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From Anti-Imperialism To Human Rights: The Vietnam War And Radical Internationalism In The 1960s And 1970s

Salar Mohandesi
University of Pennsylvania, smmoha@gmail.com

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Abstract

This dissertation explores changing forms of internationalism among the French and U.S. radical left from the 1960s through the late 1970s. In the 1960s, Vietnamese resistance to U.S. imperialism inspired French activists to forge an international antiwar alliance with U.S. activists opposing their government's aggression. Together, they created a form of anti-imperialist internationalism based on the right of nations to self-determination. Despite transnational protest, the United States escalated the war, leading many activists to argue that the best way to aid Vietnamese national liberation was to translate that struggle into their own domestic contexts. In so doing, they triggered a wave of upheaval that reached new heights in May 1968. But when this anti-imperialist front faced repression and imprisonment in France and the United States, these same radicals began to advance individual rights alongside anti-imperialist revolution in the early 1970s. Once they learned of South Vietnam's heightened repression of political dissenters, they grafted their new attention to rights onto the antiwar movement, demanding the restoration of civil liberties. Yet in arguing that South Vietnam violated fundamental democratic rights, anti-imperialist internationalism increasingly took the form of criticizing the internal affairs of a sovereign state. In this way, anti-imperialists lent legitimacy to a rival form of internationalism that shared the progressive aspirations of anti-imperialism but rejected nationalism in favor of human rights. When genocide, internecine war, and refugee crises in Southeast Asia undermined faith in national liberation in the late 1970s, former French radicals sided with the U.S. government to lead a global movement championing human rights against the sovereignty of nation-states like Vietnam. By tracing this history of solidarity with the Vietnamese liberation struggle from the 1960s to the 1970s, this dissertation explains how and why human rights came to displace anti-imperialism as the dominant form of internationalism. It shows that the Vietnam War was a truly global phenomenon, that the trajectory of the left in countries like France was powerfully shaped by developments in what was then called the Third World, and that the rise of human rights was closely connected to transformations within anti-imperialist internationalism.

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Salar Mohandesi

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_____

Warren Breckman

Rose Family Endowed Term Chair, Professor of History

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____

Peter Holquist, Associate Professor of History

Dissertation Committee

Samuel Moyn, Jeremiah Smith, Jr. Professor of Law and Professor of History at Harvard

University

Roger Chartier, Annenberg Visiting Professor in History and Professor at the Collège de France

FROM HUMAN RIGHTS TO ANTI-IMPERIALISM: THE VIETNAM WAR AND RADICAL

INTERNATIONALISM IN THE 1960S AND 1970S

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SALAR MICHAEL MOHANDESI

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indebted to her patience, encouragement, and sheer brilliance. I cherish our friendship and partnership.

Lastly, all scholarship depends heavily on the work of others. This dissertation was made possible not only by all the scholarly work that came before, but, even more importantly, by the often invisible or forgotten political work of millions. This dissertation goes to the millions of Vietnamese who suffered tremendously in their struggle against U.S. imperialism. It goes to the millions across the globe who committed their lives to not only ending that war, but to working to transform the social relations that made such wars possible in the first place. This dissertation is dedicated to all those who fought and continue to fight for a new world.

ABSTRACT

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Salar Mohandesi

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This dissertation explores changing forms of internationalism among the French and U.S. radical

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the United States escalated the war, leading many activists to argue that the best way to aid

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grafted their new attention to rights onto the antiwar movement, demanding the restoration of civil

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shared the progressive aspirations of anti-imperialism but rejected nationalism in favor of human

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1960s to the 1970s, this dissertation explains how and why human rights came to displace anti-

imperialism as the dominant form of internationalism. It shows that the Vietnam War was a truly global phenomenon, that the trajectory of the left in countries like France was powerfully shaped by developments in what was then called the Third World, and that the rise of human rights was closely connected to transformations within anti-imperialist internationalism.

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INTRODUCTION

In February 1968, as the Tet Offensive repulsed the U.S. military across Vietnam, thousands of antiwar activists from North America and Western Europe met at the Technical University in West Berlin to end the war. From the United States arrived activists representing Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. From France came groups like the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire and the Comité Vietnam National. The organizations, collectives, and individuals that traveled to Berlin by plane, car, or train represented a broad spectrum of the far left, from anarchism to Third Worldism, Castroism to Trotskyism. Although divided by many political and ideological differences, what brought them all together was a commitment to not only ending the Vietnam War, but overturning the very international system that allowed wars like the one in Vietnam to happen in the first place. It was this call for fundamental change, which hinged on connecting the war to imperialism, that turned these antiwar activists into radicals.

In Berlin, beneath a giant flag of the National Liberation Front, this new international network of radicals set to work. Committed to anti-imperialism, guided by the ideas of national self-determination, and inspired by the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese against U.S. imperialism, most radicals came to argue that the best way to support the Vietnamese liberation struggle was to open a "second front" within the imperialist centers. Internationalism, these radicals came to believe, meant worldwide revolution led by the Vietnamese. After the conference, radicals return home and searched for ways to reproduce the distant struggle they sought to support. In France, young radicals' efforts to bring home the anti-imperialist revolution of the Vietnamese triggered a series of events that would set off May '68. Internationally, just as the Vietnamese inspired the French, the events of May '68 inspired radicals in other countries, like the United States, who in turn tried to translate May '68 into their own domestic vernaculars.

A decade later, a new generation of activists, led by many veteran antiwar radicals, once again turned their eyes to Southeast Asia. But this time, they allied with the U.S. government in a

massive international campaign against human rights violations in the newly unified the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Against the backdrop of internecine war between Vietnam, Cambodia, and China, tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees risked their lives to escape state repression, often in derelict boats floating across the South China Sea. Advocating humanitarian intervention into the internal affairs of Vietnam to save the "boat people," these new rights activists championed a very different kind of internationalism – one that turned from the nation to the individual, from violence to nonviolence, and from anti-imperialism to human rights.

This dissertation explores changing forms of international solidarity among the French and U.S. radical left from the early 1960s through the very late 1970s to explain how and why human rights displaced anti-imperialism as the dominant form of internationalism in the 1970s. I argue that the success of Vietnamese resistance to U.S. imperialism made possible a renewed internationalism that framed anti-imperialism as the dominant principle of radical politics. But when the failures of nationalism in the 1970s crippled anti-imperialism, a rival form of internationalism privileging human rights over national self-determination rose to dominate mainstream political culture.

France, the United States, Vietnam

This project focuses primarily on French radicals because they played the most decisive role in the international shift from anti-imperialism to human rights. In the 1960s and early 1970s, French activists helped encourage a new radical internationalism, spearhead the turn to revolution, and initiate a reconsideration of the value of civil liberties. Later in the 1970s, activists in France, more so than anywhere else, abandoned anti-imperialism to lead a new kind of human rights internationalism that rejected national sovereignty in favor of humanitarian interventionism. But while the French emerged as the driving force in this history, they did not act alone. As consummate internationalists, French radicals constantly looked to, and were transformed by, developments abroad. Thus, the story of how human rights displaced anti-imperialism cannot be told from a strictly national perspective, but must be firmly situated within a transnational

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framework. This project sets the trajectory of the French radical left within two distinct, reciprocally implicated sets of transnational relations.

First, I examine the relationships between French radicals and their peers in other advanced capitalist countries in Western Europe and North America. As this project shows, the French constantly interacted with comrades in neighboring countries, producing a number of dense, overlapping networks across Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Federal Republic of Germany, among other countries. But the most important contacts for the French were the Americans. Indeed, despite enormous national differences, the French consistently learned from their American comrades. In the early years of the war, they borrowed tactics, like the teach-in. Later in the 1960s, many French radicals prioritized U.S. struggles because of their crucial strategic role in fighting U.S. imperialism from inside the "belly of the beast." In the early 1970s, French activists learned from black prison organizing, while also following the Americans' new emphasis on political prisoners in South Vietnam. And in the late 1970s, some activists collaborated with human rights advocates close to the administration of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Thus, while the French played the most decisive role in the transition from anti-imperialism to human rights, their trajectory cannot be understood without taking full account of the ongoing American connection. For that reason, this dissertation, while focusing on French radicals, necessarily also tracks developments in the United States.

Second, I explore the transnational relationships between radicals in the advanced capitalist world and developments in what was then called the "Third World." One of my central arguments, explored in greater detail below, is that struggles in the Third World transformed politics in countries like France from beginning to end. While radicals looked to many struggles abroad, such as Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, China, Palestine, and Mozambique, in the 1960s, Vietnam was the most important reference point. Indeed, Vietnam played such a profound role in defining the very identity of the radical left in countries like France, that many radicals came to see themselves as the "Vietnam Generation." For that reason, this project focuses primarily on developments in Vietnam from the early 1960s to the very late 1970s, using Vietnam as a window

into international solidarity.[1] I show how the Vietnamese revolution expanded the radical left,

reframed radicalism as anti-imperialism, and inspired radicals to embrace revolution. Moreover,

the successes of the Vietnamese, along with their fervent internationalism, led them to serve as a

kind of "binding element," allowing otherwise separated radicals to come together. In this way,

this transnational relation between Vietnam and the advanced capitalist world helped make

possible the other set of relationships between North American and Western European radicals

mentioned above.

This dissertation therefore tracks the history of internationalism by zeroing in on *moments*

of encounter between events at home in France and those abroad. In the late 1960s, for

example, the encounter between growing domestic unrest in France, the militancy of black

radicals in the United States, and the audacity of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam led French radicals

to argue that the best way to aid the Vietnamese was to bring the war home to France. In the

early 1970s, domestic experiences with repression, incarceration, and left unity; black prison

organizing in the United States; and South Vietnam's heightened repression of political dissenters

led French radicals to reframe antiwar solidarity as the demand to liberate the Vietnamese

political prisoners and restore civil liberties in South Vietnam. And in the late 1970s, the decline of

the French left at home, a new post-Vietnam foreign policy in the United States, and a

humanitarian catastrophe in Southeast Asia, all helped human rights internationalism bypass anti-

imperialism. By integrating developments in France, the United States, and Vietnam, therefore,

this dissertation presents a transnational and transatlantic history of how radical internationalism

transformed in the 1960s and 1970s.

The French Left

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[1] Of course, as Vietnam was by no means the only reference point, especially after 1968, it may
have been possible to tell parts of this story with reference to other struggles. I felt, however, that
keeping the focus firmly on a single struggle, rather than rapidly shifting the analysis to different
solidarity movements with different revolutions abroad, would be the best way to understand how
internationalism changed in this period.

In order to explain how human rights displaced anti-imperialism, my project bridges four historiographies: literature on the French left, the Vietnam War, internationalism in the Global 1960s, and human rights.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a combination of factors led to the reemergence of the radical left as a meaningful force in French politics. Activists breathed new life into Marxism, filled the streets with protests, and called for revolutions in all spheres of life. During the "68 years," an expansive cycle of contestation that stretched from the early 1960s to the 1970s, radicals pushed democracy in new directions, overturned social roles, challenged accepted forms of representation, and redefined the very meaning of politics.[2] Given the overall importance of the radical left to French political life at this time, it is little surprise that the literature on this topic has grown so expansive. There are now innumerable historical, sociological, and theoretical works exploring various facets of the radical left.

In recent decades, scholarship has begun to situate the French radical left within a larger global context. In particular, some historians have now begun to emphasize the importance of what was then called the "Third World" to the development of the radical left.[3] I build on this new turn in the literature to argue that struggles abroad were not simply a source of inspiration; they profoundly shaped the entire trajectory of the French radical left. But some struggles, I hope to show, were more transformative than others. Indeed, one of my central arguments is that while radicals looked to many different movements in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, it was the Vietnamese revolution that played the most decisive role in defining the identity of French radicals. Unfortunately, scholars have only recently begun to fully appreciate the enduring role of France's former Southeast Asian colony in shaping ideas, movements, and politics in Europe. As

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[2] For the concept of the "'68 years," see Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand et al. eds., *Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2000).

[3] The most path breaking in this regard is Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). Scholars have since explored the precise ways in which the "third word" influenced the left. Christoph Katler, *The Discovery of the Third World: Decolonization and the Rise of the New Left in France, c. 1950-1976*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) explores "the concept of the Third World"; Daniel A. Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals: May '68 and the Rise of Anti-Racism in France* (Pontypool, Wales: Merlin Press, 2012) investigates the relationship between immigration from the "third world" on the French left.

historian Bethany Keenan has argued, for the longest time, although "historians recognized that Vietnam garnered large amounts of attention from the French in general, their presentation of the time between the end of the Algerian War in 1962 and 1968 created the impression that for most, interest in the Vietnam War was a way to pass the time until life at home kicked up again."[4] Vietnam, it was assumed, captured attention, but did not play a fundamental role in shaping the course of French politics.

That assessment began to change in the late 1990s. In 1997, Laurent Jalabert published a perspicacious article connecting antiwar activism to the May events.[5] In 1998, Nicolas Pas penned an exhaustive dissertation tracking antiwar solidarity among the French far left up to the events of May 1968.[6] He followed this with an article on antiwar organizing, showing how Vietnam helped the left secure an independent position to the left of the Communist Party (PCF).[7] Soon after, Kristin Ross showed how the Vietnam War played an enormous role in shaping the politics of the activists who went on to spark the May events.[8] In 2009, Bethany Keenan offered a detailed account of Vietnam's impact not only on the far left, but on other sectors of French society, showing just how important Vietnam was to defining France's postwar identity.[9]

Taken together, these works have reshaped our understanding of the left. They demonstrate how Vietnam radicalized a generation of activists, allowed radicals to bypass the PCF, and created an opportunity for them to experiment with new tactics, strategies, and organizations that would take center stage during May. In this way, these studies have forced

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[4] Bethany Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us:' French Identities in the U.S.–Vietnam War, 1965-1973" (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2009), 4-5.
[5] Laurent Jalabert, "Aux origines de la génération 68: Les étudiants français et la guerre du Vietnam," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire*, no. 55 (July-September 1997): 69-81.
[6] Nicolas Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche français sur la guerre du Vietnam, 1965-1968" (Mémoire DEA, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1998). Pas's was not the only dissertation on the Vietnam War to appear in the 1990s. See, also Sylvie Tigroudja, "Les Intellectuels de gauche face à la guerre du Viêt-nam, 1964-1973" (Mémoire de DEA, Université Charles de Gaulle-Lille-III, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 1997) and Sophie Boulte, "L'Influence de la guerre du Viêt-nam sur les comités Viêt-nam en France entre 1966 et 1973" (Mémoire de DEA, Université Paris-I, Paris, 1996).
[7] Nicolas Pas, "'Six Heures pour le Vietnam:' Histoire des Comité Vietnam français, 1965-1968," *Revue Historique* 301, no. 1 (January-March, 2000): 157-85.
[8] Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*.
[9] Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us.'"

scholars to recognize the crucial role that the Vietnam War played in shaping radical politics, social movements, and the broader left during this period. Scanning the anthologies published for the 40th anniversary of May '68, it is now clear that no one can write the history of the radical left without engaging with Vietnam in some way.[10]

And yet, the impact that Vietnam had on the radical left has still not yet been fully recognized. My dissertation adds to this literature by investigating three key areas that remain underexplored. First, following Kristin Ross, I argue that Vietnam shaped the very political horizon of the radical left in the 1960s. By situating the radical left within a wider transnational field, I show how radicals saw themselves as junior partners in a worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. Indeed, they regarded their struggles, which reached new levels of militancy during the vents of May 1968, as nothing more than another front in the revolutionary wave led by Vietnam. Thus, I argue, political developments in western countries like France in the 1960s cannot be understood in isolation; they were contingent upon a vast transnational struggle. In this way, we can say that the Vietnam War was May '68's condition of possibility.

Second, I show how Vietnam allowed French radicals to connect with activists in other countries. Following a number of scholars, I show that transnational connections were profoundly important for the French radical left. I argue, however, that the key element allowing these transnational connections to come into being was Vietnam. Indeed, Vietnam, I argue, acted as a kind of "binding element," creating the conditions that permitted radicals from different countries to come together into an international alliance. My research shows that the French played a leading role in this process. Recognizing the international nature of the war, French radicals tried to internationalize antiwar opposition, reaching out to radicals in the United States and Western Europe. Together, they shared information, coordinated actions, and learned from one another. With the French in the lead, they created a number of intersecting antiwar networks: they creating an underground transnational network to resisting and deserting U.S. GIs, they tried to organize

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[10] For example, Dominique Damamme et al., eds., *Mai-Juin 68* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, 2008); Philippe Artières et Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds., *68: Une histoire collective 1962-1981* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008); Antoine Artous, eds., *La France des années 68* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2008).

international brigades to fight the U.S. military in Southeast Asia, and convened the Bertrand Russell International War Crimes Tribunal, which put the United States on trial for war crimes. Through these networks, French activists picked up new forms of struggle, adopted new tactics and strategies, and discovered new ideas. In this way, Vietnam, more than any other event, encouraged not only the revival of a new radical internationalism in the 1960s, but precipitated the formation of a functional radical international like those of the past.

Lastly, my dissertation takes the story all the way to the very late 1970s. As many historians have shown, after May, radicals returned their attention to the "hexagon," putting antiwar solidarity on the backburner. As a result, most scholars tend to conclude their treatment of Vietnamese solidarity in 1968. Of course, there are some exceptions, the most important of which is Christine Sabine Rousseau's account of Christian opposition to the Vietnam War, but even this text focuses only on Christians, who opposed the war not out of any critique of imperialism, but from a sense of religious values and duties.[11] I argue that contrary to appearances, solidarity with Vietnam shaped the history of the radical left every step of the way. Solidarity with the Vietnamese was not some kind of instrument that radicals simply discarded once they achieved their ulterior motives; Vietnam continued to play a role even into the 1970s. To take just one example, after the turn to revolution was met with state repression, South Vietnam's heightened repression of political prisoners had an effect on the left's conception of international solidarity, contributing to a general rethinking of the role of rights. By maintaining the focus on Vietnam, I show how the trajectory of the radical left was always shaped by the constant encounter between events at home with those abroad.

But this profound connection between the French radical left and the Vietnamese national liberation struggle was double-edged. In the 1960s, as revolutions exploded across the globe, the alliance with national liberation was a source of great strength. But since the radical left's very identity was so powerfully shaped by Vietnam, if the Vietnamese revolution were to ever fail to deliver on the extraordinary emancipatory hopes that radicals expected, it would have devastating

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[11] Sabine Rousseau, *La colombe et le napalm: des Chrétiens français contre les guerres d'Indochine et du Vietnam, 1945-1975* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002).

consequences for the radical left. Indeed, this is precisely what happened in the 1970s: genocide in Cambodia, internecine war between Cambodia, China, and Vietnam, and a catastrophic refugee crisis in Southeast Asia shattered the radical left.

In this way, my project also challenges how we understand the decline of revolutionary politics in France. Scholars variously blame state repression, argue that individual radicals betrayed their politics, or show how the historical conditions for the left's rise were eroded over the course of the 1970s. All these factors no doubt played a part, but I argue that the events abroad were just as important to the left's decline. Indeed, since the radical left was not shaped exclusively by events at home, but through complex encounters between developments in France and those in the Third World, it should come as no surprise that simultaneous transformations in the Third World played a crucial role in the radical left's political decomposition in the 1970s. In that decade, all the great hopes that radicals placed in national liberation struggles came undone: liberated countries turned into dictatorships, governments repressed their citizens, newly independent countries were still beholden to western capital, and the very countries that once led the charge in a new internationalism soon turned on one another. Southeast Asia in 1979 was the nail in the coffin. It is no accident that these events nearly coincided with the collapse of the radical left as an organized force and the end of the long cycle of struggle in which May 1968 stood in the center. For if the Vietnam War helped generate the imaginary that made May '68 possible; genocide, internecine war, and refugee crises in Southeast Asia in the late 1970s helped sound its death knell. Vietnam not only stood at the origins of the radical left, but was also a part of its end.

The Vietnam War

Although the literature on the Vietnam War, or the Second Indochina War, to be more precise, is voluminous, much of this work has focused squarely on the United States, treating the conflict as a largely American affair. But a new spate of scholarship on the war has taken

advantage of Vietnamese archives to produce a more inclusive account.[12] These historians have

also begun to look beyond Vietnamese and U.S. relations, insisting on the truly global nature of

the war. Scholars like Lien-Hang T. Nguyen have convincingly shown how the "war itself

transcended the borders of Vietnam."[13] Indeed, the conflict centered not only on the United

States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the Republic of Vietnam, but directly involved

Laos, Cambodia, China, the USSR, Australia, and New Zealand, and indirectly affected dozens of

countries like Japan, Germany, or France.[14] The war, it is now becoming clear, played a key role

in a number of global historical trends such as the Sino-Soviet conflict, Sino-American

rapprochement, détente, and decolonization. Since the Vietnam War was a fully global event, its

story must now be told from a transnational perspective.

       Yet much of the new transnational history of the Vietnam War remains within the subfield

of diplomatic history. To be sure, this approach has offered tremendous insights, radically

transforming our understanding of the war, but the literature often ignores non-state actors. The

oversight is significant not only because the conflict extended beyond the realm of states, but

because even at the diplomatic level, the Vietnamese practiced a kind of "people's diplomacy"

that involved directly collaborating with non-state actors across the world, above all the vibrant

antiwar movements forming in the capitalist countries of North America and Western Europe.[15]

My project therefore aims to deepen this transnational turn in Vietnam War historiography by

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[12] The best book on the war is William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009). For accounts that draw on both perspectives, see Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indochina conflict, 1956-1962* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997); Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side* (London: Routledge, 2002); Andreas W Daum et al., eds., *America, The Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[13] Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "Cold War Contradictions: Toward an International History of the Second Indochina War, 1969-1973," in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

[14] For France's role in the Second Indochina War, see Pierre Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam, 1945-1969: La réconciliation* (Paris: Tallandier, 2011).

[15] Harish C. Mehta, "'People's Diplomacy': The Diplomatic Front of North Vietnam During the War Against the United States, 1965-1972" (Ph.D. Diss., McMaster University, 2009).

complementing the work of the diplomatic historians with research into the transnational antiwar movements that bypassed, directly challenged, or collaborated with states.

To be sure, I am not the first to examine the transnational dimension of antiwar struggles, but the existing scholarship remains painfully limited. Most American accounts of the antiwar movement almost entirely ignore the fact that activists in other countries opposed the war.[16] Those that make mention of the international dimension merely describe examples of international contact, but never explain connections across borders.[17] Recently, however, some steps have been made in this direction.[18] Combining comparative and transnational approaches, Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand and Jacques Portes offered a brief survey of antiwar movements in different countries in 2000, suggesting that opposition to the war was not only widespread in different European countries, but that these antiwar struggles often in dialogue with one another.[19] Exploring the role that Europe played in the war, as well as the role the war played in Europe, Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse's anthology, *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*, gathers a number of excellent essays about European antiwar activism.[20] Another edited collection, *America, The Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International*, includes a few essays about the international nature of antiwar activism.[21]

Scholars now acknowledge that antiwar activity was always situated in a larger international context, but there is still no systematic treatment of these international

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[16] For representative examples antiwar movement, see Fred Halstead, *Out Now!: A Participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Monad Press, 1978); Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002).
[17] Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
[18] For example, Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in Global Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), chapter 3.
[19] Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand and Jacques Portes, "Les interactions internationales de la guerre du Viêt-nam et Mai 68," in *Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation*, eds. Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand et al. (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2000), 50.
[20] Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse, eds., *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2003).
[21] Andreas W Daum et al., eds., *America, The Vietnam War, and the World.*

connections.[22] My dissertation aims to fill this gap. Building on this earlier work, my project offers

the first transnational history of radical antiwar movements. Of course, it is not possible to survey

the entire field of antiwar movements in North America and Europe, let alone the entire world in a

dissertation. As a result, I have been forced to limit my analysis primarily to France, the United

States, and occasionally Great Britain, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany. Nevertheless,

by investigating the international antiwar convergences, exchanges between activists from

different countries, and the internationalist ideas that animated their solidarity, this dissertation

does begin the process of explaining how and why these different movements fit together.

By focusing on transnational antiwar movements, however, I do not intend to replace a

narrow focus on the diplomatic with an even more narrow perspective on movements "from

below." On the contrary, I try to weave these different levels into a coherent story. Thus, I

complement my study of the antiwar movements with an analysis of Richard Nixon's changing

justifications of the war, Jimmy Carter's policies in Southeast Asia, The People's Republic of

China's shifting foreign policy, or the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's diplomatic efforts. This long

history from anti-imperialism to human rights, I argue in the dissertation, was the product of

complex interactions between movements from below and state power from above.

Internationalism

Until recently, work on the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by a methodological

nationalism that rendered transnational connections invisible. Thus, while some scholars traced

the trajectory of radical social movements from the 1960s to the late 1970s, their exclusive focus

on a single country led them to neglect the transnational relationships in which they were

embedded.[23] Even comparative studies still frame social movements around national boundaries,

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[22] For example, Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, "Le champ des possibles," in *68: Une histoire collective 1962-1981*, eds. Philippe Artières and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), 40.

[23] Much of this work, to be clear, has generated many rich insights about the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Michael Scott Christofferson's book on French politics in the 1970s remains indispensible. Yet a more transnational frame could have enriched his account by highlighting the crucial role that anti-imperialism played in the overall story of French politics in the 1970s.

obscuring the fact that these movements not only learned from one another politically, but saw the fate of their diverse struggles as inextricably linked.[24]

In recent decades, some scholars have adopted a "transnational turn," producing new work on these decades that aims to resolve this gap. Scholars now pay closer attention to immigration, revolutionary tourism, or the circulation of symbols, texts, and ideas across borders.[25] More commonly, in their search for international connections, many have turned to the study of transnational activist networks.[26] While this attention to international exchanges has generated many insights into the 1960s and 1970, much of this work remains limited. There is, for example, a tendency for some historians to take international connections for granted, simply unearthing innumerable connections across space without paying attention to their overall significance. As a result, these histories often run the risk of generating a static representation of links that happened to transcend national borders, with the mere detection of transnational links effectively serving as an end in itself.

Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s in French Intellectual Politics* (New York: Berghahn, 2004).

[24] The classic example is David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). Caute brilliantly surveys developments in each country during 1968, but does not explain the connections between them. Subsequent histories began to integrate the transnational with the comparative, see, for example, Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[25] For immigration, see, for example, Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals*; Burleigh Hendrickson, "Imperial Fragments and Transnational Activism: 1968(s) in Tunisia, France, and Senegal," (Ph.D. diss. Northeastern University, Boston, Mass. December 2013); Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). For travel, see Richard Ivan Jobs, "Youth Movements: Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 2 (April 2009): 376-404. For the circulation of texts, see Alexander C. Cook, *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[26] For a few representative examples, see Michael Clemons and Charles E. Jones, "Global Solidarity: The Black Panther Party in the International Arena," in *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George Kastiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001); Klimke, *The Other Alliance*; Manus McGrogan, "Vive la Révolution and the Example of Lotta Continua: The Circulation of Ideas and Practices between the Left Militant Worlds of France and Italy following 1968," Modern and Contemporary France 18, no. 3 (August 2010): 197-222; Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Niek Pas, "European Radicals and the 'Third World': Imagined Solidarities and Radical Networks, 1958-1973," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 4 (2011): 449-71.

More sophisticated studies, however, show how the discovery of transnational connections can serve less as an end goal than as an approach, which, if properly employed, can fundamentally transform our understanding of the decade, challenge our assumptions, or shift conventional periodizations. This work carefully explains why these transnational connections were formed, what they meant to those who forged them, and how they changed over time, intersecting with major global transformations in the process. In this, many scholars, not only of the 1960s and 1970s, but of earlier periods, have begun to return to the idea of *internationalism*.[27] But while much of this work has refined our knowledge of what these various internationalisms meant, there is unfortunately still a tendency among many scholars to flatten the ideas, motivations, and objectives shaping each of these very different forms of internationalism. For example, some scholars still speak of some coherent "Third World internationalism," a term that obscures the fact that there were in fact many competing internationalisms with distinct objectives in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s: Afro-Asianism, Non-alignment, Marxist anti-imperialism, or pan-Islamism were not equivalent.[28]

Part of the difficulty stems from general confusion over the concept. In an age of transnational history, one finds the word "internationalism" almost everywhere now, but rarely do historians define what they mean by this word. Is internationalism simply a fancy way of saying that connections exist across borders? How does it relate to the concept of international solidarity? Can internationalism refer to a simple feeling or must it involve a more formally organized network? Ultimately, what is internationalism? To answer that question, we need recourse to another concept: *articulation*.

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[27] In fact, one of the best new historical works on internationalism looks to the 1920s. Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). A good exploration of ideas of internationalism in the 1950s and early 1960s can be found in Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[28] The best work on "Third World internationalism" remains Vijay Prashad's *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007). While Prashad remains very attentive to important political differences, he sometimes exhibits a tendency to speak of a single coherent "Third World" project.

The term's genealogy is well known, from the debates of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party to the carceral notebooks of Antonio Gramsci to the writings Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and others.[29] In this body of literature, articulation points to a political problem. In capitalist social formations, individuals remain divided from one another, a condition actively reproduced by the state, which disaggregates the horizontal unity of social forces and decomposes social forces into a sea of individuals.[30] Articulation, then, refers to the pulling together of distinct social forces through political construction and struggle into what is called a *form of unity*. Perhaps the best historical illustration of this process remains the October Revolution: recall how its success depended on articulating the diverse interests of the various sectors of the working class, different layers of the peasantry, and the soldiers, a unity captured in the slogan "Peace, Bread, Land."

But as many have pointed out, articulation is a contingent process. Which social forces end up in what form of unity, how they create such unity, and what they aim to accomplish are all historical. Social forces are not compelled by "economics" to aggregate into a predetermined unity. They may unite; they may not. Indeed, rival social forces with divergent class characters might actually find themselves on the same side. Nor are forms of unity destined to follow any preordained ideology; social forces may be articulated under the sign of social democracy or of communist revolution or neoliberalism. In short, articulation does not reflect invisible laws of history; it is a highly contingent, uneven, and contradictory process, that involves strategy, programs, and organization.

Of course, social formations do not exist in isolation from one another. They are connected by flows of capital, people, ideas. Developments in one will produce effects in others.

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[29] For articulation, see Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980 [1975]); Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso, 1987 [1977]); Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 45-61; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, second edition (London: Verso, 2001 [1985]).

[30] Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: New Left Books. 1978).

Thus, articulation cannot be limited to a single social formation. *Internationalism is what I call the articulation problem at the global level.* It is the coming together of various social forces across distinct social formations into a form of unity, or an *international*. As with the process of articulation, it is a messy process. To begin with, there is never just one international. Indeed, at any given movement there are dozens of competing internationals crisscrossing the globe. This was especially true of the 1960s, a time of enormous international foment.

Furthermore, internationals need not only belong to dominated social forces. In other words, when we think of internationals, we often think of bodies with oppositional politics, like the Comintern, the Non-Aligned Movement, or the Tricontinental. But we must also recognize that ruling blocs also have their own internationals. At the same time, some internationals may have highly contradictory social compositions, uniting dominant social forces from one country with dominated social forces from another. Moreover, the same social forces can belong to several internationals, even if they compete with one another in some respects.

Different internationals possess different levels of strength: some are quite weak, while others are more durable. At one end of the spectrum, internationals may consist of nothing more than feelings of goodwill, epistolary exchanges, and the occasional solidarity action. At the other end, some internationals are highly organized, endowed with a central apparatus, boast a sophisticated communication network, and are flush with resources. Think, for example, of the Comintern: an intricate international organization where different sections met regularly, pooled resources, fought for one another, and followed orders. Indeed, no matter how weak an international, internationalism always signifies more than a vague feeling of wanting to support others; it exists in actions, or what can be called *forms of solidarity*. These can include everything from propaganda campaigns, sharing resources, solidarity strikes, to military support. In this way, each international has as its disposal a *repertoire* of forms of solidarity, the contents of which are dependent on that international's overall strength. The more developed and internally cohesive the international, the more expansive the repertoire.

That said, internationals are always guided by common ideas. They are shaped by basic assumptions, a body of principles, a set of objectives. Of course, as conglomerations of distinct social forces, internationals always exhibit a degree of incoherency. But underlying these differences is what I call an *internationalist imaginary*. By this, I mean a semi-conscious system of ideas organizing those more manifest interests. This concept allows us to better distinguish between different kinds of internationals that may at first glance seem identical. Thus, by looking at competing internationalist imaginaries, we can better understand the crucial differences between, say, Che Guevara's Marxist anti-imperialism and Gamal Abdul Nasser's Pan-Arabism, or between Afro-Asianism and Non-Alignment.

At the same time, it helps us avoid the opposite danger of total nominalism. Confronted with so many differences, one may be tempted to simply catalogue hundreds of seemingly distinct internationals, too afraid of organizing them into any greater unity for fear of doing violence to their particularity. The concept of the "internationalist imaginary" allows us to see how competing internationals may have actually shared the same core assumptions. To take an example from this dissertation: the Maoist Gauche proletarienne and the Trotskyist Ligue Communiste both belonged to distinct internationals. The GP worked with other Maoist groups and expressed its loyalty to China while the Ligue represented the French section of the Fourth International. The differences between the two internationals were not insignificant. That said, beneath these differences, both groups held the same central assumptions, themselves rooted in a Leninist problematic of the right of nations to self-determination.

This dissertation, therefore, advances the concept of the internationalist imaginary as a way of adding some nuance to recent scholarship about internationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. In the following pages, I identify, delineate, and follow the trajectory of a single internationalist imaginary, one based in the Marxist-Leninist notion of anti-imperialism. I show how events in the 1960s seemed to validate the core assumptions of this imaginary. But events a decade later, in the same part of the world no less, shattered those very assumptions, destabilizing this imaginary and throwing into disarray all those radicals who operated within it.

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Human Rights

      The historical study of human rights has grown rapidly in the last two decades. However, until very recently, much of this work tended to treated human rights in a linear manner, as the unfolding or "cascading" of a continuous project whose origins were said to begin as far back as the French Revolution. In 2010, Samuel Moyn's highly polemical intervention, *The Last Utopia*, began to unsettle these key assumptions, helping to usher a new phase in human rights historiography. Criticizing the triumphalism of earlier accounts, Moyn set out to show that human rights were in fact a highly contingent, and extremely recent, phenomenon.

      Moyn makes several interventions, several of which have helped establish the conceptual and historical parameters of the present study.[31] First, human rights and national self-determination constituted two, radically distinct political projects. Second, that until the 1970s, the vast majority of activists subscribed to the latter, not the former. Indeed, as my research confirms, very few activists in France, and even in the United States, adopted the language of human rights. In the rare cases they did, they meant something like national self-determination, not individual rights that transcended the sovereignty of nation-states. Third, the rise of human rights among activists was very much a product of the 1970s. Lastly, and most crucially, human rights succeeded in this decade because other "utopias" failed. Thus, Moyn sees the 1960s and 1970s as a field of competing "utopias," or what I call instead "internationalisms," arguing that the relationship between them was one of "displacement, rather than one of succession and fulfillment."[32]

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[31] This book has unsurprisingly generated considerable debate. Some scholars are responding that human rights and national liberation are in fact incompatible. Others, especially those working on abolitionism, insist that human rights emerged earlier. Some are now trying to argue the human rights emerged not in the conference rooms of the advanced capitalist countries but from the Global South. On the question of human rights and decolonization, see Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) and Steven L.B. Jensen. *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (New York: Cambridge Universit Press, 2016).

[32] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 116.

This dissertation deepens this argument about the rise of human rights. Against some historians, like Julian Bourg, who seem to suggest that the initial politics of revolution was always already based in ethics, and therefore the transition from former to the latter followed that of a teleological unfolding, Moyn is absolutely right to insist that human rights did not "evolve" out of anti-imperialism.[33] Nevertheless, the relationship between the two was far more complex than one of simple displacement, especially when one looks at France. As Moyn himself suggests in *The Last Utopia*, the transformation within the French left in the 1970s played an important role in the overall shift to human rights. My project details this exact process, showing how anti-imperialism played a crucial role in the rise of human rights in the 1970s.

While a number of writers have acknowledged this complex transition in France, pointing to the fact that certain anti-imperialists became champions of humanitarian interventionism later in the decade, much of this work is anecdotal and descriptive, and there are very few detailed historical studies that *explain* exactly how this transition happened.[34] The best account by far is Eleanor Davey's *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988*, which sets out to explain the process by which sans-frontiérisme came to displace tiers-mondisme in France. But while there is some significant overlap with my project, Davey's book is crucially not a study of internationalism proper, but of different ways of "approaching suffering."[35] For this reason, she focuses on humanitarianism and Third Worldism, not human rights and anti-imperialism – the latter of which she tends to completely subsume under a very amorphous notion of Third Worldism. Nevertheless, the book offers important

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[33] Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). For a good critique of the teleological tendencies in this book, see Warren Breckman, "From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought. By Julian Bourg," *Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 1 (March 2009): 207-209.

[34] Paul Berman tracks this history, but remains too focused on celebrities. *Power and the Idealists: Or, the Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath* (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2005), chapter 2. Timothy Nunan, in his excellent book on development and humanitarianism in Afghanistan, points to this crucial shift in France, but offers no explanation. *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[35] Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

insights into the period as a whole, which I build on to explain the complex ways in which human rights displaced anti-imperialism as the dominant form of international solidarity.

My contributions to the study of the rise of human rights are threefold. First, I argue that after the turn to revolution was met by a wave of state repression in France, the United States, and other countries in the late 1960 and early 1970s, anti-imperialist radicals who had only recently shunned all talk of reformism began to reconsider the struggle for civil liberties. When they learned of state repression outside France, these anti-imperialists began to advocate for the liberation of political prisoners in countries like South Vietnam. Indeed, with regards to Vietnam, antiwar solidarity increasingly focused on demanding that the government of South Vietnam restore civil liberties and release all the political prisoners. Thus, anti-imperialists continued to advocate the formation and defense of strong states in the Third World to fight against imperialism while simultaneously beginning to criticize certain third-world states for violating the rights of individuals. Through this new iteration of antiwar solidarity, in conjunction with domestic experiences of incarceration, radicals grew more accepting of the idea of fighting for individual rights against states. At the same time, anti-imperialists made certain tactical alliances with human rights groups, like Amnesty International, in campaigns such as the one to free the South Vietnamese prisoners. In this way, they effectively introduced human rights, which was quite marginal among activists as compared to anti-imperialism, to a larger, more radical audience. Thus, while very few radicals made the personal leap from anti-imperialism to human rights in the early 1970s, they did help create the political terrain that allowed a rival form of internationalism based in human rights to grow.

Second, my dissertation argues that when anti-imperialists defected to human rights in the 1970s, they brought with them a repertoire of activism that helped human rights develop into a truly rival form of internationalism. When anti-imperialism began to crumble in the 1970s, human rights increasingly emerged as a viable alternative; but despite its purity, it could not offer an attractive form of activism. To be sure, human rights groups like Amnesty International already enjoyed their own forms of activism, such as letter writing, but these seemed uninspiring

compared to the dynamic activism associated with the anti-imperialist radicals of the 1960s and early 1970s. In order to compete with anti-imperialism, human rights needed more than moral purity, it needed a viable repertoire of activism. This was accomplished through the encounter between human rights and a new kind of French humanitarianism. For many French radicals did not leap directly to human rights; they first developed a form of humanitarianism, exemplified in Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), that channeled the aura of anti-imperialism, and preserved many of the forms of activism traditionally associated with anti-imperialism, yet rejected the foundational ideas of anti-imperialism, such as the right of nations to self-determination. In the 1970s, this new kind of humanitarianism began to fuse with the idea of human rights, and it was precisely this encounter that elevated human rights into a substantial form of international solidarity that could not only compete with anti-imperialism, but perhaps even beat it at its own game.

Lastly, my dissertation shows that while the French played a decisive role in the overall transition from anti-imperialism to human rights, the transition would not have happened without crucial though unpredictable *transnational* encounters. In the late 1970s, catastrophe struck Southeast Asia, and tens of thousands of refugees fled Vietnam. Human rights organizers sprung into action, organizing an international campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam. In the United States, activists collaborated with the Carter administration, which sensed a perfect opportunity to divert attention away from the Vietnam War, restore American virtue, and reestablish the United States' leadership role in the international community.[36] In the final chapters of the dissertation, I show that the story of the transition cannot be told within a national framework, that a study of the rise of human rights at this time must examine the complex relationship between activists and state governments, and lastly, that we must recognize just how critical the contingent, and opportunistic, transnational encounter between humanitarianism and human rights in the very late 1970s and early 1980s were to shaping politics and state policy.

