at this moment. This is true whether reforms are seriously contemplated or categorically denied. In the first instance, the reaction is like that of a child ~~who~~^{who} is constantly reprimanded for not doing things which it secretly makes honest efforts to do; in the second case irritation must turn to bitterness because the government must know that the refusal of reforms can lead only to still more criticism from abroad.

Before I now attempt to examine the complaints, accusations and grievances of the rebels and other oppositional voices in Vietnam, I would like to make clear that a government set up by the rebels carried with it no promise of improvements. The first and decisive point I want to make is the obvious incompetency which the rebels revealed. If they were really in control of Saigon for 36 hours and if they really had the government, as it seemed, at their mercy, I can see in their failure to overthrow Diem or to force him into a compromise only proof of disastrous organizational inability and political naivety. But perhaps there is a point in the government's assertion that some of the troops under rebel command did really not know what was going on and could therefore not be used to best purpose. Not to have prevented communication between the palace and the army in the provinces is a stupidity for which the only reward I can see ought to be failure. There

was apparently little or no preparation of the civilian opposition which is said to be strong in Saigon. If there were demonstrations by civilians at all, they were small and had no effect on the course of events. Like real dilettants, the rebel leaders divided in advance among themselves the positions in the government which they proved unable to conquer.

Let me here add an interesting detail. According to the latest reports from Saigon, which at least contain certain texts issued by the rebels during the action, the new government would have had at least one feature in common with the old, and that is the so-called nepotism. Half a dozen of its members were related to each other, which would have meant substituting one family at the top ~~for~~ another, contrary to the demands that this sort of system come to an end.

Let me now start my examination of the grievances and demands of the rebels, which I shall treat as an adequate expression of the existing opposition against the regime.

First, I shall give you my opinion about the so-called nepotism. To me the family ties among the members of the projected rebel government are as little objectionable as those in the existing government. It would be hard under present circumstances in Vietnam to find competent leaders who would not bring into the government close or distant relatives. This is due to the size of Vietnamese families, to the intensity of family ties, and to the fact that education

and therefore qualification for office can be found only in a relatively small group of people coming from a small number of formerly privileged families. The intellectual elite of Vietnam appears more numerous than it actually is. It does not consist of too many individuals who have singly risen out of many families, but of related groups belonging to a limited number of families whose members had the good fortune to receive an education under the colonial regime. The question here is not whether an uncle in the government has one or two nephews in high positions but rather whether the nephews are qualified or not. A family like the Ngo, consisting of a half a dozen exceptionally talented people, would have its members in official positions under any open regime.

Now to the facts concerning the President's family, which, incidentally, are not at all sensational. As you know, the family argument centers around the President's brothers in high position. A closer look reveals that in the actual government the President himself is the only member of his family. His youngest brother Nhu, ^{who,} with the exception of his wife, ^{is} the most vilified person of the regime, has a curious rank that carries the title "Advisor to the President". He also heads the political party on which the regime relies for organized population support. Another brother, Can, called the "Dictator of the Center", is a provincial administrator who does not head the government outfit in the Center. These two and Mr. Nhu's wife, of whom I shall speak later, are very much hated, and are

accused of abusing their power for personal ends, material and others.

I am of course not naive enough to disregard the ~~actual~~ power these people possess without actually being members of the government. What I am trying to say is that the fact of family relationship leaves me indifferent. I know that the President keeps his brothers because he trusts them and believes them to be competent almost to the point of being indispensable. I do not overlook the fact that there is no democratic mechanism through which an existing popular will could lead to the elimination of these men. But I refuse to give to this problem the character of the evil, diffuse and undefined, which the term nepotism indicates. No one thinks of nepotism merely as an abuse of power among members of a family; you pronounce the word and you instantly create also a picture of corruption, implying that this family holds on to its power chiefly for the purpose of personal gain. About corruption and its significance in politics I will say a lot more later on. Here I want to emphasize my conviction that not only is the President not corrupt, as everybody admits, but his brothers also are unjustly accused of whatever corruption is charged to them or actually exists in Vietnam. Gan is obviously a man interested only in power with a visible disregard of worldly goods. He does not even care for the honors of public office. I believe he should be in the open so that everyone knows that he is the master. This would silence some of the rumors against him which

stem largely from the mystery that surrounds a powerful man behind the scene. But against this we must weigh the fact of his extreme efficiency both in regard to the promotion of the Center's agricultural production and in regard to the security of this region.

