

July 30, 1965

DISCUSSION : P. J. HONEY AND STUDENT LEADERS

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Long: What is your opinion of the present situation in North Viet-Nam?

Honey: I just wrote a book on this subject: "Communism in North Viet-Nam" and I think it is going to be translated.

Thai: It is already translated by our Vietnamese papers. But I think that the main idea as is expressed in English has not been faithfully recorded. It rather has a propaganda purpose.

Honey: I have not read the translations yet. However, as far as I know, in the North people can buy 13.5 litres of rice per month. In big cities, they can buy more through black market but this is too expensive and the inhabitants have but little money. The standard of life is very poor in the North; money, rice and salary are very scarce. For clothing, people are allowed to buy three meters of material per year and they cannot purchase without a permission from the Tow Commission unless they write a letter explaining the reasons. The North also faces the problem of juvenile delinquency. These teen-age boys are sent to the mountains.

Long: The 1956 Rural Reform is said to be a failure because it's too doctrinal. What do you think of it?

Honey: You'd better look up Hoang Van Tri's "From Colonialism to Communism". The reason for this failure is because the Northern Government doesn't have much money to pay for industry and has to raise high taxes. The peasant is impoverished by this measure. Their productivity lowers and they have but little rice left for their own. After the rural reform each family receives a small lot for their daily products. Le Doan's 1962 statistics show that 98% of the fields belong to the government and produce 47% of the total rice, whereas 50% of the total rice come from private families. This shows that the peasant working for his own has better output than when working for the government.

An: Do the Northern people realize that the presence of the Chinese has a propaganda influence?

Honey: In theory, the Chinese are supposed to assist Northern industry but in fact they have a great influence. In 1962, after their first unclear test, the Soviets proposed their help to North VN but Ho-Chi-Minh refused to sign the agreements. Therefore the Soviets' influence is not so great as the Chinese's. In a letter a friend sent me, he told me that Northern people listen to Pekin radio more than to Moscow's.

Loc: Does the Chinese influence supersede the Soviets' ?

Honey: There has been so much propaganda in Northern papers that it is

difficult to know the truth. The Chinese are now afraid less the two growing nations - USA and USSR - might divide the world into two zones of influence and thus lose its own influence. Red China wants to destroy the influence of Russia and USA and tries to force the North continue the war in South VN. The Soviets, on the contrary, are afraid to engage too far in this war with the Americans. They send but little armement to the North.

Tue: How is the fighting strength of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam?

Honey: Many are drafted in the North. They must be well trained soldiers for they are most of them former militia men; however, they lack experience in fighting whereas many of the Northern officers have got some experience.

Long: about the competition for influence between China and Russia I think that if the North Vietnamese Government follows either Red China or Russia, it will be to their disadvantage anyhow. Can you think of a possible solution as Tito did in Yougoslavia?

Honey: The economy in North Vietnam needs foreign aid. The North Vietnamese Government doesn't want help from the free world. It's better for it to receive it from their fellow communist countries. In addition, Ho-Chi-Minh cannot do what Tito did: North Vietnam lies next to China whereas Yougoslavia is farther off from Russia.

Long: After this war, is there any hope for unification?

Honey: If Ho-Chi-Minh stopped sending troops in the South there might be peace here. The present situation in Viet-Nam is much similar to Germany: 2 regimes that are not on speaking term. Everybody wishes that one day there will be a Conference to unify Germany, but at one condition: That there should be no pressure to force a solution.

Long: Does the Americans' bombing of North VN aim at driving Red China into the war to have a reason for attacking it so as to ward off future aggression when RC becomes too powerful?

Honey: I don't think it necessary for the Americans to worry so far. At the present time, old leaders such as Mao Tse Tung and Ho-Chi-Minh are in power. But in some more years, these people will die and younger people will change China's policy as has been done in USSR and we may come to term then. But until then, the Americans have to go on bombing North Viet-Nam.

Tue: President Johnson said that if North Vietnam accepted to stop its aggression, the U.S.A. would give a one-billion dollar-aid for economic reforms. What do you think the North will answer this?

Honey: The situation in North Viet-Nam is like Europe after WW2. The Communist countries wanted to receive aid from the Marshall Plan but refused to do so. Maybe they had help from other sources.

Loc: North Vietnam refused to receive the Peace Corps. Did Davies' delegation have better results?

Honey: In Great Britain, there were fifty members in the Labor Party who were for peace and negotiation with North Viet-Nam. Wilson sent a delegation to North VN with Davies at its head to prove them that Hanoi doesn't wish any negotiation.

Loc: If the North refuses to negotiate, is it because the North Vietnamese people want to pursue this war and Hanoi authorities dare not sign an agreement that goes against the people's will the way Ho Chi Minh refused to accept conditions set up by Fontainebleau Conference because the Vietnamese people were opposed to the conditions imposed by the French?

