

INDOCHINA SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

June 15, 1975

We are writing to you to share our joy for the Victories of the Indochinese Peoples, and to inform you of the Closing of the Indochina Solidarity Committee.

THE INDOCHINESE PEOPLE HAVE WON!

Vietnam, Cambodia and now Laos are free of U.S. Imperialism and are embarking on their long needed social revolutions to create democratic, prosperous, sovereign and progressive societies.

All who have been a part of this great struggle may rejoice. Some of us will now turn more of our attention to our own peoples' social needs and others will continue to work on the issues that remain important for both the Indochinese and American peoples; such as the questions of the Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees and repatriation for those who want it, the reconstruction of the countrysides and economies, material aid, recognition of the new governments and the reunification of Vietnam - and most important for Americans, keeping alive the revolutionary lessons of that war.

THE WORK CONTINUES . . .

In the following pages, we explain briefly the ending of ISC, but we want to stress here that more important is the work we will all be continuing towards the ending of the system of imperialism and all the exploitation and repression that humankind suffers under.

U.S. / VIETNAMESE FRIENDSHIP

Serious thought and preparation is being given by many different anti-war and anti-imperialist activists and organizations around the U.S. to the formation of a broad-based U.S./VIETNAMESE FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION. We strongly support this aim and will work with the New York chapter of the Indochina Peace Campaign, at 135 West 4 Street, toward the establishment of a local friendship group. We urge you to consider supporting this goal so that we can build upon the last 10 years of work. We will forward information about these plans shortly.

I.S.C. CLOSES

For over ten years the U.S. Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (USCANLFSVN), which later became Indochina Solidarity Committee (ISC), was part of the anti-war, anti-imperialist movement in solidarity with the liberation struggles in Indochina. Now after that war has been won, ISC has been disbanded. Unfortunately, this was not done with unity, but because of a split that has destroyed the old ISC.

For some time, growing political differences had developed within ISC and, concurrently, within the local chapter of Indochina Peace Campaign/New York City (IPC/NYC) (in which all ISC people were members and which had essentially become one organization.) The major political differences arose out of the fact that some ISC members had, in the last year or so, transferred their political allegiance to the politics of the Revolutionary Union (RU), while others did not.

The Revolutionary Union, which had its origins in the 1968 SDS splits, is a self-proclaimed Marxist/Leninist/Maoist nationwide organization that is currently striving to form itself into the "New Communist Party" in the U.S. This push has caused RU supporters to seek hegemony in many movement organizations around the country. RU supporters, who sincerely believe that they are the most correct group to lead the working class at this time, tend to treat those who disagree with their leadership as if that disagreement makes one the "enemy." This has been evidenced by their style of ruthless and often antagonistic methods of struggle with people of other political tendencies. Such conflicts have destroyed or resulted in RU takeovers and ripoffs of certain groups, ie: The Rest of the New, People's Translation Service, San Francisco Thirdworld Newsreel, and some chapters and the national office of VVAW/WSO.

We believe people should investigate the line and practice of RU for themselves, but here for example is how the RU speaks of other tendencies on the Left:

...the proletariat (i.e. the RU) takes a ruthless stand against those petty bourgeois hustlers who refuse to take the stand of the working class...the leaders of these groups are deadly enemies of the working class... These various agents of imperialism, in and of themselves, amount to nothing more than cockroaches which the working class could squash under its feet. But these types do pose a greater potential danger--they can act as "shock troops" for the development of a phony "socialist" or "progressive" movement...

(Draft Programme, p. 25-26)

The lessons of the United Front in Vietnam seem lost to them. It seems that in their fight for power, the RU has become insensitive to the qualities of humanity that are the goals of any left revolution. Even during protracted armed struggle the Vietnamese maintained their great sensitivity and love of humanity. They gave their guerrilla soldiers flowers for medals and combined poetry and politics to lead their people.

USCANLFSVN TO ISC TO NOW

USCANLFSVN was formed in 1965 by Walter Teague and several others and remained, until 1972, a voluntary association. Many hundreds of people contributed to its work and helped gather one of the most complete collections of revolutionary Indochinese materials in the U.S. Gradually from 1972 to late 1974, USCANLFSVN/ISC became more collective. Among the new people who joined were Martha Chamberlain in 1971 and later, from 1971 until 1974, the five members of ISC who have politically joined RU; Gina Harman, Mike Stout, Felice Weintraub, Chris Galanos and Gary Hansjorgen.

During the period of collective work, much was accomplished. But the underlying political differences grew and became increasingly disruptive in 1974.

At some point Gina Harman joined RU and the other four became at least complete supporters of RU and its politics. This new allegiance came in direct conflict with the historic functioning of ISC.