Mr. Nhu is a horse of a different color. He has and exercises powers with which he can annul or promote ministerial decisions against the will of a minister and decide on appointments or dismissals like no one else in the entire administration with the exception of the President. This is an evil power made more obnoxious by Mr. Nhu's lack of respect for other people. A great deal could be said in his favor, but I do not want to give the impression that I approve of his role within the regime, or that I want to excuse the President for not checking his powers. What I have to say, however, is that all the incessant rumors about the abuse of his powers for personal gain have so far lacked any basis in fact. I am not the only one who has repeatedly tried, always without success, to get to the bottom of specific accusations. Whenever a profitable business transaction was said to have gone through the hands of Mr. Nhu, it turned out to have been one of the old and customary ways of supplying the treasury of the party. One may object to this method of financing a political movement, but if one does so, one cannot for the same reason accuse Mr. Nhu of personal corruption.

Because I do not want to leave out anything that has ever been said concerning the President's family, I shall

mention a few more persons and thereby show that the family argument, the broader it is conceived, becomes less and less substantial. The President has two more brothers, Luyen, who is ambassador in London, and Thuc, who is a Catholic bishop in the South. The Bishop, who is often mentioned, is probably not an unpolitical person, because of his church and family ties, but his political activity, as far as I could ascertain, is restricted to ecclesiastic affairs. He is incidentally one of the most charming and kindest people I have ever met. The last I have heard of him back in 1958 when I was in Vietnam was that he was very gravely ill, so much so that I could not visit him. Of Luyen I can only say that from his position in London he has no influence at all upon internal Vietnamese affairs, while the "power" he possesses as ambassador is quite negligible. One reason why the opposition has no leg to stand on concerning Luyen is their almost unanimous request that the President dispose of Mr. Nhu's power by sending him abroad as ambassador.

Speaking of ambassadors, I want to round out the family argument with a reference to Tran Van Chuong, the ambassador to Washington. He is related to the President by marriage. His wife is the mother of Mrs. Nhu, but you would be mistaken if you believed that the fact of this relationship denotes any extra influence for either Mr. or Mrs. Chuong. The contrary seems to be the case. I happen to know that there is no love lost between the Chuongs and the Ngos. It is quite safe to say

that the fact of their family relatedness is not the reason for the position the Chuongs have. I would also add that if I were in power in Saigon, I would certainly use a man like Mr. Chuong in an important position either at home or abroad.

For the sake of further diluting the family argument, one could argue that a family relationship to the President or his brother Nhu and ^{Nhu's} wife may under certain circumstances ~~be~~ actually ^{be} a great disadvantage. What I am now going to relate here is not to the President's credit but it certainly shows that family relationship to him can be a double-edged sword. One of the ablest young men Vietnam produced is a Mr. Chau, formerly Secretary of State at the Presidency, and now a disgruntled exile in Paris. He was married to a sister of Mrs. Nhu (who is, as you see from the above, also a daughter of Madame Chuong). I believe that Chau is out of the government and for the time being lost for Vietnam precisely because of his relationship to the "ruling family". The story is that he insisted on a divorce from his wife and that for this reason Madame Nhu worked against him until he offered his resignation which the President unfortunately accepted. However, I must point out here that this story also strengthens the position of the people who speak of the evils of family rule. It was indeed the power Mrs. Nhu was able to exercise which eliminated Chau from the government.

It is only appropriate to wind up this discourse on the family of the President with the famous Madame Nhu. I heard first of her when I was in Vietnam in 1954. She was

then the main target of ^{many} French intrigues and open attacks on the regime. The French in Saigon referred to her only as "the tigress", a designation which Joseph Alsop picked up in his reports from Saigon in December 1954, together with the whole French argument against the regime headed by Ngo Dinh Diem. There is no doubt that Mrs. Nhu then was the most outspoken and most forceful opponent of the French. This made her interesting to me. In fact, I took up her defense in my letters against Joseph Alsop to the Herald-Tribune which were however never published. I remember that the President himself talked to me about this matter at great length, pointing out the absurdity of the people who claimed that she was running the government. "How could she run the government", he said, "from a hospital in Hong Kong?" There she actually was, during some of the time of my stay in Saigon in 1954. This is the reason why I ~~only~~ ^{only} saw her for the first time a year or so later when she and her husband visited the United States. Her famous charms and beauty could obviously not have bewitched me in 1954.