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[36] Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Sources and Methods

The aim of my dissertation is to track how the transformation of the radical left allowed a rival form of human rights internationalism to achieve hegemony on both the left and the mainstream. In order trace to these changes, my dissertation focuses on what I have called the internationalist imaginary.[37] There are many ways to grasp this imaginary, but I have found that some are more effective than others. For example, reading refined theoretical tracts about imperialism, although helpful in some respects, often do not provide the best window into the imaginary: they are deliberately abstract, divorced from everyday organizing, and often intended to accentuate differences between groups that otherwise shared the same core assumptions. Far more useful, I have found, are close readings of posters, leaflets, pamphlets, agitational materials, manifestos, programs, newspaper and magazine articles, journal essays, meeting notes, membership lists, conference programs, films, political novels, letters, and diaries.

To access these texts, which are largely still undigitized, I conducted extensive research in a number of archives. The Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (BDIC) in Nanterre, which has conveniently centralized archival materials from a broad spectrum of French radical groups, served as my primary archive. I supplemented this with research in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), the Archives nationales, and various online databases. In the United States, I worked at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, the King Center in Atlanta, the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, the Tamiment Library in New York, and in the archives of Columbia University and Swarthmore College, among others. Since U.S. groups forged many international contacts, I found that many of these U.S. archives contained valuable documents pertaining to the various international convergences and networks, as well as important archival materials from other countries.

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[37] As I have explained above, by this term, I mean the semiconscious political assumptions that informed concrete practices, overall strategy, and everyday organizing. Focusing my attention here brings to light the core convergences between radicals of many stripes: despite their palpable differences and minutely formulated positions, radicals came together on several crucial issues and practices at certain points in time.

To complete this project, I read these texts not only for their explicit content, but with an eye to the imaginary that structured them. What did certain concepts mean? What goals were put forth? What did these texts take to be self-evident? What were their limits, silences, and gaps? Reading texts from different groups, I found that more often than not, groups shared similar goals, converged on the same kinds of issues at the same time, and suffered the same limits. Of course, this is not to ignore the explicit content, to treat the literal words as epiphenomenal; my goal throughout this project has been to understand the larger intellectual system organizing and making possible the specific ideas, arguments, and practices presented in these texts.

I also supplemented this archival work with memoirs and oral interviews conducted after the events covered in this dissertation. I used these sources primarily to add richness, detail, and color to the narrative. In addition, I found them essential in uncovering some of the lost connections that made radical politics possible at this time. After all, when reading a text, one can certainly suspect traces of international contacts; but memoirs, published testimonies, and interviews are crucial for definitively proving their existence. In some cases, I used these kinds of sources for their analytical value, but, like Kristin Ross, I am very cautious about relying on them to drive the argument.[38] In many cases, those interviewed had invested their entire lives in making revolution, only for that project to fail. As anyone who has conducted oral histories will know, this background will undoubtedly have a profound effect on how radicals remember that period. Some aggrandize their role. Others completely reject what they had done. Still others mutate the past to justify their actions in the present. Even the most modest and honest often misremember what they were up to decades ago, the ideas that drove them forward every day.

Of course, since the shift from anti-imperialism to human rights cannot be told solely through the trajectory of the radical left, my dissertation has relied on other sets of sources. I have drawn on some documents produced by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the National Liberation Front, and later the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. For the first few chapters the most important of these has been the *Courrier du Vietnam*, the largest foreign language newspaper

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[38] Ross, *May '68*, 17.

produced by North Vietnam. This paper not only illuminates the DRV's internationalist strategy, but allows me to see the ways in which this internationalist imaginary was shared by radicals across borders. For later chapters, the Vietnamese produced a series of texts responding to the charge of human rights violations. These are extremely useful for understanding how those operating within the anti-imperialist imaginary conceptualized human rights, and especially the relationship between individual rights and collective rights. In addition, I have worked with documents from the Nixon and Carter administrations to see how radical movements intersected with state power, to understand the course of the war affected U.S. policy, and to explain why the United States adopted human rights as state policy in the late 1970s. Lastly, my dissertation looks at material produced by human rights and humanitarian organizations – primarily Amnesty International and MSF – to see how human rights advocates crossed paths with anti-imperialist radicals, how human rights gained momentum in the 1970s, and the ways human rights internationalism successfully absorbed some of the progressive aspects of anti-imperialism.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 begins by mapping the radical critique of the Vietnam War. Starting with the antiwar struggle in the United States, I show how radicals argued that the war was not simply an isolated affair, but the product of a larger system. As an international war, then, opposition likewise had to be international. Thus, some U.S. radicals set about trying to internationalize antiwar struggle, coordinating various movements in different countries. While they were primarily looking to movements in the "Third World," activists in Europe proved to be especially enthusiastic about international antiwar unity. Although recognizing that most European countries did not play a direct role in the war, these European activists, above all the French, argued that Europe was nevertheless essential for U.S. imperialism: in order to pursue its foreign policy, the United States needed the support, or at the very least neutrality, of capitalist countries in Europe. Protesting in countries like France, or against international alliances like NATO, could help destabilize the U.S. position. Led by the French, European activists set about creating a radical

antiwar international. In this way, I argue, the Vietnam War made possible the revival of radical internationalism in the 1960s.

Chapter 2 surveys the various forms of solidarity that anti-imperialist internationalism assumed. Radicals set about building a number of intersecting international antiwar networks. They coordinated protests, created a vast transnational network to assist resisting or deserting U.S. GIs, and they even tried to form international brigades to fight the U.S. military directly in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese welcomed all these efforts, but as their response to the international brigades indicated, they felt the primary goal of international solidarity should be propagandistic. The ideological terrain, the NLF and DRV argued, was a crucial aspect of the overall war effort: radicals abroad could play a decisive role in shifting the balance of forces by trying to change public opinion. The prime example of ideological struggle, I argue, was the Bertrand Russell Peace Tribunal, which put the United States on trial for genocide. While the Tribunal had no power to enforce its verdict, it was able to generate considerable informational materials for antiwar activity, and it did have an effect on public opinion in countries like France.

This chapter also explains exactly what activists meant by anti-imperialist internationalism. As the war progressed, Marxism dominated the radical imaginary, not only in France, but in countries like the United States. Indeed, radicals now came to see their struggle against the war in solidly Marxist terms. Following V. I. Lenin, the vast majority of radicals came to frame anti-imperialism as the fight for the right of nations to self-determination. In the context of the 1960s, with successful national liberation struggles erupting across the globe, the alliance between anti-imperialism and national liberation was a tremendous boon. But if nationalism were to ever fail to deliver on its promises, the results could be disastrous for anti-imperialists.

In chapter 3, I show how some activists argued that the best way to assist their Vietnamese comrades was to bring the war home to the imperialist centers. Despite coordinated international protest, the U.S. military continued to escalate the war throughout 1967. In light of this, some radicals felt that the kind of ideological struggle exemplified by the Bertrand Russell Peace Tribunal was insufficient; they now had a duty to end the war by any means necessary.

Black nationalists in the United States and revolutionaries in Latin America led the way. Because they both faced the same enemy as the Vietnamese, U.S. imperialism, they were uniquely positioned to aid the struggle. Che Guevara soon codified this strategy by calling for "two, three, many Vietnams." Representatives from the NLF and DRV welcomed Che's new internationalist strategy, and the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers Party, Le Duan, even called for a worldwide anti-imperialist front.

Although they did not confront U.S. imperialism in the same way as African Americans or Latin Americans, French radicals suggested that they, too, could play an important role in this anti-imperialist front. Building on earlier arguments about how U.S. imperialism depended on the support of other capitalist states, they argued that opening a "second front" in Europe would deal a decisive blow to imperialism, relieving the pressure on the Vietnamese. In February 1968, thousands of radicals from over a dozen European countries met in Berlin to coordinate their efforts to open new fronts across the continent. As they met, the NLF launched a surprise attack against the U.S. military throughout South Vietnam. If the Vietnamese could repel the most devastating military machine in history, they thought, then surely they could make revolution.

Chapter 4 explores how, exactly, radicals tried to bring the war home. After the Berlin Conference, French radicals heightened the antiwar struggle, which ultimately triggered the events of May 68. For them, I argue, May 68 was one of those potential second fronts in the Vietnam War. Just as the Vietnamese inspired the French, so too did the French inspire radicals elsewhere. Indeed, May 68 showed that revolution was still possible in the advanced capitalist world. Activists in other countries, like Great Britain or Italy, tried to reproduce the French example in their own countries. The May events proved so extraordinary that they even compelled the Americans to reconsider their attitude towards the Europeans. Whereas before 1968 the Americans largely ignored struggles in Europe, afterwards they saw European struggles, above all the French, as paradigmatic. Activists everywhere, however, saw their struggles as deeply interconnected to one another and to Vietnam. In this way, I argue that the arc of radical upheaval not only in France, but in other countries, can be understood as the

opening of other fronts in the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. Lastly, this chapter ends with a long discussion about the role of "translation" in politics at this time. While some activists tried to simply duplicate the Vietnamese example, others tried to creatively translate the Vietnamese revolution into the unique historical conditions of their particular country. In this, Vietnam emerged by the late 1960s as a master symbol of revolt, coloring nearly every struggle in France.

Chapter 5 shows how the turn to revolution explored in the previous two chapters was met with widespread state repression. In France, the United States, and other Western European countries, governments infiltrated, subverted, or simply outlawed radical organizations, throwing activists in prison. In this context of widespread repression some radicals began to reconsider the fight for civil rights as a legitimate form of activism. Above all, experiences of imprisonment gave rise to a vibrant transnational prisoners rights movement in France, the United States, and Italy that pushed radicals to seriously reconsider the rights, status, and struggles of prisoners. This process of rethinking led to a change in strategy as well: radicals now built alliances with more moderate organizations, thought more seriously about the law, and demanded civil rights from the very states they sought to abolish. Although some saw this move towards "democratic rights" as a tactical expedient, it soon began to transformed the very imaginary of the French radical left.

In Chapter 6, I show how flagging domestic and international support for the Vietnam War forced the U.S. government to find new ways of justifying its involvement in Southeast Asia. Under President Richard Nixon, the United States tried to justify the war by drawing attention to the POWs held in North Vietnam. In this way, he hoped to recast U.S. intervention as a just humanitarian campaign to liberate prisoners. In response to Nixon's instrumentalization of the POW issue, antiwar activists, first in the United States, then France, and then throughout Western Europe, drew attention to the hundreds of thousands of political dissenters rotting in South Vietnamese jails. In this, they effectively grafted their new concerns with civil rights onto the antiwar movement. Informed by their own experiences of incarceration, they called for the liberation of all political prisoners in South Vietnam. This demand grew even more central to radicals after the United States agreed to withdraw from Vietnam in January 1973, thereby

depriving radicals of their main target. With this particular issue, they could maintain the antiwar momentum despite the Paris Peace Accords. In fact, this common demand helped reunite the radical left, which culminated in a massive anti-war demonstration in May 1973, when tens of thousands of Western European and U.S. radicals, including Native American activists from Wounded Knee, met in Milan, Italy.

However, in arguing that South Vietnam was violating fundamental democratic rights, anti-imperialists increasingly began to criticize the internal affairs of a sovereign nation-state. In this chapter, I trace this shift to the language of rights, which promoted the individual, rather than the nation state, as the constitutive unit of sovereignty. While radicals did not adopt the specific language of human rights, their own attention to rights, along with alliances with rival groups such as Amnesty International, developed the intellectual and political terrain on which a competing form of international solidarity could grow.

Chapter 7 tracks the collapse of the radical left in France in the 1970s. I show how the decline of the workers' movement, the restructuring of capitalist relations, the proliferation of new social movements, a changed political horizon, and a crisis of Marxism all worked to destabilize the radical left. One crucial, though overlooked, reason for the left's decline, I argue, was the fate of national liberation struggles abroad in the 1970s. Since the French left's identity was so powerfully shaped by these struggles, it should come as no surprise that their defeats would redound on the left in catastrophic ways. In 1979, Vietnamese troops marched into Cambodia, followed by a Chinese invasion of northern Vietnam. Three socialist countries once allied against U.S. imperialism now found themselves embroiled in a bloody internecine war. The Third Indochina War, as it was called, threw French radicals in disarray. Some defended Vietnam, others Cambodia. Whichever side radicals chose, events in Southeast Asia shattered the core assumptions of anti-imperialism. The failures of nationalism crippled anti-imperialism, leaving internationalism open to capture.

This chapter also examines the rise of human rights interventionism in France. For while some anti-imperialists remained steadfast in the face of crisis, a minority began to turn to a new

idea of internationalism, one based not in national liberation but in human rights. In switching sides, so to speak, they brought with them a set of techniques, a style of activism, and certain radical credentials that helped human rights become a serious challenger to anti-imperialism. When anti-imperialism began to crumble in the very late 1970s, this new kind of human rights internationalism would rush to fill the void.

If chapter 7 explains the fall of anti-imperialism, chapter 8 shows how human rights succeeded in achieving hegemony. The Third Indochina War aggravated a major refugee crisis in the region. Faced with mounting state repression, tens of thousands fled the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam, many by boats. In Cambodia, thousands more fled after the Vietnamese invasion. While what remained of the anti-imperialist left stood paralyzed as tens of thousands of Indochinese refugees fled communist governments in Southeast Asia, human rights activists, working closely with Vietnamese refugee activists, sprung into action, organizing an international campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam. The French took the lead, even sending a hospital ship to rescue refugees in the South China Sea. Effectively interfering with the internal affairs of a sovereign nation-state, this action inaugurated a new kind of humanitarian interventionism that promised to surpass Cold War ideological divisions.

The campaign soon spread internationally, entering the United States through the efforts of Joan Baez and Ginetta Sagan, who had led the West Coast branch of Amnesty International and now directed their own human rights organization. For its part, the Carter Administration used the crisis, and the international attention stoked by the humanitarians, to restore American virtue. Although the Vietnamese, backed by anti-imperialist radicals, eventually fought back by denouncing human rights as a mask for American imperialism, they offered no viable alternative. This final chapter, then, explains the rise of this new "Human Rights International."

CHAPTER 1: THE VIETNAM INTERNATIONAL

On evening of May 26, 1966, Stephen Smale of the Vietnam Day Committee rose to speak at the "Six Heures pour le Vietnam," a colossal teach-in organized by French antiwar radicals. Smale's friend Laurent Schwartz, the event's primary organizer, hoped the presence of an American radical at Paris' most spectacular antiwar action yet could deepen the feeling of international solidarity beginning to emerge around the Vietnam War. After briefly surveying the state of the American antiwar movement, Smale insisted on the importance of united action. "People in France have asked me if there is any point in Frenchmen getting involved in the Vietnam protest," Smale said.[39] "I tell them definitely yes." Since the Vietnam War was an international war, he explained, the antiwar struggle likewise had to be international. Only international unity between activists in the United States, France, Vietnam, and across the world could help halt the war. Affirming this new commitment to radical international solidarity against war, Smale walked across the stage to shake hands with Mai Van Bo of the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris. The auditorium erupted in applause.

Although most Americans initially supported the Vietnam War, some, such as Smale, dissented from the outset. At the forefront of the antiwar struggle were *radicals* who advanced a *systematic* critique, arguing that ending the war necessarily meant radically transforming the system that had created it in the first place. Although marginal for decades, radicals increasingly became a significant force in American politics, in part because of the political turmoil of the Vietnam War. But these radicals not only took the lead in antiwar organizing at home, some tried to *internationalize* the struggle, contacting antiwar activists across the globe. Although American radicals prioritized connections with movements in the Third World, Western European radicals proved especially responsive, organizing coordinated actions to support their American peers. In France, some radicals hoped to translate this feeling of *internationalism* into an organized *international*, in some ways like the radical Internationals of the past. Joined by other radicals in

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[39] Stephen Smale, "Talk at Mutualité," May 26, 1966, 1 in Stephen Smale Papers, BANC MSS 99/373 c, Carton 3, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Western Europe, they also began to insist on the strategic value of organizing an antiwar international among radicals in the advanced capitalist countries of North America and Western Europe. While most Americans in the early years of the antiwar struggle paid little attention to the struggles in Europe, French radicals arguing for the value of coordinated struggle in Europe received tremendous encouragement from Steven Smale that night in 1966.

"What is going on in Vietnam affects the world," he argued. The Vietnam War, he continued, was part of a much broader global struggle between the United States and movements for self-determination across the globe. But the United States was by no means alone in trying to prevent the people of the world from "putting their own future in their hands." To continue its foreign policy, which had culminated in the Vietnam War, the United States depended on the support of its "traditional allies," namely, Western European capitalist countries such as France. Thus, French antiwar activism could not only "reinforce American demonstrators," but also weaken the pro-American alliance that made the Vietnam War possible.[40]

French radicals, joined by others across Western Europe, articulated these insights into a political strategy, arguing that radicals in North America and Western Europe had a special responsibility to combat the international alliance of capitalist countries that made American foreign policy possible. To that end, they met in Liège in October 1966, and then again in Brussels in March 1967, to build a functional radical international to coordinate their actions, which included a formal secretariat composed of various radical organizations. Over the course of 1967, it grew to include not only many radical organizations in Western Europe, but also in the United States, such as SDS and SNCC.

While the encounter of *domestic microsystems of struggle* in North America and Western Europe on the one side with a *global political ecosystem* of interconnected national liberation movements made such a radical antiwar international possible, it was above all the specific characteristics of the Vietnamese struggle that made it a reality. Indeed, without the Vietnam War, there would have never been a new international of radicals. In serving as a *binding element* the

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[40] Ibid., 2.

Vietnamese struggle allowed otherwise isolated activists in not only the United States and

France, but throughout Western Europe and North America, to unite in a new international.

Fervent internationalists, Vietnamese revolutionaries, both in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

and the National Liberation Front, consciously played this uniting role, giving rise to a new radical

international in the 1960s.

Radicals Against the War

American involvement in Vietnam began long before 1965, when President Lyndon

Johnson dispatched U.S. Marines to the South and systematically bombed the North. In 1945,

American ships were used to transport French troops to overthrow the newly independent

Vietnam.[41] During the first Indochina War, the United States provided France with weapons,

supplies, and funds to help restore colonial rule.[42] By 1954, the United States financed about 80

percent of the French war effort.[43] When the war ended in Vietnamese victory, the 1954 Geneva

Convention temporarily divided the country into two zones at the 17th parallel, with the North

governed by the communist Viet Minh, the South by Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem and Emperor

Boa Dai, who had collaborated with the Japanese and French. According to the Convention, both

zones were to participate in a July 1956 general election to form a unified Vietnamese state. But

the United States, convinced that the communists would win handily, blocked the election. As

President Dwight Eisenhower wrote in 1954, "I have never talked or corresponded with a person

knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the

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[41] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 1; Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 37; Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 112-13.
[42] For the First Indochina War, see, among others, Jacques Dolloz, *La guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954* (Paris: Seuil, 1987). For U.S. involvement in the war, see Gary R. Hess, *The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: the United States and Vietnam 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: The Origins of the American Commitment in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*.
[43] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 471.

time of the fighting, possibly eighty percent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bảo Đại."[44] For the United States, the fiction of an independent South had to be preserved to halt the spread of communism.

American support only grew when South Vietnamese dissidents began to challenge Diem's rule. In December 1960, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (NLF) united all those, including non-communists, wanting to overthrow what they saw was an illegitimate government in the South.[45] Though initially hesitant to involve itself in what would certainly slide into a destructive war with the United States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) eventually backed the Southern rebels with troops, weapons, and supplies.[46] The United States, which saw the Southern insurgency as part of a Northern conspiracy to subvert the sovereign state in the South, began playing a very active role in South Vietnam, engaging in a cover actions, increasing the number of military advisors, and authorizing a coup against Diem once his unpopularity fell to irrecoverable levels.[47]

Despite this aid, the government of South Vietnam enjoyed neither the popular support nor the military ability to defeat the NLF on its own. In fact, in its attempt to crush the resistance the government resorted to methods that only increased the NLF's support among the people.[48] Desperate to save the United States' failing client state, President Johnson took the fateful step of throwing the United States into what would become a full-scale war.[49] On February 7, 1965, Johnson ordered 49 retaliatory airstrikes across North Vietnam. On March 2, the U.S. military

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[44] Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953-56* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 372. For more on Eisenhower's stance at this juncture, see Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[45] Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 94-101.

[46] Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 63, 69-70; Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, 89-94.

[47] For the coup, see Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1987).

[48] One can mention torture, arbitrary assassinations, and above all, the forced relocations of the "strategic hamlet" program. See Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 82-83 and Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, 96-97.

[49] Fredrik Logevall, "'There Ain't No Daylight': Lyndon Johnson and the Politics of Escalation," in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars*, 91-107.

began a sustained bombing campaign of the North that would last over three years.[50] Five days

later, Johnson dispatched 3,500 marines to the South. The U.S. government, despite studiously

avoiding the word, was at war.[51]

Although the war in Vietnam initially enjoyed widespread approval in the United States,

some Americans loudly denounced their government's policies.[52] This early, fragmentary dissent

famously culminated in a massive demonstration on April 17, 1965 in Washington, D.C. The

organizers expected only a few thousand demonstrators; to everyone's surprise 20,000 gathered

in the capital for the single largest antiwar demonstration in American history up to that point.[53]

The significance of these numbers cannot be overstated. Protesting one's government during

wartime was still a punishable offense. During the First World War, antiwar activists were arrested

under the Espionage Act of 1917, and some, such as Socialist Presidential candidate Eugene V.

Debs languished in prison for years. In addition, the April 1965 march unfolded in a politically

charged Cold War atmosphere still shaped by widespread anticommunism, FBI's COINTELPRO,

and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Protesting the government in its war against a

Liberation Front dominated by communists could be dangerous, even for those who were firmly

anti-communist.

Taking their chances, on April 17 demonstrators picketed the White House, and then

marched to the Sylvan Theater, on the grounds of the Washington Monument, where they

listened to a series of speeches on the war, interspersed by performances from Joan Baez, Judy

Collins, Phil Ochs, and the SNCC Freedom Singers.[54] In his speech, Senator Ernest Gruening,

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[50] John T. Smith, *Rolling Thunder: The Strategic Bombing Campaign, North Vietnam, 1965-1968* (Walton on Thames, Surrey, England: Air Research Publications, 1994).

[51] The best history of the Vietnam War, or the Second Indochina War, remains William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009).

[52] To take one measure of public opinion, a Gallup Poll conducted in late August 1965 found that 61 percent of Americans felt that sending troops to fight in Vietnam was not a mistake, while 24 percent said it was.

[53] "SDS to Sponsor Vietnam March," *SDS Bulletin* 3, no. 4 (January 1965): 14.

[54] Paul Booth, "March on Washington," *SDS Bulletin* 3, no. 7 (May 1965): 10. As it turned out, the forces of order did not harass the demonstrators, though a group from the American Nazi Party, clad in military uniforms and swastika armbands did interrupt the rally, chanting, "gas the peace

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one of only two members of Congress not to vote for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, demanded

the "immediate cessation of our bombing in North Vietnam."[55] Stoughton Lynd spoke of French

activists who opposed the Algerian War.[56] Paul Potter, the President of the Students for a

Democratic Society, ended the rally with a rousing call to build a mass movement to end the war.

"I believe that the administration is serious about expanding the war in Asia," he said. "The

question is whether the people here are as serious about ending it."[57] The only way to do that, he

explained, was to build a "massive social movement," a "movement rather than a protest or some

series of protests."[58]

By 1965, something like an "antiwar movement" was beginning to take shape, though this

never approached anything like a singular, coherent movement. In fact, what is often

misremembered as "the antiwar movement" was a very amorphous collection of diverse political

currents united only by a general opposition to the Vietnam War.[59] Although they occasionally

coordinated their actions, especially for large marches such as this one, groups remained fiercely

independent of one another. They issued from different political backgrounds, pursued different

tactics, opposed the war for different reasons, and championed wildly different courses of action –

from negotiated settlement, to gradual American withdrawal, to total communist victory. As the

April 17 march revealed, the American "antiwar movement" was a cacophonous hodgepodge of

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creeps." "Thousands of Students in Capital Protest the War," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1965, 1

[55] Quoted in "15,000 White house Pickets Denounce Vietnam War," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1965, 3.

[56] Fred Halstead, *Out Now!: A Participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Monad Press, 1978), 41.

[57] Paul Potter, "The Incredible War," April 17, 1965, Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project, http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/potter-the-incredible-war-speech-text/. An abridged version can be found in *"Takin' it to the Streets": A Sixties Reader*, eds. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 174-78.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, D.C.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002), 3-9.

isolationists, pacifists, liberals, civil rights activists, black nationalists, anti-communists, social democrats, Communists, anti-revisionists, and socialists of various stripes.[60]

Though most antiwar dissenters were politically moderate, some identified with the radical left.[61] Contrary to the claims of American anti-communist propaganda, the most conservative of these was in fact the Communist Party USA. For although the CPUSA survived McCarthyism, the party emerged not only numerically diminished, but also far more moderate, having effectively abandoned the goal of revolution. During the Vietnam War, the party opposed immediate withdrawal with the slogan, "Negotiate Now," which infuriated those further to the left who felt that calling for negotiations implied that the United States had a right to be in Southeast Asia in the first place. Organizationally, the CPUSA matched its reformist line by trying to channel the antiwar movement into a narrow electoralism, at times supporting the Democratic Party. But if the CPUSA was clearly no longer radical as a national organization, some individual communists still were.

The largest of these radical formations was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Originally founded as the youth affiliate of the League for Industrial Democracy, SDS won its independence in the 1960s, emerging as a beacon for a new generation of activists hoping to move beyond what they called the "Old Left." Championing participatory democracy, the struggle for racial equality, and a kind of anti-anti-communism, SDS became the premier organization of the white "New Left" – by 1969, membership peaked at about 100,000. Although claiming a few socialist members, in its early years SDS was rather moderate, especially at the national level. For example, at the National Council meeting in December 1964, SDSers voted against two antiwar proposals – one to organize draft resistance and the other to send medical supplies to

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[60] Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield offer a good survey of the distinct and often antagonistic antiwar currents in *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).
[61] For an overview of American radicals in the 1960s and 1970s, see Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left since the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Vietnam – for being too radical.[62] That said, SDS was the one of the first to appreciate the importance of Vietnam and organized the April 1965 event.[63]

Also in attendance that day were members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. One of the leading civil rights organizations, SNCC was known above all for its grassroots organizing, taking the lead in sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration campaigns in the South. Although a primarily civil rights organization, many in the group connected the struggle for rights at home with the war abroad. But while some individuals publicly opposed the war – SNCC leader Bob Moses spoke at the April 17 demonstration – others in the group were reluctant to formally condemn the U.S. government, fearing loss of state support and cuts in funds. But in January 1966, after much debate, SNCC became the first civil rights organization to formally condemn the Vietnam War, openly encouraging draft resistance.[64]

Another group that would play an enormous role in the American antiwar movement was the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party. The SWP, which advanced the slogan, "U.S. Out Now," advocated mass demonstrations, but consistently opposed civil disobedience, which the party feared would alienate the broader American public – a stance that would put the SWP at odds with others on the far left as the decade progressed. Through its youth affiliate, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), the SWP exerted considerable influence over a number of antiwar initiatives, winning near complete control of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, a coalition that would boast some 100,000 members.[65] Unsurprisingly, the SWP and YSA's role raised many criticisms. Some felt the SWP's influence proved vital to antiwar effort;

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[62] Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 13.
[63] The best history of SDS remains Kirkpatrick Sale's *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973). Other works include, David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why it Failed* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi, 2008); G. Louis Heath, ed., *Vandals in the Bomb Factory: The History and Literature of the Students for a Democratic Society* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976).
[64] For SNCC, see Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Hearts, One Mind: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007); Faith S. Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
[65] Sale, *SDS*, 664.

others argued that the SWP was merely using the war to recruit members, discomfit rivals, and impose its own agenda.[66] Irrespective of one's attitude to the SWP, it is undeniable that the party worked its way to the center of antiwar organizing in the United States.[67]

Lastly, there was Progressive Labor (PL). Critical of their party's growing moderation, a number of Communists broke with the CPUSA in the fall of 1961, forming an anti-revisionist organization by the name of Progressive Labor in 1962. PL was fiercely anti-imperialist, followed the Chinese line, and organized illegal trips to Cuba. Although mostly comprised of older militants, through its influence over the May Second Movement (M2M), PL also enjoyed contacts with the burgeoning youth movement. For its part, M2M, which had emerged out of coordinated demonstrations on May 2, 1964 in New York, San Francisco, and several other cities, became the first far left youth group to focus on Vietnam.[68] M2M soon earned a reputation as one of the most militant pro-NLF groups. "We support the National Liberation Front of south Viet-Nam and other revolutionary movements because we realize that their struggle is our struggle, that when we aid our brothers in other countries, we are aiding ourselves," a 1965 statement explained.[69] But after attending the April 17, 1965 demonstration, PL quickly recognized SDS's potential and decided to dissolve M2M and send its members into the larger student organization.[70]

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[66] Wells, *The War Within*, 3, 52-54, 59-60.

[67] For the SWP's early years, see James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism: Report of a Participant* (New York: Pioneer Press, 1944); Constance Ashton Myers, *The Prophet's Army: Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977). For the SWP in the 1960s and 1970s, see A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1988), 145-80; Barry Sheppard, *The Party: The Socialist Workers Party, 1960-1988. A Political Memoir, Volume 1: The Sixties* (Chippendale, Australia: Resistance Books, 2005); Barry Sheppard, *The Party: The Socialist Workers Party, 1960-1988. A Political Memoir, Volume 2: Interregnum, Decline, and Collapse, 1973-1988* (Chippendale, Australia: Resistance Books, 2012). For the SWP's involvement in the antiwar struggle, see Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 141 and Fred Halstead's *Out Now!*

[68] Their decision to name themselves after the day of their first protest was undoubtedly inspired by Fidel Castro's July 26 movement. Tom Wells, *The War Within*, 13-14.

[69] Bay Area Vietnam Day Committee, *Did You Pay for the War?* (Berkeley, CA: Vietnam Day Committee, 1965), 23.

[70] For Progressive Labor, see Leigh David Benin, *The New Labor Radicalism and New York City's Garment Industry: Progressive Labor Insurgents in the 1960s* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 185-99; Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002), 63-64.

In spite of their common opposition to the Vietnam War, these groups fought bitterly. They debated whether to carry U.S. or NLF flags at demonstrations; whether the movement should focus exclusively on ending the war or aim to connect the war to other domestic issues; whether activists should organize large, visible actions, such as marches, or promote more local initiatives; whether the movement should adopt a more centralized structure or remain capillary; and whether or not to pursue electoral politics. In addition to tactics, they disagreed over their analysis of the situation abroad. Was the Vietnamese struggle a single, continuous revolution; or would it have to follow a two-stage process, first a democratic revolution, then a properly socialist one? Was the Workers Party of North Vietnam a progressive, international force; or would it degenerate into a "Stalinist" bureaucracy once in power?

Yet as serious as these differences were, they belied a deeper unity. Indeed, beneath these finely argued debates, many of these radical groups shared the same semiconscious strategic assumptions about antiwar struggle. Even if they expressed it differently, they all argued that since the war was the product of a much larger *system*, ending the Vietnam War necessarily meant thoroughly transforming that system. For them, halting the bombing, withdrawing troops, pursuing negotiations, electing a new President, or moving past Cold War rivalries – as more moderate antiwar voices suggested – would not stop the Vietnam War. Even if, by some chance, such actions did reduce hostilities in Southeast Asia, without a systematic change, the United States would find itself involved in another "Vietnam" elsewhere. Instead, the strategic objective was to change the system that had made Vietnam possible in the first place. It is precisely for this reason that one can call these activists *radicals* – true to the word's etymology, they sought to grasp the fundamental "roots" of the issue. And it is this radical strategic perspective that distinguished the radicals from other antiwar currents.

Of course, as the April 17 march revealed, there was some ambiguity over exactly how radicals defined this "system." Paul Potter, who helped inject the radical perspective into the demonstration that day, raised this question when he spoke directly about the system:

> We must name it, describe it, analyze it, understand it and change it … For it is only
> when that system is changed and brought under control that there can be any hope for

stopping the forces that create a war in Vietnam today or a murder in the South tomorrow or all the incalculable, innumerable more subtle atrocities that are worked on people all over—all the time.[71]

For many radicals in the audience, especially those of the older generation, the answer was obvious. They defined the "system" as either "capitalism" or "imperialism," and in some cases, the two terms were used roughly synonymously or fused into a single concept, such as "capitalist imperialism." But Potter remained conspicuously silent on the word's meaning, prompting some in the crowd to clamor that he name the system he was describing.[72]

Potter later explained his reticence that day: "I did not fail to call the system capitalist because I was a coward or an opportunist. I refused to call it capitalism because capitalism was for me and my generation an inadequate description of the evils of America – a hollow, dead word tied to the thirties and a movement that had used it freely but apparently without comprehending it."[73] In other words, instead of relying on inherited concepts, or getting mired in antiquarian debates, Potter, along with many in the New left, hoped to embark on an open journey to find the most accurate way to describe the system. This did not make his stance any less radical. Indeed, although avoiding the words "capitalist" or "imperialist," Potter, and those like him, effectively agreed with other, more ideological radicals. It is precisely this shared assumption about the need to transform the system, often buried under petty sectarian bickering or terminological minutia, that allows us to speak of something like a *radical Left*. It should be added that by the end of the decade, many in the New Left came to agree that "imperialism" and "capitalism" were in fact the best ways to describe the system, lending the U.S. radical left a common vocabulary rooted in Marxism.[74]

To be sure, this radical left resided on the fringes of American politics in the early 1960s. But that changed over the course of the decade as a number of struggles, such as the civil rights and student movements, helped pull the radicals into the mainstream. But it was Vietnam, more

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[71] Potter, "The Incredible War."
[72] Sale, *SDS*, 188; Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People*, 1964-1968 (New York: Grossman, 1973), 77.
[73] Paul Potter, *A Name for Ourselves* (Boston: Little, Brown & co., 1971), 101.
[74] Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 130.

than anything else, that presented radicals with the perfect opportunity to grow, consolidate, and escape the political margins. First, the need for unity against the war prompted some activists to resist the virulent anticommunism of earlier years. For example, in stark contrast with earlier civil rights and nuclear disarmament demonstrations, where many organizers flatly banned Communist participation, SDS activists, even liberal ones, did not exclude any current from the April 17, 1965 march. This infuriated many of the anti-communist peace groups, such as SANE, which refused to participate in any event with pro-NLF radicals.[75] Yet, after sensing the importance of the march, SANE changed its mind and ended up rubbing shoulders with radicals. In this way, the Vietnam War helped the radical left gain mainstream exposure and even acceptance.

In addition, the war radicalized some Americans by prompting them to turn a more critical eye towards their government, think more expansively about the United States' international role, and seriously consider the possibility of major systematic change. When the draft expanded, the death toll soared, and victory continued to elude the United States, the radical left was there to propose a coherent political analysis to help Americans articulate their frustrations, push their ideas in more radical directions, and provide organizations to translate those feelings into action. The Vietnam War, more than anything else, thickened the ranks of these radical tendencies.[76] Lyndon Johnson, some joked, was their best recruiter.

Lastly, radicals filled the void left by traditional progressive organizations. Peace groups, labor unions, and moderate Old Left formations could have likely taken the lead in antiwar organizing, but the militancy of the Vietnamese struggle led them to hesitate.[77] Groups like SANE certainly participated, but adopted a lukewarm stance. Others, such as the AFL-CIO actively supported the war – indeed, ALF-CIO President George Meany only admitted the war was a

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[75] Wells, *The War Within*, 17. For SANE, see Milton S. Katz, *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, 1957-1985* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).
[76] Wells, *The War Within*, 17-18.
[77] Sheppard, *The Party*, 135-36.

mistake in 1974, after the United States had already withdrawn.[78] Sensing an opening, radicals

seized the initiative. Their organizing experiences, indefatigable efforts, and firm political

convictions more than made up for their miniscule size. Radicals came to play a leading role in

many antiwar initiatives, calling conferences, organizing marches, planning teach-ins, resisting

the draft, and presiding over national coalitions.[79] In fact, in the early years, when moderate

organizations only approached with caution, radicals proved themselves to be the most dynamic

element in the antiwar opposition. The Vietnam War gave the ghettoized radical left a chance to

become a visible force in American political life.

Internationalizing the Movement

　　Although antiwar radicals organized across the United States, certain parts of the country

emerged as national rallying points. One of these was Berkeley, California. Here, radicals

successfully channeled the energies of earlier struggles, such as the Berkeley Free Speech

Movement (FSM), towards antiwar organizing, founding one of the most militant radical antiwar

initiatives, the Vietnam Day Committee.[80] The VDC began when Barbara Gullahorn, then a

political science major, and her boyfriend, Jerry Rubin, met with Steven Smale about organizing a

massive teach-in at UC Berkeley. Rubin, who moved to Berkeley in January 1964 to pursue a

graduate degree in sociology, soon dropped out to join the civil rights movement, then traveled to

Cuba. There, he met Che Guevara, who allegedly explained that the "most exciting struggle in the

world is going on in North America. You live in the belly of the beast."[81] Inspired, he returned to

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[78] Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 102. Lewis notes, however, that while organized labor, especially the AFL-CIO, was certainly pro-war in the early years, American workers were more likely to oppose the war than its middle and upper-class counterparts.

[79] Small, *Antiwarriors*, 29.

[80] For the FSM, W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chapter 1; Robert Cohen and Reginald Zelnik, eds. *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Robert Cohen, *Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[81] Jerry Rubin, *Growing (Up) at Thirty-Seven* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1976), 75.

the United States to wage the struggle at home. Smale, a famous mathematician at the university with a long history in radical politics, was eager to help.[82]

On May 21-22, 1965, the trio threw the largest teach-in to date.[83] Vietnam Day, as it was called, rolled a debate, protest, and spectacle into a colossal 36-hour extravaganza to raise critical awareness about the war. But because of the far more radical atmosphere of the Bay Area, this teach-in was not only larger, attracting over 35,000 people, but far more militant than others. Many of the major radical tendencies of the time participated. Paul Potter spoke on behalf of SDS, Bob Parris of SNCC, Mario Savio of the FSM, Jack Barnes for the YSA, and Levi Laub of the Progressive Labor Party, along with a number of famous personalities, such as Staughton Lynd, the radical pacifist Dave Dellinger, and the famous biographer of Leon Trotsky, Isaac Deutscher.[84] On the tables, one could find a host of radical literature, including copies of the black nationalist journal, *Soulbook*. In addition to creating a space for some of the most radical views in American politics, the organizers also hoped to foster a sense of unity.[85] To that end, they hosted a panel titled, "United Political Action," which featured speakers from rival radical antiwar groups such as the YSA, M2M, the W.E.B. Dubois Clubs of America (the Communist Party's youth affiliate), and the International Socialist Clubs (a small Trotskyist tendency). The VDC followed up by publishing a pamphlet, *Did You Vote for the War?*, which collected the perspectives of nearly all the radical groups of the time – from the IWW to the Sparticist League, the SWP to the CPUSA.[86]

After Vietnam Day, Gullahorn, Rubin, Smale, and others decided to continue their efforts as a formal organization, the Vietnam Day Committee, which quickly became the leading radical

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[82] Steve Batterson, *Stephen Smale: The Mathematician Who Broke the Dimension Barrier* (Providence, RI: American Mathematical Society, 2011).

[83] Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War*, 91-92; Gerard J. De Groot, "The Limits of Moral Protest and Participatory Democracy: The Vietnam Day Committee," *Pacific Historical Review* 64, no. 1 (February 1995): 97-104.

[84] Many of the speeches that day were republished as *We Accuse* (Berkeley: Diablo Press, 1965).

[85] Halstead, *Out Now!*, 56.