USCANLFSVN/ISC had always been an independent solidarity committee, which did not take positions on matters unrelated to its primary work and carefully avoided positions contradictory to those of the Indochinese Revolutionaries. In practice this meant that we worked for broad coalitions within the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements. Just as the Vietnamese accepted support from pacifists or liberals, Trotskyists or Maoists, so too we worked as best we could with all tendencies who opposed the war. It meant for example, that we did not take public positions on questions that could put us at odds with the Indochinese, such as taking sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

But gradually, it became more difficult for ISC to function collectively. The five who adopted RU's politics began to take more antagonistic positions toward various political tendencies that the RU had disagreements with. This meant, for example that our resources were not readily available to feminist groups, or groups associated in any way with Trotskyist or Prairie Fire politics, or supporters of the Soviet Union. Increasingly, the others found fault with coalitions and tendencies that gave what they felt was too much consideration to the self determination of 3rd World people. Within the U.S. for example, they opposed the right of 3rd world women in the organizing of the U.S./ Vietnam Women's Conference to select 3rd world delegates.

As their political stance hardened, it became less possible for us to work with unity and respect in other coalitions, such as with national IPC and the U.S. Vietnamese Women's Conference. Private criticism and derision toward one and all that were on the "outs" with RU became common. Eventually the others in ISC started using their majority to block anything that didn't fit with their new political priorities. But this process could not change the fact that ISC remained more than just a collective of seven people.

Over a period of ten years, hundreds of people had worked and associated with USCANLFSVN/ISC and had helped put together an extensive collection of Indochina resources. This included thousands of documents, photos, films and books. One of the most valuable was the most complete set of Vietnamese literature in English in this country, gathered from 1964 until the present. Many other items were donated by the Vietnamese and many visitors to Indochina. These materials, gathered and held in trust for both the Indochinese and American people, should have great continuing value for all who want to understand the Indochina war from the revolutionary point of view.

THE BREAK

After a final breakdown in collectivity, which occurred during preparations for the Victory Celebration in Montreal May 18-19, we proposed to the others that a public split be avoided and that the organization be disbanded with one last newsletter stressing the victories and announcing what future work each of us was going to be doing. We suggested that the resources be equitably distributed according to usefulness, etc. The others adamantly rejected our proposal and instead said that they were going to keep the name and organization and that Martha and Walter should resign immediately. We urged them to consider our proposal for a week and we parted. We had no further discussions until the events described below.

THE RIPOFF

On Monday, May 26 in the early AM, the RU supporters in ISC and others stole the major important resources from the ISC office in the Washington Square Church. They also took many valuable items belonging to the church and individuals. Lists are available.

About 2PM, Walter Teague and Martha Chamberlain discovered that the others in ISC had changed the lock on the office and when they tried to enter, the other ISC people and some of their friends came with sticks and threatened Walter, Martha, and the staff of the church if they tried to enter. They told Martha and Walter that they had been "voted" out of ISC and would be kept out of the office by force.

There have been no such procedures in ISC in the past. After refusing entry to the minister of the church, the RU supporters did accept his offer to mediate and finally admitted that they had taken items from the ISC office. Later they agreed that Walter could enter the office with Gary to inventory what was left and to discuss what each side thought right to do with the various resources. The other group admitted they had

taken valuable church and personal items but were unwilling to return or to release to anyone the Indochinese materials. They did finally return some church equipment and a tape deck of Walters, but kept a mimeograph and shortwave radio that belonged to other individuals. They also kept much other valuable equipment that others helped provide to ISC. From that Monday until Saturday night that group and their friends held on to the gutted and dysfunctional ISC office. They barricaded it and carried around lead pipes, and other similar weapons. Also from Monday until Sunday, many long time supporters of the work of USCANLFSVN/ISC came to the church to prevent anything else from being taken out. During this time they were joined by members of the church who volunteered to stay 24 hours a day to protect the church and remaining materials.

A mass meeting was called for Sunday by many different concerned groups. The other ISC people decided to force the issue before that mass meeting and on Saturday requested a meeting with the minister, Paul Abels. They made various proposals, none of which included the return of any Indochina items, but which did demand for example, 5/7ths of the value of the remaining furniture in the ISC office. During these negotiations, the church members and staff learned that they were calling around for carloads of their people to come to the church. Again church members and friends of ISC and IPC gathered at the church to prevent any further thefts.

Martha and Walter and the others refused to negotiate away any more of ISC's remaining resources, partly because the others already had thousands of dollars worth of equipment as well as the important political items, but also because we did not wish to allow the threat of force to intimidate anyone.

The minister finally had to insist that the others in ISC leave the church with only their personal possessions and the office was closed to all.

The mass meeting on Sunday June 1 was attended by over 50 people representing a broad spectrum of the New York anti-war and progressive movement. They agreed to denounce the theft and to build pressure for the return of the materials, temporarily to the custody of an uninvolved group (The War Resisters League), after which the movement as a whole would then decide the best and proper place for these resources to be accessible for all.