When I was back in Saigon in 1958, Mrs. Nhu was ~~also~~ ^{again} out of the country. So I did not see her. My personal contacts with her in New York were too brief to entitle me to pronounce any judgment on her character and behavior from direct observation. All I know about her is secondhand, but it is a lot. During my stay in Vietnam in 1958 I ^{met,} literally, ~~met~~ only two Americans and not ^{a single} Vietnamese ~~at all~~ who had a good word to say

about Mrs. Nhu. Everybody was extremely bitter about her, both for political and personal reasons. She was then said to be in complete control of the Assembly where she pushed through the so-called family bill which makes divorce virtually impossible. Mrs. Nhu was allegedly motivated only by her hatred for Chau whose divorce from her sister she tried to prevent. I do not like this kind of argument because it can by its very nature contain only a fraction of the whole truth. But I am inclined to believe that the universal hatred this lady is able to arouse excludes the possibility of innocence. Her role in the Assembly, and her behavior toward the other Assembly members, is considered objectionable by everybody. There was also talk of business transactions which came about through her influence; the beneficiaries of such transactions were supposedly obliged to let the Nhus out in, but as I said before, the very systematic attempts to verify any of these rumors always ended negatively. Only once did a competent man produce real proof, but ~~as I said before~~, it showed that the beneficiary was the party organization headed by Mr. Nhu.

It is very hard to come to grips with this kind of argument in rational political terms. There is no denying that even if no corruption or abuse of power exists, an atmosphere of discomfort and distrust will always be engendered by the fact of such family relationships at the center of power. It is for these reasons that I wish something ^{could be} ~~done~~ done about it, in order to reduce the vulnerability of the regime. I believe the entire family argument would collapse

If the President made one single move, ^{to} deprive Mrs. Nhu of all official and unofficial power. There is a general agreement that this will be difficult to achieve without sending her out of the country. In this case the removal of Mr. Nhu would also be required, something the President obviously does not want. This could explain why he tolerates a situation that is not unknown to him, although rarely anyone has had the courage to discuss it with him. In fact I know only of one foreign diplomat who openly raised the question of Mrs. Nhu with the President. The answer he got was rather unexpected and could be described as evasive. The President actually said, "Why don't you talk to her husband; she isn't my wife".

I think this exhausts the unpleasant facts behind the accusation of nepotism. If I draw a political conclusion from this lengthy exposition, I would say that the sin of nepotism has importance only in a secondary way. It is blown up to unjustified proportions only because of the totally unpsychological manner in which the President reacts to all opposition against him and his regime. This is true for a great deal of political discontent in Saigon. Not the real facts of authoritarianism but the manner in which they find personal manifestation arouses the bitterness which characterizes the opposition against the President. I am not denying that the facts of the situation also arouse and partly justify the existing political opposition. I will speak about that later on. But the pettiness, and the

unresponsiveness to the real fundamental problems which characterize much of the opposition is largely the result of the President's disregard of personal sensibilities, a fault which seems to be even greater in his brothers Nhu and Can.

A word here about the alleged corruption. There is a very high degree of irresponsibility in all reporting and writing on corruption in Vietnam. Its existence is taken so much for granted that no one bothers to give or even to ask for proof of it. Because of this absence of proof or even attempted demonstration, and also because of the President's determined fight against corruption, I have long maintained that Vietnam is probably the least corrupt country of Southeast Asia. If you believe otherwise, please let me have at least a shred of evidence. Besides, what right do we have to complain about corruption in other countries? Lets talk about New York, which is undoubtedly a more corrupt city than Saigon.

To give you some relief, let me now speak about something more pleasant and politically less vague. I am still postponing the promised analysis of the extent of political unfreedom and the degree of justification that can be said to exist for the position on the other side. There is something very general I would first like to express in regard to the imperfection or the absence of democracy in countries we politically support. Whatever unfreedom we observe in such countries annoys us a great deal more than open dictatorship in the enemy camps or among so-called neutrals. I say it annoys us, which is of course

something different from our deep concern over the fate of the people in the enemy camp and over the dangers the existing dictatorships represent for the entire world. This annoyance, which one might compare to the sharp distress we feel over the imperfections of close relatives, colors our political judgment considerably. For instance, if we talk about a Communist country expressing regret over the political brutality of the regime, we often qualify our condemnation by referring to the economic and other achievements of these regimes. Some liberals sometimes even go so far as to excuse the methods of dictatorship because of the good result they supposedly produced. I wish that this way of looking at hard political reality were more often extended to the not so liberal regimes on our side. By this I do not mean to say anything in defense of real dictatorships. I am happy ^{about} ~~over~~ their overthrow in Korea, Venezuela and Turkey. I wish we took a more active part in overthrowing such regimes, particularly in countries where they represent a small parasitic upper class which does nothing at all to improve the economic and social conditions of the people.