[86] Bay Area Vietnam Day Committee, *Did You Pay for the War?* (Berkeley, CA: Vietnam Day Committee, 1965).

antiwar formation in the United States.[87] After the April 1965 march everyone expected SDS to

take the lead. As Paul Booth of SDS recalls with regret, "We had the opportunity to make SDS

the organizational vehicle of the anti-war movement," but instead, he continued, "we chose to go

off in all kinds of different directions."[88] With SDS preoccupied, the VDC filled the national

leadership vacuum.[89] One of the group's keys to success was its radical inclusivity.[90] True to its

roots, the VDC welcomed every radical current – the CPUSA, SWP and YSA, International

Socialists, along with many radicals who remained independent of formal organizations.

At the forefront of the antiwar struggle, the VDC made several contributions to radical

antiwar organizing in the United States. First, the committee served as a model for loose,

democratic, yet uncompromisingly radical grassroots antiwar organizing. For instance, the VDC

launched the Community Project as a way to organize antiwar sentiment outside the university.

Second, the VDC, far more so than most antiwar groups at the time, championed civil

disobedience. In August, for example, VDC activists tried to stop trains carrying troops through

the Bay Area, prefiguring the kind of militant confrontational politics that would characterize the

struggle several years later. Lastly, the VDC's greatest contribution was its commitment to

internationalizing antiwar struggle. The VDC laid the most important foundations for the idea of

radical internationalism against the Vietnam War.

This internationalism appeared from the beginning. In selecting speakers for Vietnam

Day, Smale and Rubin invited foreign intellectuals, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand

Russell. Sartre, whose vocal opposition to the French government during the Algerian War

became an important inspiration for American radicals, refused to visit the United States in

protest to the war; Russell, now in his eighties, could not make the trip, but recorded a speech for

the event. In organizing Vietnam Day, Smale also recalls receiving valuable international support

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[87] Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War*, 91-100.
[88] James Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 235-36.
[89] Sheppard, *The Party,* 134.
[90] Diane Carole Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers: Richard Aoki on Race, Resistance, and a Paradoxical Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 109; Halstead, *Out Now!*, 153.

from others abroad, above all Laurent Schwartz from France.[91] In fact, it appears that Schwartz, one of the most recognized antiwar radicals in France, was one of the first to seriously suggest organizing not only a coordinated day of international protest, but possibly some kind of radical international network.

On May 14, 1965, before Vietnam Day, Schwartz wrote to Smale expressing his solidarity with the forthcoming teach-in. Schwartz, who had protested the Algerian War, began by drawing parallels between his experiences in France and the nascent American movement against the Vietnam War. You will "know in the following months a situation very similar to ours during the Algerian War," he remarked. "The government will become more and more ferocious and hypocritical; in a general climate of fear throughout the country, you will be rather isolated, calumniated, accused of beeing [sic] enemies of the USA." But, he added encouragingly, "your cause is the right one, and is considered as much everywhere in the world." Schwartz wanted Smale to know that he and others like him would do whatever they could to support the American struggle against the war, "You may be sure to receive from your colleagues in France any help you want." Although he doubted there was much they could do to directly assist the American movement, Schwartz wondered if there might be a way to *internationalize* the movement by inventing ways of ensuring continued international support for American efforts. "But perhaps," he suggested, "we could think of an international Committee against war in Vietnam." And if not that, at the very least, "an international day of protest, say in October; what do you think?"[92]

The VDC did just that. Soon after Vietnam Day, the VDC prepared for what it called the International Days of Protest for October 15-16, 1965, the first major, internationally coordinated mass protests against the Vietnam War. As one of the VDC's fliers explained, "People throughout

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[91] Smale also recalls receiving support from Shokichi Iyanaga in Japan. It is interesting to note that Iyanaga, Schwartz, Smale, and Russell were famous mathematicians, and it seems that these figures used their international professional societies as a way to organize against the war. For example, during Vietnam Day, Schwartz happened to be in Japan where he circulated information about the activities in Berkeley. For Vietnam Day, some Japanese mathematicians signed a letter of support while Japanese activists held a solidarity demonstration to coincide with the event, marking one of the earliest moments of international coordination.

[92] Laurent Schwartz to Stephen Smale, May 14, 1965, Stephen Smale Papers, BANC MSS 99/373 c, Carton 3, Bancroft.

the world must now move beyond single demonstrations and teach-ins to one massive

internationally coordinated action."[93] Through a demonstration of this scope, supported by mass

protests throughout the world, the "full impact of world opinion can be brought to bear against the

policy of the American government."[94] With that objective in mind, the VDC organized an

international committee in late June 1965 to contact activists in other countries. The committee,

largely composed of international students studying in the United States, released international

calls for support in seven languages and sent "hundreds of letters to foreign governments,

political parties, trade unions, student organizations, peace groups and individuals, asking their

support for the October 15-16 International Days of Protest."[95]

The response was "immediate and encouraging."[96] When October 15 arrived, activists

protested in dozens of countries on every habitable continent, from Mexico to Canada to Senegal

to Prague to Tokyo to Melbourne. In London, Bertrand Russell kicked off a weekend of protest by

"tearing up his Labour Party membership in front of a capacity audience, to show his disgust at

the Labour Government's support for U.S. policy."[97] In Italy, activists organized sizeable,

coordinated demonstrations in seven cities.[98] In Brussels, home to a rapidly growing antiwar

movement, thousands participated in a weekend of antiwar events. Although the idea for an

international day of protest slated for sometime in October came from a Frenchman, the French

organizers chose not to organize any major events that day because of conflicts with the French

academic calendar.[99] Thinking they could reach more students, they postponed their action to

November. The change of date worked well since the VDC, buoyed by the resounding success of

the International Days of Protest, decided to call yet another coordinated international action for

November 1965. Thus, in anticipation of the November 27, 1965 march on Washington, D.C.,

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[93] "News From the Vietnam Day Committee," no date, Social Protest Collection, BANC MSS 86/157 c, Bancroft.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Carol Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers*, 110;
[96] *The International Protest Movement*, ii.
[97] Elaine Pierce, "British Commonwealth Countries," in *The International Protest Movement*, 23.
[98] Ben C. Ramos and S. Pollard, "Europe," in *The International Protest Movement*, 17.
[99] Letter from M. Rebérioux to Stephen Smale, June 28, 1965, Stephen Smale papers, BANC MSS 99/373 c, Carton 3, Bancroft.

French activists of the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire (CIU) organized an "International University Week Against the Vietnam War" from November 18-25 to support their American comrades. The CIU, which comprised the three major French academic unions, served as an umbrella organization for those who opposed the Vietnam War in the university. But the CIU hoped to use the International University Week to go beyond the university to reach the "wider public" as well.[100] They succeeded – that week of action, organized explicitly to support the American movement, proved to be the "first mass demonstration in France" against war.[101]

By that point, the VDC had joined with several other radical antiwar organizations, including SDS, the YSA, the CPUSA, and dozens of smaller antiwar collectives, to form a national organization, the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NCC).[102] Together with the VDC's international committee, the NCC published a pamphlet, *The International Protest Movement Against American Intervention in the War in Vietnam*, to develop the international movement. First, they aimed to "explain and document" the "international protest movement against American intervention in the war in Vietnam."[103] Second, the authors explained that since the mainstream media had ignored the international protests, likely in order to lead Americans to believe that the rest of the world somehow supported U.S. foreign policy, the pamphlet hoped to educate the general public about antiwar opinion throughout the world. "It is most important," they clarified, "that American citizens be informed about these demonstrations and that the truly worldwide, unified dissatisfaction with current U.S. foreign policy be adequately publicized."[104] Lastly, they hoped the booklet could contribute to the growth the international antiwar movement by deepening contacts. As a sign of its commitment to internationalism, the NCC called for a second International Days of Protest for March 1966, which proved even larger than the first.

Thus, by 1966 many American antiwar radicals were keen to build an international

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[100] "Semaine universitaire en France contre la guerre du Vietnam," *Le Monde*, November 6, 1965, 7.
[101] Nicolas Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche français sur la guerre du Vietnam, 1965-1968," (Mémoire DEA, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1998), 20.
[102] DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 121-22.
[103] *The International Protest Movement*, ii.
[104] Ibid.

antiwar network. But in their minds, international connections largely meant forging links with movements in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Diane Carole Fujino, who worked on the Asia section of the report, spoke for many when she admitted, "I was most interested in Third World people and politics."[105] After all, the Third World was where revolutions were unfolding. This was where history was being made, where American activists looked for inspiration, ideas, and models. If there were to be international links, they had to be with the Third World. This attitude was explicitly theorized by Richard Aoki, another member of the international committee, who explained the VDC's efforts to internationalize the war in the Committee's newsletter. In true radical fashion Aoki argued that the Vietnam War was not some "unfortunate error," but the result of a deliberate "policy."[106] The United States, he explained, was determined to "crush national liberation movements" across the globe through military intervention, economic exploitation, and the creation of pro-American dictatorships. In this sense, Aoki explained, the Vietnam War was just one part of a broader "international war" between the United States and "[r]evolutionary struggles for self-determination" throughout the Third World. If "the war in Vietnam is an international war," he concluded, then "its opposition must be international."[107] But since the fight was essentially between the United States and the Third World, then internationalization meant real coordination with third-world movements.

Western Europe, by contrast, was not a battlefield in this international war. Thus, while Americans certainly appreciated solidarity from Europeans, connections with those movements were without question secondary. Indeed, before May 1968, most American antiwar radicals did not pay serious attention to Europe, and certainly not to France.[108] Many drew inspiration from the French resistance to the Nazis and later the Algerian War, and in some cases lionized that experience as a model for antiwar struggle in the United States, but contemporary French anti-

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[105] Carol Fujino, *Samurai Among Panthers*, 110.
[106] Richard Aoki, "International Protest," *The VDC News* 1, no. 4 (October 11, 1965): 2.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Michael Kazin, presentation, "Book Discussion: The Other Alliance: *Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in Global Sixties*," Wilson Center, Washington, D.C., April 21, 2010.

Vietnam War activism did not hold the interest of American radicals.[109] The French antiwar

struggle was tiny, and student radicals seemed harmless, especially compared with their

pugnacious German peers.[110] Of course, there were plenty of contacts on an individual basis, but

no sustained, international network linking American radicals with those in France or other

capitalist countries of Western Europe. For most Americans in early 1966, building an

international network between radicals in North America and Western Europe made little strategic

sense.

That said, these early American efforts to build an international movement, even if

focused on the Third World and not on Europe, did end up playing a crucial role creating a new

kind of international solidarity between radicals in North America and Western Europe later in the

decade. For if these early international connections with Western European activists may not

have been important for most Americans, they were for Europeans, who looked to the United

States for inspiration. The teach-in, for example, spread across Europe like wildfire. More

importantly, many Western European antiwar radicals, especially in France, initially

conceptualized their antiwar internationalism as a way of supporting U.S. activists, whom they

saw as the lynchpin. In this way, a feeling of internationalism had emerged by early 1966, but it

was highly asymmetrical and largely unidirectional. While U.S. radicals provided the

indispensable spark and laid the groundwork for future networks, the heavy task of not only

deepening that feeling of internationalism, but also building a functional international network

connecting radicals in the advanced capitalist world would be taken up by Western European

radicals, and especially the French.

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[109] The examples are legion, but for a few representative cases of U.S. radicals drawing
inspiration from the French, see, Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 139; DeBenedetti, *An
American Ordeal*, 97; Halstead, *Out Now!*, 41. For connections and comparisons between French
opposition to the Algerian War and American opposition to the Vietnam War, see David L. Schalk,
War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[110] For connections between Americans and Germans, see Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance:
Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in Global Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.:
Princeton University Press, 2010). Klimke reveals, however, that international connects between
the two sides were far more important for Germans than they were for the Americans.

French Radicals Call for An International Front

In 1966 the teach-in washed onto the shores of France. The May 1966 "Six Heures pour le Vietnam," explicitly convened to show solidarity with American antiwar struggles, brought together five thousand French antiwar activists from a variety of otherwise antagonistic political tendencies for a six-hour marathon of speeches, discussions, music, and films.[111] The Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire, which took the lead in organizing the event, called for "the union of all forces who, in France and in the world, notably in the United States, fight against the Vietnam War and support the fight of the South Vietnamese people for their independence, under the direction of the National Liberation Front."[112] Indeed, French radicals not only heeded the call to internationalize the movement, they worked even harder than their American peers to develop a revived sense of internationalism among antiwar radicals.

For French radicals from a number of distinct currents, the war was not a localized affair between the United States and Vietnam, but a global struggle. This perspective defined the second mass meeting of radicals in Paris, the "Six Heures du Monde pour le Vietnam," which captured the internationalist emphasis in its very name.[113] There, on November 28, 1966, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued that the French had a duty to support the Vietnamese struggle since the NLF and North Vietnam were part of a much larger, common fight against "American hegemony, against American imperialism."[114] In this context, the "defeat of the Vietnamese people would be politically our defeat, the defeat of all free people." "Vietnam," he concluded, "is fighting for us."[115] Sartre's speech, which "caused unbridled enthusiasm," gave

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[111] Bethany S. Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us:' French Identities in the U.S.–Vietnam War, 1965-1973," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2009), 65-69. Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 56-60.

[112] "Manifestation contre la guerre jeudi prochain à la Mutualité," *Le Monde*, May 21, 1966.

[113] "A la Mutualité: de nombreuses personalités étrangères participeront à la manifestation 'Six Heures pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde*, November 27-28, 1966; "Aujourd'hui à la Mutualité: Manifestation internationale contre guerre au Vietnam," *Le Figaro*, November 28, 1966; "Les six heures du Monde pour le Vietnam," *Tribune Socialiste*, December 3, 1966; Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" 87-89; Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 63-68. For the "Six Heures" outside of Paris, see Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 68-72.

[114] "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde*, November 30, 1966.

[115] Ibid.

perfect expression to the thoroughly internationalist vision of many French radicals, and his

words, "their struggle is ours," would become the official slogan of the most dynamic radical

antiwar organization in France, the Comité Vietnam National (CVN), which emerged from that

meeting in November.[116]

Just as important as defining an internationalist perspective on the antiwar struggle, the

Six Heures du Monde showed that radicals could, against all odds, organize independently of the

French Communist Party (PCF). Like their fraternal party in the United States, the PCF had

tempered its radicalism by the 1960s; but unlike the CPUSA, the PCF remained a mass party of

enormous consequence, casting a wide shadow over the entire left in France. Although involved

in the French antiwar struggle from the beginning, the PCF disliked anything it could not directly

control.[117] The unparalleled success of the first Six Heures in May 1966, which originated outside

the party, seemed to confirm their fears that through antiwar organizing other radical currents

might outflank the Party. Thus, when the organizers of the original Six Heures approached the

PCF about organizing a second meeting, the PCF tried to sabotage the event, forcing the

organizers, Laurent Schwartz, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alfred Kastler, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and Henri

Bartoli to take the enormous risk of not only organizing the next Six Heures independently of the

PCF, but to use the gathering to launch an autonomous organization, the CVN.[118]

As it turned out, their gamble paid off. As Ken Coates, a noted British antiwar radical,

reported, "The remarkable thing about the whole meeting is the way in which it was assembled

entirely by the independent socialist forces."[119] This success cannot be exaggerated. The primary

challenge of the French radical left after the Second World War had been to find a way to

organize outside the PCF without completely losing touch with the masses under the Party's

control. Vietnam was their solution. As in the United States, the Vietnam War, more than anything

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[116] Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout compte fait* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 464-5.
[117] For early PCF antiwar organizing, see Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 16-19.
[118] Laurent Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, trans. Leila Schneps (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2001), 393.
[119] Ken Coates, "Mass Rally in Paris Backs War Crimes Tribunal," *World Outlook* 4, no. 40 (December 1966): 14.

else, allowed French radicals to develop into a major political force. But in the United States,

Vietnam brought radicals back into the mainstream by building a loose sense of unity that

overcame the anti-communism of the 1950s; in France, Vietnam strengthened the radical left by

allowing it to escape the hegemony of the PCF.[120] Vietnam was an issue where the radical left

could not only distinguish itself from the PCF, but even bypass the Party. Where the PCF's

antiwar organizing was hierarchical, French radicals promoted grassroots, autonomous initiatives.

Where the PCF adopted a very ambiguous stance on the war, chanting "Peace in Vietnam," the

radicals countered with the intransigent, "The NLF will Win!" Where the party apparatus

sponsored only the most moderate actions, the radicals called for militant struggle. And where the

PCF leadership saw Vietnam as only another tragic issue in need of resolution, the radicals saw it

as the focal point of a worldwide struggle. With Vietnam, the French radical left could truly come

into its own.[121]

Vietnam allowed radicals to organize independently of the PCF. But despite shared

opposition to the Communist Party, the radical left in France was just as fragmented as in the

United States, and radical groups created their own rival antiwar formations. One was the Centre

Information-Vietnam sponsored by the Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste de France.[122] Far

more effective, however, was the Comité Vietnam de base (CVB), organized by the Union des

jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJC-ml). The UJC-ml began as a Maoist student

group within the PCF's youth organization (UEC), based primarily at the prestigious École

Normale Superieur.[123] After being expelled from the UEC, they formed themselves into a distinct

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[120] Nicolas Pas, "'Six Heures Pour le Vietnam': Histoire des Comité Vietnam français, 1965-1968," *Revue Historique* 302, no. 613 (January-March 2000): 165.

[121] Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, "1962-1968 : Le champ des possibles," in Philippe Artières and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds. *68: Une histoire collective, 1962-1981* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), 38-43.

[122] Centre Information-Vietnam, "Manifeste pour un soutien politique au peuple vietnamien," 1967, and Centre Information-Vietnam Bulletin no. 1, F Delta Res 701, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (BDIC), Nanterre, France.

[123] Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Plon 1996), 54-63, 77-88; Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 88-94; Christian Delacroix, "L'engagement radical de la rue d'Ulm," in *68: Une histoire collective,* 125-31; Patrick Kessel, *Le mouvement maoiste en France: Textes et documents, 2 Vols.* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1972 and 1978).

political organization on December 10, 1966 and quickly developed what would become one of their primary axes of organization, the CVBs.[124] The CVBs were militant, grassroots committees that sought to develop the antiwar struggle not only in universities, but in neighborhoods and factories.[125]

Of course, the most important of these non-PCF radical antiwar initiatives was the CVN. Like the CVBs, the CVN sponsored more militant actions than the PCF, adopted a far more radical stance on the war, and encouraged grassroots committees across France – Schwartz even called for teach-ins at Renault factories.[126] Yet, the two formations differed in crucial respects. First, the CVBs offered unconditional allegiance to the DRV, whereas the CVN, though still supporting North Vietnam against the United States, remained a bit more cautious. Second, while the CVBs eschewed institutionalized hierarchy, the CVN possessed a firm federalist structure.[127] Third, the CVN often relied on the star power of intellectual celebrities, unlike the CVBs, which tried to remain closer to the grassroots. Most importantly, whereas the CVBs were very sectarian, criticizing every other group while hosting their own separate actions, the CVN practiced a radical inclusivity.[128]

In fact, much like the VDC in the United States, the CVN successfully fused a number of distinct radical currents. There were dissident Communists, such as Jean-Pierre Vigier, a hero of the French Resistance, who opposed the PCF's organizational obstinacy and lukewarm stance on the war. There was also a small but distinct tendency of radical Christian socialists, such as Henri Bartoli, one of the original CVN organizers, and Nicolas Boulte, the CVN's official secretary.[129] Far more important than either of these two currents, however, was the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), a leftist organization formed out of a union of several socialist currents in

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[124] Nicolas Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 73-87.

[125] Bethany S. Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" 101-103. The CVB also published its own paper, *Victoire pour le Vietnam*, accessible at the BDIC.

[126] Laurent Schwartz, "Il faut crever l'écran," *Nouvel Observateur*, November 16-22, 1966.

[127] For the CVN's structure, see Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 101-103, 110-12.

[128] For their criticism of the CVN, for example, see, "L'ancien et le nouveau comité," *Victoire pour le Vietnam* 3 (November-December 1967): 2.

[129] It was Boulte's arrest, along with other antiwar activists, in March 1968 that directly triggered the formation of the famous March 22 Movement.

April 1960. The bulk of the PSU were former members of the SFIO, France's mainstream socialist political party, who abandoned their party after it threw its weight behind the Algerian War.[130] The PSU, which counted some 15,000 members, was therefore less a disciplined party based on ideological unity than a conglomeration of activists from distinct political currents, from Christian socialism to Trotskyism, social democracy to Castroism. Although the PSU never played an ideologically or even organizationally preponderant role in the CVN, a number of PSU radicals, such as Laurent Schwartz, Claude Bourdet, Pierre Naville, and Marcel Francis-Khan, helped form the backbone of the Committee. The fourth, and most significant component of the CVN was the Trotskyists, themselves adhering to a number of distinct groups. Schwartz, for instance, was a Trotskyist from the PSU. Others issued from explicitly Trotskyist organizations such as the Alliance Marxiste Révolutionnaire. Indeed, more than any other general political perspective, Trotskyism dominated the CVN. This did not mean that the CVN was a Trotskyist front group, but as historian Nicolas Pas argues, their influence was so great that "one can rightly speak of a strongly *Trotskisante* organization."[131]

The CVN, more so than the CVBs, was also a profoundly intergenerational political formation, uniting radicals who had fought the Nazis, militants who came of age during the Cold War, antiwar activists who cut their teeth on the Algerian War, and the young people who would compose the generation of May 68. The most important youth organization in the CVN, and one that would go on to play a central role in the events of May 68, was the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire (JCR). Like the UJCml, the core of the JCR originally consisted of young activists from the Communist UEC, though predominantly issuing from the Faculty of Letters of the Sorbonne, rather than the ENS. They, too, were expelled by the PCF, but for refusing to endorse

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[130] For the PSU, see Marc Heurgon, *Histoire du PS, Tome 1: La fondation et la guerre d'Algérie*, 1958-1962 (Paris: La Découverte, 1994); Vincent Duclert, "Le PSU: une rénovation politique manquée?," in *68: Une histoire collective,* 152-57; Noëlline Castagnez et al., eds. *Le Parti socialiaste unifié: Histoire et postérité* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013).
[131] Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 90.

François Mitterand in the 1965 Presidential elections. Joined by other young radicals, the expelled students decided to found their own autonomous organization on April 2, 1966.[132]

JCR radicals, who declared in the very first issue of their paper that "the war in Vietnam will become one of the central axes of our struggle," served as the foot soldiers of the CVN.[133] They organized the grassroots, developed the CVN in the provinces, and extended the radical antiwar struggle to high school students encouraging the formation of Comité Vietnam lycéens (CVL).[134] With one of its leaders, Alain Krivine, serving on the National Bureau of the CVN, the JCR also played something of a leadership role in the organization. Indeed, as one of the most radical currents in the CVN, the JCR ultimately helped push the CVN towards a more revolutionary position over the course of the decade. But their partnership with the CVN proved transformative for JCR radicals as well. The JCR benefited from the CVN's role as a transmitter of radical historical memory as young radicals learned from older militants. The CVN also helped the JCR forge a number of important national and international connections. But most importantly, through the CVN's antiwar efforts, JCR radicals gained invaluable organizing experiences that would come to the fore during the tempest of May 68. Retrospectively, their time in the CVN can be seen as a formative radical apprenticeship.

The JCR was politically heterogeneous, in large part reflecting its composition.[135] The nucleus of the group was affiliated with the French Section of the Trotskyist Fourth International. Others came from the youth branch of the PSU. Some, such as Daniel Bensaïd, were not originally Trotskyists.[136] One early member of the group, gay activist Guy Hocquenghem, would

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[132] Richard Johnson, *the French Communist Party versus the Students: Revolutionary Politics in May-June 1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 54-57; Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 49-50. Daniel Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life: A Political Memoir*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2013), 35-41; Alain Krivine, *Ça te passera avec l'âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 91-93.

[133] Éditorial, *Avant-garde jeunesse* no. 1 (May-June 1966): 2. See also, Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération, vol. 1: Les années de rêve* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 412.

[134] Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 116, 161-62.

[135] Hamon and Rotman, *Génération*, 412.

[136] Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life*, 52.

later become the leader of the libertarian Maoist group Vive La Révolution![137] The JCR's

Trotskyism was thus tempered by a potent infusion of other political trends, most importantly

Guevarism. Indeed, like most radical youth in North America and Western Europe, JCR radicals

were profoundly inspired by anti-imperialist revolutions abroad, above all Cuba.[138]

But they also looked to the United States from the start. For example, in 1965, the young

Sorbonne radicals who would go on to form the nucleus of the JCR wrote a detailed article about

struggles in Berkeley, reporting on the history of the civil rights movement, the FSM, and the

formation of the VDC. For the JCR, the antiwar movement's formation in the United States carried

enormous consequences. "After years of political passivity in the persistent climate of anti-

communism," the JCR explained, "a new left is in the process of bursting forth in the United

States."[139] The development of a radical left taking aim at the "system" was especially welcome.

"Criticism of the Vietnam War," the JCR optimistically forecasted, "is rapidly transforming into a

radical movement of opposition to the Democratic Party and the anti-democratic system that

reigns in the U.S.A."[140] This movement, the JCR hoped, could lead to a "real, mass political force"

in the very heart of the United States, which would in turn completely transform the international

balance of power.

The CVN shared this optimism about American struggles and forged durable links with

American activists. At their founding event, CVN organizers made special effort to invite U.S.

radicals, such as Dave Dellinger and SNCC's Courtland Cox. To underscore the French

movement's commitment to aiding their U.S. comrades, they held a symposium on the antiwar

struggle in the United States.[141] After the Six Heures, the CVN worked with the Paris American

Committee to Stopwar (PACS), a group of antiwar American expatriates led by Maria Jolas, to

formalize these relationships with American radicals. "Maria was linked to the American anti-war

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[137] Ron Haas, "The Death of the Angel: Guy Hocquenghem and the French Cultural Revolution after May 1968" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, Houston, Texas, May 2007), 117 and 119.
[138] Krivine, *Ça te passera avec l'âge*, 93-94.
[139] "Le Vietnam à Berkeley," *Avant-garde Sorbonne* no. 1 (November 1965): 9.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ken Coates, "Mass Rally in Paris Backs War Crimes Tribunal," 13-14.

movement," Schwartz recalls, "and was our link with it."[142] Indeed, through Jolas' efforts, PACS not only served as a major information center for Americans abroad, but also as a vital relay for French radicals. As historian Bethany Keenan has shown, "French anti-war groups sought PACS out for information on American activism," and most information passing to and from the United States went through the group.[143]

But the CVN, though fastened to the American struggle, also looked to movements in other countries. At the Six Heures du monde, CVN organizers invited activists from Brazil, Cuba, Morocco, Algeria, Germany, Australia, and of course, Vietnam. The final symposium of the evening, dedicated to the theme of "The Anti-Imperialist Struggle in the World," included talks by Lawrence Daly, a member of the Russell Tribunal; Marcello Cini, president of a similar Vietnam Committee in Italy; and Marcel Niedergang and Bernard de Vries, leaders of the Provos, a Dutch anarchist group. As we have already seen, from its very origins one of the CVN's primary objectives was to push the internationalizing work of the VDC even further. This obsession with promoting internationalism had something to do with the particular domestic political situation. In France, de Gaulle's vocal opposition to the United States' war in Vietnam worked to take some of the wind out of the radicals' sails, which left militant antiwar organizing in France lagging behind movements elsewhere.[144] In other countries, especially Great Britain, West Germany, and Italy, whose governments played a crucial role supporting the American war effort, the stakes were much higher, which pushed antiwar struggles to achieve a certain amplitude, unity, and ferocity missing from the hexagon in 1966. Some French radicals compensated by putting considerable effort into solidarity campaigns, which translated into a deep commitment to internationalism. One can add to this the fact that the vast majority of French antiwar radicals were dedicated Marxists

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[142] Laurent Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 413. He added, "Every dissident who came to France necessarily visited her, including Joan Baez and Jane Fonda."
[143] Bethany Keenan, "At the crossroads of world attitudes and reaction': the Paris American Committee to Stopwar and American anti-war activism in France, 1966-1968," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 1, no. 11 (March 2013): 66. Jolas also worked with NLF representatives in Paris, tutoring them about the state of the U.S. antiwar movement, assisting with outreach, and organizing events, such as the 1968 Paris Women's Conference. Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 210.
[144] Laurent Schwartz, "Il faut crever l'écran," *Nouvel Observateur*, November 16-22, 1966.

and therefore had internationalism virtually inscribed in their DNA – unlike the Americans, for

whom Marxism was still marginal in 1966. For these reasons, by late 1966 the CVN became a

nodal point in a number of intersecting international antiwar networks.

Some CVN radicals, above all the JCR youth, aspired to turn this internationalism into a

fully organized, "coordinated" force.[145] Hoping to move beyond simply forging personal contacts,

sharing information, or synchronizing the occasional demonstration, some radicals aimed to build

not only a feeling of internationalism, but what they now called an "international front."[146] To be

more precise, if some American activists, led by the VDC, helped foster *internationalism*, that is to

say, the political assumption that the struggle against the war had to be international, then some

antiwar radicals in Western Europe, especially the French, responded by trying to organize this

internationalism into an *international*, or a formal international organization capable of uniting

radicals from different countries for a common aim.[147]

Building a Radical International

Significantly, while they certainly intended to include everyone "from Vietnam to America"

in this new international, some French radicals also began to insist on the special value of a

radical antiwar international specifically within the advanced capitalist countries of North America

and Western Europe.[148] For these radicals, building an international in "Berkeley, Washington

[D.C.], New York, Paris, Brussels, and Berlin," that is to say, in the "heart of imperialism," was

more important than ever because traditional internationalist forces in North America and

Western Europe had turned their backs on internationalism precisely when it was needed

most.[149] For while third-world radicals quickly took the lead in international solidarity by forming

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[145] JCR, "Halte à l'agression impérialiste au Viêt-Nam," supplément à *Avant-garde Sorbonne* no. 1 (November 1965): 4, F Delta Res 2089, BDIC.
[146] CVN, "Communiqué à la presse," January 19, 1967, 1, F Delta Res 151, BDIC.
[147] As I will show below, while these radicals did not themselves use the specific word "international," but preferred other terms such as "international front," they were clearly following in the footsteps of the Internationals of the past.
[148] Ibid.
[149] JCR, "Halte à l'agression impérialiste au Viêt-Nam," 4.

their own radical internationalism, which culminated in the Tricontinental Conference in January

1966, the leadership of the traditional left in North America and Western Europe did the opposite,

in the words of Alain Krivine, effectively throwing the "principles of proletarian internationalism

overboard."[150] Indeed the social democratic parties that comprised the Socialist International had

almost all become accomplices of imperialism. Had the SFIO not overseen both the First

Indochinese War and the Algerian War? Now, faced with Vietnam, Krivine charged, these parties

"shed a few tears of sympathy," but ultimately bowed to the United States.[151] As for the

communists, Joseph Stalin had disbanded the Comintern in 1943. And while the various

Communist Parties in North America and Western Europe still enjoyed a certain international

network, this too had become hopelessly accommodationist. Most of these parties, such as the

PCF and the CPUSA, did not even call for the victory of their fraternal party in Vietnam. In this,

they reflected the USSR's policy to prioritize "peaceful coexistence" with U.S. imperialism over

international solidarity with revolutionary movements. In 1954, the USSR exerted enormous

pressure on the Vietnamese to accept partition; in the early 1960s, they tried to dissuade the NLF

from launching armed struggle; and now, in 1966, the Soviets offered pitifully little aid to the war.

Like the Communist Parties, they called for negotiated settlement.

Unsurprisingly, this behavior provoked a rupture in the international communist

movement. The People's Republic of China (PRC) blasted the USSR for raising its national

interests above those of the international revolutionary movement. Their disputes escalated into

an open split in the early 1960s, after which China struggled to become the leader of global anti-

imperialism, winning considerable support in Southeast Asia and beyond.[152] A number of pro-

Chinese parties also emerged in North America and Western Europe, such as Progressive Labor

in the United States and the UJC-ml in France. Although there were some attempts to unite these

scattered parties into a new anti-revisionist international – Hardial Bains tried to create a network

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[150] Alain Krivine, "Editorial," *Avant-garde jeunesse* no. 2 (November-December 1966): 2.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: the Sino-Soviet competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

in the Anglophone countries while Jacques Grippa of the Parti Communiste de Belgique traveled

across Western Europe on orders from the PRC itself – these ended in failure.[153] The pro-

Chinese parties – of which there were usually several in each country – were so sectarian they

could never agree with one another, let alone work with other non-Maoist groupings. Thus, the

Maoists proved unable to fill the space left by the renegacy of Soviet international communism.

One internationalist tendency, however, seized the opportunity to build an antiwar

international. Although nearly moribund in the 1950s, the deeply divided international Trotskyist

movement held what was known as a Reunification Congress in June 1963 in order to

reassemble the various currents into a unified Fourth International (FI).[154] In December 1965, the

new Fourth International held another Congress, which reconfirmed its commitment to anti-

imperialist struggle, specifically naming the Vietnamese revolution. In its official statement, *The*

International Situation and the Tasks of Revolutionary Marxists, adopted in June 1966, the FI

declared that, "The most urgent immediate task facing revolutionary Marxists on a world-wide

scale is to strengthen the struggle against the imperialist aggression in Vietnam and for the

Vietnamese Revolution."[155] The best way to do that, the statement continued, was by "tirelessly

stressing the need for an anti-imperialist united front on an international scale."[156] To stop the

Vietnam War, radicals had to build a new antiwar international.

But the Fourth International could never play that role itself. Trotskyism still had a terrible

reputation, the organizational capacities of the FI were severely limited, and the various Trotskyist

groups were miniscule. Ernest Tate, an FI international organizer, recalls that in the early 1960s,

the French section claimed perhaps 100 members, the Belgians fifty or sixty, and the Italians

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[153] Manuel Abramowicz, "Le Parti prochinois en Belgique dans son context historique (1963-1989)," in *Dissidences 7: La Belgique Sauvage: L'extrême gauche en Belgique francophone depuis 1945* (October 2009): 93-94

[154] Robert Jackson Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 304-39.

[155] Reprinted in "The International Situation and the Tasks of Revolutionary Marxists," *International Socialist Review* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1966): 37-48, https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1963-1985/usfi/8thWC/usfi01.htm.

[156] Ibid.

even less.[157] In Great Britain, the Fourth International did not even have an organized presence, and the Unified Secretariat had to send Tate to build a branch there.[158] As a result, the FI Trotskyists resumed the older strategy of "entering" existing political organizations, such as the Socialist or Communist Parties, to organize.[159] Their main focus was the youth. As the FI put it in 1965, the FI "attaches particular importance to the working and student youth, who stand in the vanguard today in a number of countries."[160] As it turned out, the FI's efforts to connect with these emerging youth movements proved quite fruitful. In Belgium, entryism in the Socialist Party helped radicalize its youth section, the Jeunes Gardes Socialistes (JGS), which grew so militant its parent organization ultimately expelled the group in 1964.[161] In France, the FI's relentless efforts helped pull some students in the Sorbonne Letters section of the UEC towards Trotskyism, ultimately giving birth to the nucleus of the JCR. A similar process was underway in Italy, where Trotskyists hoped to gain influence in the Communist Party, inspiring Trotkyisante young radicals to publish their own journal, *Falcemartello*.

In this way, despite its many limitations, the FI succeeded in channeling internationalist sentiment into a new kind of functional antiwar international. They did not mastermind every step of the process, but they did create the conditions of possibility for a future international. Trotskyist militants from the Fourth International had not only helped radicalize a number of young activists across Western Europe, they also provided them with a very rudimentary network, making future multilateral conversations between them possible. Thus, when the JGS announced a militant

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[157] Ernest Tate, *Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s & 60s, Volume 2: Britain 1965-1969* (London: Resistance Books, 2014): 25-26. For Trotskyism in France, see Jacques Rousel, *Les enfants du prophète: histoire du mouvement trotskiste en France* (Paris: Spartacus, 1972); Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 41-86; Jean-Jacques Marie, *Le Trotskyism et les trotskystes* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2009).

[158] For Trotskyism in Great Britain, see John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), chapters 3, 4, 5.

[159] "Dynamics of the World Revolution: Text of the Resolution Adopted by the First ("Reunification") Congress of the United Secretariat (Seventh World Congress)," reprinted in *International Socialist Review* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1963): 129-39.

[160] "The International Situation and the Tasks of Revolutionary Marxists."

[161] Guy Desolre, "Contribution à l'histoire du trotskysme en Belgique: La question de l'entrisme (1948-1964)," in *La Belgique Sauvage: L'extrême guache en Belgique francophone depuis 1945* (Lormont, Le Bord de l'eau, 2009): 66-67.

antiwar demonstration for October 1966, their call did fall into a void, but could find a powerful echo in a preexisting transnational network.

The October 1966 convergence in Liège cannot be reduced to a Fourth International front. Some of the groups that attended, such as the JCR, included non-Trotskyist members. A few groups, such as the German Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund (SDS), the expelled youth section of the German Social Democratic Party, were not affiliated with the Fourth International. The organizers of the convergence, hoping to be as inclusive as possible, even welcomed two rival Trotskyists groups, Gerry Healy's Young Socialists from Great Britain, and the "Révoltes" youth group from France, who repaid the gesture by trying to sabotage the meeting.[162] It was precisely this radical openness that allowed this nascent network to develop into a radical antiwar international. Indeed, although the FI helped spark an antiwar network in the 1960s, it would soon assume a life of its own, moving well beyond its Trotskyist imprint.

On October 15, 1966, 3,000 young radicals representing 20 different groups gathered in Liège.[163] As the hosts, the JGS commanded the largest contingent. By one account, the JCR brought about 220 activists from across France.[164] The Frankfurt section of the German SDS sent a delegation of about 100 students. From the United States, the YSA sent Mary-Alice Waters to not only attend the meeting, but also visit England and France to forge stronger ties with radicals abroad. The major points of unity among the groups, Waters reported, were "support to the Vietnamese Revolution, the demand for immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, and the demand for European countries to get out of NATO."[165] Indeed, despite the Young Socialists and the "Révoltes" group's disruptions, a sense of international unity prevailed, and the day ended with radicals singing the Internationale. The following day, many of the groups stayed

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[162] Mary-Alice Waters, "Report on European Trip," November 4, 1966, 1, Box 46, Folder 13, Socialist Workers Party Records, Hoover Institution, Palo Alto, California, hereafter SWP Records. For more on Gerry Healy's Socialist Labor League, see Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 72-83. For the Révoltes group, see Robert Jackson Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 384.

[163] Jeunes Gardes Socialistes, "Organisations participantes," October 16, 1966, 1, Box 47, Folder 4, SWP Records.

[164] All figures based on the numbers given by Mary-Alice Waters in her report to the YSA. Mary-Alice Waters, "Report on European Trip," 1.

[165] Ibid.

to finalize a tentative program to serve as the basis for future international antiwar coordination. The task of all the youth organizations, the final statement declared, "is to support the struggle of the Vietnamese fighters by supporting their demand for immediate and unconditional retreat of the imperialist forces."[166]

The JCR left the gathering determined to maintain the momentum. As their paper, *Avant-garde jeunesse*, explained, the Liège gathering was no "ordinary demonstration."[167] "For the first time," the JCR enthused, "an independent organization of the youth, attacked by the bureaucratic leadership of the workers' parties, took the initiative of an international gathering against imperialism and capitalist military pacts."[168] This "unprecedented success, unthinkable several years ago," the JCR continued, "demonstrates the strength of this new vanguard" developing throughout the countries of North America and Western Europe.[169] Soon after Liège, the JCR, which quickly spearheaded the work of building the new international, collaborated closely with the JGS to organize another conference in Brussels in March 1967 to refine the points of unity, find ways to coordinate international actions, and solidify the international.[170]

Ernest Tate recalls that in preparation, the JGS and JCR "issued a call to the International's few youth organizations to send people to Europe to help with its organization."[171] The Young Socialists in Canada sent an organizer, Jess MacKenzie, who spoke French, to spend a couple months "helping get the printed materials ready, organizing registration of delegates and arranging their billeting."[172] On March 11, 1967 delegates representing over a dozen radical organizations arrived in Brussels.[173] The JCR, JSG, YSA, and German SDS were of course all present. A new addition came by way of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), the major

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[166] Jeunes Gardes Socialistes, "LIEGE, 16.10.1966," October 16, 1966, Box 47, Folder 4, SWP Records.
[167] "LIEGE, 15 Octobre 1966," *Avant-garde jeunesse* 2 (November-December 1966): 2.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 3.
[170] "Première conférence internationale de la jeunesse," *Avant-garde jeunesse* 4 (February 1967): 2.
[171] Tate, *Revolutionary Activism*, 184.
[172] Ibid.
[173] "La Conférence de Bruxelles," *Avant-garde jeunesse* 5 (April-May 1967): 18.

grouping of antiwar radicals in Great Britain.[174] The VSC, which held its founding conference on

June 4, 1966, would play a highly analogous role to the CVN. Like its fraternal organization in

France, the core of the VSC was also Trotskyist.[175] But at the same time, the new international

continued to move beyond its Trotskyist origins, inviting the Étudiants Socialistes Unifiés (ESU),

the youth section of the French PSU, to send delegates.[176]

In Belgium, radicals produced a unifying statement that not only discussed the purpose of

a permanent international formation, but also clearly explained why international coordination

among antiwar activists in North American and Western Europe was so necessary. Whereas

most Americans largely subordinated international coordination with radicals in Western Europe

to the far more important task of building relations with movements in the Third World, Western

European radicals now tried to make the case that a radical international within the advanced

capitalist world could be just as important for the overall antiwar struggle. Developing ideas

developed at Liège, the official statement of the Brussels convergence argued that U.S.

aggression does not operate independently, but actually depends on a kind of "international

capitalist alliance."[177] This alliance was codified in certain formal treaties and pacts, with the North

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) being one of the most important. As the radicals explained,

NATO "is the military expression of the solidarity of the capitalist countries of Europe," with the

United States serving as its "pivot."[178] In a certain sense, the capitalist countries had their own

"international" led by the United States.