Honey: I don't think so. I believe that both North and South Vietnamese people want unification and hope for an agreement.

Thai: In 1956 there was a chance for re-unification. The North wanted an agreement so that there could be economic exchange.

Honey: If I were Diem, I would have accepted and invited the United Nations here to organize a free referendum. I think Diem's policy was wrong and it's too late now to make up for the loss.

Tue: Two years (1954-56) is too short for the Vietnamese to understand what Communism really is.

Honey: Diem was afraid that if there was a referendum in 1956, the South Vietnamese would have voted for Ho Chi Minh. But after the failure that followed the rural reform, both the North and South Vietnamese would have lost faith in the North regime.

Thai: What is your opinion of the Front for Liberation of South Viet-Nam?

Honey: According to me, the Front for the Liberation of South Viet-Nam is an organization consisting of cadres coming from the North, receiving orders from Hanoi and with no freedom for action. The Call-back program may destroy this Front but the difficulties are numerous for once the rebels leave the enemy's rank they need to be provided with conditions for subsistence and yet there is a sense of drafting them into the army and a sense of suspicion always hovers on top of them.

Long: Many do not understand our policy and doubt the Americans. The Communists may use this for their propaganda.

Honey: The Communists are very skillful in their propaganda. They are even helped by the free world. We are lacking behind them in this field and time is scarce now to make up for it. If possible, I will invite individuals to go abroad, make speeches and write for foreign papers.

Bau: I would like you to give a historical criticism of the period extending from 1945 till now. What should have been done historically during this period? For if we understand the past, we can avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

Honey: I agree that there has been much failure in the South and that we should understand these failures to escape future mistakes.

Hoat: If there had been a referendum, you believe that the North would not have voted for Ho Chi Minh. You must have reasons for saying so. We know some defects such as the 56 rural reform, but this was rather technical and leadership defect. We had no proof that there was discontent among the people. What was the youth's attitude?

Honey: The North Vietnamese knew little of Communism. But after the 56 rural reform they must have understood it since they were directly concerned and they must be unhappy about it.

Hoat: If there was discontent among the people, why wasn't there a revolution of the Hungarian kind?

Honey: In Quynh-Luu, the people revolted but the French and Americans could do nothing, for if they did the Chinese would interfere and establish a kind of demination like the Russians in Hungary.

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Honey: Are you satisfied with this government, if not, what reforms do you wish?

Vi: We don't have much sympathy for Ky. It is true that he knows and dares do what he wants, he promises much - the 26 point program - but till now the economic situation has not improved. The high living standard has not been solved and yet higher taxes on drinks are raised. Problems pile up one on top of the other instead of being solved. One month has passed by and our people think that a promise that cannot be kept will destroy our faith and is but a flattering, a dupery.

Honey: Has any one of you studied Economics? What do you think General Ky should do to lower the standard of life? The leaders of every country say the same thing but if it ends in failure, the responsibility is the specialists', the economists'. I believe that Ky wants to keep his promise but if he cannot, it must be a purely technical failure.

Tu: In our country, the trader is now facing with a dilemma: the government on one side and the VC on the other. Besides, this kind of life based on American aid seems superficial. It gives a sense of insecurity.

Bau: Our two worst enemies are now the VC and Chinese traders. On the one hand the VC prevent the transportation of food while on the other, the Chinese make opeculation everywhere they like because they have money; they can lend it to the peasant and obtain from the later the privilege of having rice delivered to them at harvest time. We propose that the government should help the peasants by organizing rural cooperations with governmental aid, lend money to them and sell rice directly to the people. Now, about the problem of distribution, the government has to face a dilemma too: either ask for the students' assistance - but these are busy with their class

work - or the civil servants' - whose probity is not guaranteed. Therefore, we have to buy American rice whereas our rice will go to the VC.

Honey: Diem did try the government-step-in solution but he too met with failure, for the peasant did not have faith in the government and besides, they were used to trading with the Chinese.

Bau: We, Asian people, live with feelings. While trading, the Chinese never cheat and between themselves, the Chinese and Vietnamese can make loose agreements whereas the case is not the same when we have to deal with the government and formalities. Another thing is that civil servants are not well-trained agents, therefore they are liable to corruption.

Honey: Now Ky has lowered the civil servants' salary. Do you agree with this measure?

Tue: Lowering salary is not the point if the government can provide us with living conditions where we can abide by accordingly. But here a high living status plus low salary form a vicious cycle from which we can't step out.