Let us also keep in mind the difference between an authoritarian regime in an underdeveloped and ⁱⁿ an advanced country. The latter has traditions of democracy, established institutions for democratic controls, organized and responsible opposition parties with broad mass bases, general literacy and general participation in political life. In a dictatorship in such a country, as existed in Austria after 1934, the regime has to do away with democracy and hold down by force all attempts at

reviving democratic life. An authoritarian regime like that in Ghana or Vietnam does not have to destroy democracy, because democracy as a way of life does not exist, and could as yet not fully exist even under a government of democratic saints. The question here is one of not impeding the growth of democratic political elements that are possible although the economic and social conditions for a genuine democracy have not yet developed. If I went deeper into this question, I would never be able to end this letter. However, I am confident that I would be able to show that a regime may well deserve our support although it lacks most of the institutions of liberty we ourselves cherish.

We have here a problem which shows how difficult it is to generalize about countries showing certain similarities. South Vietnam does not fall easily in any of the categories into which lazy thinking wants to put it. Dien is no ^{Syngman} Rhee or Chang-Kai-shek. On the other hand, Dien's authoritarian regime is also something quite different from today's regime in Pakistan, and not at all like the military government that was temporarily in existence in Burma. It would also be interesting to compare the promise of democracy that Dien makes with the reality of the so-called "guided democracy" of Sukarno in Indonesia. Superficially there is more "democracy" in Thailand than in Vietnam, but anyone who tried to prove that the Thai people have more real freedom would have a hard task. In short, South Vietnam is a special case not only for special reasons, but simply because almost every country is a special case.

What is so special about South Vietnam in regard to the question I have just raised, namely the relationship between social and economic progress and political conditions? There are two outstanding facts. One is the political power of the Communists as it expresses itself in the ongoing campaign of assassination and sabotage. The secret of this power is the existence of the Communist regime in the North of Vietnam. The other outstanding fact characteristic for South Vietnam is the economic and social stability of the country, or, if you wish, the evidence of achievement in the economic and social field. It is remarkable how little notice critics usually take of this fact. I do not want them to repeat interminably what the regime has done in settling 800,000 refugees from the North. But why ^{are} the absence of inflation, the continuous rise in production of rice, rubber and other crops as well as the increase in salaries and in peasant income so consistently neglected? Well, the chief reason of course is ignorance. It takes a great deal of attention and work to put the innumerable and undramatic facts of economic and social progress together and present them as significant news. I do not want to bother you with too many figures. They are in any case not sensational. But the few I shall give ^{later} ~~later~~ below will show what the regime has already done for the people, and what it is continuously doing to improve their lot.

It is one of the virtues of President Diem that he makes no mere gestures in order to harvest applause. One might re-

proach him with excessive caution for his slow manner of going about the problem of industrialization. But one can only praise him for his determination not to do anything without solid preparation. The result is a very slow but an equally safe progress which is not likely to suffer any setbacks. Basic in the President's thinking is the importance of agriculture as a growing source of wealth for Vietnam. I think the approach he has chosen was wise and is already justified by the results. I could cite the land reform, the resettlement of people from the overcrowded Center in the highlands, and in particular the agriculture credit system to show what has been done.

It is perhaps not amiss to insert here the few figures with which I want to demonstrate the steady nature of South Vietnam's economic progress. Prices in Vietnam have now for years been stabilized and the cost of living ^{has} consequently been stable. The people live better now than in 1955, although fewer consumer goods are imported. The importation of investment goods has risen at the expense of consumer goods from 22% of the total in 1955 to 36% in 1959. This is important because without these investment goods industrialization cannot proceed. How it proceeds can be shown in textiles, paper and sugar. Vietnam produces now about one half of the textiles it needs. Textile production incidentally ^{has risen} ~~rose~~ 34% since 1953. There is a paper mill under construction which will begin production the middle of 1961 and will supply about

40% of the country's needs. Sugar production rose from 1,000 tons in 1957 to 5,000 in 1958, 33,000 in 1959 and 42,000 during 1960. This is more than one half of the total of the country's consumption. The dreadful imbalance between imports and exports which existed after the end of the Indochina war will take a long time to correct. But the progress that has been made through the reduction of imports and the increase of exports is substantial. The change since last year is that instead of paying only for 26% of the imports with Vietnamese exports, exports paid for 33% of the imports in the first half of 1960. The construction of the Dan Hia power project with Japanese reparations money will create, in two stages to be completed in 1963 and '65, one of the largest hydro-electric plants in the Far East. This will undoubtedly give an enormous impetus to industrialization.