Thus, what made American military intervention in Vietnam possible was not simply the

power of the U.S. military, but the fact that through this imperialist international the United States

could count on other allied countries to support its specific policies. Given the indispensability of

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[174] Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (New York: Verso, 2005): 187, 199-200, 233-35; Anthony O. Edmonds, "The Viet Nam War and the British Student Left: A Study in Political Symbolism," March 1994, http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Texts/Scholarly/Edmonds_Brit_Left.html

[175] Tate, *Revolutionary Activism*, 85-93, 201-205, 247-55; Callaghan, *The Far Left*, 120-23.

[176] "La Conférence de Bruxelles," 18.

[177] "Basic Political Resolution Adopted by the Conference of the Vanguard Youth Organizations of Europe for the Coordination of Aid to the Vietnamese Revolution and the Struggle Against NATO," March 12, 1967, 1, Box 22, Folder 3, SWP Records.

[178] Ibid., 3.

this international to the U.S. war in Vietnam, a crucial aspect of the antiwar struggle was attacking on this international. This meant, first of all, that antiwar struggle had to take an international form – against the U.S.-led imperialist international, radicals had to form their own radical international. More importantly, since so much of the United States' power derived from the support of major Western European countries, radicals in Western Europe would play a decisive role in this new antiwar international.[179]

Of course, this argument posed a potential problem for French radicals, some of the strongest proponents of this strategy, since President Charles de Gaulle had not only criticized the Vietnam War, but had withdrawn the French Navy from the North Atlantic fleet of NATO in 1963. Yet French radicals remained undeterred. Although France had withdrawn from the military alliance, they explained, it was still a part of the Atlantic Alliance. Thus, despite de Gaulle's actions, France objectively remained an important pillar of U.S. aggression. A statement from the CVN in Rennes developed the argument even further. Reminding readers that U.S. aggression in Vietnam was made possibly by "an imperialist front in the heart of which they assume the leadership role," the statement went on to explain that even if de Gaulle occasionally dissented, this changed little since "the Gaullist positions only differ from the American theses over the means of containing the liberation movement of the people: that which JOHNSON attempts to accomplish by force, DE GAULLE tries to obtain through the diplomatic route."[180] Despite disagreements, French policy still legitimized the broader logic behind American aggression, which meant that the struggle in France was still crucial to breaking the hegemonic power that allowed the Vietnam War to continue. Indeed, far from dissuading radicals, de Gaulle's actions further galvanized them. His withdrawal, the Belgium statement explained, should be welcomed because it "objectively weakens" NATO.[181] It showed that contradictions had appeared within the enemy internationalism, that the United States' actions were straining the international alliance on

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[179] Ibid.
[180] "Comité Universitaire Pour Le Vietnam," 1967, 1, F Delta Res 151, BDIC.
[181] "Basic Political Resolution," 3.

which its foreign policy ultimately depended. In this context, a radical international in North America and Western Europe could be especially effective.

The Liège and Brussels gatherings were the first coordinated international meetings of North American and Western European radicals in the 1960s. They established the general strategy and defining ideas of the international antiwar struggle for radicals into 1967. They would also give birth to a functional radical international that would fill the void left by the social democrats and the communists. After the Brussels conference, radicals established a permanent Secretariat in Brussels, complete with an Executive Bureau, composed of six radical organizations, including the JCR. Regularly communicating with radical groups, and holding meetings once every two months, the organization coordinated "international campaigns," from multilingual propaganda to planned demonstrations.[182] By early 1967, a veritable radical, antiwar international, based above all among the youth, had taken shape.

To be sure, this international differed from those that came before. Unlike the Second, or Socialist International, it was not composed of formal parties; unlike the Third, it was not sponsored by a foreign government; and unlike the Fourth, it was not united by fidelity to the ideas of a singular political figure. This international was looser in structure, dominated by youth, politically pluralistic, and operated just as much through imaginary identification as formal contacts. Furthermore, while thoroughly aligned with the Third World, it was North American and European, with the notable exception of the Japanese.

And yet, one can still classify this as a kind of international. After all, however inchoate, this international hoped to unite radicals from different countries in a coherent, sustainable, coordinated international organization. In this respect, the "Vietnam International" of the 1960s bore striking similarities with the original International Working Man's Association, or the First International, as it came to be known. Like the IWMA, it was a small, loose group of radicals largely from Europe.[183] Like the IWMA, it was anti-imperialist. Indeed, the first international was

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[182] "La Conférence de Bruxelles," 18.
[183] Henryk Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).

founded out of support for Polish national liberation from Tsarist Russia, in the same way that this new radical of the international 1960s was sparked by the Vietnamese struggle against American imperialism.

Why Vietnam?

By 1967, the Vietnam War had become the undisputed center of international political attention. Many radicals not only in the United States and France, but throughout North America and Western Europe, made international solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle one of their highest priorities. Through antiwar activism, radicals developed into an independent political force of significant consequence in countries like the United States and France. More importantly, the Vietnamese struggle emerged as a kind of *binding element*, unifying otherwise isolated radicals into a new radical international. In this way, Vietnam came to shape the very identity of what was increasingly becoming a *self-consciously* international radical left. Without Vietnam there would likely have never been an international of radicals in North America and Western Europe. But why did Vietnam, and not some other struggle, come to play this function?

To answer this question, we must take a step back for a moment. For while the specificities of the Vietnamese struggle played the determinant role in creating a radical international, two other elements were needed: the reemergence of domestic struggles in North America and Western Europe in the early 1960s and the wave of national liberation revolutions cascading across the Third World. Let's begin with the first element. Before the Vietnamese struggle could unify radicals in different countries into some kind of international, there had to be radicals to unify in the first place. While the Vietnam War certainly provided an opportunity for the radical left to grow in countries like France and the United States, it did not itself create the radical left. On the contrary, before escalation in 1965, a number of other domestic struggles across North America and Western Europe had already begun to politicize a new generation, draw exiled radicals from the margins, and provide activists with experiences that would define their struggle against the Vietnam War. In this sense, the radicals who went on to form the antiwar international

did not emerge out of a vacuum, but from a preexisting radical *microsystem of accumulated struggles*.[184] Without these domestic microsystems in North American and Western European countries, there would have been no antiwar radicals, and therefore, no antiwar international.

Beginning in the 1950s and early 1960s, in nearly every country in North America and Western Europe, important struggles helped form the microsystems that made antiwar struggle possible later in the decade. In Great Britain, for example, the antiwar struggles of the 1960s are incomprehensible if one does not take into account the enormous impact of the peace movement for nuclear disarmament – after all, the majority of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign's rank and file had been active in the earlier Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.[185] In France, a number of struggles played similar roles in shaping the various microsystems of struggle, such as the nascent student movement, but the Algerian War played the most determinant role.[186] The war prompted many French radicals to engage directly with a national liberation movement.[187] It pushed intellectuals to regroup as a political force, setting a vital precedent for the subsequent anti-Vietnam war struggle.[188] In addition, the war not only politicized a generation of French students, it triggered the formation of a militant, antifascist youth movement that increasingly set itself apart from the PCF, which adopted a "wait and see" attitude to the war.[189] In short, it was Algeria that taught a new generation of radicals how to fight fascists, battle police, organize grassroots committees, and mobilize thousands. It is little coincidence that many of those

[184] For the concept of the "microsystem of struggle," see Sergio Bologna, "An Interview with Sergio Bologna," *Left History* 2, no. 1 (2000): 91; Danilo Montaldi, *Militanti Politici di base* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971).

[185] Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 122.

[186] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 33-58.

[187] Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Les Porteurs de valises: La résistance française à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), especially parts 2 and 3; Sylvain Pattieu, *Les Camarades des frères: Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algerie* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2004); Marie-Pierre Ulloa, *Francis Jeanson: A Dissident Intellectual from the French Resistance to the Algerian War*, trans. Jane Maire Todd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), especially part 3.

[188] Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, *La guerre d'Algérie et les intellectuels français* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1991); Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 325-77; James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

[189] A. Belden Fields, *Student Politics in France: A Study of the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 33. For the PCF's stance on the war, see Danièle Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

involved in the opposition to the Algerian War – from Laurent Schwartz to Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Krivine to Bernard Kouchner, Madeleine Rebérioux to Pierre Vidal-Naquet – went on to lead the French struggle against the Vietnam War.

Similarly, the United States witnessed a series of domestic struggles in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as the student movement, movement for nuclear disarmament, and the counterculture. The most important was by far the civil rights movement, which can in many ways be seen as the United States' own decolonization struggle. As with French radicals and the Algerian War, most American activists, both black and white, passed through the civil rights movement in some way or another before turning to the Vietnam War.[190] There, they learned crucial organizing skills, built important networks, and developed an array of tactics that made the antiwar movement possible – to take only one example, the famous teach-ins that came to define early antiwar activism not only in the United States, but throughout the world, were directly inspired by the civil rights sit-ins. In the words of SNCC Freedom Singer Bernice Johnson Reagon, the civil rights movement was the "centering, borning" struggle of the American 1960s.[191]

Thus, when the Vietnam War began to make headlines, a core of activists in countries like France and the United Sates were already radicalized, organized, networked, and battle-tested. The struggle against the war could therefore channel these preexisting energies, experiences, and skills. In this respect, the timing of escalation was impeccable: the United States intensified the war just as the radical left was beginning to reemerge as an organized force in a number of countries, but also when these preceding, formative struggles had begun to transition, subside, or collapse. The signing of the Test Ban Treaty in 1963, for example, sent the British campaign for nuclear disarmament into decline. Similarly, the Evian Accords of 1962 precipitated a lull in radical activism in France. As for the United States, the combined effects of urban rebellions, legislative victories, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights

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[190] Appy, *Patriots*, 142-43; Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 92-93.
[191] "The Borning Struggle," in *They Should Have Served that Cup of Coffee*, ed. Dick Cluster (Boston: South End, 1979), 38.

Act of 1965, and internal political shifts in the broader black liberation struggle, above all the spread of black nationalism, prompted many in the civil rights struggle to reassess the movement's trajectory. In this way, the Vietnam War erupted at an opportune moment, precisely when radicals, hardened by earlier experiences, were either eager to dive into the next struggle in the cycle, as in France, or caught in a moment of reevaluation, as in the United States.

The second indispensable element was the *global political ecosystem*. The United States escalated its involvement in Vietnam amidst the cresting of a seemingly unceasing wave of national liberation struggles across the globe. Indeed, huge swathes of the world's population were on the cusp of struggles for liberation, presently fighting revolution, or had recently emerged victorious. Most importantly, these struggles saw themselves as part of a global movement. Liberation movements in Asia connected with anticolonial struggles in Africa, which allied themselves with anti-imperialist movements in Latin America. Newly liberated countries gathered in Bandung in April 1955, an Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference convened in Cairo in 1957, and in January 1966, at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, leaders from the Third World founded the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America to promote global revolutionary solidarity.[192] Unfolding against this background of unity, the Vietnamese struggle benefited enormously from these preexisting international networks, structures of support, and mentalities of solidarity.

The militant self-activity of the revolutionary movements in the Third World had a profound effect on radicals in North America and Western Europe. Since it was here, and not in the capitalist strongholds, that revolutionary movements were changing the world, radicals naturally turned their attention abroad.[193] Searching for revolution, some traveled to revolutionary countries abroad, above all Cuba. They all returned transformed. General Baker, Jr., an antiwar black nationalist, spoke for many when he recalled how experiencing the "revolutionary

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[192] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2001), chapters, 12-14, 16.
[193] Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Niek Pas, "European Radicals and the 'Third World': Imagined Solidarities and Radical Networks, 1958-1973," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 4 (2011): 449-71; Ross, *May '68*, 80-90; Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 40-46.

laboratory" of Cuba "was a real awakening."[194] Back home, radicals organized vibrant solidarity

organizations to circulate information, offer moral support, and provide material aid to numerous

third-world struggles, such as those in the Congo, China, and Cuba, to name only a few.[195] In the

United States, the best example of this kind of solidarity was the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, in

which many future antiwar radicals, such as Dave Dellinger, Stephen Smale, and much of the

SWP leadership, participated.[196] Thus, the Vietnam War unfolded after structures of international

solidarity were already taking shape, allowing radicals to easily pivot towards Vietnam.

Without the encounter of domestic microsystems of struggle on the one hand with a

specific global political ecosystem on the other, something like a radical international would have

never emerged in the 1960s. This is precisely why, for example, nothing of sort took shape during

the First Indochina War against the French in the 1940s and 1950s. On the one side, an

independent radical left was virtually inexistent in the early 1950s. In the United States,

McCarthyism devastated radicalism as an organized force; in France, the Cold War forced

radicals to choose sides, banishing those who searched for alternatives to the political desert. Of

course, some radical formations survived, and while a few even coordinated among themselves,

their numbers were too miniscule to form anything like a meaningful radical international.[197] On

the other side, decolonization had only just begun when the First Indochina War began in

December 1946. Although in retrospect the war marked the beginning of a worldwide surge of

victorious revolutions, at the time, the trend was far from clear. The great international

convergences of the liberation movements or the stunning revolutionary victories of China or

Cuba were still in the future. Even when the Vietnamese smashed the French at Dien Bien Phu in

1954, nearly all of Africa was still firmly under colonial rule. During the First Indochina War,

therefore, neither element – the domestic microsystems nor the global ecosystem – obtained. But

if the First Indochina War came "too soon," as it were, the Second Indochina War intensified

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[194] General Baker, Jr. quoted in Appy, *Patriots*, 147.
[195] Gildea, Marks, and Pas, "European Radicals and the Third World," 455.
[196] Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso, 1993), especially chapter 5.
[197] Nicola Pizzolato, "Transnational Radicals: Labour Dissent and Political Activism in Detroit and Turin (1950-1970)," *International Review of Social History* 65, no. 1 (March 2011): 1-30.

precisely as domestic struggles in North America and Western Europe and international solidarity throughout the Third World had come to synchronize.

But while domestic microsystems and a global ecosystem provided the necessary conditions for the formation of a radical international, they do not on their own explain why Vietnam, and not some other struggle, played the role of *binding element*, uniting radicals from different North American and Western European countries into an international. After all, from Palestine to the Congo, there was no shortage of galvanizing revolutionary movements in the 1960s. Indeed, at the very same moment that the United States intensified the war in Vietnam, the U.S. military invaded the Dominican Republic. After a popular movement overthrew the pro-American Donald Reid Cabral on April 26, 1965, the United States, intent on preventing another Cuba, authorized "Operation Power Pack," ultimately deploying 40,000 U.S. troops to crush the revolt. Antiwar activists everywhere rallied behind the movement.[198] In fact, it is often forgotten that Vietnam Day in Berkeley was also called to protest against U.S. aggression in the Dominican Republic.[199] It is also forgotten that in 1965 French radicals leading the struggle against the Vietnam War, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, were simultaneously involved in the Comité de solidarité avec le peuple dominicain.[200] Indeed, the two struggles were often joined in the imagination of many radicals. But then why was there no Santo Domingo International? Why did it fall to Vietnam to organize a new radical international?

The answer lies in the *specific characteristics* of the Vietnamese struggle. To begin with, the sheer immensity of the suffering in Vietnam was virtually unparalleled. The Vietnamese had lived under colonial occupation since the 1880s, had been fighting since the 1940s, and after having already lost hundreds of thousands against the Japanese and French, now found themselves once more in the jaws of war. Northern towns were leveled, Southern villages torched, hundreds of thousands were forcibly relocated, over a hundred thousand political

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[198] For detailed history of the invasion from an overtly pro-U.S. perspective, see Lawrence A. Yates, *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, Leavenworth Papers no. 15, 1988.
[199] See, for example, several of the speeches reprinted in *We Accuse*.
[200] See, for example, *Solidaridad: bulletin du comité de solidarité avec le peuple dominicain*, no. 1, Décembre 1965, F Delta Res 2089, BDIC.

dissidents rotted in prisons, and the Vietnamese people faced some of the most lethal weapons ever invented. Even worse, there seemed to be no end in sight. The Dominican Civil War came to a close in September 1965; the Vietnam War, which had in many respects begun two decades earlier, would not conclude for another decade. Thus, unlike in Cuba or China in the 1960s, where the revolution seemed relatively more secure, the Vietnamese struggle was still underway, which meant the results were still uncertain and the stakes incredibly high. In this context, international solidarity with Vietnam was a priority, for it could have a real effect on the outcome of the struggle.

In addition, not only was the war ongoing, it seemed like the Vietnamese, who categorically refused to surrender, might even have a chance. Somehow, a tiny country of mostly poor rice farmers held its own against the most advanced military force in human history. Radicals therefore began to interpret the war as a heroic struggle between David and Goliath, a narrative the Vietnamese revolutionaries created themselves. Indeed, in addition to never showing the slightest sign of defeatism, all their public statements reaffirmed the inevitability of their victory. Exclamations such as "Our Unshakeable Will: All the Way to Complete Victory," regularly appeared on the front pages of the *Courrier du Vietnam*, the primary foreign language publication of the DRV, printed in French and English versions.[201] This kind of unflappable courage had a tremendous effect on American and French radicals – no other struggle in the 1960s captivated them in this way. Demonstrating solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle therefore not only gave radicals the chance to aid this struggle towards victory, but allowed them to invest themselves affectively in the movement.[202]

Although other national liberation movements spoke of international solidarity, the Vietnamese were arguably the most committed to orchestrating internationalism from the very start. They not only welcomed support from friendly governments, but encouraged radical internationalism across the globe. In the South, the NLF, which saw itself as part of an international movement, officially called for "struggle against all aggressive war and against all

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[201] For example, *Courrier du Vietnam* 26, July 27, 1966, 1.
[202] Hamon and Rotman, *Génération*, 410-11.

forms of imperialist domination; support [for] the national emancipation movements of the various

peoples," as well as solidarity with "all movements of struggle for peace, democracy, and social

progress throughout the world."[203] In the North, governed as it was by committed communist

internationalists, connecting with struggles throughout the world, including North America and

Western Europe, was a central component of state policy. As Schwartz explains, "This was one

of the things that made the Viet-Nam war very different from the Algerian War: the North

Vietnamese government was fully internationalist in the Marxist sense of the word."[204] No other

ongoing revolutionary struggle made so much of international solidarity in the 1960s.

Indeed, the NLF and the DRV genuinely believed they were fighting not only for

Vietnamese independence, but also for the liberation of all the people of the world. Vietnam, they

argued, stood at the front line of the global struggle for liberation. In May 1966, for example, the

National Assembly of North Vietnam formally declared, "To defeat the American aggressors, the

shared enemy of the peoples of the entire world, such is the noble historic mission of our people.

All while fighting for the interests of our people, we also fight for those of the peoples of the entire

world."[205] For the Vietnamese, in other words, all the liberation struggles were in fact

fundamentally linked, which meant that victory in Vietnam "effectively contributes to the liberation

movement of the people" across the planet.[206] By the same token, the victory of other struggles

could directly assist the Vietnamese. This explains why the Vietnamese placed such enormous

emphasis on internationalism, actively figuring the success of other struggles into their own

military strategy. To that end, both the NLF and the DRV prioritized connections with other

liberation movements.[207] The DRV, for example, not only built strong relations with countries that

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[203] "Program of the National Liberation Front of South Viet-Nam," December 20, 1960, point ten.
[204] Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 395. For a good study of the Algerian liberation struggle and internationalism, see Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[205] Declaration of the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Third Legislature, Third Session, reprinted as "Nous Vaincrons, les agresseurs américains seront certainement battus," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 56, April 28, 1966, 3.
[206] "Merci aux intellectuels du monde entier," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 87, December 5, 1966, 7.
[207] See, for example, "Côte à côte dans la lutte contre l'impérialisme U.S.," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 107, April 24, 1967, 6.

had already won their liberation, but publicly hailed every ongoing revolution, including Soudan, Palestine, Cambodia, Laos, and Puerto Rico.

In this way, Vietnam continued the work of the Tricontinental by fusing heterogeneous struggles into an imagined international unity: struggles still in progress with those that had just won their independence, movements fighting colonialism with those confronting imperialism, communist revolutions with non-communist movements. The Vietnamese could assume this role because their struggle stood at the crossroads of these differences: they fought both an anti-colonial and an anti-imperialist war; half the country had recently emerged victorious from a war of independence, while the struggle continued to rage in the southern half; in the North, the government was explicitly communist, while in the South, the NLF coalition included anti-communists. Vietnam, in other words, *condensed* all the major trends of the time.[208]

But it also emerged as the focal point of global contradictions: peasants against landlords, the working masses against the comprador bourgeoisie, national liberation against colonialism, anti-imperialism against empire, socialism against capitalism, global revolution against American hegemony. It was precisely this unique role that led so many radicals in North America and Western Europe to elevate the Vietnamese struggle over all others. "The struggle of the people of South Vietnam against American imperialism and the ruling class of Saigon is not only a struggle of international importance," the Brussels statement explained, "Vietnam is the key to the world situation, a decisive text of strength between American imperialism and the colonial revolution and the whole labor movement. The international capitalist alliance directed by the American government (NATO, SEATO, Treaty of Manila) is locked in combat with the Vietnamese revolution which is an integral part of the worldwide socialist revolution."[209]

The NLF, and especially North Vietnam, contributed to the idea that Vietnam had become a kind of nexus of international solidarity. Every issue of the *Courrier du Vietnam* featured a section called, "Le Monde à nos côtes," which reported on antiwar struggles throughout the world. By bringing all these distinct antiwar actions – in different countries, by different groups, for

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[208] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 28.
[209] "Basic Political Resolution," 1.

different ends – onto the same *plane of consistency*, Vietnamese revolutionaries encouraged the feeling that a unified international antiwar movement already existed. Politically astute, the Vietnamese strived for maximum inclusivity, carefully promoting, supporting, and graciously thanking all antiwar forces – liberals, communists, radicals, anyone who stood against the war.[210] The Vietnamese, for example, never took sides during the Sino-Soviet split, knowing full well that doing so would have weakened the war effort. In the same way, the DRV thanked both the PCF and the CVN, even though North Vietnam recognized the differences between the camps, and knew that each "claimed" Vietnam for their own side. In fact, the Vietnamese encouraged this kind of projection, adeptly balancing these contradictory political forces, domestic rivalries, and competing internationalisms.

Yet Vietnam also gave strong indications to North American and Western European radicals that they fully endorsed their efforts. Because of the crucial strategic importance of antiwar contestation in the United States, American radicals frequently received approbation and encouragement from the Vietnamese. American radicals solidified these contacts by meeting with NLF and DRV representatives directly, either in Vietnam, or in other countries, such as Czechoslovakia or Cuba.[211] These personal meetings, regular communications, and glowing endorsements left radicals convinced that the Vietnamese supported their cause.

Although their struggle was certainly less important than that of their American peers, French radicals also received unambiguous support from the Vietnamese. In 1966, the DRV applauded the formation of the CVN in the pages of the *Courrier du Vietnam*. Around Christmas 1966, Ho Chi Minh wrote a personal message to Schwartz thanking the CVN, which, to them,

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[210] For the efforts of Vietnamese revolutionaries in fostering global antiwar sentiment, see Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Harish C. Mehta, "'People's Diplomacy': The Diplomatic Front of North Vietnam During the War Against the United States, 1965-1972" (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, Ontario, 2009); Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 113; and especially, Pierre Asselin's excellent unpublished paper, "The Forgotten Front: The NLF in Hanoi's Diplomatic Struggle, 1965-67."

[211] Andrew E. Hunt, *David Dellinger: The Life and Times of a Nonviolent Revolutionary* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 153-56.

"represented official recognition of the role of the CVN in the struggle against the war."[212] From

then on the CVN enjoyed a correspondence with leaders of both the NLF and the DRV. In the

second issue of its paper, for example, the CVN reprinted a letter from the FLN expressing its

"militant solidarity" with the committee.[213] In the fall of 1967, the CVN published a letter from DRV

Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, in which he thanked the CVN for developing the struggle in

France, calling the committee "a magnificent example of the militant friendship between our two

peoples, which is destined to consolidate itself and develop ceaselessly."[214] He ended

triumphantly, adopting the CVN's own slogan, "as you put it in your message, our struggle is also

yours, dear friends, let's move forward to victory!"[215] For CVN radicals, nothing could be a greater

endorsement of their politics – Vietnam was on their side.

French radicals also benefited from the presence of a North Vietnamese embassy in

Paris. To the dismay of the PCF, Vietnamese delegates not only spoke at CVN events, but often

collaborated with French radicals in organizing antiwar actions. Explaining how the Vietnamese

began to reorient towards the more radical CVN, Schwartz recalls how Mai Van Bo of the North

Vietnamese delegation called him during the bombing of Hanoi:

> "I need your help. I've tried telephoning the Communist Party office, but in vain; I didn't
> reach anybody. So I'm calling you: can you organize a demonstration of the CVN as
> quickly as possible?" The bridges linking us to the Vietnamese authorities were firmly
> established. After that, every Vietnamese official visiting France wanted to meet with
> us.[216]

From then on, French radicals and Vietnamese authorities, from both the NLF and the DRV,

forged intimate relations, coordinating initiatives and discussing strategy.

But Vietnamese revolutionaries not only encouraged radicals in countries like France and

the United States, they also supported deeper international coordination among radicals in North

America and Western Europe. During the Brussels conference in March 1967, for example, Mai

Van Bo of the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris sent radicals a letter of appreciation for their

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[212] Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 396.
[213] "Un message du F.N.L. au C.V.N.," *Vietnam* no. 2 (December 1967): 7.
[214] "Une lettre du Premier Ministre Pham Van Dong," *Vietnam* no. 1 (October 1967).
[215] Ibid.
[216] Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 395.

international initiative.[217] In addition, as we will see, the Vietnamese came to agree with radicals'

assessment of the strategic value of antiwar struggle in North America and Western Europe.

Radicals interpreted all this as a ringing endorsement of the new radical international, which

continued to grow into 1967. Indeed, by the next convergence in January 1968, even American

groups such as SDS or SNCC would join. And while it was initially an explicitly *antiwar*

international, with Vietnam at its center, it would soon grow into a radical international *tout court*.

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[217] "La Conférence de Bruxelles," 18.

CHAPTER 2: FORMS OF SOLIDARITY

In the first issue of *Pour le Viet-Nam*, the CVN's official paper, Laurent Schwartz argued that the resistance of the Vietnamese concerned the entire world. "[T]heir fight," he announced, "is our own." Unfortunately, there were many in France, he went on, who opposed the war, but felt the French could do little to affect its course. Countering the defeatists, Schwartz declared that it was wrong to say that "only the American left and the Vietnamese can do something about it." "Our American friends feel very alone and often discouraged," he explained to his readers. "They need a broad international support." Thankfully, the CVN was there to do just that. To galvanize his readers, Schwartz went on to list the many forms of international antiwar solidarity in which the CVN was presently engaged: the spectacular Six Heures teach-in; the campaign to raise a million francs for Vietnam; international conferences organized by American, European, and Japanese antiwar students; street protests and demonstrations; a vibrant transnational network of draft resisters, deserters, and subversive soldiers within the army; an International War Crimes Tribunal; and even creation of international brigades to fight in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Contrary to what, some of the naysayers assumed, there was a great deal the French could do to help end the war.[218]

The Vietnamese, for their part, were immensely appreciative of all these efforts. They placed particular emphasis, however, on the ideological struggle. Thus, they encouraged the idea of international brigades, but not for their military contribution, but their overall propaganda effect. Given this priority in winning the ideological war, both the NLF and the DRV were especially enthusiastic about the Bertrand Russell Peace Tribunal, a war crimes tribunal, modeled after the one held at Nuremburg, convened to try the United States for war crimes. The Vietnamese knew that the results, whatever they may be, could never be enforced, but saw the Tribunal as an excellent way of eroding the United States' legitimacy in the western countries. Indeed, at this point, many antiwar radicals felt the best way to help the Vietnamese was to change public

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[218] Laurent Schwartz, "La victoire du Viet-Nam c'est …," *Pour le Viet-Nam* no. 1 (February 1967): 1.

opinion, win the ideological struggle, and isolate the U.S. government from its other allies in Western Europe.

The Tribunal also signaled the growing popularity of the radical critique over the course of 1966 and into 1967. As radicals strove to better understand, then change, the system that made this war possible, the Marxist problematic of anti-imperialism rose to dominance. Indeed, whatever their differences, and there were many, anti-imperialist radicals in France, and later the United States, all came to accept V. I. Lenin's positions on anti-imperialist struggle, the core of which was the idea of the right of nations to self-determination. By this, however, radicals did not mean individual rights protected by international law; they saw rights as collective in nature, firmly within the framework of nation-states. As the Bertrand Russell Tribunal shows, despite all its talk of international law, war crimes, and atrocities, radicals saw the subject of rights as the nation, not the individual.

Of course radicals debated at length how anti-imperialist struggles should unfold, how many stages this should take, or who should be involved, but almost no anti-imperialist seriously disputed the centrality of the nation-state in the process of liberation. In the struggle against imperialism, oppressed peoples would fight to build their own sovereign nation-state. For the colonized and "semi-colonized," as in Vietnam, this meant creating a unified nation-state where none existed before. For those who had already won their formal independence, as in Latin America, this meant securing real independence from imperialist intervention and aggression. For those in the imperialist centers, anti-imperialist internationalism meant supporting all of these struggles as best as possible. This centrality of the nation-state was, of course, double-edged. In the context of the 1960s, with national liberation struggles unfolding across the globe, the alliance with nationalism made perfect sense for anti-imperialists. But so profound was this connection that if anything were to ever problematize the hopes that radicals invested in the revolutionary nation-state, anti-imperialist internationalism could be thrown into disarray.

The War in Europe

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In early April 1976, President Johnson dispatched Vice President Hubert Humphrey to meet with European allies about the administration's war policy, among other things. In France, he tried to reaffirm Franco-American bonds, meeting with President Charles de Gaulle, laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and visiting the statue of George Washington on the Place d'Iéna. With de Gaulle openly against the war, Humphrey was eager to rebuild relations, especially now that international opposition had begun to mount. He made a toast to the "friendship that has linked our country through so many years and so many trials."[219]

French activists had other ideas. In preparation for Humphrey's arrival they had organized a series of coordinated protests. Activists greeted Humphrey at the airport with chats of "U.S. Assassins!" They positioned themselves on the route leading to the capital, screaming at the Vice President, throwing rotten eggs, and pouring paint on cars. In Paris, they harassed him incessantly, anticipating his every move. Indeed, the night before, some pasted posters that read "Humphrey Go Home!" at venues he was supposed to appear. At the Arc de Triomphe, over a thousand protesters broke past the barricades, unleashing police repression. That day, violence engulfed the city. Demonstrators tore down the American flag at the American Cathedral in Paris and burned it. Others threw rocks at the windows of the American Express office. Another group attacked the offices of the *New York Times*. Battles raged into the night as protestors and police clashed near the American Embassy, and later into the streets surrounding the Opéra.[220]

The day's significance lay, however, not simply in its militancy, but in the fact that the French protests served as just one act in a coordinated action across Western Europe. Indeed,

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[219] John W. Finney, "Humphrey Praises de Gaulle warmly; Crowds assail US," *New York Times*, April 8, 1967; "M. Humphrey: les liens de mon pays avec l'Europe sont profonds et réels," *Le Monde*, April 9-10, 1967.

[220] "La tournée Européene du vice-président américain: M. Humphrey est reçu par le général de Gaulle," *Le Monde*, April 8, 1967; Don Cook, "Anti-War Parisians Riot Over Humphrey," *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1967; "Plusieurs manifestations anti-americaines ont ponctue le programme de la visites," *Le Figaro,* April 8-9, 1967;
"Plusieurs milliers de manifestants ont participé à Paris aux démonstrations organisées contre la politique
américaine au Vietnam," *Le Monde*, April 9-10, 1967; "46 agents blesses, 156 interpellations," *France-Soir* April 9-10, 1967; "Manifestations contre Humphrey," *Tribune Socialiste*, April 13, 1967, 2. See also, Bethany S. Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us:' French Identities in the U.S.–Vietnam War, 1965-1973," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2009), 108-17.

Humphrey found little solace as demonstrators attacked him in every city he visited. In Belgium, activists gave the Vice President a nasty welcome, showering him with rotten eggs. In Florence, he met the same treatment, and one demonstrator pelted him in the face with a lemon. In Rome, angry crowds forced the police to rush him to safety. Not to be outdone, demonstrators in West Berlin threw eggs and bottles, chanting "Vice Killer." In London, Humphrey's last stop, only a hard rain succeeded in thinning the ranks of demonstrators.[221]

Protestors everywhere targeted symbols of U.S. power. But such attacks cannot be reduced to simple anti-Americanism, as many Americans argued at the time.[222] For the protestors focused not only on the United States, but also their own governments. Indeed, the coordinated protests against Humphrey's European tour represented one of the first realizations of the plan radicals sketched in March. If the United States' power rested in part on the support it enjoyed from its European allies, then the best way for Europeans to protest the war would be to attack their own government's implicit or explicit support for U.S. foreign policy. As the CVN explained, they were not only protesting Humphrey, the representative of U.S. imperialism, "we denounce the French government's complicity in receiving him."[223] As Humphrey himself observed, the French heckled the American anthem as well as the Marseillaise.[224] Chants of "Humphrey Assassin!" were often followed by "De Gaulle complice!"[225] What's more, to French activists, the alacrity with which the French police began to beat protestors only confirmed the tight alliance between the U.S. and French states. With the French police basically crushing opposition to the United States's war in Vietnam, American imperialism, the JCR argued, "is not solely to

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[221] Bernard Noel, "Manifestation d'hostilité en Italie sur le passage de M. Humphrey," *Le Monde*, April 2, 1967; "Manifestation anti-Américaine à Rome," *AFP*, March 31, 1967; Joseph W. Grigg, "Le séjour à Londres du Vice-Président Humphrey," *UPI*, April 3, 1967; Max Paul Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 191-94.
[222] For U.S. responses to the protests in France, see Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" 115 and Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism*, 192-93.
[223] "Solidarité avec les combattants vietnamiens," 1967, F Delta Res 2089, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (BDIC), Nanterre, France.
[224] Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism*, 192.
[225] Ibid.

blame."[226]

Humphrey's trip was a disaster. Not only did he meet protests in the streets, his European allies raised concerns about the war. De Gaulle remained opposed. In Italy, Deputy Prime Minister Pietro Nenni confided, "Europe does not understand American any longer. America does not understand Europe. The root of the discord is the Vietnam War."[227] In Great Britain, Prime Minister Harold Wilson urged a peace settlement, while his Foreign Secretary criticized U.S. bombing. The Vietnam War was beginning to strain the alliance between the imperialist powers. Of course, the United States was slow to listen. "No one with whom I spoke," Humphrey announced after his tour, "indicated basic disagreement with our presence and objectives in Vietnam." As for the protests, he argued, the United States simply needed to hire European journalists to redouble publicity efforts.[228]

But protestors saw right through this. They felt the timing of the trip was especially significant, for it showed the United States was not only getting bogged down in the battlefields, but also beginning to lose the propaganda war. "The American troops continue to suffer defeat after defeat," a UJC-ml flier announced. "That's why the United States Vice President Humphrey, traveling salesman of US imperialism, has come to Europe, and today France, seeking the support of the governments of the so-called 'free' world."[229] But instead of supporting him, the UJC-ml gleefully observed, the "people of the European countries have shown through particularly dynamic demonstrations their solidarity with the Vietnamese people and their hatred of American aggression."[230]

The Humphrey protests were not, however, the only form that antiwar solidarity assumed at this time. Nor were the young radicals behind them the only antiwar activists. Indeed, as Schwartz explained in the very first issue of the CVN's paper, there were a variety of forms of protest, and the CVN itself served as the nexus of a number of intersecting international antiwar

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[226] "Humphrey à Paris," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 5 (April-May 1967): 5.
[227] Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism*, 191.
[228] Ibid., 194.
[229] "Humphrey à la porte," 1967, F Delta Res 2089, BDIC.
[230] Collectif de diffusion des comites de base, *Lisons et diffusions les texts vietnamiens*, 2, F Delta Res 2089, BDIC.

networks. Some CVN activists tried to raise funds and collect supplies for Vietnam. Others tried to

organize an international boycott of American products. Still others organized an international

network to aid draft resisters, deserters, and antiwar activists still in the military.

Antiwar Soldiers

In the mid-1960s, some U.S. soldiers stationed in U.S. bases in West Germany began to

desert. Initially, most embarked for Sweden, but given the sour relations between the United

States and France, a trickle began to arrive in Paris as well, figuring they might be afforded some

protection. Their legal status remained uncertain until May 1967, when Louis Armsfield, an

American GI, was caught sleeping in a car in the Latin Quarter.[231] Although obliged to return

deserters to the United States, the French government granted him permission to stay, giving

Armsfield a temporary visa and work card. By setting such a precedent, France began to attract

greater numbers of deserters.

American GIs often had assistance finding their way into Paris. In Germany, the German

SDS agitated around American bases, not only convincing GIs to desert, but helping them flee

the country.[232] In some cases, GIs traveled directly into France, often meeting with French

radicals in cities like Strasbourg, then making their way to Paris.[233] Indeed, German and French

radicals collaborated closely in these sensitive missions, and German SDS often gave deserters

CVN addresses.[234] In other cases, deserters took a more roundabout path, often crossing

through the Netherlands. There, they received assistance from the Dutch Provos, who then sent

the GIs off on the next leg of the journey into France.[235]

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[231] "L'affaire Armsfield: Le jeune déserteur américain à obtenu un permis de séjour temporaire en France," *Le Monde,* May 21-22, 1967.

[232] Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in Global Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 84-86.

[233] Dick Perrin, *G.I. Resister: The Story of How One American Soldier and his Family fought the War in Vietnam* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford, 2001), 106.

[234] Lettre de la S.D.S.," *Vietnam* 3 (February 1968): 4.

[235] Perrin, *G.I. Resister*, 86 and 106; Max Watts, "American RITA GIs in the Paris of May 1968," *Le blog de mai*, May 3, 2008, http://mai68.over-blog.org/article-19253262.html

Once in France, deserters found a number of organizations to help them find their way. Two in particular worked to politicize desertion, both with ties to members in PACS and the CVN.[236] The first, called RITA, was organized Dick Perrin, a deserter, and had connections with activists in France. Max Watts of PACS played an enormous supportive role, and the group used Jean-Paul Sartre's mailbox as their mailing address.[237] Perrin and Watts announced the formation of RITA in December 1967, during a televised press conference with Stokely Carmichael.[238] As its name suggested, RITA aimed to organized soldiers inside the army. "RITA," the organization announced, "is a Resister inside the Armed Forces, an American Serviceman who resists imperialistic aggression in S.E. Asia."[239] As Perrin later explained: "We developed a network with soldiers still inside the military, guys who wanted to take part but were reluctant to desert. We made a point of saying that was okay. In fact, those antiwar GIs who saying in became really helpful."[240] Indeed, RITA hoped to organize resistance inside the heart of the U.S. military machine itself. To reach these soldiers, RITA published ACT, the first GI paper written in Europe by GIs, out of Paris and smuggled copies onto bases in West Germany with the help of the Provos and German SDS.