Vinh: Now, to go back to your previous question as to whether or not we are satisfied with this government and what reforms we aspire after, what we are witnessing now is a phenomenon of younger generations. After Diem we were desperate with the old generation. We are now optimistic with regards to the youth and not the effectiveness of Ky's cabinet yet. The present baders are not well-trained politicians. While the old skillful leaders were all killed, the young ones lack experience and leadership ability, however, they are honest and dare to act but there is a limit to this.

Tue: In this area of "deception", the military strong measures are necessary but not sufficient.

Honey: Nguyen Ngoc Bich had tried to find out the reasons for the failures in Viet-Nam. According to him, the able men must have been killed by the Viet-Minh and the French or they became communists themselves. What must be done now is to let the young leaders have their chance and acquire more experience progressively.

Bau: Under Diem, civil servants were forced into cadres (Republican Youth). But this movement failed: 1) because it was too doctrinal, 2) it cannot prove its efficiency during the short time of its existence. Then, after 63, there were coups followed by changes at the upper administrative level. We saw the government through village administrators who could be divided into 2 categories: either they were honest and able men and liable to VC's discriminations or corrupted and bent now on the republican, now on the communist side. What we want is a policy in administrative reforms, well-trained people to fill administrative posts.

Long: In Confucius time, the notions of oldness and wisdom were confused. What we need at the present time are personal ability and a national spirit, entertain among our people a sense of "national following".

Honey: If I were a villager and had no condition to defend myself, I would be forced to follow the VC. And if the Republican army come I would shift to its side. This is quite natural, how can we talk about "national following" then?

An: Since we are speaking of reforms, I would like to mention Ky's 26 point program in which the question of making a revolution is raised. How shall we make it, where to start? I think we should start with the army itself because of the very fact that we need American military assistance now and quite a few people have a mercenary spirit.

Honey: I've heard the word "revolution" repeated over and over again. But truly speaking, I don't understand what you mean but it.

An: A general transformation because here everything is corruption.

Long: The word "revolution" has lost its meaning because there has been an inflation of the term, even among military leaders, that it has become a kind of slogan.

An: The kind of revolution we need should be both mental and concrete. We have to face a war on a general scale therefore we don't know where to begin with and trample around in a vicious circle.

Honey: I believe no Vietnamese likes to kill his fellowmen. The British don't like to kill each other, therefore they set to make reforms. On the contrary, French people like to kill and they start revolutions.

Tue: After Maurice Duverger, revolution means "a fight in the regime, a fight for the regime". Every effort aims at shaping a government. In villages where there is a good administration, there are at least two regiments of fighting youths stationed there whereas at other places, you can find either one of the 2 categories of people mentioned before: good-willed and honest persons or two-side people. So, what people say for the case of Malaysia - 6 soldiers to fight against 1 guerilla - should be "10 soldiers for 1 guerilla" in VN.

Bau: We, Vietnamese, feel nearer the British than the French in that we don't like strong actions. Why do we talk about "revolution" now? There have been revolutions, but not those of the Russian kinds. We are in an "against the wall" position. We have been deprived of the right to make revolutions. Before, the Communists had an advantage on us: that of being resistants, for to fight against the Communists meant to walk with the French and thus became "Viet Gian" or traitors. Now we need American help and may lose the people's support - Revolution aims at obtaining something and not losing something - The Vietnamese people have one aspiration and one obsession: can we become a purely Vietnamese people?

Honey: The revolution in North Viet-Nam aimed at satisfying the people's will. But the Northern authorities have killed many persons and thus raised much discontent. Here we need a kind of life suitable to the Vietnamese people.

Bau: The revolution in the North was indeed superficial and had but few followers. I agree that we must find a way of life for the Vietnamese people and not go to the former state of things. We have to fill the gap resulting from the loss of able men. We must frame the people and force them to take part in the revolution.

Honey: Yesterday, I saw a woman arrested by a policeman for she was caught selling lottery tickets for 11\$ each. At the police station, Dr. Phan-Quang-Dan pleaded for her. He said that the legal price of one lottery ticket was 9,5\$ but she had to pay 10\$ for it. If the police seized her 700 tickets - which represented all her worldly belongings - this would bring about the poor woman's ruin. The fault was not the woman's but others' who had made her pay more than was indicated. If not for Dr. Phan Quang Dan, who would be there to defend the woman's cause? This is to show you how much difficult it is to know the real culprit so as to inflict punishment.

Vinh: Corruption is among authority officials and the contractors themselves.

Honey: However, General Ky primised to make reforms.

Vinh: We are tired of waiting

Honey: But for a month

Thai: We have always been on a subordinate footing. After Diem's regime, we saw governments set up without popular election; and now, why don't we have the right to talk with the North?

Honey: The two governments don't want to exchange relations for to recognize the National Front for the Liberation of South VN is to recognize the partition of VN.

Honey: There is no advantage in negotiating when the two parties are still fighting.