I think it is the slow but sure effect of these achievements which explains the violence of the Communist attack in the South since 1958. Both land reform and agricultural credit have been received well by the peasant population and have together with the limits set for tenant rents done away with century-old abuses and miseries suffered by the people. I think some of the critics who deplore the President's unwillingness to relax his strict controls should speak more about these achievements and balance them against the less welcome aspects of the regime.

I shall now attempt to describe the conditions of

unfreedom and other critical aspects of the regime which make up the grievances of the opposition. But first, a word about the opposition itself. To my knowledge no one has ever tried seriously to assess the political weight and analyze the composition of the forces supposedly opposed to the regime. All we hear is that most of the intellectuals and the educated youth are dissatisfied and voice their dissatisfaction. To this some observers add that the mass of the people is indifferent. All critics agree that no enthusiasm for the regime exists anywhere in the country. The latter fact, according to most critics, explains the success of the Communist guerilla and assassination teams in the country.

The first thing I would like to point out is that it must be a relatively small number of people who constitute this opposition if it consists chiefly of intellectuals. They can be only a few thousand, even if lawyers, pharmacists, doctors and small businessmen are included, and they live chiefly or almost exclusively in Saigon. I think it is fair to assume that the much larger number of the educated classes which is in the administration, including most of the army officers and holders of well paid other positions depending on government money, cannot be added to the group of the intellectual opposition. Many of them may be dissatisfied with conditions in the country, but the advantages of their position certainly weigh ^{more} heavily with them. It is therefore incorrect and misleading to put all intellectuals in the opposition camp. I am

fairly certain that the great majority of them, as far as they live in Vietnam, supports the government, even if only half-heartedly. This picture would of course change drastically if one added to the dissatisfied groups in Saigon the large group of educated Vietnamese in France. I would not be surprised if their numbers were greater than those of all the intellectuals in Saigon. The Vietnamese intellectuals in Paris are all against the regime. The majority of them are probably Communists or Communist-sympathizers. The reasons for their dissatisfaction are different in many respects from those of the criticizing groups in Saigon. Many would go back to Vietnam only if they were assured of positions good enough to enable them to continue the much easier life they lead in Paris. I think it would not be fair to use their grievances as a measure of the actual conditions in Vietnam. The President has obviously decided that no policy on his part can bring these people back and turn them into supporters of a Vietnamese government dedicated to the social and economic improvement of the country.

Who are the so-called intellectuals in Saigon from whom most foreigners receive their information about conditions and their impressions about the political mood in the country? There is a small number of journalists either active or idle, a greater number of small businessmen and professionals, such as lawyers, doctors and dentists, and a substantial number of former land owners and their relatives, many of whom have lived and are still part of their families living in France. To these

must be added many students, teachers and professors, and the more conscientious and idealistically oriented younger elements on the lower levels of the administration. But I repeat that they can add up only to a few thousand people if we count as we should, in assessing opposition, only those really interested in public affairs. Their numerical strength and economic and intellectual weight is probably quite inferior to that of the dissatisfied Chinese community in Saigon-Cholon, whose grievances, however, very few Vietnamese critics are willing to share. (I might add here that the President has among his other achievements a tolerable solution of the Chinese problem, a problem that has plagued and is still plaguing other Southeast Asian countries very much more than Vietnam.)

In examining the case of the opposition against the government, I would assume that very few people in Vietnam or in the United States would be inclined to sympathize with the complaints of the larger land owners. The land reform was a big blow for them. Compensations are not excessive, and only a small percentage is given them in cash while the bulk of their wealth exists now in government bonds with which they will some day be able to become stockholders of the not yet existing Vietnamese industrial companies. But as regards land owners and land reform, the complaint that has to be taken seriously could only increase the dissatisfaction of this group. ~~From this~~ I am ^{here} referring to the demand some people have raised that the maximum landholdings which ^{are} now 100 hectares, be reduced to 50 hectares

in order to increase the available land for distribution among the still very large group of tenants and other landless people. I am sorry to say that the Saigon-centered intellectual opposition has so far shown little interest in this problem and certainly not made a more radical land reform one of its demands.