The second organization was a bit more militant. It was closely connected to Henri Curriel's group Solidarité, and primarily organized by an American named Robert "Bo" Burlington, who went by the nom de guerre "Arlo," and PACS member Larry Cox.[241] Curriel, of course, had been deeply involved in the Jeanson network during the Algerian War.[242] As for Burlington, he would later join the Weather Underground in the United States. It is no surprise, then, that the group was somewhat conspiratorial and even paranoid.

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[236] Bethany Kennan, "At the crossroads of world attitudes and reaction': the Paris American Committee to Stopwar and American anti-war activism in France, 1966-1968," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 1, no. 11 (March 2013): 70.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Perrin, *G.I. Resister*, 73-77.
[239] "Rita …" *ACT* 1, no. 3 (1968): 1.
[240] Perrin, *G.I. Resister*, 83.
[241] Kennan, "'At the Crossroads,'" 71; Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 54.
[242] Gilles Perrault, *A Man Apart: The Life of Henri Curiel* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

This second group also had deep international contacts. In 1967, a French representative of the group contacted SDS during a visit to the United States, seeking further collaboration. In July, SDS sent Greg Calvert to help build this transnational network of deserters and resisters. Calvert had studied abroad in Paris in the early 1960s and the experience left a deep impression on him.[243] "The first anti-war demonstration I was ever in," he later recalled, "was a demonstration against the Algerian war, in Paris, France."[244] He was particularly impressed with efforts to organize draft resistance during the Algerian War, which no doubt had some role in his early advocacy of pushing SDS to organize draft resistance, desertion, and support for antiwar soldiers.

The group also enjoyed much deeper contacts with French radicals than Perrin's. In April 1968, Larry Cox organized a public event where American soldiers, backed by representatives of a number of antiwar groups, including the CVN, turned in their draft cards. To support resisters and deserters living in France, French radicals decided to create the "French Union for American Deserters and Resisters."[245] Unfortunately, the repression following the events of May 1968 led to the group's demise. But French support for resistors continued to be such a major axis of antiwar struggle that a new organization was built from the ashes, the American Deserters Committee (ADC).[246] The ADC was in fact a fully transnational movement, with branches of the same name in Montreal and Sweden. It distributed a publication, *Second Front*, in order to coordinate struggles around desertion in Europe, North America, and Asia. For their part, the Vietnamese were extremely support of the ADC's efforts, and Tran Van Hue, representative of the NLF, personally thanked its Swedish branch.[247]

Like its predecessor, it also enjoyed firm support from French radicals. On March 21, 1969, for example, figures associated with the CVN, like Sartre, Schwartz, and Vidal-Naquet, founded a new organization, the Association for the Support and Defense of American Exiles

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[243] Greg Calvert, Oral Interview no. 1452, 93, "Student Movements of the 1960s," Oral History Research Office, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Kennan, "'At the Crossroads,'" 71.
[246] "L'ADC: notre lutte," *The Second Front Review*, Édition français, no date, 11.
[247] "Déclaration du FLN sur la désertion," *The Second Front Review*, 35.

(ASDAE), to support resisters and deserters in France, gather resources, organize their legal

defense if needed, and popularize their struggle. Beyond this, such an organization could

"facilitate contacts" between deserters, the American left, anti-imperialists in Europe and in the

Third World.[248] This kind of "international solidarity," the organizers concluded, constitutes "an

essential link in the anti-imperialist struggle that is developing every day in the world."[249] Indeed,

given the post-May atmosphere, the ADC itself was extremely militant. Its manifesto firmly aligned

the group with the NLF, declaring, "We wish to express our solidarity with all the forces of the

Third World standing up to imperialist domination …"[250]

   While these activities signaled growing international coordination between radicals in the

United States and France, and the deepening of an international front, they also illuminated some

crucial differences. Significant misunderstandings and disagreements had emerged between the

Americans and the French over media work, for instance.[251] For the Americans, the primary

objective was to use public media to connect to other soldiers and address the American public.

For them, declaring their presence, holding press conferences, speaking out publicly about their

desertion were important forms of resistance. But for the French, many of whom had been

involved in the Resistance or with the Algerian FLN, where speaking out in this manner carried

severe consequences, the American approach seemed outrageous. This disagreement pointed to

a deeper mutual incomprehension over the objective of clandestine work in the first place. Given

their experiences, the French radicals involved in aiding U.S deserters brought with them very

specific ideas about clandestine operations, centralized organizing, and insurrectionary struggle,

imagining that the resisters and deserters network could trigger some kind of underground

revolutionary force inside the United States.[252] The Americans, on the other hand, had no such

traditions to speak of, and imagined resistance and desertion completely differently. For example,

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[248] "Convocation à l'assemblée générale de l'Association pour le soutien et la défense des américains exiles (ASDAE)," April 26, 1969, 1, F delta 0721/7/5, BDIC.
[249] Mikel Dufrenne et al., "Cher ami . . ." March 13, 1969, 2 in F delta 0721/7/5, BDIC.
[250] "Manifeste des comité des déserteurs américains en France (ADC)," *The Second Front Review*, 40.
[251] Watts, "American RITA GIs."
[252] Calvert, Interview, 224.

instead of remaining secretive, they were eager to go public, which confounded the French.

Calvert remembers this frustration well:

> I remember very clearly a conversation that I had with one of them. It sort of cleared the air for me around these issues and this is why I talk about it. In the conversation I had been pressed by people to come with some kind of organizational strategy and I was just at my wit's end to even begin to talk in the terms they were talking about, and I finally had a conversation with a guy and we began talking about the situation he finally said, "I don't see why you need a clandestine organization." He said, "It sounds to me, as you present your political movement and the needs of that movement, that some people in your country need to organize some clandestine services to provide services for people who are in these situations, but," he said, "it doesn't make any sense to me that you organize a clandestine organization," and everything sort of clicked, too, for me.[253]

Calvert's experience also points to the learning process that resulted from these transnational contacts. "So I came back to the States with a lot more knowledge about something that I really didn't know very much about before," he concluded. "I also had my first really heavy exposure to people who thought strictly in Leninist terms and were trying to devise a Leninist strategy for the United States."[254] Indeed, as we will see, one of the most important differences between the radical left in France and the United States was their relationship to Leninism. By the late 1960s, most of the anti-imperialist radical left in France was firmly Leninist. This was not the case in the United States, though that would soon change, in large part because of these emerging transatlantic connections and future events in France.

International Brigades

Attempting to emulate the experiences of the Spanish Civil War, some French antiwar radicals tried to organize international brigades as yet another form of international solidarity with the Vietnamese. Although its precise origins are unclear, the idea seems to have been encouraged very early on by the Vietnamese themselves. In March 1965, just as the United States unleashed its massive bombing campaign of the North, the NLF announced that "if the American imperialists continue to engage their troops and those of their satellites in Vietnam, and to expand the war to the North and into Laos, the Front National de Libération will call on the

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[253] Ibid., 224-25.
[254] Ibid., 225.

peoples of different countries to send young people and soldiers to South Vietnam to join the population in order to annihilate the common enemy."[255]

In France, a certain Trotskyist current known as the "pablists," named after its leader, Michel Pablo, welcomed the call with great excitement. The pablists had experiences with this kind of solidarity. In 1949, the Fourth International organized international Work Brigades for Yugoslavia, with the French sending over 1,500 volunteers, including future pablist leader Gilbert Marquis. Later, during the Algerian War, a number of pablists became deeply involved in the liberation struggle, with Pablo himself arrested for arms trafficking and printing counterfeit money. Soon after the Vietnamese appeal, the pablists issued their own call exhorting readers to "[o]rganize the international brigades to defend, whatever the cost, heroic Vietnam against the barbarian imperialist oppressor."[256] But while they were perhaps the most eager about the call, the pablists were not alone. Other groups, like the JCR, quickly backed the idea.[257] The call for brigades was also formally endorsed by the CVN – which a few pablists such as Marquis, Jacques Grimblat, and Michel Fiant joined – almost immediately after its formation.

By early 1967, the initiative attained a certain degree of seriousness. CVN co-founders Jean-Paul Sartre and Laurent Schwartz supported the project, the first issue of the Comité's journal featured an article on the Brigades, Gilbert Marquis established an office for the campaign, and the group began to publish its own journal, *Le Volontaire*. From there, the movement grew to such a degree that in February 1967 *Le Monde* could write that two hundred French volunteers, including twenty-five women, had signed up. In addition, the organizers had made efforts to internationalize the campaign, revealing that they had received applications from many other European countries, including Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, and

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[255] Cited in "Des volontaires pour le Vietnam," *Pour le Viet-Nam* 1 (February 1967): 4.
[256] Appel "Défendre l'héroïque Vietnam, March 31, 1965, reprinted in *Sous le drapeau du socialisme: Revue mensuelle de la commission africaine de la Quatrième international* 17 (May 1965): 2.
[257] "1967: année de Vietnam héroïque," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 4 (February 1967): 4.

Switzerland.[258] Ready to take the campaign to the next level, in May of that year, the French contingent met with Le Dinh Nahn of the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris to present the first list of 209 volunteers.[259]

Publicly, the Vietnamese reaction was enthusiastic. As Le Dinh Nahn put it in his formal letter to the organizers, later reprinted in *Le Volontaire*, "We thank you most sincerely and appreciate this gesture that demonstrates your militant solidarity with the struggle we are leading against the imperialist of the United States, for our national independence, and for peace in Southeast Asia."[260] Behind closed doors, however, Vietnamese representatives expressed firm opposition to the plan. Marquis recalls how they were "received by the Vietnamese, who did not discourage us, on the contrary, thanked us, but left us absolutely no hope that they would support this campaign."[261]

One gets a sense of why in Tariq Ali's autobiography. When Ali visited Vietnam in February 1967 as part of the Russell Tribunal, Ali directly asked Prime Minister Pham Van Dong about the possibility of organizing international brigades in emulation of the Spanish Civil War. According to Ali, Pham Van Dong aired several concerns, but he seemed most opposed to the idea because of its military impracticability. Brigades would be of little value in the North, given the nature of the air war. As the Prime Minister put it, "this is not Spain in the thirties, where the technological level of combat was primitive. You have seen the scale of the US attacks on us. International brigades are no good against B52 bombers."[262] Furthermore, international brigades would be ill suited to the kind of guerilla warfare waged by the NLF. "In the South," he explained, "any brigade from abroad would not be able to function effectively. Many areas we control by night are overrun by the enemy during the day. We disappear very effectively because, after all,

[258] "Deux cents volontaires français prets à lutter contre les Américains au Vietnam," *Le Monde,* February 16, 1967, 2.
[259] "Entrevue avec les Vietnamiens," *Le Volontaire* 4 (September 1967): 3.
[260] Le Dinh Nan to J. Grimblat, June 7, 1967, reprinted in *Le Volontaire* 4 (September 1967).
[261] Gilbert Marquis, Interview with Nicolas Pas, April 21, 1998, quoted in the Nicolas Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche français sur la guerre du Vietnam, 1965-1968," (Mémoire DEA, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1998), 124.
[262] Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005), 176.

we are Vietnamese. Just imagine trying to hide several thousand European faces in the forests of the South."[263] In fact, not only would volunteers prove largely ineffective, they would likely become a burden. The NLF would have to spend considerable time training recruits for guerrilla warfare, constantly look after their safety, and expend precious resources keeping them alive. In fact, Pham Van Dong continued, "even if we had them repair bridges and roads and schools and hospitals we would be more worried about their safety and would have to expend more resources on housing and looking after them."[264] Civil or military, international brigades were off the table.

Why, then, had the Vietnamese themselves encouraged their formation? Indeed, Pham Van Dong had himself promised that Vietnamese revolutionaries would call for "brigades of foreign volunteers in the more or less near future and hope that there will be many Americans in these brigades."[265] What's more, even after firmly rejecting these initiatives by North American and Western European antiwar radicals, Vietnamese representatives continued to support the idea of international brigades of some kind or another. For example, as late as July 18, 1968, the North Vietnamese Ambassador to the United Arab Republic, Nguyen Xuan, announced that he would be "very thankful" to receive applications from Americans willing "to come fight side by side with the Vietnamese people against the common enemy, that is United States imperialism."[266]

The reason for this attitude lay in what the Vietnamese felt was the immense propaganda value of such an initiative. Though ineffective on the battlefield, the initiative to organize international brigades could score a victory in the war of ideas. The mere fact that North Americans and Western Europeans would even consider risking their lives to die in the distant jungles of South Vietnam revealed the dedicated international support the NLF and North Vietnam enjoyed in their joint struggle against the United States. If part of the American strategy was to isolate Vietnam, then the formation of international brigades, even if only a possibility, dispelled the illusion that Vietnam was alone. Moreover, talking about international brigades could draw positive parallels with Spain, casting the Vietnamese revolutionaries in place of the heroic

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[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Quoted in "Un corps de volontaires civils?," *Le Monde*, 3.
[266] "Hanoi Termed Open on U.S. Volunteers," *The New York Times*, July 19, 1968, 2.

Spanish Republicans, and the Americans as the rebels, or worse, the Nazis and Fascists who propped up General Franco's rebellion against democracy. Indeed, by the 1960s, the Spanish international brigades had achieved an almost mythical status, marking the apotheosis of revolutionary internationalism. Evoking that legacy could lend a sense of legitimacy to the Vietnamese fight.

Thus, although opposed to the idea in practice, the Vietnamese strongly encouraged it as a form of propaganda, a powerful symbol of dedicated moral support. In his meeting with the organizers of the volunteer corps in France, Le Dinh Nan confirmed that the corps could nevertheless play an important role in developing "active propaganda" in France.[267] The French committee played along.[268] As Marquis put it, "[A]fter the meeting with the Vietnamese delegation and Vietnam's response, the volunteer corps became instead a means of propaganda."[269] The effort to organize international brigades for Vietnam never came to fruition and would be remembered as a rather marginal episode in the history of transnational antiwar activism. Nonetheless, the attitude of the Vietnamese revolutionaries in this matter revealed something very important about how they conceptualized international solidarity before 1968. For them, one of the best things internationalism could do for the war effort was to help wage the ideological struggle at an international level. While all forms of support were encouraged, ultimately, the greatest strength of international coordination lay in its ability to help win with the war of ideas.

The Ideological Front

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[267] "Entrevue avec les Vietnamiens," *Le Volontaire* 4, 3.

[268] In some respects, the arrangement held a certain benefit for the radicals as well. It could demonstrate the depth of their opposition to the United States, the seriousness of their commitment to the Vietnamese cause, and the selflessness of their internationalism. This is, for example, why Huey Newton wrote to the NLF on August 29, 1970, offering "an undetermined number of troops" drawn from the Black Panther Party to "assist you in your fight against American imperialism." Newton was not serious, but the letter successfully demonstrated the resolve, dedication, and magnanimity of the Black Panther Party. It showed that the Panthers would sacrifice their own to help an ally in need. Huey P. Newton, "Letter to the National Liberation Front," August 29, 1970, reprinted in *Vietnam Documents: American and Vietnamese Views of the War*, ed. George N. Katsiaficas (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), 133.

[269] Gabriel Marquis quoted in Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 124.

The most famous example of ideological struggle was the International War Crimes Tribunal (IWCT), sometimes called the Bertrand Russell Tribunal. Since the United Nations and the International Criminal Court were both unwilling, and unable, to do anything about the Vietnam War, British philosopher Bertrand Russell decided to take matters into his own hands, organizing an international tribunal to try the United States in direct emulation of the famous Nuremberg Trials. Russell collaborated with the Vietnamese from the very start. Already corresponding with Ho Chi Minh since 1963, Russell sent two representatives, Ralph Schoenman and Russell Stetler, to meet with the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam in the summer of 1965. The idea was met with great enthusiasm, and Nguyen Huu Tho, Chairman of the Central Committee of the NLF, conveyed to Russell that the "National Liberation Front is ready to co-ordinate as actively as possible in all the work of the War Crimes Tribunal. Whatever assistance is required from our Central Committee will be provided concretely and immediately."[270] In February 1966, Schoenman and Stetler spoke directly with DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Ho Chi Minh, who agreed to allow investigators into the North, provide them access to all facilities, and make available witnesses and all evidence in their possession.[271] The Vietnamese felt the Tribunal could provide a venue for them to make their case before a larger audience, especially one in the orbit of the United States.[272]

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[270] "Summary Report of Series of Meetings," Working Correspondence with Vietnamese (December 1966), 1-2, SNCC Records, Box 126, Folder 5, Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

[271] "Summary Report of Meetings in Hanoi," Working Correspondence with Vietnamese (December 1966), SNCC Records, Box 126, Folder 5, King Center.

[272] Harish C. Mehta, "North Vietnam's Informal Diplomacy with Bertrand Russell: Peace Activism and the International War Crimes Tribunal," *Peace & Change* 37, no. 1 (January 2012): 64-67. For accounts of the International War Crimes Tribunal, see Arthur Jay Klinghoffer and Judith Apter Klinghoffer, *International Citizens' Tribunals: Mobilizing Public Opinion to Advance Human Rights* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), chapters 10-14; Bruno Bagnato, "Les États-Unis mis en accusation. Le Tribunal Russell et la Commission d'enquête sur les crimes américains au Vietnam," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*, eds. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Brussells: Bruyant, 2003): 223-39; Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" chapter 5; Harish C. Mehta, 'People's Diplomacy': The Diplomatic Front of North Vietnam During the War Against the United States, 1965-1972" (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, Ontario, 2009), chapter 5; Stefan Andersson, "A Secondary Bibliography of the International War Crimes Tribunal: London, Stockholm, Roskilde," *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, no. 31 (Winter 2011-12): 167-87.

In an effort to expand the Tribunal, Russell wrote to Jean-Paul Sartre in April 1966. Sartre readily agreed, as did others in the CVN. Indeed, French involvement proved decisive. The French supplied key personnel: Sartre served as Executive President, Laurent Schwartz as co-President, and dozens of French doctors, journalists, lawyers, filmmakers lent their services, many traveling to Vietnam as part of the investigative teams. They also provided essential logistical support and publicized the event at home and abroad.[273] The Tribunal ultimately came to include Sartre, Schwartz, de Beauvoir, and Gisele Halmi from France; Stokely Carmichael, former SDS President Carl Oglesby, James Baldwin, and Isaac Deutscher from the United States; Lelio Basso from Italy; and playwright Peter Weiss from Germany; among many others.

During the fall of 1966, the Tribunal met to formalize its procedures. At the behest of the French, Tribunal organizers decided that instead of putting individual U.S. officials on trial for war crimes, the Tribunal would serve as an investigative commission to determine whether the United States had committed war crimes.[274] In November 1966, they posed five questions to establish guilt: has the United States and its allies committed acts of aggression, has the U.S. military made use of illegal weapons, has the U.S. bombed civilian targets, have prisoners and civilians received inhuman treatment, and has the United States committed genocide in Vietnam?[275] To answer these questions, the Tribunal not only collected as much documentary material as possible on the nature of the war, but dispatched a series of research teams to gather firsthand accounts in Vietnam. In addition, all those involved in the war were invited to submit their own evidence, though the United States refused to participate. First at Stockholm in May 1967, then in Copenhagen in December 1967, the Tribunal convened to review the evidence, hear testimonies,

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[273] Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français," 189-95; Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 401-13.
[274] Andersson, "A Secondary Bibliography," 172.
[275] "Aims and Objectives of the International War Crimes Tribunal," in *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal*, ed. John Duffett (New York: O'Hare Books, 1968), 14-16.

and reach a decision. In the end, the United States was found guilty of all charges, including genocide.[276]

In levying these charges, the Tribunal had a very specific political objective. Most of the organizers felt that part of the U.S. government's war effort hinged on its ability to win over public opinion not just at home, but in the world. As a brochure by the "French Friends of the Russell Tribunal" put it, the IWCT "can facilitate rising consciousness in the western world."[277] Thus, even though the Tribunal could not possibly enforce its judgment, its findings had the potential to weaken the United States in the arena of world opinion. As Sartre explained in his inaugural statement, the Tribunal is a jury, but the "judges are everywhere: they are peoples of the world, and in particular the American people. It is for them that we are working."[278] Thus, although the Tribunal was designed in part to show the Vietnamese that they were not alone in their struggle, the primary goal was to turn audiences in the West against the war. In so doing, the Tribunal hoped to shift the balance of forces on the ideological terrain of struggle.

This was precisely the kind of support the Vietnamese wanted from their North American and Western European comrades. As Ho Chi Minh himself put it in his telegram to the preliminary meeting of the IWCT, "By condemning these crimes the international tribunal will promote worldwide indignation against the American aggressors and will intensify the movement of protest among the peoples of all countries in order to demand the end of this criminal war and the withdrawal of the troops of the U.S. and their satellites." "It will contribute to the awakening of the conscience of peoples of the world against American imperialism," he concluded.[279] Prime Minister Pham Van Dong underlined the point: the Tribunal "will have a wide and profound impact

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[276] For a retrospective account of the difficulties involved in making this final judgment, see Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 409-10.
[277] Cited in Keenan, "Vietnam is Fighting for Us," 205.
[278] Jean Paul Sartre, "Inaugural Statement to the Tribunal," in *Against the Crime of Silence*, 45.
[279] Ho Chi Minh to International War Crimes Tribunal, no date, SNCC Records, Box 141, Folder 1223, King Center.

on world opinion, helping to intensify and widen the international movement of solidarity with the Vietnamese people."[280]

To accomplish this task, the Tribunal did not aim to morally condemn the U.S. government, but to measure the United States and its allies against its their laws. As Sartre put it in a 1967 interview, the goal was to determine "whether imperialist policies infringe laws formulated by imperialism itself."[281] The United States, and all the major powers, had agreed at Nuremberg to a certain category of laws governing the conduct of war. The Tribunal sought to show that the United States had violated these. Through its investigative missions, the Tribunal amassed a wealth of information about napalm, cluster bombs, civilian bombings, exfoliants, torture, and so forth. Since the United States had lied about the conduct of the war from the beginning, much of this information was quite revelatory for most in North America in Western Europe. Even committed antiwar activists had little knowledge of the details. It was the Russell Tribunal, for example, that famously broke the news about cluster bombs, weapons designed not to kill but to brutally maim.[282] Drawn as they were from copious notes, photographs, and films, the accounts were vivid: villages reduced to rubble, children blown apart, civilians burned alive, churches bombed on Sundays, rice crops devastated, dams destroyed. The United States was not engaged in a simple peacekeeping mission; it was to kill as much of the civilian population as possible in order to reduce the Vietnamese will to resist.

In addition to focusing on the *conduct* of the war, the Tribunal also explored its *causes*. Lyndon Johnson justified American intervention by arguing that the United States was simply aiding a free country from foreign invasion. In short, the United States was in Vietnam to protect the national sovereignty of the Vietnamese. But the Tribunal showed quite clearly that the only threat to Vietnam's sovereignty was the United States. Marshaling massive historical evidence, the Tribunal completely disrupted the U.S. government's narrative about the war. As the lawyer Lelio Basso put it, "not only is there not a war between two States of Vietnam, there is not even a

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[280] Pham Van Dong, "Message du Premier Ministre Pham Van Dong à M Jean Paul Sartre," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 139, November 27, 1967, 3.
[281] Jean Paul Sartre, "Imperialist Morality," *New Left Review* 41 (January-February 1967): 6.
[282] Mehta, "North Vietnam's Informal Diplomacy," 67.

civil war in the South. This war is being fought by the people on one side and by the American army and mercenary troops on the other."[283] In this way, Basso concluded the Stockholm session by arguing that the United States had violated Articles 1 and 2 of the United Nations Charter, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and the UN General Assembly Resolution of December 1960.

How effective was the Russell Tribunal? Although most accounts assume the Tribunal was virtually ignored, recent scholarship shows this was far from the case. Indeed, historian Harish C. Mehta has shown that the United States saw the Tribunal as a significant threat.[284] The Undersecretary of State drew personnel from the CIA, State Department, Department of Defense, and U.S. Information Agency in a disinformation campaign. The group talked with French and British governments about how to handle the Tribunal, ordered U.S. ambassadors abroad to convince foreign governments sympathetic to the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation to withdraw their support, collaborated with the press to convince the world that the Tribunal was a Communist front, and even considered hosting a counter-trial, but ultimately felt doing so would only draw more attention to the Trial. Indeed, it was certainly the weight of the alliance between the United States and European countries that led de Gaulle and then Prime Minister Wilson to ban the Tribunal from meeting in France and Britain respectively.[285] Thus, far from ignoring the Tribunal, the U.S. government worked hard to combat its potentially deleterious effects on the ideological front. Indeed, the U.S. government had reason to worry. A 1967 White House study concluded that the DRV was effectively winning the psychological war in the "free world" against the U.S. war.[286]

But even with the massive repression, the Tribunal did have important effects. In France, the Tribunal's findings were warmly received. The CVN distributed information from the Tribunal, held a giant meeting at the Mutualité to review the results, and devoted an entire issue of its magazine to the IWCT. The JCR actively publicized the Tribunal in France, and published an

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[283] Lelio Basso, "Summary of the First Two Charges," in *Against The Crime of Silence*, 297.
[284] Mehta, "North Vietnam's Informal Diplomacy," 78-85.
[285] Keenan, "Vietnam is Fighting for Us," 206-207; Mehta, "People's Diplomacy," 261-62.
[286] Mehta, "People's Diplomacy," 96.

interview with Ralph Schoenman in its paper.[287] CVN activists were not the only ones transmitting

the information. Indeed, *Le Monde* republished Sartre's concluding remarks on its front page,

allowing the Tribunal to reach a more mainstream audience.[288]

Given the lengths the U.S. government went to undermine the Tribunal, it had much less

impact in the United States. But while the mainstream media, liberal and conservative, denigrated

the proceedings, the Tribunal still managed to have an important effect. Karen Wald, an American

antiwar journalist, wrote a report immediately after the Stockholm session for her comrades in the

antiwar movement at home. Drawing out the implications of the Tribunal for American antiwar

activists, she argued that the proceedings could be of immense value, allowing activists to

become better informed and supplying "documentation and evidence which can be used to recruit

and mobilize new people into the anti-war movement."[289] In particular, she continued, activists

could use the arguments about the violation of international law, the detailed information about

atrocities, and the evidence proving that the assault on civilians was not "accidental" but part of

the entire war plan.

In his speech at the second meeting in December 1967, Carl Oglesby, former President

of SDS, confirmed that the results the first meeting earlier in the year "has played an important

role in the developing of the consciousness which instills this militancy among America's young

people."[290] Oglesby confided that the "the Tribunal has been the clearing-house of information on

the war." He clarified:

> You understand that it is not always easy for us, unless we probe with great care, to get
> an accurate picture of what actually happens in Vietnam. The Tribunal's capacity for
> pulling together and then developing in a most public and conspicuous way the elements
> of the war's reality – this function has been very important to us in the United States.[291]

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[287] "Interview," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 4 (February 1967): 6.
[288] Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre," 196; Klinghoffer and Klinghoffer, *International Citizens' Tribunals*, 132.
[289] Karen Wald, "Tribunal: Implications for the American Antiwar Movement," May 11, 1967, 1, Box 1, Folder 31, International War Crimes Tribunal Records, Taimiment Library, New York City.
[290] Carl Oglesby, "Greetings to the Tribunal from American Supporters," in *Against the Crime of Silence*, 322.
[291] Ibid.

Thus, if the Tribunal did not change opinion in the United States directly, it did so indirectly, by funneling important information to activists to then use strengthen their case against the war, thereby shifting American opinion.

Oglesby also added that the Tribunal had provided a "clear legal base" for draft resisters since its findings proved that the United States had itself broken international law.[292] Indeed, this was actually one of the primary motivations for forming the Tribunal in the first place. In 1965, the Bertrand Russell Peace foundation provided support for David Mitchell, who went on trial in 1965 for resisting the draft. Aiming to go further, Russell hoped that by presenting concrete evidence that the United States was committing war crimes, the Tribunal could give resisters legal grounds for opposing the war.[293]

Lastly, Oglesby said, the Tribunal "creates in the very heart of the West a window on the Third World." In this, he concluded, the Tribunal has played a vital role in "the building of an internationally solid New-Left movement."[294] Indeed, the IWCT formalized contacts across borders, made new ones, and expanded the reach of the network to include representatives from countries like Pakistan, Cuba, and so forth. It was through the IWCT, for example, that the French CVN came to build stronger ties with SNCC and black radicals in the United States, a connection, we will see, that proved transformative.

The Anti-Imperialist Imaginary

The Tribunal did not simply accumulate evidence in a neutral manner; it presented the Vietnam War as a just struggle for national liberation against imperialism. As Russell himself argued in the introduction to the published proceedings, "I hope the peoples of the Third World will take heart from the example of the Vietnamese and join further in dismantling the American

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[292] Ibid.
[293] Bertrand Russell to Pham Van Dong, Plas Penrhyn, January 25, 1966, in *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell: The Public Years, 1914-1970*, ed. Nicholas Griffin and Alison Roberts Miculan (New York: Routledge, 2001), 586.
[294] Oglesby, "Greetings to the Tribunal," 322.

empire."[295] His remarks signified a dramatic shift in the discourse about the war. From the

formation of the Tribunal in 1966 to its final session in December 1967, the radical critique of the

war gained currency: the objective was not simply to end the war, but to end the system. As

radicals grasped to understand the larger system that made the Vietnam War possible, they

increasingly embraced Marxism.

Of course, many activists in France were already familiar with some version of Marxism.

But over the course of the 1960s, Marxism experienced a kind of renaissance. There are many

reasons for this surge in popularity, but two stand out in particular. First, worldwide anti-imperialist

struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s politicized many young activists in France, creating

the conditions for the positive reception of Marxism. "The basis of our politicization," Étienne

Balibar recalls, "was mostly that of the anti-colonial and, consequently, anti-imperialist

mobilization."[296] Second, at the very moment that activists were searching for cutting-edge radical

theory to make sense of the radical struggles unfold around them, Marxism entered a period of

reinvention and experimentation. Figures like Sartre, Henri Lefebvre, and especially Louis

Althusser were taking Marxism in new directions.

The Vietnam War unfolded in precisely this context. The Vietnamese liberation struggle,

which was in large part led by communists, further radicalized youth, presented an example of a

living struggle guided by Marxism, and helped circulate the Marxist critique of imperialism. Thus,

even radicals in the United States, who had a very complicated relationship to Marxism in the

1960s, began to follow suit by the late 1960s.[297] In this way, the Vietnam War not only

encouraged the growth of the radical left in France and the United States, or enabled a new kind

of radical internationalism; it was also one major factor in the renewed international popularity of

Marxism in 1960s North America and Western Europe. With the revival of Marxism, the system

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[295] Bertrand Russell, "Introduction," in *Against the Crime of Silence*, 5.
[296] Étienne Balibar, "'A Period of Intense Debate about Marxist Philosophy': An Interview with Étienne Balibar," trans. Salar Mohandesi and Patrick King, *Viewpoint Magazine*, March 17, 2015, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/03/17/a-period-of-intense-debate-about-marxist-philosophy-an-interview-with-etienne-balibar.
[297] Sale, *SDS*, 391-92.

came to be fully identified as imperialism, and the struggle against that system as anti-imperialist. But what, exactly, did it mean to be anti-imperialist?

Radicals in the late 1960s understood anti-imperialism within not just a Marxist problematic, but a specifically Leninist one. To be clear, not all radicals in the 1960s were Leninists. Indeed, there were quite a few anarchist, libertarian, and left communist currents at this time, especially in France, that explicitly broke with Lenin on a number of points. But these groups were often miniscule, and often did not play as great a role in anti-imperialist solidarity.[298] On the other hand, those radicals who cared about the struggle against imperialism, which in France and the United States was by far and away the majority, for the most part derived their idea of anti-imperialist revolution from V. I. Lenin. For that reason, it is worth briefly sketching a genealogy of this anti-imperialist problematic.

The roots of the Leninist conception of anti-imperialism lay in an earlier Marxist debate over the "national question" in Europe.[299] With numerous peoples across Europe subjected to imperial rule, the problem of national oppression became one of the burning issues of the early twentieth century. Marxists offered a number of competing solutions. Lenin's answer to the problem was the right of nations to self-determination: oppressed nations had the right to secede and form independent nation-states if they so desired. Although it would become hegemonic by the 1960s, this position was in fact fiercely opposed by other Marxists, both inside and outside the Bolshevik Party. The most forceful and wide-ranging critique of the idea of national self-determination, however, came from the pen of Rosa Luxemburg.

Luxemburg began by dismantling the idea of rights. Why, she asked, did Marxists have to articulate the struggle against national oppression in the language of rights? "The duty of the

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[298] The best example in France is the Situationist International, which effectively argued that nothing truly revolutionary would come from the Third World. As their 1967 article on Vietnam put it, "State capitalism is the natural tendency of colonized societies." *L'Internationale Situationiste* 11, October 1967, http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/localwars.html

[299] For the "national question," see Demetrio Boersner, *The Bolsheviks and the National and Colonial Question, 1917-1928* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), chapters 2 and 3; Michael Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review* 96 (March-April 1976): 81-100; Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 1917-23 (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999), chapter 2.

class party of the proletariat to protest and resist national oppression," she wrote, "arises not from any special 'right of nations,' just as, for example, its striving for the social and political equality of sexes does not at all result from any special 'rights of women' which the movement of the bourgeois emancipationists refer to."[300] Not only was this recourse to the language of rights unnecessary, it was dangerous. The language of rights, she continued, suggests a universal solution, valid in all contexts, and thus a "metaphysical cliché" no different from "rights of man" and "rights of citizen" peddled by the bourgeoisie.[301] With this universal "right" socialists would be compelled to defend national aspirations to statehood anywhere, ignoring the specific historical context, the opposite of what Marxism entails.[302] Even worse, asserting the right to self-determination not only flattens particular political conjunctures; it is incapable of actually achieving anything political. Asserting a nation's right to self-determination, she added sarcastically, is "worth as much as the "right" of each man to eat off gold plates."[303]

From the criticism of rights, she moved to the concept of the nation. The nation, Luxemburg argued, cannot be accepted as the agent of liberation. Indeed, the nation is but a fiction that obscures irreconcilable class divisions within a social formation. As a result, there is no guarantee that the nation would lead to socialism. In other words, just because a nation determines itself does not mean that it will do so in a progressive manner. In fact, chances were very high that "nationalism" would inevitably become the nationalism of the bourgeoisie. The nation, she continued, has become a fundamental aspect of capitalist accumulation and is therefore incompatible with the emancipation of the proletariat. Indeed, the nation, she argued, is an "efficient instrument of conquest" and domination, not only against the proletariat, but also against other nations.[304] In this context, talking about the rights of nations "can serve only as a means of deception, of betraying the working masses of the people to their deadly enemy,

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[300] Rosa Luxemburg, "The National Question and Autonomy," in *The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Horace B. Davis (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 110.
[301] Ibid., 110-11.
[302] Ibid., 110-21, 135.
[303] Ibid., 123.
[304] Ibid., 173.

imperialism."[305] Lastly, Luxemburg suggested that the nation actually possess a kind of internal logic or compulsion towards war, giving the cautionary example of Latin America, where new nations almost immediately went to war against each other after freeing themselves from Spain.[306] Not only could nations not guarantee peace, she concluded, they could in no way ensure economic independence; the right to self-determination would ineluctably result in the economic subordination of newly liberated nations to the great powers, turning political freedom into a fiction.

These were devastatingly sharp criticisms, and they deserve to be studied again today, especially in light of the disasters of national liberation since the 1970s. That said, Luxemburg's indisputably strong criticisms of the right of nations to self-determination were not only encumbered by many weak and dubious claims, but fastened to a deeply flawed conceptual framework, which in turn led to highly unsatisfactory political positions. Luxemburg's entire line of argument rested on a philosophy of history in which capitalism was said to necessarily move towards higher levels of concentration, thus erasing local economies, particular cultures, and individual nation-states themselves. For her, this was a progressive development, and socialism, "the legitimate child of capitalism," would simply take over and complete this tendency towards complete centralization: a completely interconnected economy, the formation of single international culture, and the disappearance of nations.[307] Given this view, the call for national self-determination, which suggested small national units, the fiction of small economies, and the preservation of cultural particularities, was not only impossible, the demand for it was completely regressive. The goal was to push this natural development along towards socialism, not step backwards.

Luxemburg believed that national differences would tend to dissolve as capitalism progressed, and that the national question would be definitively resolved with the socialist revolution, which was in fact the primary question. But national oppression would no doubt

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[305] Quoted in Nigel Harris, *National Liberation* (I. B. Taurus: London, 1990), 57.
[306] Luxemburg, "The National Question and Autonomy," 174-75.
[307] Ibid., 167,

continued to exist until then, so what was to be done in the meantime? For Luxemburg,

oppressed nationalities should remain within the larger imperialist social formations until the

socialist revolution, but depending on the particular circumstances they could pursue a variety of

options. For people like the Poles, who formed the majority of a specific territory, the solution was

regional autonomy within the larger multi-national empire. But for others, like the Jews,

Lithuanians, or peoples of the Caucuses, the solution could only be some kind of local self-

government, legal protection, schools, and support for minority languages.[308]

There were a few problems with such a solution. First, such provisions did not guarantee

that the dominant nationalities would cease to oppress the minority peoples in these regions.

Second, and following from the first, since Luxemburg saw national oppression as primarily

cultural or economic, her approach denied other aspects of national oppression, namely, the

political. Third, Luxemburg's solution completely discounted the colonies. Their struggles, she

argued, would have no impact on the course of the world revolution. They could only be liberated

by revolution in the capitalist core.[309] This solution no doubt left many quite displeased. What, for

example, were the Vietnamese supposed to do? Quietly endure their oppression until the workers

made a successful socialist revolution in France?

Lenin responded ferociously, diving straight into the heart of the matter. He began by

pointing out that while Luxemburg began her disquisition by declaiming against generalities,

insisting instead on the need for concrete historical investigation, it is Luxemburg herself who has

succumbed "to the sin of abstraction and metaphysics."[310] Luxemburg's philosophy of history, he

explained, had led her to completely misread the trajectory of capitalist development, discounting

crucial historical differences and particularities. The future, he predicted, would not see the

disappearance of nations into more homogenous units, but their rapid proliferation. Lenin argued

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[308] Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 13-14.

[309] To be sure, such a position was by no means unique to Luxemburg. This stance was widespread among Marxists in the West. Writing the manifesto of the Communist International, for example, Leon Trotsky went so far as to declare: "The liberation of the colonies is only possible accompanied by that of the metropoles . . . Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation."

[310] V. I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-determination," in *National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism: Selected Writings by V. I. Lenin* (New York: International Press, 1970), 46.

that the nation-state was not regressive, but the primary political form of capitalist development.[311] Those remaining multinational empires, he prophesized, would soon crumble into distinct nation-states as capitalist spread across the globe.

Indeed, for Lenin, the crux of the national question was the question of uneven development. The call for the right of nations to self-determination, he clarified, was specific to the underdeveloped East. For him, the countries of the capitalist core had already passed through a series of crucial structural transformations resulting in territorial unification, constitutions, national assemblies, domestic markets, and so forth. This process, Lenin continued, was only just beginning outside North America and Western Europe. "In Eastern Europe and Asia the period of bourgeois-democratic revolutions did not begin until 1905. The revolutions in Russia, Persia, Turkey and China, the Balkan wars – such is the chain of world events of *our* period in our 'Orient.'"[312] Justifying the Bolshevik's affirmation of the right of nations to self-determination, he wrote: "It is precisely and solely because Russia and the neighbouring countries are passing through this period that we must have a clause in our programme on the right of nations to self-determination."[313] For Lenin, the right to self-determination was therefore the expression of the coming transformations of these peripheral societies, which would include the formation of centralized states, the adoption of constitutions, and the establishment of democratic rights.