Vi: When De Gaule started his campaign for Neutralism, we marched to the French Embassy to protest but we still ignore what De Gaule's neutralism is about?

Honey: At the time, I was in Paris and made inquiries about De Gaule's neutralism. But those who went to meet the French President were told that their duty is to execute his orders and not understand them. May be De Gaule himself didn't know more.

Vi: What is the best attitude we should adopt now?

Honey: Peace can be re-established when the North has suffered great damages and understood that to attack South VN is harmful to them. Until then, there's little hope that the North government will be willing to attend an international conference for this is as though they recognize their own failure. They would rather withdraw their troops and say that they had never

interfered in the South. I don't believe that an international solution can be attained.

Vi: What are your advices to this government?

Honey: I consulted your government officials I came here to learn more about the present situation. I dare not say what they should do.

Long: How can you explain the fact that the North Vietnamese army, composed mostly of badly trained guerillas should be so very dangerous?

Honey: I talked to a soldier who had been made prisoner by the VC once and he told me that during his two year stay in Communist Zone, he observed that a great number of guerilla leaders were very skillful but most of their followers had no spirit and had other reasons for staying with the VC: either they were forced to or they were Diem's opponents and were afraid to come back because they had once supported Communism. If those good leaders went back North, their followers would surrender. Besides if they succeed, those leaders would become high officials under Communist regime.

Long: We are now detaining a force of 30,000 pro-communists (prisoners). Why don't we call them back to our cause and use them as a means in our anti-communism propaganda?

Honey: That won't be a wise measure for those prisoners won't forget the bad treatment they have been through.

Long: What role is Ho Chi Minh playing now?

Honey: We'd better not talk about Ho Chi Minh now. He has grown old and lost most of his power. The others don't have as much talent and experience in internal affairs but they just cannot get rid of him because Ho Chi Minh is so famous. He has no more power now. In 1945, the Nationalists didn't want to talk with the French because they were enemies and the Communists shared the Nationalists' attitude. Ho Chi Minh who was a courageous and talented man, knew that to succeed one had to talk with the French, he was then called a traitor by the Nationalists. At the present time, there are three parties in the North: one headed by Truong Chinh and supported by the Chinese - this party is not for negotiation with the South - Nguyen Duy Trinh, who belongs to this group, doesn't want an international conference. Another party headed by Le Dzuan tries to conserve its advantages whereas the Laborites will have a position in every activity. A third party, among which Pham Van Dong, are Soviet followers and don't believe in warfare. Vo Nguyen Giap hates the Chinese (may they be Reds or Nationalists) and his party wants to negotiate with the South but knows that they will be criticized by their rivals. If Ho Chi Minh controlled the political situation, there would have been negotiations a long time ago.

Thai: Which party does the National Front for the Liberation of South VN follow?

Honey: Phan Quoc Viet is a Chinese follower. His orders are for pushing further this invasion.

Loc: Do you think this war will go on until the North regime crumbles under economic depression or will there be a revolution in the North?

Honey: Red China promised much aid but gave little. When the North asked for more military aid, the Chinese were afraid to engage too far and gave therefore little help. When the Americans started their bombing and that the Chinese did nothing, there were protestations from the North Vietnamese government. The Chinese projected a film and said to the North Vietnamese that the 10 million Chinese will be a sufficient threat to the world.

Vi: Do you think that the successive bombings on North VN will force the North to sit at the Conference Table?

Honey: I myself don't understand American policy very well. However, it is very dangerous to continue like this.

Vi: Will this war end in destruction as in Korea before any agreement can be reached?

Bau: Can there be any solution to save VN and insure a long-lasting peace against the ambitions of Red China?

Honey: If the North failed in their invasion, they would not attempt another attack. If they succeeded, China would supersede and invade their neighboring countries.

Thai: How can we have peace when the presence of foreigners is almost permanent here? The Chinese will grow alarmed and continue their aggression.

Vinh: After the failure met by Davies' delegation, do you think Japanese influence will grow as a medium nation?

Honey: Unless the North regime wants to negotiate, there's no need to send more delegations.

Bau: Is there any hope for the disparition of borders between USSR, Red China and America?

Honey: Before, no effort was made to promote better understanding between these countries. But now the relations between USSR and America have become better and there is hope that the same thing will happen with Red China.

An: It has been said that this war is not between Communism and Freedom but rather a migrating movement of Asian people to larger countries such as New Zealand and Australia. Do you agree that this is a war between races?

Honey: I think this is rather a question of birth control. If so, the war solution is good then.

Thai: There are now Americans, Australians and New Zealanders fighting in Viet-Nam. The Communists use this for their propoganda, saying that VN is being the prey of imperialistic nations. What can the Western countries do to counteract that?

Honey: I am not the person who can give an answer for that.