This point shows well that the interests of the opposition groups, as far as they are expressed in Saigon, are not at all identical with those of the mass of the people. But there are a number of points on which, by the nature of political processes, the intellectuals would express the general interests of the whole population. The difference, however, between a country like Vietnam and an advanced western country must not be overlooked. In an advanced western country the intellectual easily speaks for everybody if he makes himself the champion of civil liberties. Freedom of press, of assembly, of travel, of association for political purposes have a meaning for almost everybody in the advanced western societies. This is true only to a limited extent for a country like Vietnam. The mass of the people cannot be equally interested in freedom of the press if they see no newspaper all their lives long. Non-interference in the affairs of the village by provincial authorities is infinitely more important to them. But even more important is an effective educational system which eliminates illiteracy. This can only come through the government. Through the government also must come all help for the improvement of land yield through better working methods, crop selection,

etc., as well as better marketing facilities for the products of the villages. For 90% of the Vietnamese people an effective and competent administration is infinitely more important than a "liberal" administration. This is why the question of administrative efficiency and ^{the} fight against corruption preoccupies the President a great deal more than the degree of freedom or restriction for the Saigon press, and I am certain that in this respect he is closer to the people ^{or} than his critics.

Freedom of the press, however, could be vastly enlarged if two prerequisites were given. The first and most important one is connected with the security of the country. By security I do ~~here not~~ mean the need to suppress certain news because their dissemination is regarded as dangerous by the government. In that respect most governments, and that of President Diem in particular, make many unnecessary blunders. This is of course the chief reason why in a really democratic society it is not left to ^{certain} people, to their understanding and their good will, what news should be spread. Complete freedom in that respect is guaranteed by constitutions and laws. If I speak of security as a justified consideration for limiting the freedom of the press, I mean something quite different. If there were complete freedom of the press in South Vietnam, it would not take long for the press to be largely controlled by the Communists. The Communists know the methods of infiltration and have both the people and the money to use the opportunities that exist in

unrestricted freedom to publish newspapers and magazines. Their papers would of course not be in any sense "Communist", they would represent all shades of possible opposition identical only in that they would all be fervently democratic. They would also spread to smaller towns because they have the means to do ^{so}. No matter how small the Communist underground in the South may be, the Communists certainly dispose of the few hundred people they would need to obtain almost complete control of the Vietnamese press excepting one or two government sponsored papers. With such a weapon they would indeed be able to inflict deadly damage. As long as the Communist danger in Vietnam exists, complete freedom of the press is out of the question.

The second prerequisite for more freedom of the press is a larger degree of toleration by the government of the existing criticism that is not Communist-inspired. What I would like the government to do is to admit frankly and discuss openly the need for protective restrictions, apply them rigorously but learn to give up the pettiness in their daily treatment of the papers permitted to exist. The men in power, if they are at all honest in their avowed democratic aim, must learn to tolerate the unavoidable irritation which a good press represents for them. In that respect the government of Vietnam is unfortunately not better than any other government with the power to punish those who dare to criticize them. It is a pity that the President with his authority and unusual strength

of character does not set an example, but rather lets his brother who employ quite vicious means to punish critics. I am referring to the scandalous attacks on newspapers that keep occurring. They are presented to the world as expressions of popular anger but every child in Saigon knows that they are the work of thugs in the service of Mr. Nhu's organization.

It is because of such and similar occurrences that the great majority of the Americans in Saigon sympathizes with the opposition or rather finds the grievances against the regime justified. I believe there are now very few Americans in Vietnam who are not very critical of the government. They were so to speak in advance of public opinion in the United States which has adopted this anti-government attitude only since the November coup. Very few of the Americans in Vietnam are foolish enough to disregard the compelling reasons for limiting the freedom of the press. What exasperates them is governmental pettiness in dealing with this complicated problem. And they have little hope that this situation will soon improve. The first requisite for more freedom, namely the removal of the Communist danger, can now not be brought about quickly through any governmental action, although such action may soon lessen this danger. The second one, which would mean that in spite of necessary restrictions there is still enough freedom for a press to fulfill its important function, does depend on governmental understanding. There is little prospect that this will now come about, but it is not impossible for us to help bring about an improvement through constant friendly advice.