Luxemburg, writing from Germany, assumed that the revolutionary process in the West would lead the way for all other oppressed peoples. Here, in the capitalist heartlands, a mature proletariat could directly confront the bourgeoisie. Other classes, like the peasants, were retrograde and doomed to disappear.[314] Other struggles, like that over national oppression, were effectively distractions from the struggle for socialism. For Lenin, writing from the peripheries, the revolutionary process had to take place differently. In Russia, the proletariat was miniscule, most Russians lived as peasants, and national minorities fought against the Empire. For Lenin, the revolution here had to be contradictory and complex. "Whoever expects a 'pure' social

[311] Ibid., 47.
[312] Ibid., 56.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Luxemburg, "The National Question," 264.

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revolution," he later wrote, "will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is."[315] This meant that socialists not only had to ally with other classes and class fractions, but they also had to support other struggles which might not be immediately socialist. Thus, given the Russian context, struggles for national liberation, even if not socialist, could play a crucial role in the overall struggle by striking blows against the Tsarist Empire.[316]

Lenin's approach to the national question, then, was purely strategic. The right of nations to self-determination, he thought, was the precondition, he thought, for political articulation in certain parts of the world: the unification of heterogeneous elements into a political unity. Indeed, for Lenin, the national question was purely political, not an economic, psychological, or cultural one. The question of self-determination, he wrote, "belongs wholly and exclusively to the sphere of political democracy."[317] This is precisely where he differed from Luxemburg. "For the question of the political self-determination of nations and their independence as states in bourgeois society, Rosa Luxemburg has substituted the question of their economic independence," he argued.[318] "This is just as intelligent as if someone, in discussing the programmatic demand for the supremacy of parliament, i.e., the assembly of people's representatives, in a bourgeois state, were to expound the perfectly correct conviction that big capital dominates in a bourgeois country, whatever the regime in it."[319] Thus, for Lenin, it made no difference if new nations could not be economically independent. To begin with, no country was wholly independent. "Not only small states, but even Russia, for example, is entirely dependent, economically, on the power of the imperialist finance capital of the "rich" bourgeois countries."[320] But more importantly, the national question was not about economics at all.

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[315] Quoted in Boersner, *The Bolsheviks*, 55.
[316] Ibid., 45.
[317] V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," *Collected Works*, vol. 22, 145, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm.
[318] Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," 49.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.

In this, Lenin insisted that the right of nations to self-determination was not the *obligation*

of nations to secede.[321] The right, he clarified, was the precondition for politics. As historian

Michael Löwy has explained, Lenin "understood, firstly, that only the freedom to secede makes

possible free and voluntary union, association, co-operation and, in the long term, fusion between

nations. Secondly, that only the recognition by the workers' movement in the oppressor nation of

the right of the oppressed nation to self-determination can help eliminate the hostility and

suspicion of the oppressed, and unite the proletariat of both nations in the international struggle

against the bourgeoisie."[322] Thus, for Lenin, the right to national self-determination was the basis

for a deeper international solidarity.

Luxemburg had mounted a string of brilliant criticisms only to deliver a highly

unsatisfactory political solution. Lenin, on the other hand, seemed to have found a solution that

emphasized the agency of oppressed peoples outside the capitalist core, included them in the

global revolutionary struggle, and therefore encouraged future internationalism. The solution no

doubt had its limits, which would become apparent over the course of the twentieth-century, but

Lenin's advocacy of the right of nations to self-determination had an undeniable appeal. For

better or worse, his positions on the national question achieved hegemony in the international

communist movement after 1917.

Since Lenin himself had directly connected the national question, which had originally

been limited to Europe, to the larger "colonial question," his ideas also came to play a

fundamental role in shaping the way Marxists approached the question of anti-colonialism and

anti-imperialism. [323] As prospects of revolutionary victory in the West subsided into 1920, Marxists

began to turn their attention to the struggles outside of Europe. Thus, at the Second Congress of

the Communist International that year, Marxists from both the West and the East met to establish

the Comintern's formal policy with regards to the colonial question. Lenin's "Draft Thesis on the

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[321] Boersner, *The Bolsheviks*, 53.

[322] Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," 96.

[323] For a history of the "colonial question" in the international socialist movement, see Boersner, *The Bolsheviks*; Madeleine Rebérioux and Georges Haupt, "L'attitude de l'Internationale," *Le Mouvement sociale* 45 (October-December 1963): 7-37.

National and Colonial Question," served as the basis for the discussion. In the Theses, Lenin

argued that the revolution in the colonies and what he called the "semi-colonies" would effectively

pass through two stages. In the first, colonized peoples would join in a united front for national

self-determination. Socialists, based in the tiny working classes, had to unite with both the

peasants, the immense majority of the population, and also "enter into a temporary alliance" with

the "bourgeois-democratic" movement, that is to say, the nationalist movement of the

bourgeoisie.[324] Lenin added that while socialists should always retain their autonomy, advancing

an independent socialist perspective throughout the struggle, the first phase could not be

socialist. Only after the successful realization of national liberation, and with it the fundamental

tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, would the struggle for socialism proper commence.

At the Second Congress M. N. Roy objected to Lenin's call to ally with the national

bourgeoisie, arguing that the bourgeoisie would only pursue the most reactionary aims.[325] As a

compromise, the Comintern made an important distinction between two kinds of nationalist

bourgeois movements, the "reformist" and "revolutionary."[326] The former, to be called the

"bourgeois-democratic" movement, was not to be supported; the latter, to be called "national-

revolutionary" movement, could serve as an ally. In addition, Roy, as well as other

representatives from the colonized countries, pressured Lenin to consider the possibility that

revolutions in these "backwards" countries might be able to bypass capitalism on the way to

socialism. As Lenin explained in his report to the Comintern, "the Communist International should

advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that the backwards countries,

aided by the proletariat of the advanced countries, can go over to the soviet system and, through

certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist

stage."[327] But as historian Demetrio Boersner has shown, Lenin and Roy assumed this path

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[324] Boersner, *The Bolsheviks*, 79-87.
[325] M. N. Roy, "Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Questions," July 26, 1920 in *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920, vol. 1*, ed. John Riddell (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 220-21.
[326] V. I. Lenin, "Report on the National and Colonial Questions," July 26, 1920, in *Workers of the World*, 212-13.
[327] Ibid., 215

would only be possible if the communist revolution met imminent success in the West. Barring

that outcome, the revolution in the colonies and semi-colonized would have to pass through two

stages.[328] Thus, in his Supplementary Theses, Roy stated quite clearly that the "revolution in the

colonies will not be a communist revolution in its first stages."[329] Immediately after the Congress,

Marxists realized the revolutionary wave in the West was about to subside, and the Comintern

formalized the two-stage policy, establishing the basic outlines of the anti-imperialist problematic

within which most radicals would operate until the crisis of the late 1970.

Subsequent thinkers introduced important clarifications over the decades. For radicals in

the 1960s, the two most important were the Maoist and the Trotskyist. Following the Comintern

model, Mao Zedong reiterated that in colonized and semi-colonized countries like China, the

revolution would have to pass through two stages, the bourgeois-democratic and then the

proletarian-socialist. In the first stage, the revolution would result in "the joint dictatorship of all the

revolutionary classes of China headed by the Chinese proletariat."[330] Politically, this joint

dictatorship, which Mao called the "New Democracy," would include the peasantry, the petty

bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, and even the nationalist bourgeoisie. Its two primary tasks would be

the overthrow of imperialism through national liberation and the destruction of feudalism through

agrarian reform. Under the "new-democratic republic," the state would nationalize enterprises

such as banks, railways, and airlines, but "the republic will neither confiscate capitalist private

property in general nor forbid the development of such capitalist production as does not 'dominate

the livelihood of the people.'"[331] Mao insisted that given the backwardness of China, the first step

would take a "long time." "We are not utopians," he wrote, "and cannot distance ourselves from

the actual conditions confronting us."[332] Mao's model soon spread to other anti-imperialist

struggles, and became one of the pillars of what was called "Maoism" in the 1960s.

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[328] Boersner, Part 3.
[329] M. N. Roy, "Supplementary Theses," 221.
[330] Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy* (Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 13.
[331] Ibid., 21.
[332] Ibid., 28.

Leon Trotsky proposed yet another variation. As is well known, since 1905, Trotsky had begun to experiment with a different strategy in which the two distinct revolutions, the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist, could in fact be compressed into a single continuous revolution, or what he called the "permanent revolution."[333] However, Trotsky did not initially extend this new model to the colonized world, considering it far too backwards. Indeed, when it came to China, Trotsky fully supported the stagist model; he only felt that proletarian socialist forces should preserve their autonomy.[334] After the disastrous results in China, however, Trotsky extended the model of permanent revolution to the colonized world, making three basic arguments about the nature of anti-imperialist revolution there.

First, in the colonized world there could be no sharing of power between different classes in some kind of "democratic dictatorship." There would emerge either a bourgeois dictatorship or a proletarian dictatorship, which meant, first, that, contra Mao, the national bourgeoisie could not be counted as an ally; and second, that other classes, like the peasantry, had to follow one or the other, but could not ally as equal partners. "This means that the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is only conceivable as a *dictatorship that leads the peasant masses behind it*."[335] Thus, the only form of revolution in the Third World had to be proletarian dictatorship. Second, Trotsky insisted that there could not be an "intermediate stage" on the way to socialism, but only a single continuous revolutionary process.[336] "The democratic revolution grows over immediately into the socialist, and thereby becomes a *permanent* revolution," Trotsky explained.[337] This meant that a "country is 'ripe' for the dictatorship of the proletariat of the proletariat not only before it is ripe for the independent construction of socialism, but even before

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[333] Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2012), 214-25. Lenin, too, it should be noted, had independently devised a similar strategy in April 1917, shocking the entire Bolshevik Party by announcing that the bourgeois-democratic phase was over and that the socialist revolution should be made in Russia at once.
[334] Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?*, 254, 284-86.
[335] Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, trans. Max Shachtman (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1931), 153.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid., 154.

it is ripe for far-reaching socialization measures."[338] Lastly, although Trotsky still conceptualized the process as a single "national democratic revolution," which would culminate in an independent nation-state, he insisted that the process could not be completed within a single state, but required an international revolution. It was this position that most Trotskyists followed into the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1960s, most anti-imperialists in France, and later the United States, adopted some version of these two models, which framed their solidarity with Vietnam. That said, the Vietnamese Communists, themselves sophisticated Marxists in their own right, developed their own unique model. Like all other models, the basis of the Vietnamese model of anti-imperialist revolution derived directly from Lenin's theses. Like many radicals from the colonized world, Ho Chi Minh was first exposed to these ideas during a sojourn in Paris.[339] In July 1920, he studied Lenin's writings on imperialism, published in *L'Humanité*, the main paper of the PCF.[340] He recalled years later:

> There were political terms difficult to understand in this thesis. But by dint of reading it again and again, finally I could grasp the main part of it. What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness and confidence it instilled into me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted out aloud as if addressing large crowds: "Dear martyrs compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation! After then, I had entire confidence in Lenin, in the Third International.[341]

In 1929, Vietnamese radicals from three parties merged into the Vietnamese Communist Party, soon to be converted to the Indochinese Communist Party on instructions from the Comintern. In October of the following year, the ICP adopted a formal program that would guide Vietnamese communism for the next forty years. Directly modeled on the Leninist problematic, the 1930 Theses followed the classic two-stage model of revolution. The two primary tasks of the "bourgeois democratic" phase would be to "do away with the feudal vestiges and the model of pre-capitalist exploitation and to carry out a thorough agrarian revolution; on the other hand, to

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[338] Ibid., 125.
[339] Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapter 6.
[340] Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2003), 31.
[341] Ho Chi Minh, "The Path Which Led Me To Leninism," April 1960, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/works/1960/04/x01.htm

overthrow French imperialism and achieve complete independence for Indochina."[342] In so doing, the "bourgeois democratic revolution is a preparatory period leading to socialist revolution."[343] But the Vietnamese added a surprising twist, arguing that crucial historical events – namely, the rise of global revolutions, the capitalist crisis, and the consolidation of the first socialist state – necessitated a revision of the model. In this context, the 1930 Theses asserted, "Indochina will bypass the capitalist stage and advance direct to socialism."[344]

Although the imminent collapse of capitalism prophesized by the Comintern in 1930 did not come to pass, subsequent developments led Vietnamese revolutionaries to believe that the unique path they had sketched for themselves remained valid. As Le Duan, General Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers Party, explained years later, the confluence of a set of unique conditions, such as the existence of a weak national bourgeoisie, the underdevelopment of capitalist relations, a very militant peasantry, a tightly organized Communist Party, and the certainty of aid from the Soviet Union meant that the "*North can and must bypass stage of capitalist development to advance to socialism*."[345]

Reflecting on the Vietnamese experience in 1971, Le Duan explained that in the first stage of the revolution the Vietnamese revolutionaries formed a united front, which included the bourgeoisie, to simultaneously fight the French and complete the tasks of the "national democratic" revolution. After 1954, however, the country was split in half, and the national democratic revolution was completed in the North, but left unfinished in the South, creating an imbalance. The Vietnamese communists therefore had two tasks ahead of them. In the North, the Democratic Republic effectively functioned as the dictatorship of the proletariat, abolishing capitalist relations, building the productive forces, launching a cultural revolution, and constructing socialism. In the South, the NLF, working with the North, would have to complete the prerequisite

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[342] Political Theses of the Indochinese Communist Party (Excerpts), in Robert F. Turner, *Vietnamese Communism: Its Origins and Development* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), 316.
[343] Ibid., 316.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Le Duan, "Leninism and Vietnam's Revolution," April 20, 1960, collected in *On the Socialist Revolution in Vietnam*, vol. 1 (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/le-duan/works/1965/soc-rev-viet-v1/ch01.htm

national democratic revolution, which meant breaking up the landed estates, redistributing land, and uniting with the North to create an independent nation-state.

In this way, the complexities of the Vietnamese experience had radicals from a variety of competing currents vying to claim Vietnam as their own. The Maoists approvingly cited the VWP's theoretical distinction between the two stages, and believed they perceived the two-stage model in action, above all in the South. But some Trotskyists argued that in leaping through the various stages towards socialism in the North, the Vietnamese Workers Party, the party that had repressed Trotskyists in Vietnam, was in fact following a path described by Trotsky. Indeed, for the Ligue Communiste, the successor of the JCR, the Vietnamese revolution represented "the concrete verification of the theory of the permanent revolution."[346] The specific historical conditions in Vietnam, the international context, and the decisive leadership of the VWP, the Ligue argued, had pushed the Vietnamese to move from democratic tasks to socialist ones.

As the Vietnamese case shows, anti-imperialists remained divided over crucial questions about the nature of anti-imperialist revolutions abroad. Who was to lead the revolution? Who could be included? How many stages would it require? How long would these last? What were their tasks? Despite these differences, virtually all anti-imperialists shared the same fundamental assumption: the conjugation of anti-imperialism with national-self-determination. Of course, anti-imperialists recognized the pitfalls of nationalism, but they argued, following Lenin, that nationalism always had a dual character, the nationalism of the oppressor nations and the nationalism of the oppressed nations. And the only way to combat national oppression, they continued, was through the right to self-determination. They were also all cognizant of the dangers of states, but as Marxists they believed that some kind of "non-state" state was still essential for the transition to socialism. Thus, all major trends of radical anti-imperialism believed that anti-imperialism required the struggle for an independent nation-state, which would then create the conditions for the subsequent transition to socialism. These independent nation-states would then cooperate in some kind of international.

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[346] *Vietnam, Laos, Cambodge: même combat! Cahier "Rouge"* no. 14 (Paris: François Maspero, 1970), 3.

It should be noted that the struggle against imperialism does not necessarily need to result in the formation of a nation-state. Indeed, other polities could replace the nation-state, such as communes. Yet since Lenin, the link between anti-imperialism and the nation was unbreakable, serving as the foundation for the imaginary of the radical anti-imperialist left not only in the United States and France, but of anti-imperialist radicals across the globe, including the Vietnamese themselves. For the colonized, this meant creating an independent nation-state where none existed. For those with their own nations, it meant defending national sovereignty from imperialist depredations. For those living in the imperialist centers, it meant assisting, in whatever way possible, all those oppressed by imperialism to realize their own sovereign nation-state. In this way the fight for national liberation became the dominant principle of anti-imperialist internationalism. In the 1960s, empires crumbled, dependent nation-states tried to achieve a more robust independence, and oppressed peoples across the world joined together. The inspiring successes of national liberation struggles and the enormous promises they seemed to hold for the future of the world put wind into the sails of anti-imperialist internationalism. But the alliance between anti-imperialism and nationalism could be double-edged. For if national liberation were to ever fail, then anti-imperialism would pay dearly.

The Rights of the Nation

For better or worse, Marxist anti-imperialists ignored Luxemburg's warnings and embraced the language of rights. By the 1960s and 1970s, the impulse to frame the struggle against imperialism in the framework of rights had become second nature. But what did anti-imperialists mean by rights? In recent years, historians have spilled considerable ink on this question. Turning their attention to this period, some have argued that when anti-imperialists spoke about rights, they meant principally the right to national self-determination, which should be contrasted with the idea of individual rights. Thus, scholars like Samuel Moyn argue that whatever the rhetoric, the vast majority of anti-imperialists did not make use of anything like the human rights discourse so common today. Others have pushed back, arguing that the idea of human

rights was in fact not only present in the 1960s, but a crucial aspect of the struggles of these decades, often pointing, for example, to how black radicals in the United States like Malcolm X framed political demands in the language of human rights.

As an international gathering of anti-imperialists appealing to international law it is no surprise that the Russell Tribunal has emerged as a flashpoint in this debate. For Robin Blackburn, for example, the Tribunal was a clear example of how activists employed ideas about human rights to further social justice. As evidence of the Tribunal's immersion in rights talk, he argues, "One of its members, Jean-Paul Sartre, declared in this journal that its deliberations were animated by 'a certain idea of human life.'"[347] As further evidence, he points out how in later iterations the Tribunal investigated the crimes of Latin American dictatorships. Moyn, however, insists on a sharp distinction, arguing that this version of internationalism was a "world away from the human rights movement soon to form."[348] While the debate over the Tribunal seems academic, the stakes are in fact quite high; determining exactly what anti-imperialists meant by human rights at this time is essential to understanding the broader trajectory of the radical left, and, as we will soon see, explaining its eventual collapse decade later.

At first sight, the Russell Tribunal would seem to have fit neatly under the sign of human rights. Activists invoked the Nuremburg trials, made regular appeals to international law, investigated acts of atrocity against the Vietnamese, and often spoke of "war crimes," "humanity," and "inhuman treatment." But upon closer inspection, we see that despite the rhetoric, the participants had a very different conception of rights in mind. In his inaugural statement to the Tribunal, Sartre tried to explain the need for a Tribunal following in the footsteps of Nuremberg. Curiously, though, while he made reference to genocide, Nazi crimes, and the Nuremburg Trials, he justified the new Tribunal with reference to the recent phenomenon of decolonization. "You know the truth. In the last twenty years, the great historical event has been the struggle of the Third World for its liberation: colonial empires have collapsed and in their place sovereign nations

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[347] Robin Blackburn, "Reclaiming Human Rights," *New Left Review* 69 (May-June 2011): 135.
[348] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 142.

have come into existence, or have recovered a lost traditional independence, destroyed by colonization."[349] This, Sartre says, is the historical context of the Tribunal: the struggle for national sovereignty.

But all this, he continues, has "taken place in suffering, in sweat, and in blood."[350] Because of the great suffering surrounding the struggle for national independence, he concludes, "A tribunal such as that of Nuremburg has become a permanent necessity."[351] In this way, Sartre argued that the precedents set at the Nuremburg Trials should now be used to safeguard the rights of oppressed people against imperialist aggression. He added that after Nuremburg, no one can "prevent people from thinking back to its sessions whenever a small, poor country is the object of aggression, prevent them from saying to themselves, 'but it is *this*, precisely this, which was condemned at Nuremberg."[352] Sartre, it seemed was trying to rewrite history: Nuremberg's objective was to uphold the right of nations to self-determination, condemning imperialist aggression against "small, poor" countries seeking liberation. Whether this was actually what Nuremberg did is irrelevant; what is significant is that for the participants Nuremburg established guidelines for trying violations to the rights of national self-determination. And it was precisely this crime that had brought them together.

This was a view shared not only be other members of the Tribunal, but by the Vietnamese themselves. For their part, the Vietnamese covered the Tribunal very closely, publishing articles, informing the people about the proceeds, and organizing their own meetings. In the *Courrier du Vietnam*, Do Xuan Sang, deputy Secretary General of the Association of Vietnamese jurists, argued that the Tribunal was not only a great political act, but carried tremendous importance from a "juridical point of view."[353] Arguing that "sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity" formed the "touchstone" of contemporary international relations, it was imperative to condemn all infractions of the right to national self-

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[349] Sartre, "Inaugural Statement," 42.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Do Xuan Sang, "Le tribunal international Bertrand Russell tiendra sa 2eme session officielle à Copenhague," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 138, November 20, 1967, 2.

determination.[354] In his message to the preliminary meeting of the Tribunal, Ho Chi Minh

underlined this point: "The tribunal is an action of world-wide importance for justice and for the

right of people to self-determination."[355] Violating this right was in fact the primary crime to be

investigated.

Everyone involved in the Tribunal understood rights in a collective manner. In his opening

statement, Russell explained: "There is one reason for this International War Crimes Tribunal:

Overwhelming evidence besieges us daily of crimes without precedent. Each moment greater

horror is perpetrated against the people of Vietnam."[356] Indeed, participants thought in terms of a

collective subject, not individuals. The victims were not individual Vietnamese, but the

"Vietnamese people" as a whole. The War Crimes Tribunal certainly investigated crimes that may

now be considered attacks on individuals: for example, whether the United States and its allies

had taken hostages, tortured or mutilated prisoners, or forcibly relocated communities. But at the

time, these were not seen as violations of the basic liberties of individual Vietnamese. There was

no appeal to their "human rights." Operating as they did within the framework of collective rights

to national self-determination, anti-imperialists saw these kinds of atrocities as attacks on the

entire people: a collective people with a collective right to nationhood. Hence their particular focus

on genocide, which they understood not as affronts to individuals, but as an attack on an entire,

coherent people, on the totality. As Russell put it, the opposite of genocide was national

liberation: "the war knows no middle course between national salvation and genocide."[357]

In short, the Tribunal, despite its constant references to international law, was not

interested in establishing international legal protection for individuals. Instead, as with all Marxist

anti-imperialists at the time, it understood rights only within the context of the right of nations to

self-determination. If anti-imperialists occasionally spoke of human rights, they did so only

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[354] Ibid.
[355] Ho Chi Minh to International War Crimes Tribunal.
[356] Bertrand Russell, "Opening Statement to the First Tribunal Session," in *Against the Crime of Silence*, 49.
[357] Russell, "Opening Statement to the Second Tribunal Session," in *Against the Crime of Silence*, 314.

rhetorically. Indeed, for them, human rights could only mean the right to national self-determination.

It is important to also point out that while the Vietnamese and their antiwar comrades abroad justified their revolution in terms of the right to self-determination, President Lyndon Johnson justified his war in the same terms. In his famous 1965 speech explaining to the American public why their sons were dying in a country few could find on a map, Johnson explained, "Tonight Americans and Asians are dying for a world where each people may choose its own path to change. This is the principle for which our ancestors fought in the valleys of Pennsylvania. It is the principle for which our sons fight tonight in the jungles of Viet-Nam."[358] In other speeches, he explicitly named that principle. Thus, on September 29, 1967, just a couple months before the Second Session of the Russell Tribunal, Johnson flatly announced, "We cherish freedom – yes. We cherish self-determination for all people – yes. We abhor the political murder of any state by another …"[359] This is the same language one could expect from Ho Chi Minh. Indeed, the NLF and DRV argued that their war was a justified struggle for national self-determination: an imperialist power had divided their country in half, denied them the right to choose their fate, and now murdered them in order to prevent the formation of a unified, independent nation-state. The United States justified its war by arguing that North Vietnam was violating the national self-determination of South Vietnam.

In this way, the Vietnam War was also a struggle over the meaning of self-determination, which reflects just how hegemonic the idea had become not only on the left, but in mainstream political culture. Neither the anti-imperialists nor the U.S. government justified their actions or articulated their objectives in the language of human rights, but as the struggle between one nation-state against another. This, however, would begin to change over the next few years, as the U.S. government, anti-imperialist radicals in France and the United States, and representatives from the NLF and North Vietnam began to talk about individual rights. This shift is

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[358] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Peace Without Conquest," John Hopkins University, April 7, 1965, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650407.asp

[359] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Speech on Vietnam," September 29, 1967, http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-4041

reflected in the fact that the Bertrand Russell Tribunal focused on what were increasingly called "human rights violations" in Argentina and Brazil. But that was not until 1973, and to use this as evidence of what radicals thought in 1967, as Blackburn does, prevents us from understanding exactly how and why the meaning of rights began to change.

CHAPTER 3: FROM PROTEST TO REVOLUTION

On December 6, 1967, a handsomely dressed Stokely Carmichael addressed four thousand French antiwar activists at the Mutualité in Paris. After a five-month world tour that included stops in Cuba, Vietnam, Algeria, Syria, Guinea, Tanzania, and Sweden, Carmichael landed in Paris, his final stop before returning to the United States. Although French police detained immediately after he stepped off the plane at Orly airport, on Tuesday, December 5, he remained defiant. When the authorities let him free, he set to work, filling his schedule with political meetings with Laurent Schwartz, army resistor Dick Perrin, black expatriates, and antiwar organizers. The highlight of his brief, but eventful stay was a thunderous speech at the CVN's latest event, "Che Guevara Week," a weeklong action intended to commemorate Che's death earlier that year.[360]

There, beneath a giant poster of Che Guevera, and flanked by NLF flags, Carmichael launched into a militant critique of the Vietnam War. Calling for a shift from protest to active resistance against the war, he declared: "We don't want peace in Vietnam. What we want is a Vietnamese victory over the U.S. In spilling our own blood to help this victory, we feel that we're not paying too high a price, even if we have to destroy the structures of the United States."[361] Soon after, at a press conference, he was even more blunt:

> The war in Vietnam must be brought to the United States of America. If Ho Chi Minh cannot sleep, Lyndon Johnson shall not sleep. The babies in Vietnam are in threat of their lives, and people in the United States must be in threat of their lives. If fire is raging in Vietnam, then fire must rage in the United States. And as long as the United States oppresses black people inside the United States and oppresses Vietnamese in Vietnam, we have a common bond against a common enemy.[362]

Carmichael's militant speech captured an important shift among antiwar radicals. Despite coordinated international protest, the U.S. military continued to escalate the war. In light of this, some radicals now argued that the kind of ideological struggle exemplified by the Bertrand Russell Peace Tribunal was simply insufficient; radicals had a duty to end the war by any means

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[360] Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2014), 225-29.
[361] Quoted in Jacques Amalric, "Le Pouvoir noir à la Mutualité," *Le Monde*, December 8, 1967.
[362] Quoted in Joseph, *Stokely*, 227.

necessary. As Julius Lester, a member of SNCC, explained in his reflections on the Russell Tribunal, "Commitment is something that Sartre has written extensively on, and I presume that his involvement at Stockholm was an example of his commitment. If so, possibly what this age needs is not commitment but just caring about other people and being willing to die because you care so much."[363] The black nationalists who led this revolutionary charge argued that African Americans had a particularly important role to play in this respect: as an "internal colony" inside the United States, they faced the same enemy as the Vietnamese, and could therefore open a second front right inside the belly of the beast. Other radicals quickly began to embrace this idea, arguing that the best way to aid the Vietnamese was to bring the war home. Soon after, Che Guevara codified this new strategy of anti-imperialist internationalism, calling for "two, three, many Vietnams." For their part, representatives from the National Liberation Front and Democratic Republic of Vietnam welcomed Che's new internationalist strategy, and the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers Party, Le Duan, even called for a worldwide anti-imperialist front.

The CVN's decision to invite Carmichael to Paris reflected, but also contributed to, the growing radicalization of French antiwar activists. Although many radicals were already committed Marxist anti-imperialists, and therefore open to the theoretical possibility of revolution, making domestic revolution to aid the Vietnamese abroad was not on the agenda. Even though they had already made a strong case for including Europe in the international antiwar struggle, antiwar activism was primarily oriented towards winning the ideological struggle, putting pressure on their governments, and condemning NATO. But over the course of 1967, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the growing militancy of movements in the United States, and domestic struggles in France, signaled to many French radicals that making revolution at home may not seem so farfetched after all. Thus, when Carmichael spoke at the Mutualité in December, he struck a chord, articulating what French radicals were starting to think. The time for revolution had come.

Although they did not confront U.S. imperialism in the same way as African Americans or Latin Americans, French radicals began to suggest that they, too, could play an important role in

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[363] Julius Lester, "Judgment at Stockholm," in *Revolutionary Notes* (New York: Richard W. Baron, 1969), 19.

this anti-imperialist front. Building on earlier arguments about how U.S. imperialism depended on the support of other capitalist states, they argued that opening a "second front" in Europe would deal a decisive blow to imperialism, relieving the pressure on the Vietnamese. Antiwar activism grew more militant, culminating in February 1968, when thousands of radicals from over a dozen European countries met in Berlin to coordinate their efforts to open new fronts across the continent. As they met, the NLF launched a surprise attack against the U.S. military throughout South Vietnam. If the Vietnamese could repel the most devastating military machine in history, they thought, then surely they could make revolution.

The Internal Vietnam

In December 1965, a teach-in at Wayne State University took a confrontational turn. Activists sneered at the American flag, prowar students interrupted speeches by screaming the Star Spangled Banner, and a conservative heckler was punched in the face. Amidst the chaos, John Watson, a black nationalist, stood up, connected the war in Vietnam to the one waged against African Americans at home, and, in what amounted to a declaration of war, threatened that "the only fighting we are going to do is right here in America."[364] Even the organizers, some of whom were professed socialists, thought he had gone too far. Three years later, declarations such as this would become commonplace. In 1965, they appeared outrageous.

John Watson, however, was not alone. He belonged to a vibrant constellation of black nationalist organizations that emerged in the cities of the northern United States in the early 1960s. In Detroit, Watson was joined by Luke Tripp, John Williams, Charles (Mao) Johnson, General Baker, and Gwen Kemp in the leadership of a revolutionary nationalist student collective named UHURU. In early 1965, some of them regrouped as the Detroit chapter of the Afro-American Student Movement (ASM), editing a journal for black students called *Razor* and a publication for factory workers called *Black Vanguard*. In Oakland, radicals led by Ernest Allen,

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[364] Reported in *The Organizer*, December 3, 1965, 5-6, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Records, Box 141, Folder 1, Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

who by chance met an UHURU delegation on an illegal trip to Cuba in 1964, organized the Soul

Students Advisory Council, which produced the journal *Soulbook*.[365]

The organizational node of this emerging black nationalist network was the Revolutionary

Action Movement (RAM), a small but extremely influential clandestine group founded in the spring

of 1962.[366] Beyond its core of young radicals, which included Max Stanford, Donald Freeman,

and Wanda Marshall, RAM was closely associated with nearly all the major radical figures of

black nationalism. James Boggs, for example, served as the group's Ideological Chairman,

Robert F. Williams as International Chairman, and Malcolm X as International Spokesman.[367]

RAM not only kept disparate radicals tightly connected, largely through the tireless efforts of its

field organizer, Max Stanford, but it also played a crucial role in the circulation of revolutionary

black nationalist theory through its journals *Black America* and *RAM Speaks*.

What brought these groups together was the fundamental idea that African Americans

constituted an oppressed nation within the United States. This belief, of course, was not invented

by radicals in the 1960s, but can be traced at least as far back as the nineteenth century. It had

formed the basis of the various Back-to-Africa proposals, with Marcus Garvey's perhaps only the

most famous. While many of these exodus formulations may have seemed somewhat farfetched

even at the time, they persisted deep into the twentieth century precisely because they captured

the unfulfilled desire for full self-determination. In the 1930s, the idea of black national self-

determination was reframed in a Marxist register by the Communist Party USA as the famous

"black belt thesis."

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[365] Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch "Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution" *Souls* (Fall 1999): 16.

[366] Maxwell C. Stanford, "Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of an Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society" (M.A., Thesis, Atlanta, Georgia, 1986); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 72-91; Lance Mill, *Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 221-224; Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2006), 53, 59-60; Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 31-36, 40-50.

[367] Maxwell C. Stanford, "Revolutionary Action Movement," 99.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, inspired by the wave of national liberation movements

overthrowing colonialism across the globe, many American radicals came to imagine the history

of black struggle through the optic of colonialism.[368] While the comparison with colonialism was

not new, the preferred term in radical discourse had always been the nation, and whenever the

term colony was used, it was often put in quotation marks, suggesting a distance, perhaps even

discomfort with the word.[369] Indeed, the Communist International, pushed by black radicals such

as Harry Haywood, Claude McKay, and others to formally adopt a resolution in 1928 recognizing

African Americans in the Southern United States as an oppressed nation, clearly stated that while

national oppression of colonial peoples and African Americans was "of the same character," it

was "not correct to consider the Negro zone of the South as a colony of the United States."[370]

In the early 1960s, however, the idea of the nation, while by no means abandoned, was

increasingly recoded in the language of the colony, the black nation understood as a specifically

colonized nation rather than just an oppressed or minority one. For instance, after returning from

Cuba in 1960, Harold Cruse argued[371]:

> From the beginning, the American Negro has existed as a colonial being. His enslavement
> coincided with the colonial expansion of European powers and was nothing more or less
> than a condition of domestic colonialism. Instead of the United States establishing a
> colonial empire in Africa, it brought the colonial system home and installed it in the
> Southern states.[372]

Since African Americans were a colonized people, even if they happened to live within the

imperialist world, their struggles could only be understood within the framework of national

liberation.[373] This line of reasoning had a powerful impact on a number of young revolutionaries,

especially those in RAM, and the colonialist paradigm, now shorn of its scare quotes, became

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[368] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 174-211.
[369] See, for example, Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), 147.
[370] *The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Black National Question in the United States* (Washington D.C.: Revolutionary Review Press, 1975), 29
[371] Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 30-32; Kelley and Esch "Black Like Mao," 12; LeRoi Jones, "Cuba Libre," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Norton, 1998), 16-17.
[372] Harold Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," *Studies on the Left* 2, no. 3 (1962), http://brotherwisedispatch.blogspot.com/2009/12/revolutionary-nationalism-and-afro.html.
[373] Singh, *Black is a Country*, 186.

hegemonic among black radicals, forming the basis, for example, of Stokely Carmichael's influential concept of Black Power.[374]

The idea of the "internal colony" helped black radicals clarify their status as oppressed peoples inside the heartland of the oppressors, as pockets of the Third World inside the First. In addition, it gave even greater legitimacy to their struggles. For decolonization seemed to be an unstoppable force – new nations appeared everywhere, the old colonial powers crumbled, and even those in the imperial centers wished to be on the right side of history. Drawing attention to their own colonized situation allowed the internally colonized to ride the anticolonial wave. As Cruse put it: "Those on the American left who support revolutionary nationalism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America must also accept the validity of Negro nationalism in the United States. Is it not just as valid for Negro nationalists to want to separate from American whites as it is for Cuban nationalists to want to separate economically and politically from the United States?"[375]

Above all, it was precisely this "colonial consciousness" that allowed transnational solidarities to emerge, creating the possibility of an international of the colonized. This is why black nationalist organizations like RAM were so fervently internationalist. RAM was not only inspired by the Cuban revolution, decolonization in Africa, or the Chinese Communists; it believed that African Americans, as a colonized people, formed an integral part of what they called the "Bandung World."[376] "We must <u>all</u> do what is necessary to gain our rightful freedom," they declared, "for the world can never be free until Black America is free, and Black America cannot be free until the Bandung world is free."[377]

This self-identification as a colonized people allowed African Americans to advance a vision of solidarity with the Vietnamese that was inaccessible to many other radicals in North

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[374] Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 31; Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1967), especially chapter 1.
[375] Harold Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," *Studies on the Left* 2, no. 3 (1962), http://brotherwisedispatch.blogspot.com/2009/12/revolutionary-nationalism-and-afro.html.
[376] Revolutionary Action Movement, "The Relationship of the Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution," *Black America* (Summer-Fall 1965), 11-12.
[377] Revolutionary Action Movement, "People Get Ready: An Analysis by RAM (Revolutionary Action Movement)," (no date, likely 1965), 1, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Folder 010629-006-0241, Series 5.

America and Western Europe.[378] They could oppose the war not only on the grounds that African

Americans were disproportionately drafted, that they faced racial discrimination at the front, or

even that the money wasted in Vietnam could be better spent assisting poor black communities –

all arguments mobilized by more moderate African American leaders, such as Martin Luther King,

Jr. For black nationalists, the basis of their solidarity with the Vietnamese lay in the fact that they

experienced an analogous form of colonial oppression.[379]

African Americans, they argued, lived the same colonial situation, facing the kinds of

racial discrimination, legal injustices, economic domination, and political violence that other

colonized peoples like the Vietnamese did. "When a child is murdered by bombs in the Congo, or

Vietnam," young black nationalists powerful reminded each other, "it is the same as a child

murdered in a church bombing in Alabama or in Harlem."[380] In addition, African Americans and

Vietnamese shared a special bond since they not only suffered the same colonial violence, but

confronted the exact same enemy. "The same white man who is killing our brothers in Vietnam,"

Black Women Enraged (BWE), an early black nationalist women's group closely affiliated with

RAM, explained, "is lynching our black brothers here in Mississippi, Los Angeles, and New

York."[381] American imperialism, black nationalists argued, was waging not one, but two wars, one

at home against African Americans, another abroad against the Vietnamese. "The gas used in

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[378] One may also add that this self-identification allowed African Americans to build international alliances with other internal colonies, not only Puerto Ricans or Mexicans in the United States, but even white Quebeckers, who also argued they constituted an oppressed colony inside Canada. In 1965, for instance, some RAM militants allied with the Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale (RIN), a Quebecois political party that called for full independence from the rest of Canada, in a plot to blow up the Statue of Liberty, Liberty Bell, and Washington Monument. See Salar Mohandesi, "Black Americans, French Quebeckers, and the Allied Struggle against Internal Colonialism," paper delivered at Southern American Studies Conference, February 20, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia.

[379] For an excellent survey of black responses to the Vietnam War, see Tracy Tullis, "A Vietnam at Home: Policing the Ghettos in the Counterinsurgency Era," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, New York, 1999), chapter 2.

[380] Charles Simmons, "Declaration of the Afroamerican Student Movement," 1964, 1, The Black Power Movement: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962-1996, Folder 010629-014-0108, Series 10.

[381] Black Women Enraged, "Black Women!!" no date, SNCC Records, Box 141, Folder 1, 1106, 3 of 3, King Center. For more on Black Women Enraged, see, Maxwell C. Stanford, "Revolutionary Action Movement," 165.

Vietnam," they claimed, "was first 'tested' in Selma, Ala."[382]

Lastly, both sides fought for the same project: national liberation. On Independence Day 1964, for instance, RAM penned an open letter of solidarity, titled, "Greetings to Our Militant Vietnamese Brothers,"

> On this Fourth of July 1964 when White America celebrates its Declaration of Independence from foreign domination one hundred and eighty-eight years ago, we of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) congratulate the Vietnamese Front of National Liberation for their inspiring victories against U.S. imperialism in South Vietnam and thereby declare Our Independence from the policies of the U.S. government abroad and at home."[383]

Like the Vietnamese, whose own declaration of independence quoted the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, RAM believed, as so many black nationalists had argued before, that African Americans had to win independence, even if this meant forming a separate black state.

The strong parallelism between Black Americans and Vietnamese articulated by RAM and other early black nationalist groups became a defining trope in radical discourse. Vietnamese face the US army; African Americans face the American police. Vietnamese are shot; African Americans lynched. Vietnamese are denied full civil rights in South Vietnam; African Americans are denied the same freedoms in the Southern United States. Vietnamese are racially degraded; African Americans confront racial discrimination throughout the United States. In the words of a later Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) pamphlet, which reproduced this parallelism in its very structure, with images of African Americans on the one side, and Vietnamese on the other: "black people in Washington want: black power … The colored people of Vietnam want: Vietnamese Power."[384] Occasionally such comparison bordered on straightforward identification. For example, *Soulbook* closed a 1967 issue with the following announcement: "To the Vietnamese people: your confidence and determination lends impetus to

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[382] RAM, "People Get Ready (An Analysis by RAM: Revolutionary Action Movement), 1.