THE COMMITTEE TO RECLAIM THE INDOCHINA RESOURCES

They set up a Committee to Reclaim the Indochina Resources to begin this work at 135 West 4 Street. This committee itemized the remaining organizational materials in the ISC office and turned them over to the War Resisters League.

By their theft of the Indochina materials, the 5 people from ISC have proven their disdain for the years of work of hundreds of people, and have abrogated to themselves the right to determine the use of materials that in reality belong to the whole movement. We urge you to do all you can to pressure them to return these items.

We believe a group representing the movement at large must have custody of these resources, otherwise many good and serious activists will be denied access to these materials. Certainly this denial will include all the old members of ISC, and those who have strong disagreements with the RU. It will clearly include all those individuals who worked against the removal of more materials from Washington Square Church and all who have joined in demanding their return. And since the real allegiance of the other group is now to RU, and since RU's behaviour is increasingly sectarian, it will probably include people in the growing number of groups that the RU is antagonistic toward.

Refusal to return these items can only prove the exploitative nature of their actions. They are now declaring that they are the only ISC. They will probably publish an ISC

newsletter and have claimed that anyone will have access to the materials at some point in the future, except those who are working for the return of the materials. The same people are also trying to hold onto the name of IPC/NYC even though they were expelled from IPC for "sectarian, disruptive and antagonistic behavior," by the national IPC Standing Committee, in a letter dated May 13.

It has been made very clear to us through months of practice with them, that in light of their almost total contempt for the politics, practices and program of National IPC, the only reason they can put forward for attempting to maintain the national affiliation, is as a means to attack the "wrong" politics of National IPC. We too have had disagreements with some of national IPC's politics, but we and the others in the official IPC/NYC chapter also respect the work and intentions of the national and local chapters of IPC and do not see ourselves as antagonistic to the essential program or politics of National IPC.

The others are now planning to form an Indochina friendship association which will be made up mostly of their own people and for which the Indochina resources will be very useful. We hope this opportunism will be exposed and condemned. What is needed is the formation of a true friendship association in which all activists and future supporters of U.S./Vietnamese Friendship may join without having to accept the RU's line on such questions as the Sino-Soviet split, the national question, their limited concept of the united front, or the RU's recent approach to coalition which has caused so many splits and breakdowns; such as with the Oman Coalition, the difficulties in the U.S./Vietnamese Womens Conference, etc.

If you wish more documentation or clarification, please write or call us. We will continue to use the Box C address and 982-7162. We will be working with the others in IPC/NYC chapter and other groups. All new materials on Indochina and the progressive movements received at Box C, will be used by IPC/NYC and others and then turned over to the Washington Square Library for Social Change at 133 West 4 Street, where they will be accessible to the public.

Thanks to you all, we have been able to be part of the great popular movement in this country against the Indochina war. The heroic resistance in Indochina and the contradictions here at home have revived the progressive movement in the U.S. and it is up to us all to keep it growing until we get rid of the system that caused and profited from that war.

One important lesson taught by the Indochinese is that if we are to succeed, we must learn how to unite the broadest possible sectors of our population, guided by a true revolutionary party, around the essential common goals of our people, and in unity with the worlds liberation struggles.

Our criticisms of the actions of those in ISC and the others that support the Revolutionary Union are not criticisms of the stated long range goal of RU and others who call for revolution and socialism. We join in that call and dedication for a classless and progressive world, but we do not think the RU, functioning as it now does, will lead that revolution. Rather at this point, they are becoming increasingly destructive of the movement we should all support and build.

In the last few days hundreds of people and many groups have signed the petitions demanding the return of the resources. With the growing awareness of a nationwide pattern of such ripoffs, many groups are increasingly concerned. If those who are holding on to these resources do not heed the movements' call, many groups are considering further actions to expose and rectify these destructive politics and tactics.

We urge you to consider doing the following:

1. Call or write the other "ISC" group demanding the return of the resources.
c/o Mike Stout, 126 Macdougall Street,. #982-0068.
2. Sign and circulate the enclosed petition.
3. Have your organization send the CRIR committee and the other ISC group a letter endorsing that the items be returned.
4. Consider other actions to expose and remove these politics from our movement.
5. Help us build a new Indochina resource library.

We would like to hear from you on these matters. We are especially interested in reestablishing an Indochina Library and resource center at the WSLFSC and later at some national resource center, and need documents, films, books and photos concerning Indochina 1964 (and before) till now.

Thank you for your support,

Yours in Struggle,

Martha Chamberlain

Martha Chamberlain

Walter Teague

Walter Teague

NOTE: New York City supporters are invited to a MEETING called by the Committee to Reclaim the Indochina Resources on Thursday, June 26, at the Washington Square Church, 135 West 4 Street, at 7pm.