What I have said about freedom of the press can be applied to a large degree to all other freedoms. The necessary restrictions cannot be lifted in the foreseeable future. But a more enlightened management in all fields where government control must be exercised is possible. One might say that there exists a vicious circle out of which not even a government led by a political genius could break. All seems to depend on the quality of the government and administration, but how can they be improved without freedom to criticize their actions, or without institutions to replace them by popular will? I am fully aware of this dilemma, but also of the fact that there simply is no easy way out. We must learn that behind the President's rigidity there is a great deal of compulsion derived from South Vietnam's precarious situation. The government must learn to educate and pacify the opposition by the granting of possible freedoms and the discontinuation of administrative chicanery. The uprising, no matter how small the group involved actually was, must be taken as a warning. If that which in spite of the Communist danger can still be done to improve the relationship between the government and the opposition is indefinitely postponed, no amount of repressive preparation on the part of the government can remove the fear that the uprising of last November will be repeated on a larger scale.

drawn conclusions as to the attitude
Before I ~~certify that as now announced the most important~~
~~we should advocate toward the regime of President~~
~~result of this long investigation. One is that Vietnam, unlike~~
~~Ngo Dinh Diem, let me once more underline~~
~~for instance Indonesia, is economically healthy and orderly,~~
~~the nature and the importance of the Communist threat~~
~~setting forward in any direction. Do not credit this to the~~

~~Government. Another factor is that~~ ^{South} Vietnam is more plagued by Communist terror than any other non-Communist country in Asia. But the blame for this cannot be put on the government. Communist strength in South Vietnam is not simply a result of present conditions in the country, and the effectiveness of present communist action can only partly be explained with reference to these conditions and to the policies of the government in the South. Communist action is exercised by small and well organized guerilla bands whose main source of strength is the Communist state in North Vietnam. From there the armed Communist bands receive their leaders, their equipment, and from there their losses are constantly replaced. No one has any idea about the number of armed Communist agents who roam and terrorize the country, but experts in this kind of warfare believe that less than two thousand could easily account for the damage they are at present doing. Chiefly because of geographic conditions and poor means of communication, these guerillas are difficult to combat. They are able to terrorize the population, whose active support they do not need. Nobody knows how much strength the Communists might reveal in the South if the movement were ^{legal}; perhaps as much as in Indonesia. But that is a theoretical question at this time. Their present operations do not depend on much strength. One does not understand the situation if one believes that the guerillas can operate only if the people support them. The people are quite powerless against them in most parts of the country. They may hate them, and very likely do, and still be forced by the guerillas into submission or passivity, because of fear of terrible reprisals.

The suppression of the guerillas is a difficult military task, as Malaya and the Philippines showed; it will be made easier with the people's cooperation, but such cooperation presupposes already that the government be able to act much ^{more} quickly and more effectively than at present, because the people will otherwise remain subject to brutal communist revenge. Only when the government forces are organized in such a manner that the villages are at all times effectively protected can the people be expected openly to take part in anti-guerilla action.

Social and economic progress on the one hand, and the exceptional strength of the externally organized Communist terror on the other are the two facts that must always be kept in mind by anyone who wants to judge the Saigon government fairly. In both respects there is a general lack of information. It is partly the fault of the government if we are insufficiently informed ~~in~~ ^{about} ~~respect to~~ both the good economic and the bad security situation of South Vietnam. For reasons I do not quite understand, the government has so far prevented the world from fully realizing that the Communists have chosen what must be called the path of open civil war against the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. The extent of the Communist terror is actually officially minimized. No one knows exactly how many assassinations of officials and open government supporters the Communists commit. A foreign correspondent has recently been expelled from Vietnam because he wrote that the number was over 500 a month. Some observers believe the figure is even higher. A complete picture of this cruel conflict, the victims of which are often the best and most needed administrators

in the provinces, would go far in convincing the world that the expected war by the North to conquer the South has begun, and that the powers who are responsible for the country's partition through the Geneva Agreement cannot remain indefinitely passive in the face of this fact. It seems the leaders in Saigon themselves have only lately realized the extent and tenacity of the Communist onslaught, and are apparently still convinced that they can find the ways and means to bring the situation under control. The so-called Agrevilles - concentration of widely dispersed populations in larger settlements that are not exposed to nightly terrorization - and small specially trained anti-guerrilla units of the army, are two promising methods. I am sure that in the long run, the government will gain the upper hand, not only for reasons of improved military techniques but chiefly because the population does not wish the Communists to win. This I believe is true, in spite of much evidence produced by observers who constantly point out the lack of popular enthusiasm for the existing regime. Between lack of enthusiasm for the government - a phenomenon not limited to Vietnam but rather common all over the world - and active support for the Communist is a difference great enough to decide the outcome of the present battle in favor of the anti-Communist regime.

And now, probably in conclusion (because my time is running out), let me return to the question that affects the November coup in Saigon has already had and what others we may expect. One I have already discussed at length. It is the change for the worse of American public opinion toward Vietnam. This can

safely be taken as valid also for other countries and individuals formerly friendly to President Diem's regime. It is easy to guess that from now on criticism of the regime's policies will increase here and elsewhere, and that it will become more difficult to obtain from Congress the aid Vietnam needs to continue on the road of economic progress.