[383] RAM, "Greetings to our Militant Vietnamese Brothers," *Black America* (Fall 1964): 21.

[384] SNCC, "Uncle Sam Wants You Nigger," no date, 4, SNCC Records, Box 55, Folder 208, King Center.

our own struggle for national liberation, North America's "internal Vietnam," and renews and revitalizes each day our unshakable faith in mankind. SOCK IT TO 'EM!!!"[385]

Given this idea of solidarity, it is no surprise that radical African Americans were the first in North America and Western Europe to seriously argue that the best way to aid their comrades was to open another front inside the imperialist world. If African Americans lived the same colonial experience, faced the same enemy, and held the same desires for emancipation, black nationalists argued, then they could not limit themselves to simply holding demonstrations, fighting the draft, or pressuring the American government to negotiate, but had to follow the Vietnamese and wage armed struggle inside the United States. Ridiculing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s threat to help the Vietnamese by using non-violence tactics to push the American government into negotiations, John Watson, General Gordon Baker, and other young black nationalists argued it was time to use Vietnamese tactics to help African Americans win their own war against American imperialism. "Let us remember, first of all," they wrote, "that the Vietnamese people have already shown that they really know how to handle Charlie. We support the Viet Cong, they are our blood brothers, having spilt their blood fighting the same white racist beast which we have! The Viet Cong know how to take care of themselves. It is high time we learned to do the same."[386] "Cowboy Johnson wants to double the daft induction into the white U.S. army of slavery," they continued. "Well my program calls for tripling that number of recruits into an Army of Black Freedom Fighters."[387]

The Black Army was no idle threat. In fact, RAM was busily forming a youth army, called the Black Guards, which was to be the forerunner of a Black Liberation Front (BLF) intended to wage revolution inside the United States.[388] Inspired by Robert F. Williams, RAM and other nationalist organizations not only experimented with the idea of armed guerilla warfare, but practiced with firearms, studied military strategy, and made preparations for the coming

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[385] The Editors, "On Vietnam," *Soulbook: The Quarterly Journal of Afroamerica* 2, no. 3 (Summer-Fall 1967): 181.
[386] The Editors, "Dr. King and the Viet Cong," *Black Vanguard* 1, no. 5 (August 1965): 53.
[387] The Editors, "Cockroach for Council," *Black Vanguard* 1, no. 5 (August 1965): 54.
[388] RAM, "The 12 Point Program of RAM (Revolutionary Action Movement)," 1964, 1-3.

insurrection.[389] RAM members even participated in the famous Watts Riots in Los Angeles, which they saw as "the inauguration of the guerilla war."

For RAM, Watts was intimately connected to the war in Vietnam, a point captured by the agenda for the conference on Black Power they called for September 4-5, 1965 in Detroit, Michigan. Two of the key tasks were to "evaluate the Los Angeles Campaign," and to "discuss the afroamerican's international responsibility and the war in Vietnam." In November 1965, RAM's Chairman-in-Exile, Robert F. Williams, made these links explicit to the Vietnamese, when he delivered a speech at the International Conference for Solidarity with the People of Vietnam in Hanoi, North Vietnam. "As a representative of the Revolutionary Action Movement, I am here to give support to the Vietnamese people in their struggle against U.S. imperialist aggression," he said. But this was not enough:

> Not only do we condemn, protest, and raise our fists in indignation at these brutal crimes perpetrated against the noble patriots of this gallant land, but we promise our brothers, and let the whole world bear witness, that we shall intensify our struggle for liberation in the so-called free world of the racist USA. We shall take the torch of freedom and justice into the streets of American and we shall set the last great stronghold of Yankee imperialism ablaze with our battle cry of freedom! Freedom! Freedom now or death![390]

RAM's pioneering ideas about internal colonization, armed struggle, and international solidarity had a profound influence on other, more visible organizations. RAM introduced Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, both of whom joined the Soul Students Advisory Council, to black nationalism and revolutionary Marxism.[391] The Black Panther Party, SNCC, and others eagerly adopted RAM's idea that making internal war against the American empire would be the best way to support the National Liberation Front (NLF).[392] In September 1967, for instance, a delegation of

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[389] See, especially, Robert F. Williams, "Revolution without Violence?" *The Crusader* 5, no. 2 (February 1964): 1-8 and "USA: The Potential of a Minority Revolution" *The Crusader* 5 no. 4 (May-June 1964): 1-7, which went beyond self-defense to call for open guerrilla warfare. For more on Robert F. Williams, Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), especially chapters 7-10.

[390] Robert F. Williams, "Speech delivered at the International Conference for Solidarity with the People of Vietnam Against U.S. Imperialist Aggression For the Defense of Peace," printed in *The Crusader* 6, no. 3 (March 1965): 5.

[391] Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 32.

[392] It seems RAM played an important role in helping to steer SNCC towards more revolutionary nationalist positions, Maxwell C. Stanford, "Revolutionary Action Movement," 87, 90-96.

Americans led by David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, and others met representatives of the NLF in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia.[393] There, John Wilson of SNCC told his Vietnamese counterparts that "we feel very close to your struggle and understand it to its fullest since we are a colonized people also."[394] He continued:

> It is not our job to give our brothers in arms advice. But it's our job to do what we can to forward their struggle for liberation and self-determination. Therefore it is our job to disrupt American society by any means necessary. The duty of a revolutionary who finds himself captured in the heart of imperialism is to destroy that imperialism by any means necessary so that it cannot carry its aggression to other people of color around the world."[395]

"We believe this linkage is necessary," he concluded, "because the goals of our struggles are the same and we have the same enemy.[396]

The Vietnamese, for their part, applauded African Americans for helping the Vietnamese by making revolution inside the United States, lending legitimacy to their claims. An August 1966 article in the *Courrier du Vietnam*, North Vietnam's primary foreign language newspaper – printed in French as well as English, and therefore read by radicals in North America and Western Europe – explained:

> The first front against American imperialism is to be found in Vietnam. The second is in the United States itself. In this country there are 20 million Blacks oppressed, exploited, despised like slaves… they realize that they share a common enemy with the Vietnamese people – American imperialism – and that to win freedom and equality, they must, like the Vietnamese people, oppose counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence.[397]

Surprisingly, although this article, acknowledged the special bond between the Vietnamese and African Americans, it simultaneously expanded the idea of the second front to include the white antiwar movement as well. These two movements, the white and the black, "fusing into an

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[393] James Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 278-80; Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 192-93.
[394] John Wilson, "Statement by John Wilson, Conference – talks between Vietnamese and Americans," September 1967, 1, SNCC Records, Box 59, Folder 298, King Center.
[395] Ibid., 1-2.
[396] Ibid., 4.
[397] Chien Sy, "Le deuxième front contre l'impérialisme américain," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 73, August 29, 1966, 6.

imposing force," the article read, "constitute the Second Front against American imperialism."[398]

African Americans and white radicals could both offer tremendous assistance to the Vietnamese

since they were strategically placed inside the United States, able to wage the struggle behind

enemy lines, so to speak. "Attacked on both fronts," the article concluded, "American imperialism

will be defeated by the American people and the Vietnamese."[399]

Most white radicals in the United States, however, did not take the offer seriously. Some

accepted that African Americans could play this role – the organizers of the famous October 1967

march on the Pentagon, for example, officially declared, "*We recognize that there is only one*

struggle – for self-determination – and we support it in Vietnam and in Black America."[400] Most,

however, did not feel that white Americans could play this kind of revolutionary role. Some, like

the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), were happy to link the war to struggles at home, but like

most of the official Communist Movement, did not call for revolution, either at home or abroad,

believing the war could end through negotiations.[401] Others, such as the Socialist Workers' Party

(SWP) felt the best way to end the war was not to bring it home, which sounded adventurist, but

to agitate around a single-issue campaign for immediate withdrawal.[402] The Progressive Labor

Party (PL) called for revolution, but eventually condemned all national liberation struggles,

including those of African Americans at home and the Vietnamese abroad, as reactionary.[403] As

for Students for a Democratic Society, by far the largest formation on the American left, while

some of its members did identify with the NLF, even to the point of trying to share their struggle,

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[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid.

[400] The National Mobilizing Committee, "Confront the Warmakers Oct. 21-22," *Mobilizer: To End the War in Vietnam* 2, no. 1 (September 1, 1967), 1.

[401] Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 53-55.

[402] The clearest articulation of the SWP's position on this question is Fred Halstead, *Out Now! A Participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Monad Press, 1978).

[403] Progressive Labor Party, "Revolutionaries Must Fight Nationalism," August 1969, reprinted in *Revolution Today: U.S.A., a Look at the Progressive Labor Movement and the Progressive Labor Party* (New York, Exposition Press, 1970), 288-289. For PL's general trajectory, see A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Praeger), 186-195; Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002), 63-64.

this was often framed within a moralistic perspective. For instance, at the very same 1967

meeting in Bratislava, Tom Hayden reportedly said, "now we are all Viet Cong." While the media

spun this as a declaration of war, he was not suggesting that American radicals emulate the Viet

Cong 's model of guerilla warfare in the United States, but that Americans should share the

suffering of the Vietnamese victims. As Hayden, bemoaning the misquote, clarified later, the "test"

of solidarity "is whether we as Americans can identify enough with the suffering and ordeal of the

Vietnamese people to feel what they feel, and not turn away. So when the Pentagon carries out a

search-and-destroy mission and demands to know where are the Viet Cong, we will be able to

step forward and say, 'Here we are, take us instead …'"[404] Thus, with few exceptions, the white

American left, though bestowed a place in the second front, did not accept the offer at this time.

Multiplying the Fronts

If white Americans were not ready to join the second front, radicals elsewhere were. In

April 1967, one revolutionary fighting deep in the jungles of Bolivia issued an appeal for not only a

second front, but for multiple fronts. In his final address to "the peoples of the world," Ernesto Che

Guevara laid out what, in the words of one radical, would become "the internationalist manifesto

of our generation."[405] Che's vision of solidarity was simple: he proposed that the best way to help

the Vietnamese would be to create a worldwide front against American imperialism. Of course,

although he was one of the earliest defenders of the Vietnamese revolution, the idea of a

worldwide anti-imperialist front preceded him, perhaps most powerfully expressed at the first

meeting of the Tricontinental in January 1966.[406] After all, the Tricontinental, which brought

together delegates from Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the first international body committed

to the overthrow of imperialism to be organized by the Third World itself, unanimously recognized

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[404] Tom Hayden quoted in Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets,"* 280. The original statement appeared in *Newsweek*, and was subsequently reprinted in "The New Left Meets the Real Thing," *Dissent* 15 (March-April 1968): 80.

[405] Daniel Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life: A Political Memoir*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2013), 54.

[406] For more on the Tricontinental, Robert J.C. Young, "Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental," *Historien* 5 (2005), 11-21.

the program of the FLN and the four points of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, offered its

active support to the revolution, and created a continuing solidarity committee. In his closing

speech, Fidel Castro even offered to send Cubans to fight there:

> Thousands and thousands of Cubans have expressed the desire and readiness to go anywhere in the world where they may be needed to help the revolutionary movement and this is logical. If the Yankee imperialists feel free to bomb anywhere they please and send their mercenary troops to put down the revolutionary movement anywhere in the world, then the revolutionary peoples feel they have the right, even with their physical presence, to help the peoples who are fighting the Yankee imperialists.[407]

The Vietnamese welcomed this tremendous show of support, proposing a worldwide front

to combat American imperialism. Since the "struggle, destiny, and future of the Vietnamese

people are tied to those of the peoples of the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America,"

the *Courrier du Vietnam*'s report declared, their task was to "concentrate all their efforts in order

to defeat, together with the Vietnamese people, the new military adventures of Yankee

imperialism." [408] This meant demonstrations, boycotts, financial donations, and even sending

"volunteers to fight alongside the Vietnamese people."[409]

But in 1967, Che advocated a different vision.[410] Instead of dispatching revolutionaries to

Vietnam, as Castro offered, he suggested that the best way to assist the Vietnamese revolution

would be to intensify struggles wherever else American imperialism was engaged. Vietnam, he

said, is "isolated"; to break that isolation, revolutionaries had to "create, two, three, many

Vietnams."[411] Instead of fortifying one front, they had to build new ones.

While in certain respects Che merely updated an already familiar idea of solidarity, his

contribution nevertheless proved decisive. Not only did he articulate a complex strategy into an

elegantly poetic slogan, he found a way to justify the move from the two to the many. While the

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[407] Fidel Castro, "At the Closing Session of the Tricontinental," January 15, 1966, Havana, Cuba, https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1966/01/15.htm

[408] N. T. L., "L'Asie, Afrique, Amérique Latine: Solidaires du Peuple Vietnamien," *Le Courrier du Vietnam* 50, March 1966, 5.

[409] Ibid.

[410] Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 718-20.

[411] Che Guevara, "Message to the Tricontinental," April 1967, reprinted in *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Politics and Revolution*, ed. David Deutschman (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2003), 361.

Vietnamese often spoke of the "second front," it was not until Che that radicals across the globe could seriously contemplate a plurality of coordinated fronts. Above all, he personally demonstrated how his sensational slogan could be operationalized; he lived his vision of solidarity, setting an example for others to follow.

Of course, Che primarily had Latin America in mind. It is often forgotten that the phrase "two, three, many Vietnams," is used twice in that address, the first time in overt reference to Latin America. "America, a forgotten continent in the last liberation struggles," Che explained, "will today have a task of much greater relevance: creating a Second or a Third Vietnam …"[412] Latin American countries faced the same kind of imperialism as the Vietnamese, he said. While they had won their independence long ago, unlike the newly decolonizing countries of Asia and Africa, they were the first to feel the brunt of American imperialism, which had now subsumed the colonialism of the old European empires. Latin America, more than anywhere else, offered the most fertile terrain for building new fronts against imperialism. At the same time, however, Che's grandiloquence pushed the idea further, suggesting that any country facing Yankee imperialism could become a front. Many Vietnams would "flourish throughout the world," he prophesized, as American imperialism would be "impelled to disperse its forces under the sudden attack and the increasing hatred of all peoples of the world!"[413] While Latin America was perhaps *best* poised to make new fronts, it was not the *only* place where this could happen.

Vietnamese representatives had the opportunity to officially welcome his conceptual discovery at the first meeting of the Organization for Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) in Havana, Cuba the following July: "when '2, 3, or many Vietnams,' as comrade Ernesto 'Che' Guevara puts it, emerge, when in the very heart of the USA the movement of the American people in struggle, particularly the black sector, develops with the force of a storm, it is certain that North American imperialism can no longer stay standing."[414] Solidifying this emerging alliance between the Vietnamese, Latin Americans, and African Americans, SNCC's Stokely Carmichael spoke at the

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[412] Ibid, 358.
[413] Ibid., 362.
[414] "'Créer 1,2,3 … Vietnam': Les Vietnamiens à l'O.L.A.S.," *Vietnam* 1 (October 1967): 8.

meeting as well.[415] "The struggle we are engaged in is international," he argued, "we know very well that what happens in Vietnam affects our struggle here and what we do affects the struggle of the Vietnamese people."[416] OLAS's General Declaration echoed the sentiment, formalizing the mutual reciprocity of their struggles: "the heroic struggle of the people of Viet Nam aids all revolutionary peoples fighting against imperialism to an inestimable degree and constitutes an inspiring example for the peoples of Latin America." OLAS ended the conference by advocating for armed struggle throughout Latin America.[417]

This emerging worldwide front against U.S. imperialism prompted the NLF to update its program almost immediately after the conference. Departing from the original 1960 statement, the new program assumed an aggressive internationalist stance. In Part 4, Section 3, the NLF vowed to "actively support the national liberation movement of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism and old and new colonialism," support "the just struggle of Black people in the United States for their fundamental national rights," and "the struggle of the American people against the U.S. imperialists' war of aggression in Viet Nam." In a passage read by radicals the world over, the NLF called to consolidate their struggles into a "world peoples' front in support of Viet Nam against the U.S. imperialist aggressors…"[418]

In late 1967, Le Duan, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh's right hand man, went further, condensing all these internationalist ideas into a powerful historical statement. "The struggle of the Vietnamese people is the offensive point of the global revolutionary tide," he declared.[419] The "global counter-revolutionary strategy of American imperialism," however, was to "contain the revolutionary wave"

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[415] Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 191-194; Sarah Seidman, "Tricontinental Routes of Solidarity: Stokely Carmichael in Cuba," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2012): 1-25.
[416] Stokely Carmichael, "Solidarity with Latin America," July 1967, reprinted in *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1971), 104.
[417] OLAS General Declaration, reprinted in *International Socialist Review* 28, no. 6 (November-December 1967): 55.
[418] "Political Programme of the South Viet Nam National Liberation Front," reprinted in *The Vietnam Courier* 127, 1967, 7.
[419] Le Duan, *En avant sous le glorieux drapeau de la revolution d'octobre* (Hanoi: Éditions en langues étrangères, 1967), 53.

by destroying the Vietnamese revolution.[420] Thus, the "objective situation" called for a worldwide coordination of forces, "the constitution of a united global front against imperialism, with American imperialism at the head."[421]

The Worldwide Anti-Imperialist Front

Radicals in France followed these developments with great interest. The Comité Vietnam National reported on OLAS,[422] glowingly reviewed Le Duan's book,[423] interviewed Vietnamese officials, and ravenously consumed literature from Vietnam, including *Le Courrier Vietnam*. Despite their differences, French radicals paid close attention to black struggles in the United States, which they all saw as an integral front in the global struggle against American imperialism. As the Union jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJCml) argued, "The resolute struggle of the African American people of the United States is a blow against American imperialism, it forms an integral part of the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed peoples and nations of the world." "Each battle fought by black Americans," they continued, "weakens imperialism and constitutes support for the revolutionary struggles of people elsewhere in the world."[424]

A few, like the Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire (JCR) even toyed with the idea of opening new fronts inside Western Europe. The JCR argued as early as 1965 that "the best way to support a people in struggle is to intensify the class struggle against one's own bourgeoisie. The best way to help the Vietnamese revolution is to weaken global imperialism by effectively threatening the capitalist order in one's own country."[425] The delegates to the March 1967 Vietnam conference in Brussels shared this sentiment: "the worldwide escalation of the anti-imperialist struggle involves in Western Europe the intensification of the struggle against capitalist

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[420] Ibid., 45.
[421] Ibid., 34.
[422] "'Créer 1,2,3 … Vietnam': Les Vietnamiens à l'O.L.A.S.," *Vietnam* 1 (October 1967): 8.
[423] "En avant sous le glorieux drapeau de la révolution d'octobre," *Vietnam* 3 (February 1968): 3.
[424] "Viva la lutte du people afro-américan," *Servir le Peuple* 3 (August 1, 1967): 4.
[425] Alain Krivine, "Éditorial," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 2 (November-December 1966): 2.

governments and against their political and military instruments …"[426] But for these radicals, such

notions, however rhetorically persuasive or intellectually seductive, nevertheless remained

unrealizable as strategy. These groups were far too marginal, they had no examples to follow,

and struggles at home never approached the desired degree of mass militancy. The idea was

therefore banished to abstraction and many Western European groups focused their activism on

winning the ideological war, that is, changing public opinion, raising consciousness, pressuring

their own governments, and hoping to isolating the United States. In their day-to-day practice,

they continued to collect aid for Vietnam, circulate literature, and hold demonstrations.

Over the course of 1967 and into the beginning of 1968, however, a series of events not

only legitimated the idea of waging war at home, but convinced many French radicals to adopt it

as the most effective form of solidarity. First, struggles in the United States, especially those led

by African Americans gained in militancy, suggesting to the French that black radicals' objective

of opening a second front could succeed. In the summer of 1967, Detroit city police raided a party

where a number of African-Americans celebrated the return of two local GI's from Vietnam. An

altercation ensued, followed by one of the largest riots in American history.[427] When it was over,

43 lay dead, 1,189 injured, 7,200 arrested, and over than 2,000 buildings razed. Detroit was not

the only uprising in the United States; that summer 159 race riots exploded across the country.[428]

For Pierre Rousset, the JCR's Vietnam specialist, these events confirmed that African Americans,

"concentrated in the vital centers of the U.S.A., the most exploited part of the working class,

oppressed racial minority, experiencing the intolerability of the present situation, possessing the

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[426] "Basic Political Resolution Adopted by the Conference of the Vanguard Youth Organizations of Europe for the Coordination of Aid to the Vietnamese Revolution and the Struggle Against NATO," 1967, 2, Socialist Worker's Party Records, Box 22, Folder 3, Hoover Institution for War and Peace, Stanford, California.

[427] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Anthony Oberscall, "The Los Angeles Riot of August 1965," in *Cities Under Siege: An Anatomy of the Ghetto Riots, 1964-1968*, ed. David Boesel and Peter H. Rossi (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

[428] Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

will to act," were emerging as the vanguard of the coming American Revolution.[429] The JCR certainly projected its desires onto these riots, contorting all African Americans into urban guerrillas. Yet the thought of a revolutionary force struggling inside the heart of American imperialism, even if based on a misreading, gave substance to the idea of multiple fronts.

Second, a new round of struggles at home suggested the return of revolution to the imperialist countries. In France, workers struck at a nylon and polyester factory in Besançon on February 25, 1967, with demonstrations rapidly spreading to neighboring plants. [430] The workers even convinced Chris Marker to document their struggle, and the film would have an enormous radicalizing effect on the new generation of activists.[431] Indeed, young radicals from all tendencies hailed the strike, perhaps the most militant in over a decade, as signaling the definitive return of "class struggle."[432] The "length, scale, and violence of the movement," the JCR wrote, not only revealed the bankruptcy of syndicalist capitulation, but also put to rest all those "neo-capitalist 'theories' about the deep complacency of a sated and bourgeoisified working class."[433] The strike prefigured the militant mass actions of May 1968, opening the cycle of what historian Xavier Vigna has called "worker insubordination."[434] At the same time, events were moving rapidly in those countries that neighbored France. In Germany, for example, German police shot and killed a young student, Benno Ohnesorg, triggering a wave of militant action.

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[429] Pierre Rousset, "Le long été chaud aux États-Unis," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 7 (October 1967): 21.

[430] Nicolas Hatzfeld and Cédric Lomba, "La grève de Rhodiaceta en 1967," in *Mai-Juin 68*, eds. Dominique Damamme et al. (Ivry-sur-Seine: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2008), 102-13; for a personal reflection on the strike, see Georges Maurivard, "'Classes de Lutte,' luttes de classes," *Critique Communiste* 186 (March 2008), 92-100; for a scrapbook chronicling the events, see Pol Cèbe, *Culture en trois-huit: Une mémoire militante 1959-1968* (Besançon: Amis de la maison du peuple de Besançon, 2009).

[431] For Marker's film projects at Besançon, see Trevor Stark, "Cinema in the Hands of the People": Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film," *October 139* (Winter 2012): 117-50, especially 119-27; Donald Reid, "Well-Behaved Workers Seldom Make History: Re-viewing Insubordination in French Factories during the Long 1968," *South Central Review* 29, no. 1 (2012): 69-74; Celia Britton, "The Representation of Vietnam in French Films Before and After 1968," in *May 68–Coming of Age*, ed. D. L. Hanley and A. P. Kerr (London: Macmillan, 1989), 163-81; For its effect on radicals, see Kristin Ross *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002), 33.

[432] "Le Combat des Travailleurs Contre Rhodiaceta," *Garde Rouge* 5 (April 1967): 5.

[433] W. Chatelet, "Grève à Rhodiacetta," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 5 (April-May 1967): 15.

[434] Xavier Vigna, *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68 : Essai d'histoire politique des usines* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 11-18, 21.

The heightened political situation in North America and Western Europe in turn radicalized growing frustration with the antiwar movement. Despite persistent worldwide condemnation, the war continued to escalate. In March 1967, the United States increased its aid to South Vietnam to a total of $700 million for the year. In December, the number of US military personnel on the ground reached 486,600. By the end of the year, the United States had dropped 864,000 tons of American bombs on North Vietnam – compared with 653,000 tons during the entire Korean War and 503,000 tons in the Pacific theater during the Second World War.[435] In the face of such carnage, traditional forms of protest appeared ineffective. At a strategic impasse, antiwar activists in Western Europe searched for more militant forms of solidarity.

Even if the idea of opening another front seemed more legitimate, revolution appeared more likely in Europe, and the influence of radical groups seemingly greater than ever before, an intractable theoretical problem remained: how could these radicals possibly justify opening multiple fronts in Western Europe, which was not directly involved in the war?[436] Before radicals in Western Europe could make the slogan "two, three, many Vietnams" the "categorical imperative of solidarity," as Daniel Bensaïd, one of the leaders of the JCR, later put it, they still had to resolve a final conceptual obstacle: they did not confront American imperialism in the same way that African Americans, Latin Americans, or the Vietnamese did.[437]

These radicals solved the problem by arguing, along the lines of the Brussels Statement, that imperialism was a larger system that was not reducible to the foreign policy of the United States alone. While the United States formed imperialism's "head," it needed the support of other capitalist countries in Europe, which meant that European radicals had an equally revolutionary part to play in the struggle. But they went even further, effectively decoupling imperialism from the

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[435] Carl Berger, ed., *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia* (Washington DC: Office of Air Force History, 1977), 366

[436] For the de Gaulle's role in the Indochinese Wars, see Pierre Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam, 1945-1969, la reconciliation* (Paris: Tallandier, 2011); for Great Britain's role in the war, see Peter Busch, *All the Way with JFK? Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003); for the Federal Republic of Germany, Hubert Zimmermann, "The Quiet German: The Vietnam War and the Federal Republic of Germany," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*, eds. Chrisopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Brussels: Bruylant, 2003), 49-64.

[437] Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life*, 54.

United States, and turning it into its own autonomous force. In this way, the enemy ceased to be "U.S. imperialism," but "imperialism" pure and simple. For radicals, imperialism was basically synonymous with worldwide counter-revolution in the service of capitalism. As radicals explained in the antiwar youth international's official announcement for their next conference, scheduled to take place in Berlin in February 1968: "Imperialism seeks, through its offensive operations in Vietnam, in Latin America, its maneuvers in Greece with its general, to change the international relations of force. Its goal is to terminate the development of the global revolution and to attempt an attack on the conquests of the workers movement."[438] In other words, wherever capitalism was in danger, imperialism would rush to the rescue, repressing struggles, overthrowing governments, or going to war. This conceptual reduction, it should be noted, had ambiguous results. On the one hand, it risked evacuating the concept of imperialism of its historical specificity, turning it into a subject with its own will. On the other hand, reducing imperialism to an abstract synonym of capitalist counter-revolution was immensely effective at the agitational level. It gave radicals a broad, expansive enemy that could be fought wherever they were.

All these ideas were codified into an official strategy in the Executive Bureau of the Brussels Conference's statement, released in December 1967. The statement argued that Vietnam served as a focal point, a "a decisive confrontation between the international revolution and counter-revolution." But that struggle between imperialism and world revolution extended globally, assuming different forms in different national contexts. In Europe, the struggle took the form of an attempted onslaught against the working classes, who were said to be objective allies of the national liberation struggles abroad. Thus, "Europe constitutes a decisive battlefield in the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle."[439] The duty of the revolutionaries in Europe, the authors of the statement argued, was to open another front against "the international counter-revolution," which meant the "intensification of class struggle."[440] "This strategy," the statement concluded, "finds its expression in Guevara's call to "create two, three, many Vietnams, a

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[438] "Appel de la Conférence de Bruxelles," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 9 (January-February 1967): 28.
[439] Ibid.
[440] Ibid.

conception that revives proletarian internationalism."[441] With this, French radicals not only found a way to justify making domestic revolution, the antiwar international transformed itself into a revolutionary, anti-imperialist international.

Meeting of the Tribes

In the days before February 17, 1968 radicals from North America and Western Europe filed into trains, boarded planes, and packed into cars. Their destination: Berlin. Their objective: to build the worldwide anti-imperialist front inside the advanced capitalist world. The Berlin Conference held at the Technical University on February 17-18 1968, and the international march that followed, marked an important turning point for radicals.[442] "It was the first real gathering of the clans," recalled Tariq Ali, who represented the British VSC, "and it reinforced our internationalism as well as the desire for a world without frontiers."[443]

The choice of Berlin was deliberate. Germany was not only the home of the most militant student organization in Europe. As the CVN put it, "'Showcase' of capitalism and emblem of the 'German Miracle,' Berlin is also the outpost of the Federal Republic of Germany, where, over twenty years after the war, 250,000 American soldiers are still stationed, and which is presented as a model of social stability where the great mass movements are practically inexistent."[444] Gathering in Berlin, the JCR argued, "assumed a particular resonance," since they would be in the very "bastion of European capitalism."[445]

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[441] Ibid.

[442] Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005), 246. For the Berlin Conference, Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in Global Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 91-96; Ingrid Gilcher-Hotley, *Die 68er Bewegung: Deutschland, Westeuropa, USA* (München: Beck, 2001), 7-10. For a transcript of the speeches, SDS Westberlin and Internationales Nachrichten- und Forschungsinstitut. INFI, eds., *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes und die Globalstrategie des Imperialismus, Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß 17./18. Februar 1968, Westberlin* (Berlin: Peter von Maikowski, 1968).

[443] Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 242.

[444] "Berlin: La Jeunesse européenne pour le Vietnam," *Vietnam* 4 (March 1968): 7.

[445] "Berlin 17-18 février 1968: manifestation international," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 9 (January-February 1968): 2

Berlin was also a city under siege. Police murdered a demonstrator in 1967, the press

demonized the student movement as terrorists, and the Bundestag discussed banning SDS.

Meeting in Berlin, then calling for a massive demonstration the following day, was not only a show

of strength, but a direct provocation. Upon hearing that thousands of radicals from all over Europe

would storm Berlin, the municipal government prepared for battle, further encouraging radicals.

The JCR reported to its readers that the Senate had banned the international demonstration,

"3,000 cops were directed to reinforce the city," and "the chief of police had reserved 4,000

vacant cells in the central prison, in the English sector."[446]

It was against this background that approximately five thousand radicals from over fifteen

European and North American countries – including a delegation from Turkey – met to discuss

the future of the international radical left. Although a number were in some way affiliated with the

Trotskyist Fourth International, participants represented a broad spectrum of political ideologies,

from anarchism to Third Worldism, Trotskyism to Situationism, and insurrectionism to anti-

revisionism. The conference brought together personalities as distinct as Manuel Castells, the

theorist of urban space, Paola Parangua, the future Argentinian revolutionary, Gianciacomo

Feltrinelli, the publishing magnate turned guerilla, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a Nanterre sociology

student who would be catapulted into fame during May 68.[447] Those unable to attend such as

Stokely Carmichael and Jean-Paul Sartre delivered messages of support.[448] There was even a

delegation from Vietnam present.[449]

Indeed, what brought them together, despite their differences, was precisely Vietnam. It

not only united the radical tribes, it did so under the sign of international revolution, something

captured by the enormous NLF flag blanketing the main auditorium, which blazoned Che's

unforgettable command that "The Duty of Every Revolutionary is to Make Revolution." For two

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[446] Anne-Marie Lespinasse, "Berlin: 30,000 derrière les drapeaux rouges" *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 10/11 (February-March, 1968): 3.

[447] Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life*, 56; Carlo Feltrinelli, *Feltrinelli: A Story of Riches, Revolution, and Violent Death*, trans. Alastair McEwan (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 274.

[448] "Berlin 17-18 février 1968: manifestation international," 2. Statements of solidarity have been collected in SDS Westberlin, *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes*, 161-175.

[449] The only notable absences were the various Marxist-Leninist (ml) parties, which were, in almost every country, very sectarian at this time.

days, radicals not only traded stories, shared tactics, and briefed one another on the political

situations of their own countries, they discussed how to contribute to the Vietnamese revolution.

There was a general consensus that it was time to intensify the struggle in the imperialist

countries themselves. The most vocal proponents of this idea, as we have seen, were radical

African Americans, primarily represented at the conference by Ray Robinson and Dale Smith of

SNCC. "As long as parents in Vietnam are crying about their children," Smith threatened in Berlin

"parents in the USA should cry about their children, too."[450]

The Germans were also exceptionally militant.[451] They had, more than other European

groups, forged deep transnational ties with the American movement, through which they learned

direct action tactics.[452] They were also acutely aware of their country's Nazi past, vowing to

prevent such horrors from repeating, unlike their parents, whom they pinned as cowards.[453] This

seemed particularly exigent given the country's incomplete de-Nazification – Nazi laws were still

active, the civil service had not been purged, and many leading businessmen and politicians had

loyally served in the SS.[454] In addition, the radical left was an isolated minority in a very hostile

country. The Federal Republic of Germany aligned strongly with the United States, the state was

fiercely anti-communist, and there was little chance the working class would join in any kind of

revolution, as in France or Italy. This extreme marginalization led many German radicals to

militant action. If they could never hope to sway the majority of public opinion in their favor, why

fear radical actions that might further alienate a fundamentally hostile populace?

Lastly, since Germany was, of all the European countries, closest to the United States,

with its accommodating government, American military bases, and GIs, the German left could

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[450] SDS Westberlin, *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes, 93.*
[451] For a general overview of the German antiwar movement, see Jost Düffler, "The Anti-Vietnam War Movement in West Germany," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*, 287-306.
[452] Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, chapters 2 and 3.
[453] Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 84-103.
[454] Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 309; Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany, 1918-2008: The Divided Nation* (Malden, M.A.: Wiley Blackwell), 126; for an overview of this history, Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapters 1 and 2.

more easily justify bringing the war home as a way to materially aiding the Vietnamese. Peter Weiss, the revolutionary artist, gave expression to this sentiment when he unequivocally declared: "The NLF – the sole and victorious representative of the revolutionary people – has given us the task of organizing the resistance in the metropoles." Only by meeting this challenge, he continued, would radicals in the imperialist world pass from mere "spectators" to "participants in the liberation struggle." It was time to begin the struggle in the "cities, universities and schools, and vulnerable industries of the capitalist world," resorting to sabotage "wherever possible."[455] Rudi Dutschke, one of main leaders of SDS, further emphasized the need to internationalize the revolution, "if to the Viet-Cong there will not be added an American, a European, and an Asiatic Cong, the Vietnamese revolution will fail as others before."[456]

Significantly, however, most radicals, even those not from Germany, were ready to accept this logic. Of course, making revolution at home necessarily meant very different things in different contexts, but the Berlin Conference effected a kind of synchronization whereby the various national radical lefts – all of which, though certainly networked to one another, had nevertheless developed according to their own temporal rhythm – for a brief moment converged on the same plane of consistency. It is only in this context that we can understand why, at what Tariq Ali called a "high point" of the Conference, everyone joined the chant led by African American radicals:

> I ain't gonna go to Vietnam
> Because Vietnam is where I am
> Hell no! I ain't gonna go!
> Hell no! I ain't gonna go![457]

While these words were accurate only for African Americans and other oppressed minorities in the United States, and certainly not for West European radicals, the Conference nevertheless allowed radicals to adopt a common form of international revolutionary solidarity.

As radicals plotted to bring revolution to the imperialist world, the city authorized the scheduled march, and the next day around 20,000 revolutionaries draped in red banners

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[455] SDS Westberlin, *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes*, 90.
[456] Rudi Dutschke quoted in Düffler, "The Anti-Vietnam War Movement in West Germany," 299.
[457] Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 244.

marched through the streets of Berlin.[458] Hoping to discredit German radicals, the papers

regularly referred to the SDS as "a small radical minority." In response, when reporters,

administrators, and the police came to surveil the march, the impressive crowd boomed in unison,

"we are a small active minority," as if to show that, globally speaking, the German radical left was

not at all isolated, but could count on the active solidarity of radicals throughout Europe and

beyond. Some German bystanders were emboldened to join, even though the state exhorted

citizens to avoid the march. The JCR reported that one German remarked, "It's the first time since

1933 that one sees so many red flags on the streets of Berlin!"[459]

Even more significantly, radicals not only reactivated, and even exchanged, their own

national revolutionary traditions – Germans carrying portraits of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa

Luxembourg; the Italians of Falce Martello and the PSIUP chanting "Bandiera Rossa" – they saw

the march as the first step in formalizing the united European Front. As the CVN put it "this

European Front must not be a word just thrown onto paper," but should "really lead to the war

against imperialism in the metropoles." "The Berlin demonstration of February 17 and 18," the

article went on, was at the same time its "beginning and guarantee."[460]

The Berlin demonstration was important in one final, unanticipated respect. At the very

moment that all these radicals linked arms and dreamt of revolution, the Vietnamese unleashed a

devastating surprise attack. Beginning on January 30, 1968, the Vietnamese lunar New Year Têt,

nearly eighty thousand NLF and NVA soldiers launched what was at that point the largest

offensive of the war, overrunning 100 cities, towns, and provincial capitals throughout Vietnam in

a coordinated strike that shocked the entire world. Communists held Hué for twenty-five days,

dislodged only after the United States Air Force destroyed eighty percent of the city; 35 NLF

battalions invaded Saigon; and, most daringly, nineteen guerillas stormed the US Embassy.[461]

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[458] For eyewitness accounts, see Anne-Marie Lespinasse, "Berlin: 30,000 derrière les drapeaux rouges," 5; Renaud Legrouillot, "C'en était trop pour les Berlinois," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 10/11 (February-March, 1968): 6.
[459] Lespinasse, "Berlin: 30,000 derrière les drapeaux rouges," 5.
[460] "Berlin: La Jeunesse européenne pour le Vietnam," *Vietnam* 4 (March 1968): 7.
[461] On the destruction of Hué, see Gabriel, Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (Pantheon Books, 1986), 308-309. On the Têt Offensive,

The campaign hit like a thunderbolt. Millions of Americans, told for years that the war was almost over, now gaped at images of slain GIs sprawled on the Embassy floor. Têt set the media's tapestry of lies ablaze, violently exposed American imperialism's fragility, and proved to the world that the Vietnamese would win. Its effect on young radicals was immeasurable. To radicals, the worldwide anti-imperialist front was no longer just rhetoric; revolution had become a reality.

News of the ongoing offensive poured in as thousands of these radicals gathered in Berlin. Tariq Ali recalls how

> The Tet offensive had begun even while we were preparing to open the Congress. Every fresh victory was reported to the Congress amidst louder and louder applause. The Vietnamese were demonstrating in the most concrete fashion imaginable that it was possible to fight and win. This was critical in shaping the consciousness of our generation. We believed that change was not only necessary, but possible.[462]

Following the offensive as it unfolded, radicals felt they were fighting alongside the NLF. "This was a time," Ali continued, "when it really seemed as if our actions in the West were co-ordinated with what was happening on the actual battlefields in Vietnam."[463] The Vietnamese were beating imperialism in South East Asia; it was time for radicals to do their part in North America and Western Europe. Têt accelerated political time. Defeat was around the corner; worldwide revolution felt immanent. When radicals left Berlin that February, they took with them not only new tactics, contacts, and slogans, or even a committed revolutionary perspective, but a feeling of incredible urgency.[464]

William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), chapter 6; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 523-66.

[462] Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 242.

[463] Ibid., 247.

[464] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Sartre par Sartre," *Situations* IX (Paris, Gallimard, 1972), 127.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSLATING VIETNAM

In the 1967 omnibus film *Far from Vietnam*, Jean-Luc Godard muses aloud about what it means to support a struggle when one is so far, in every sense of the word, from the scene.[465] He admits, with brutal honesty, how he wanted to travel to Vietnam, but the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declined his offer. This refusal, he confesses, was for the best. Driven by altruism, yet knowing nothing of that struggle, he was more likely to have "made things worse, rather than better." Vietnam was not his struggle; how could he possibly film it? You cannot "talk about bombs when they are not falling on your head," he sagaciously pointed out.[466]

Godard posed the most important political question of the period – how could one most effectively demonstrate solidarity with a struggle that is not one's own? Antiwar radicals in France experimented with many forms of international solidarity in the 1960s: they formed grassroots committees, hosted teach-ins, held mass marches, agitated in neighborhoods, schools, and factories, assisted deserting GIs, put the United States on trial for genocide, and some even attempted to organize international brigades to combat U.S. imperialism directly in Southeast Asia. But by the end of the decade, an escalating war, an increasingly militant global political landscape, and a new conception of anti-imperialist struggle pushed thousands of radicals to embrace one form of solidarity above all others.