Another effect, related to the above, is a growing irritation in Vietnam government circles with American criticism and a stiffer Vietnamese attitude toward American advice. The two sides whose mutual understanding becomes more important as the crisis over Vietnam sharpens are now farther apart than at any time since the end of 1954.

This unfortunate gap could be bridged only if another effect of the coup, still hoped for by a minority of observers, would materialize quickly. I mean the promised reforms, which some observers expect to appease the opposition and to repair in the U.S. and the world the good name South Vietnam has lost. In its references to reform the government keeps emphasizing that its promised measures have nothing to do with the coup, because they were already announced by the President on October 3rd. This attitude, although understandable, augurs nothing good. However, what matters is the kind of reforms under consideration, and their impact upon the opposition at home, upon the critics abroad, and, above all, upon the masses of the population whom they affect.

I do not know whether it is a good or a bad sign that weeks have now gone by with no hint at all at the nature of the

reforms. (I hope you know something more concrete when this letter reaches you.) "A big change in the cabinet and in institutions", and "a beginning of the implementation of an extended reform and revamping of institutions" are the phrases used, the aim being more production and less dependence on foreign aid.

To be sure, this is more than just commendable; it may in the end be decisive; but it very likely means that the regime ~~sees neither~~ a need nor does it now contemplate any political reforms, such as would reduce immediately internal and external discontent. Diem is not the man likely to make a mere gesture, and obviously against appeasing people whose opinions and attitudes he condemns; in that sense, he is not a democratic politician, but acts rather as a stern father who in times of trouble inclines to become stricter. But the man has surprised us already several times and may yet have to reveal the full scope of his leadership abilities. It would indeed surprise me, however, if at this time he adopted a more understanding attitude toward foreign critics and a more lenient treatment of domestic anti-Communist opponents. The reforms will most likely concern themselves with, and be justified by, the double task of more effective anti-guerilla action and speedier economic progress, even at the risk, probably calculated, of reduced political support and less financial aid from the United States. This attitude is connected with a curious growth of confidence in France. This is no mere illusion. The French may deplore publicly Diem's heavy hand in dealing with the opposition, but

I expect them to continue their support of his regime. More than that, they probably will do everything they can to help should Washington decide to curtail its aid. The French are less touchy than America's friends of Diem in regard to the lack of civil liberties, and they are very keen to improve their economic and political position in Vietnam at the expense of the United States.

But what the French do or not ~~do~~ need not really influence America's policy. Whatever the reforms may turn out to be, and even if we find them politically very disappointing, the United States has at this time no other choice than to continue its support of South Vietnam's existing regime, and do it openly and without irritating qualifications. If we deplore the Vietnamese irritation over public criticism in the United States and find it devoid of deeper political understanding, we put ourselves automatically under an obligation not to commit the same fault. No matter how the leaders in Saigon may now irritate us, the situation can only become worse if we retaliate in kind. Here is a problem of partnership between two countries basically depending on each other that needs further and deeper exploration. But ~~as this~~ much is certain, that any break in the existing cooperation could only do grievous harm to both sides.

We must not only continue to support the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem. We must also respect and try to understand his approach, which is that effective military measures will reduce the threat coming from the Communists, and effective economic

measures increase the good will of the people toward the government. However, once this is made clear, we can and should freely express our opinion. I believe the President and his advisors must be made fully aware of the effect his policies and the recent coup have produced in the United States. We have a right and a duty to tell our opinion to those who in respect to the worldwide threat of Communism are in the same boat with us. Not only may we give advice, we must give it, but we cannot combine this with pressure, or ~~met~~^{note} out punishment in the form of reduced aid if our advice is not taken. This would be like acting as a poor typist who tries to improve her skill by cutting off the less dexterous of her fingers.

The task for American policy in Vietnam has become more difficult but also more urgent since the recent coup. It requires that the new administration send its best available people to a country which may soon be the center of a new world crisis. A policy is not wrong because its application becomes more difficult and its defense more painful. The alternative to support for Diem at this time could mean that we are willing to risk the loss of a fateful battle because we disagree with an ally on how the battle can best be waged.

I suppose you are as glad as I am that I have at last reached a conclusion, even if you should disagree with it, with which to ~~conclude~~^{end} this letter. Although ninety percent of it could well have been written in a form fit for publication,

I must beg you to treat it as a private document. Except for this limitation, which means that I do not want you to quote me from this letter, I leave it to your judgment what use you wish to make of its contents.