"Instead of invading Vietnam with generosity," Godard explained, we must "let Vietnam invade us."[467] In other words, the best way to support Vietnam would be to "create a Vietnam" in France. For Godard in 1967, this meant looking to the struggles already unfolding in France, such as the Rhodiaceta factory strike in Besançon, which prefigured the explosive events of May 1968. While *Far From Vietnam* became enormously important for the young radicals later involved in

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[465] For the film, see Laurent Véray, *1967, loin du Vietnam: film collectif réalisé par Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda* (Paris: Editions Paris expérimental, 2004).
[466] Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, and Alain Resnais, *Loin du Vietnam* (France: SOFRACIMA (Société franco-africaine de cinéma) - SLON (Société pour le lancement des œuvres nouvelles, 1967).
[467] Ibid.

the May events, the directors debuted the film not in a Parisian theatre, but inside the Rhodiaceta plant itself. The connection was not lost on the audience. Georges Maurivard, a Rhodiaceta worker, introduced the film by affirming: "It will be about us."[468]

Neither Godard nor any of the thousands of radicals who pursued this strategy invented the idea in the 1960s; but they did, through a dense transnational network, reanimate it for their own historical conjuncture. Some French radicals, especially youths, formed a new antiwar international to coordinate their efforts. Through these exchanges, many came to believe that the best way to assist their Vietnamese comrades would be to open a second front within the imperialist countries of North America and Western Europe. The best form of solidarity, therefore, was one that could reproduce the distant struggle they sought to support. To do so, they *translated* that struggle into their own particular contexts. In France, young radicals' efforts to bring home the anti-imperialist revolution of the Vietnamese triggered a series of events that would culminate in May '68. Internationally, just as the Vietnamese inspired the French, the events of May '68 inspired radicals in the United States, who in turn tried to translate May '68 into their own domestic vernaculars. Thus, the radical left's turn to revolution was in large part an attempt to bring the anti-imperialist struggles of the Vietnamese home to the imperialist world. Seen in this way, the entire arc of radical upheaval in the United States and France from late 1967 to the early 1970s must be understood as the opening of other fronts in the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle led by the Vietnamese, with the wars at home serving as auxiliaries to the war in Vietnam.

The Second Front Opens in Europe

French radicals from the JCR, CVN, ESU, and other formations returned from Berlin high on revolution. Losing no time, they prepared to "inaugurate a new type of political demonstration"

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[468] "Loin du Vietnam," *Cinéma*, January 1968, 37; Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 87-89. For Chris Marker's film projects at Besançon, see Trevor Stark, "Cinema in the Hands of the People": Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film," *October 139* (Winter 2012): 117-50, especially 119-27 and Donald Reid, "Well-Behaved Workers Seldom Make History: Re-viewing Insubordination in French Factories during the Long 1968," *South Central Review* 29, no. 1 (2012): 69-74.

on February 21, 1968 to "break decidedly with the routine of nonchalant processions."[469] Although

some plans had been laid in advance, the events of Berlin changed the action's tenor.[470] From

Berlin, they not only brought a German SDS banner, which they would wave during the

demonstration, but the fast-march chant "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh," which now spread throughout

Western Europe, and a variety of confrontational street tactics they had learned from the German

SDS.[471] Their *service d'ordre*, or what amounted to the group's flying squad, had been

"particularly 'hardened' since Berlin, they threatened.[472] The most important export, however, was

a more fully developed conviction to wage the revolution at home. That day, CVN, JCR, and

UNEF radicals would not simply protest the war, but "make the Latin Quarter into the Heroic

Vietnam Quarter."[473]

On February 21, six CVN activists planted the NLF and North Vietnamese flags on the

Sorbonne, as hundreds of others changed street signs, renamed buildings, and covered the walls

of the Latin Quarter with posters celebrating the recent victories of the NLF. Boulevard Saint-

Michel became Boulevard du Vietnam Heroique; the lycée Saint-Louis became the lycée Nguyen

Van Troi, after the guerilla famously executed in 1964 for attempting to assassinate US Secretary

of Defense Robert McNamara and future ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge; an effigy of Lyndon

Johnson was hung in the Fontaine St. Michel, just over the subdued devil, and set ablaze; and

the words "FNL Vaincra" appeared in burning letters above the gates of the Jardin du

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[469] "21 Février, Journée du Vietnam Héroïque," *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 10-11 (February-March 1968): 14. See also, Daniel Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life*, 56; CVN, "Le 21 Février sera la journée du Vietnam héroïque," February 1968, and CVN, "Tout Pour la Victoire," February 1968, F Delta Res 2089, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (BDIC), Nanterre, France.

[470] February 21 held great importance in France. In 1944 the Nazis executed 22 immigrants, led by the Armenian-French communist Missak Manouchian, at Fort Mont-Valérien near Paris; during the Algerian War, activists revived it as an international day of action against colonialism; and in 1967, radicals rechristened it a day of anti-imperialist solidarity with the Vietnamese Revolution. CVN et al., "Journée d'action anti-impérialiste du 21 février," February 21, 1968, Tract 4628, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF).

[471] Alain Krivine, *Ça te passera avec l'âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 96; Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand and Laurent Gervereau, eds. *Mai 68: Les mouvements étudiants en France et dans la monde, Catalogue de la BDIC* (Paris, 1988), 140.

[472] "21 Février, Journée du Vietnam Héroïque," 14.

[473] Ibid.

Luxembourg.[474] In arguably their most militant antiwar action yet, a coalition of radicals took Che's idea of "creating two, three, many Vietnams" literally, bringing Vietnam to Paris by mutating its very physiognomy.

The campaign continued into the following months. On March 18, 1968, antiwar radicals bombed the offices of three American businesses. Two days later, several hundred demonstrators smashed the windows of the American Express offices in the Rue Scribe. The police arrested six activists, including Nicolas Boulte, one of the student leaders of the CVN, and - Xavier Langlade of the JCR. Radicals immediately viewed the arrests as part of a state campaign to repress antiwar demonstrations, with the CVN publishing an article in *Le Monde* alerting the public to the repression.[475] Significantly, the arrest created unity between rival factions.[476] On March 22, 1968, 150 students from different political tendencies occupied a conference room at the Nanterre campus, forming a coalition called the Mouvement du 22 Mars, in direct emulation of Fidel Castro's Movimiento 26 de Julio.[477] It was this coalition, in which the JCR played a very important role, that would go on to spark the events of May 1968. That month, the efforts of the March 22 Movement to defend their arrested antiwar comrades snowballed, prompting the closure of not only the Nanterre Campus, but also the Sorbonne, ultimately triggering the police repression that kicked off the events of May 68.[478] In that month, mass student unrest articulated with a general strike of over nine million workers, forcing President de Gaulle to surreptitiously flee the country.[479]

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[474] Comité Vietnam National, "21 Février," *Vietnam* 4 (March 1968): 8. Maurice Grimaud, *En mai, fais ce qu'il te plaît* (Paris: Stock, 1977), 71-73; Laurent Jalabert, "Aux origins de la généneration 68: Les étudiants français et la guerre du Vietnam," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire*, no. 55 (July - September 1997): 73-74.

[475] Comité Vietnam National, "Après les attentats anti-américains de paris, M. Boulte, l'un des dirigéants du Comité Vietnam National et plusieurs lycéens sont arrêtés," *Le Monde*, March 23, 1968.

[476] Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 72.

[477] For the March 22 Movement, Jean-Pierre Duteuil, *Nanterre 1965-66-67-68: vers le mouvement du 22 mars* (Mauleon, France: Acratie, 1988); Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 74-84.

[478] For more on the sequence of events, see Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 17-160.

[479] The literature on May-June 1968 is enormous. For an excellent review of the recent literature, see Julian Jackson, "The Mystery of May," *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 624-

Reflecting on the events, Jean-Paul Sartre once suggested that, "the origins of May lie in the Vietnamese Revolution."[480] As radicals themselves recognized, Vietnam "played a determinant role in radicalizing youth."[481] The war, historian Nicolas Pas has demonstrated, allowed the fledgling radical left to escape from the French Communist Party (PCF). For instance, while the Party chanted "Peace in Vietnam," radicals distinguished themselves with "NLF will Win!," proposing their own stance on the burning international issue of the day.[482] In addition, historian Bethany Keenan has shown how antiwar activity allowed young radicals to gain invaluable experiences – learning how to organize events, hold demonstrations, and battle the police.[483] Above all, antiwar work allowed radicals to experiment with a variety of organizational forms that would take center stage during the May events. In some cases, especially at the high school level, the Vietnam Committees simply transformed into the Action Committees of May.[484] Antiwar activism, in other words, prefigured May of 1968, providing radicals with a "veritable political formation."[485]

More profoundly, however, Vietnam lay at the origins of May, Sartre continued, because it "expanded the field of the possible."[486] If Vietnamese peasants could defeat the most powerful military machine in human history, then anything was possible. Vietnam played what became

53. For a concise overview, see Boris Gobille, *Mai 68* (Paris: Découverte, 2008). For a study that attempts to move beyond the students, see Xavier Vigna and Jean Vigreux, eds., *Mai-Juin 1968: Huit semaines qui ébranlèrent la France* (Dijon: Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2010). For a few valuable anthologies, see Philippe Artières and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds. *68: Une histoire collective, 1962-1981*; Dominique Damamme, Boris Gobille, Frédériqye Matoni, Bernard Pudal, eds. *Mai-Juin 68*, (Ivry-sur-Seine: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2008); Julian Jackson, Anna-Louise Milne, and James S. Williams, eds. May 68: *Rethinking France's Last Revolution* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

[480] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Itinerary of a Thought," *New Left Review* 58 (November-December 1969), reprinted in Jean-Paul Sartre, "Sartre par Sartre," *Situations* IX (Paris, Gallimard, 1972), 127.

[481] Ligue Communiste, "Washington, Tokyo, Berlin, Londres, Amsterdam … Paris, F.N.L. Vaincra!," November 1969, 2, F Delta Res 151, BDIC.

[482] Nicolas Pas, "Sortir de l'ombre du Parti Communiste Français: Histoire de l'engagement de l'extrême-gauche français sur la guerre du Vietnam, 1965-1968," (Mémoire DEA, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1998).

[483] Bethany Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us:' French Identities in the U.S.–Vietnam War, 1965-1973," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2009), chapters 3 and 6.

[484] Nicolas Pas, "'Six Heures pour le Vietnam:' Histoire des Comité Vietnam français, 1965-1968" *Revue Historique* 301, no. 1 (January-March, 2000): 181; Boris Gobille, *Mai 68*, 14; Robi Morder, "Les comités d'action lycéens," *Les Cahiers du GERME* no: 22-23-24 (December 2002).

[485] Jalabert, "Aux origines de la généneration 68," 78.

[486] Sartre, "Sartre par Sartre," 127.

known as an "exemplary" role, inspiring the March 22 Movement in France.[487] Thus, Vietnam set

in motion the defining characteristic of this entire period, what might be called a *chain of*

exemplarity. One struggle inspired another, which would inspire another, and so forth. "As the

Vietnamese success inspired the students," Tariq Ali reflected on May 68, "so now the triumph of

the students inspired the workers."[488] To this sequence of resonating examples – which was by

no means unidirectional, as the heroism of the workers worked back on the students – one could

easily add how the workers' rebellion in France in turn inspired radicals all over Europe and North

America.

Lastly, Vietnam lay at the origins of May because the revolution abroad provided French

radicals with the very ideas that made May possible. "All militants," the Maoist Gauche

prolétarienne explained the following year, "know that the ideas they had in their heads during the

May struggles came for the most part from the practice of the Vietnamese people."[489] They

meant, of course, the idea of revolution. The Vietnamese not only revived it, their struggles

redefined revolution itself as the worldwide struggle against imperialism, as the coordinated

opening of fronts all over the world. At an international meeting in Paris on May 9, 1968 –

involving SNCC, the German SDS, JCR, and Italian students – the radicals who made May

possible revealed they were not just fighting against a repressive university system in France,

they were opening a new front in the war against imperialism.[490] May 68 was not a singular,

French event; it was merely one front in the worldwide revolution, with the Vietnamese at the

head.[491] As the JCR argued in June, the "French revolution," by which they meant the events of

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[487] "Bulletin du Mouvement du 22 Mars," reprinted in Jean-Pierre Duteuil, *Nanterre*, 225-237; see also, the contemporary analysis in Fredy Perlman and Roger Gregoire, *Worker-Student Action Committees: France, May 68* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Red and Black, 1968), 37.

[488] Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005), 273.

[489] La Cause du peuple, *Cahiers de la Gauche prolétarienne*, no. 5 (April 1969): 24.

[490] JCR, "Berlin-Louvain-Rome-Londres-Paris: Meeting International," May 9, 1968, F delta 1061 (4) Part 1, BDIC.

[491] While much of the historiography of May 1968 once dwelt on the Parisian students, in recent years historians have complicated the received narrative by stretching the event into a longer conjuncture, widening the focus beyond Paris, and weaving the forgotten histories of marginalized subjects, like women, workers, immigrants, and homosexuals, back into the story. I should point out that while my emphasis on predominantly white students would seem to return to this older historiography, it actually contributes to this revisionist turn. By situating May 68 within

May 68, "could have been one of Che's 'many other' Vietnams." "Reciprocally," they went on, "the victory of the Vietnamese revolution reinforces our own fight."[492]

The JCR, March 22 Movement, and others were able to help open this second front precisely because they struggled to *translate* the ideas of the Vietnamese into the French context, making Vietnam their own. In contrast, the Maoist UJC-ml argued that this vision of solidarity only instrumentalized the struggles of the Vietnamese, doing violence to the particularity of the Vietnamese revolution. Instead, they adopted a very literal form of solidarity. Their primary activity, after all, consisted of convincing everyone to read the *Courrier du Vietnam*, for them the first and last word on anything that had to do with Vietnam. The group, echoing every position the NLF or the RDV took, served as a kind of mouthpiece. While it made for effective propaganda, this stance rendered the group's antiwar work extremely rigid, and they never took the creative leaps that others like the JCR, March 22 Movement, or the CVN did.

This literal attitude is one of the main reasons why the UJCml was caught completely off guard when rebellions finally broke out in France.[493] Content to simply *present* what they assumed to be the authentic voice of the revolution abroad, unwilling to *interpret* it in light of their own conditions, and therefore unable to see how deeply Vietnam *resonated* with other seemingly distinct issues at home, the UJCml missed the events of May '68.[494] Instead of joining thousands of students on the barricades, the UJCml – which had been eagerly awaiting the Peace Talks between North Vietnam and the United States, which were held in Paris during May 1968 – instructed its members to gather around the Vietnamese embassy as the best way to show their

the broader global context of anti-imperialist struggle, we see that even these students saw themselves as little more than junior partners of the Vietnamese, and regarded May as nothing more than an extension of the Vietnamese Revolution.

[492] H. R., "Viet Nam: de la guerilla rurale à la guerilla urbaine," *La Nouvelle Avant-Garde Jeunesse* 1 (June 1968): 13.

[493] Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 89-104.

[494] It was this same behavior that led the group to condemn the events as a trap, forbidding its own militants from participating. Instead, they called for students to "go to the factories and popular neighborhoods to unite with the workers," the only class who could make the revolution. UJCml, "Et maintenant, aux usines!" May 7, 1968, F delta 1061 (4) Part 1, BDIC.

"support and complete solidarity" for North Vietnam as the talks were about to unfold.[495] After

realizing their too *literal* vision of solidarity prevented them from playing a part in a potential

revolutionary opening, which would have been an even more profound act of solidarity with the

Vietnamese struggle than surrounding an embassy, the group saw no choice but to dissolve

itself. After the May events, the JCR admonished the UJCml, explaining that remaining loyal to

the Vietnamese did not mean following their every wish, but rather activating the essence of their

example. "It was stupid," they wrote, scolding the UJCml, "to put one's self at the service of the

Vietnamese because the Vietnamese cannot judge for us the possibilities of our actions."[496]

Some in the UJCml learned their mistake. In June they conceded that "the Vietnamese

example is universal."[497] After the UJCml's auto-dissolution in November, some radicals – many

of whom would go on to form La Gauche prolétarienne, the most dynamic of the Maoist groups in

France after 1968 – continued the new direction with their paper *La Cause du peuple*. "The mass

movement of May-June in France," a lengthy article announcing their adhesion to the worldwide

anti-imperialist front explained, "is a link in a long chain that encircles imperialism before

strangling it. The revolutionary flames spread from one end of the world to the other."[498]

May allowed radicals to explore the challenges of "creating many Vietnams" On the one

hand, as the UJCml pointed out, this vision of solidarity risked speaking for the oppressed, with

an orientalizing, even imperialist perspective – silencing the voices of those who fight in favor of

Western radicals' own idealist projections. If they ignored difference, radicals not only

decontextualized struggles, but risked substituting themselves for the Vietnamese, turning

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[495] "Le peuple vietnamien vaincra!," May 9, 1968, Tract 4602, BNF. The UJCml was forced to postpone the demonstration because of the extreme police presence, but they asserted the whole plan was nevertheless "entirely correct." "La manifestation du dimanche 12 mai est reporté, no date, Tract 4603, BNF.

[496] "Luttes étudiantes, luttes ouvrières," supplement to *Avant Garde Jeunesse* 12 (May 18, 1968): 6.

[497] "L'exemple du peuple vietnamien," *La Cause du peuple: journal de front populaire* 21 (June 29-30, 1968): 6.

[498] "Soulèvement génerale des peuples du monde," *La Cause du peuple: journal communiste révolutionnaire prolétarien*, nouvelle série no. 1 (November 1, 1968): 10. It should also be noted that the Maoists went even further than other groups, adding a unique twist. Channeling their anti-revisionism, they extended imperialism to include the "social imperialism" of the Soviet Union, thereby expanding the worldwide anti-imperialist front to account for the struggles in the Eastern Bloc, especially Prague Spring.

solidarity into its opposite. Yet at the same time, other radicals, such as the JCR, recognized that

bending the stick too far the other way, insisting on absolute difference, risked foreclosing all

creative resonance with the Vietnamese struggle, reducing solidarity to either hero worship or the

neurotic policing of others. Radicals struggled to find the best way to approach this field of

differences in order to make repetition possible. For without difference, there could be no

repetition, only imitation; but too much difference would occlude all reproduction, and with it

solidarity itself.

Resonating Revolutions

The exhilarating events of May 1968 convinced radicals across Western Europe, and

even North America, that the strategy of building multiple fronts against imperialism could

succeed, although this would be interpreted differently in distinct national contexts. In retrospect,

it may seems unsurprising that the breakthrough would come in France, a country known for its

vibrant revolutionary past. At the time, however, nothing seemed more unlikely. Compared to its

neighbors, especially the Germans and Italians, the French radical movement seemed tame.

Norberto Bobbio, who would go on to form Lotta Continua, one of the largest of the extra-

parliamentary groups in Italy, spoke for many when he later revealed radicals initially saw the

American and German movements, and not the French, as vanguards.[499] After May, however,

France took center stage, to the surprise of everyone, including the French themselves. Mary

Alice Waters of the Youth Socialist League asked Alain Krivine about the sudden change in an

interview later published in several languages:

> We worked here month and month to organize demonstration after demonstration in
> support of the student's struggle in Germany and Italy. We never thought that our turn
> would come so soon. The movements of solidarity in Germany, in Italy, in Belgium, as well
> as in Rome, where thousands of students marched under the slogan of "two, three, many
> Parises," had a great impact on us; we feel part of a vast movement.[500]

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[499] Manus McGorgan, "Vive La Révolution and the Example of Lotta Continua: The Circulation of
Ideas and Practices Between the Left Militant Worlds of France and Italy Following May '68," in
Modern & Contemporary France 18, no. 3 (August 2010): 319.
[500] Reprinted as "Interview with Alain Krivine," in *France: The Struggle Continues* (New York:
Committee to Defend the French Students, September 1968), 22, New Left Collection, Box 19,
Folder 2, Hoover Institution, Palo Alto, California.

Only Tet rivaled the international impact of the May events. Indeed, the two fused together in the imaginary of the North American and West European radical left. "The world had to be changed and France and Vietnam proved that it is possible to move forward," recalled Tariq Ali of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, the premier antiwar organization in Great Britain.[501] Most importantly, however, the May events functioned as a relay from the Third World to the imperialist centers, showing that North America and Western Europe could again serve as privileged sites of radical action.

Inspired by what was quickly perceived as the return of revolution to the advanced capitalist countries, radicals everywhere learned as much as they could. Some, especially those in neighboring countries, went to see for themselves. In September 1968 Krivine explained that:

> since the beginning of the struggles there have been numerous delegations from the revolutionary student organizations in Italy, Germany, Belgium and England. They want to discuss with us, they want to learn from our experience, they want to aid us financially. Since the Berlin demonstration in February, all these student organizations have participated in struggles in their own countries and are putting up a fight. We will all come out of this with a much richer experience.[502]

Students were not the only pilgrims. To take just one example, Rossana Rossanda, Lucio Magri, and Filippo Maone, all established intellectuals within the Italian Communist Party (PCI), also made the journey. "When we set out on our journey in France," Rossanda recalled, "the transport system was still on strike, trains were idle, planes were grounded, there was no petrol and the filling stations were all closed. Our friend the editor Diego De Donato took the risk of lending us his Giulia, and we packed it with cans of petrol and hoped we wouldn't have an accident, because we would have gone up in flames."[503]

Of all the visitors, the Italians had perhaps the most to learn, since their situation resembled the French more than any other. As in France, Italy boasted a militant working class, a long history of revolutionary struggle, a vibrant Marxist culture, and an enormous though largely

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[501] Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 305.
[502] Reprinted as "Interview with Alain Krivine," *France: The Struggle Continues* (New York: Committee to Defend the French Students, September 1968), 22, New Left Collection, Box 19, Folder 2, Hoover.
[503] Rossana Rossanda, *The Comrade from Milan* (New York: Verso, 2010), 302.

obstructionist Communist Party.[504] If there was anywhere else in Europe where the political

sequence of May 68 might have been reproduced, it was Italy, something not lost on Italian

militants. As Sergio Bologna recalls, "The French May changed everything," it was "a watershed

in the collective imagination," inspiring many Italian radicals to do the same.[505] Indeed, only a few

months later Italy would see its own wave of revolutionary struggles, sometimes called "the

creeping May" because it spanned an entire decade.[506]

The May events and the idea of making revolution inside the imperialist world even had

an effect in those countries, such as Great Britain, where revolution seemed extremely unlikely.

This did not stop the British government, however, from fearing they would be next. "France

shook the ruling classes throughout Europe," Tariq Ali, one of the main organizers of the Vietnam

Solidarity Campaign (VSC), later put it, "and the British decided to take no chances that the

disease would spread."[507] In an almost farcical rerun of 1789, the British state prepared for the

worst, and the authorities openly feared that the VSC's planned demonstration for October 1968

would devolve into "a French-style insurrection."[508] The Press referred to the coming

demonstration as the "October Revolution," the government banned The Rolling Stones' "Street

Fighting Man," and secret police infiltrated the VSC's meetings. Police raided the offices of *The

Black Dwarf*, a prominent radical paper with close ties to the VSC. Two days later, *The Times*

published an inflammatory article warning that a "small army of militant extremists plans to seize

control of certain highly sensitive installations and buildings in central London next month." This

"starting plot," the article continued, was "uncovered by a special squad of detectives to track

down the extremists who are understood to be manufacturing 'Molotov cocktail' bombs and

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[504] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), chapters 8 and 9.

[505] Sergio Bologna, "1968: Memoirs of a Workerist," November 1988, trans. Alessandra Guarino, *Viewpoint Magazine*, January 12, 2016, http://www.mirafiori-accordielotte.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1968-Memorie-di-un-operaista-di-S.-Bologna.pdf.

[506] Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990); Phil Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!: Rebellion and Repression in Italy, 1972-77* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

[507] Tariq Ali quoted in Ronald Fraser, ed. *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 279.

[508] Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 294 and 296.

amassing a small arsenal of weapons. They plan to use these against police and property in an

attempt to dislocate communications and law and order …"[509] Although fictional, it succeeded in

inciting fear – and fascination – that spread beyond the British Isles. Journalists flooded in from all

over, "hoping that the next act after Paris might be London."[510]

As for British radicals, a growing number seriously believed in the possibility of

revolution.[511] Some even expected the October demonstration to trigger a nationwide insurrection

similar to what was imagined to have happened in France. "None of us knew for sure what might

happen," recalled John Rose, an LSE student and member of the International Socialists, the

other major Trotskyist group in Great Britain.

> But we thought the revolution was going to start then …We would have welcomed a
> major confrontation which would have raised the stakes and drawn the workers into the
> struggle … had there been fighting, with serious injuries, possibly even a killing, I'm quite
> sure a major student rising across the country would have taken place, and the thing
> would have exploded."[512]

Other LSE radicals turned their occupied university into a headquarters, complete with a medical

center for the coming fight.[513] During the famous October demonstration, some 6,000 radicals

from the Maoist Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front, the Action Committee for Anti-Imperialist

Solidarity, and several anarchist groups broke from the march in an ultimately unsuccessful

attempt to storm the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square.[514] Inspired by the events in France,

these radicals hoped to provoke the police into overreacting. Taking the embassy, they thought,

would lead to precisely the violent confrontation that might trigger the British Revolution.[515]

But most radicals, even those affiliated with *The Black Dwarf*, proved more sober in their

assessment of the situation. The events in France were no doubt tremendously inspiring,

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[509] Quoted in ibid. 296
[510] Ibid., 300.
[511] For a background to the radical student movement in Britain, see Caroline M. Hoefferle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties* (London: Routledge, 2013), chapters 2 and 3.
[512] John Rose, quoted in Fraser, *1968*, 280.
[513] Fraser, *1968*, 280
[514] The BVSF split from the VSC back in 1966. For a brief survey of the British Maoists, see Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119-12.
[515] Gordon Carr, *The Angry Brigade: A History of Britain's First Urban Guerilla Group* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 30.

something symbolically captured by the many May 68 posters visible in the October march, but

Great Britain was not the next domino. "As we listened to the news from Paris," remembered Pete

Gowan, a student leader at Birmingham University and a member of the British section of the

Fourth International:

> we were aware that what was going on there was worlds away from the everyday realities of the British student movement. The British state, the whole political system in this country, had immensely more ideological authority amongst students than was the case on the Continent. British universities were fairly flexible, tough institutions that didn't have great difficulty in absorbing and containing radical impulses.[516]

"The very thought was absurd," Ali argued. "Britain was not France. Labour was in office and the

working class was restive, but quiescent … none of us ever believed that anything remotely

resembling France could happen in Britain that year."[517]

This attitude was also shared by the International Socialists, who, while certainly inspired

by May, and still believing in revolution, nevertheless felt that the kind of insurrection some were

hoping for was simply utopian:

> But in Britain, the new English Jacobins who solidarized with the Vietnamese revolutionaries, who flew over to Paris and who pasted over their bathroom mirror Che's imperative injunction "the duty of a revolutionary is to make revolution," were troubled. While events in foreign parts sprouted wild plumage, the struggles in Britain were a determined mufti …
>
> What must be emphasized and re-emphasized is the immense gulf that separates the working class's revolutionary potential and our revolutionary ideas. There are no short-cuts to overcoming this. No amount of verbal euphoria or frenetic activism will do this – especially if it is confined to the university ghetto. What is required is not the heroic gesture or the symbolic confrontation (any more than the perfect revolution); nor is it vicarious participation in the self-activity of others (whether they be in Hanoi or Paris); rather we have to be where the various sections of the working class are as they begin to work out new ways of dealing with the new problems, in the factories in the unions…[518]

Revolution was not to be abandoned, but the British could not simply mimic the sequence that

played out in France. However much inspired by Hanoi or Paris, if it were to happen in Britain,

revolution must necessarily assume a different form, one that would involve a much longer, less

glamorous struggle.

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[516] Pete Gowan, quoted in Fraser, *1968*, 273.
[517] Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 296.
[518] Editorial, "1968 - The Ice Cracks," *International Socialism* 35 (Winter 1968/1969): 1-2.

Sensing the pressure from their left, and hoping to prevent political suicide, *The Black Dwarf* released a special issue with a print run of over 50,000 for the October demonstration, which featured an excerpt from Friedrich Engels' famous essay on the ineffectiveness of street fighting.[519] The march, numbering some 200,000 people, culminated not in revolutionary violence, but in old-fashioned Chartist respectability, when Tariq Ali handed a 75,000-signature petition to the government.

While it seems, in retrospect, that *The Black Dwarf* and the VSC leadership may have bent the stick too far the other way – focusing on the students, avoiding confrontation, insisting on a single-issue campaign[520] – a real change had nevertheless taken place. For if insurrection might not have been on the agenda for most radicals, fundamental social transformation of some kind was. Whatever the official public stance of the VSC, most radicals now placed greater emphasis on the struggle against capitalism at home. After May, the VSC pushed for an autumn offensive, and the discussion, having been "flavoured perceptively by the events of Paris," called for a more direct confrontation with the British government, even if this never materialized in the streets.[521] "Harold Wilson," *The Black Dwarf* reported, "could ponder the problems facing de Gaulle at this very moment…"[522]

May 68 gave substance to the idea of "creating two, three, many Vietnams" in Europe. But as Great Britain shows, this was not a single, unchangeable, universal doctrine, but a flexible guide to action, to be translated according to national conditions. Even radicals in those countries where revolution seemed completely unlikely, therefore, could uphold the watchword. May was the first opening of the worldwide anti-imperialist front's struggle in Europe. But it would not be the last. As the front page of *The Black Dwarf*'s inaugural issue put it, echoing a chant shouted at a

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[519] Ali, *Street Fighting* Years, 300.
[520] Fraser, *1968*, 281.
[521] Pat Jordan, "Autumn Offensive," *The Black Dwarf* 13, no. 1 (June 1, 1968): 8.
[522] Ibid.

May 25, 1968 solidarity demonstration at the French embassy in London: "We Shall Fight, We Shall Win: London, Paris, Rome, Berlin."[523]

Reversing the Polarities

Claimed by nearly every group, whatever its line, May 68 commanded attention in the United States as no other recent militant event in Europe had. The newspapers of the SWP, the YSL, and Progressive Labor all featured stories. *New Left Notes*, the official SDS bulletin, ran a series of articles, including a translation of a detailed eyewitness account by French radicals. The SDS magazine *CAW!* devoted its entire third issue to the "Battle of France," presenting translated materials brought directly from France by a March 22 Movement activist.[524]

May 68 accelerated three transformations in the United States. Above all, the sight of nine million striking workers compelled many radicals to reassess the American working class. This alone marked a revolution in ideas. Many of the young white radicals who formed the core institutions of the pre-1968 American New Left, especially SDS, disavowed not only the organized labor movement, but the broader working class as such. Present at the drafting of the Port Huron Statement, the founding document of SDS, activist Kim Moody, for instance, remembers the statement as "very, very negative, a dismissal of the labor movement."[525] "Simply stated," historian Peter Levy summarizes, "the New Left inherited an anticlass perspective; it assumed that class struggle and class structure were essentially irrelevant to the modern American experience. Contemporary social theorists described the workers as satisfied, labor as bureaucratized and complacent, and class conflict as anachronistic."[526] There were important exceptions, especially among Marxist parties such as Progressive Labor or the Socialist Workers

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[523] "We Shall Fight, We Shall Win: London, Paris, Rome, Berlin," *The Black Dwarf* 13, no. 1 (June 1, 1968): 1.
[524] *Caw! Magazine of Students for a Democratic Society*, no. 3 (Fall 1968): 1, New Left Collection, Hoover.
[525] Kim Moody in Christopher Phelps, "Port Huron at Fifty: The New Left and Labor: An Interview with Kim Moody," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 9, Issue 2 (2012): 39-40.
[526] Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 111.

Party. In general, however, during much of the 1960s few in the white American left consistently distinguished between the rank-and-file and the supposedly corrupt, torpid, or collaborationist unions that claimed to represent them. Convinced that white workers were racist, conservative, or bought off by capitalism, many students turned to other social subjects, ignoring the militant workers' struggles slowly re-emerging across the country.[527] Unlike France or Italy, much of the American student movement remained relatively disconnected from the workers' movement.

May 1968 helped change that view, something observed by Jean Dube of the JCR during his speaking tour of the United States and Canada in August of 1968:

> I was extremely impressed by the response of the American students. They were eager to know what has happened in France. But the most encouraging thing was that they are optimistic about the situation in North America and the struggle here. They felt that they might soon be confronted with a situation similar to France. On almost every campus the students asked how we in the student struggle in France had managed to achieve a link with the working class, how we had been able to involve the working class and work together. I think the fact that this question was asked is extremely important, because it shows that a lot of people here have understood the main lessons and drawn the most important conclusion from the May and June struggle in France: the main task of the student struggle in any country, if you want to carry it to a higher state, is to involve the young workers in the struggle.[528]

Proposals appeared in publications such as *New Left Notes*, the *Guardian*, or *Liberation*, arguing that the strategic question of an alliance with the working class was now the order of the day.

This new concern with labor gave Old Left groups such as Progressive Labor a shot in the arm. As a result, PL argued the May events fully validated their workerist line:

> France is the sharpest people's struggle in recent history in an advanced Capitalist country. It clearly shows that the industrial working class is the key force on the people's side in the advanced Capitalist countries … French students were very clear that while they could start the fight, the working class must finish it![529]

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[527] Aaron Brenner, Preface, *Rebel Rank And File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*, eds. Aaron Brenner et al. (London: Verso, 2010), xv-xvi; Levy, *The New Left and Labor*, 111-21.

[528] "People are Mobilized to Fight the Repression," in *France: The Struggle Continues* (New York: Committee to Defend the French Students, September 1968), 29, New Left Collection, Box 19, Folder 2, Hoover.

[529] "National Student Labor Action Project," *New Left Notes*, June 24, 1968, 5. The article is signed by Cathy Kelly (Boston University SDS), Jared Israel (Harvard SDS, PLP), Steve Raudenbush (Harvard SDS, PLP), Allen Gilbert (Harvard SDS).

PL tried to capitalize on this renewed interest in workers' struggles by calling for a "worker-student alliance," encouraging SDSers to organize campus workers, and even plan a series of "summer work-ins," and pushing students to take industrial jobs.[530]

This meant that those radicals trying to combat PL's attempt to take over SDS had to confront their adversary on the question of the working class. The very reasoning behind the tendency known as the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) – named after a position paper drafted by Jim Mellen, Mike Klonsky, and others – was precisely to "undercut" PL's "influence in SDS and take away their exclusive identification with working-class politics."[531] The working class was no longer PL's pet project, but the burning issue of the entire movement. "At this point in history," the paper explained, "SDS is faced with its most crucial ideological decision, that of determining its direction with regards to the working class."[532] Thus, many of the young revolutionaries in SDS who once rejected the working class out of hand now upheld the proletariat as not only a litmus test, but as the ultimate factor in the revolution to come.

May 68 also internationalized the white American left. As we saw in the previous chapter, despite a few early initiatives, the vast majority of white radicals in the United States did not seek out ties with other groups. If they did look abroad, it was almost exclusively to the Third World, not to Western Europe. Wherever such transatlantic connections existed, they were often ad hoc, isolated, or on a strictly personal level. While there were certainly some very important exceptions to the rule, such as the Socialist Workers' Party, these groups were numerically miniscule. For instance, by 1968 the premier organization of the white New Left, SDS, which had discounted international ties for most of its history, may have had 100,000 members completely overwhelming the ranks of the SWP. This is not to say that the United States was not part of some international. For even if most American radicals did not actively build ties with their activists in Europe, their struggles did figure quite prominently in the imaginary of Western

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[530] For a history of the PL that explores one of their campaigns to "colonize" industry, see Leigh David Benin, *The New Labor Radicalism and New York City's Garment Industry: Progressive Labor Insurgents in the 1960s* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000).
[531] Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), 509.
[532] RYM, "Toward a Revolutionary Youth Movement," December 1968, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/debate-sds/rym.htm.

European radicals, who looked to Americans for inspiration, models, and strategies. Nonetheless, for much of the 1960s, the United States was far more important for Europeans than Europe was for Americans. By 1968, the polarities were reversed, as it was the Americans' turn to look abroad.

As Kirkpatrick Sale notes, a sequence of events that year led to a "growing international consciousness for the American Movement."[533] First came the Berlin conference, which was not only attended by the SWP, but also representatives from SDS. Then, in April, a rightwing student shot Rudi Dutschke in the head, provoking a strong show of solidarity from radicals all over the world.[534] Since Dutschke was regarded as not simply a German radical, but a highly visible international figure, perhaps one of the best known European radicals in the United States, his attempted murder was interpreted by American groups as an assault on the "international anti-war movement."[535] The most important chain in this sequence, however, were the events of May 1968 in France.

May convinced many American radicals that struggles abroad were profoundly connected to those in the United States.[536] Carl Davidson, SDS Inter-Organizational Secretary, explained how "there are more critical reasons for developing fraternal relations with Europeans and Japanese New Left groups than political education or moral solidarity; namely, we have a solidarity based in struggle around a community of interests."[537] He surveyed struggles in France, Germany, Japan, and Quebec, and proposed joint actions: "A variety of programs joining American, Japanese, and European New Left students could be developed, co-ordinating international actions around Draft-resistance, desertion, or attacks on the CIA, NATO, and other

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[533] Sale, *SDS*, 405.
[534] For a vivid recollection of the militant protests in New York, see Jeff Jones, Oral Interview no. 2265, 46, "Student Movements of the 1960s," Oral History Research Office, Butler Library, Columbia University.
[535] Student Mobilization Committee and SDS, "Protest the Attempted Assassination of Rudi Dutschke!" flyer, April 1968, no date, Protest and Activism Collection, 1963-1975, 8, RC 7, 3, Columbia University Archives.
[536] Sale, *SDS* , 405.
[537] Carl Davidson, "Inter-organizational," *New Left Notes*, June 10, 1968, 11.

military alliances."[538] "Hopefully," he continued, "the recent dramatic struggles of the European New Left students will change some of our isolationist attitudes."[539]

SDSers discussed the matter at the National Interim Committee meeting in June. "On the whole," the meeting minutes made clear, "the consensus was that European travel is to be stressed at this time. Everybody shouldn't go to Hanoi as we have been doing; the struggle in the advanced capitalist countries has been ignored by SDS."[540] A debate soon erupted about the best way to forge these connections. Carl Oglesby suggested inviting European leaders, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit or Tariq Ali, to speak in the United States. Barbara and John Ehrenreich vigorously opposed his proposal, arguing that passively inviting foreigners to visit the United States would only reinforce "the inexcusable provincialism of American SDS," while inviting celebrities would simply defeat the purpose of understanding the real movements developing on the ground: "The bourgeois press has an understandable interest in transforming movements into 'personalities' and their followings. We don't, so let's not fall into the trap."[541]

Acknowledging that "Columbia and France" had convinced them "that something was happening," the Ehrenreichs had already embarked on an SDS-sponsored tour of Europe. They would write a series of research articles about the various student movements in order "to import whatever European movement ideas looked useful to us." But one could not randomly "transfer" ideas from one context to another, they explained; they had to discover the "setting in which they were developed and the context in which they were applied."[542]

The Ehrenreichs were correct about forging deeper international ties. "There is no question," Kirkpatrick Sale confirms, "that the growing international consciousness of the young American left helped to turn it in a deliberately revolutionary direction."[543] The French events played an instrumental role in this transformation because they demonstrated "the possibility of

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[538] Ibid.
[539] Ibid., 6.
[540] "Minutes of the New NIC," *New Left Notes*, June 24, 1968, 8.
[541] Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "N.C. Notes – in Absentia," *New Left Notes*, July 29, 1968, 2.
[542] Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "European Student Movements: part one – germany," *New Left Notes*, July 29, 1968, 8.
[543] Sale, *SDS*, 405.

the radical overthrow of established regimes even in advanced industrial nations despite their armed might and domestic entrenchment."[544] Of course, just as the May events did not singlehandedly convince Americans to rediscover the struggles of their own domestic working class, May did not suddenly reveal the idea of revolution. May was just one event in a long chain that ultimately pushed many American radicals in the white left into adopting revolution as a political possibility. One can mention the October 1967 demonstration, the Têt offensive in January 1968, and the riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April. Frustration with an unresponsive government, impatience with reforms, and outrage at the murder of progressive leaders culminated in the "Ten Days of Resistance," a series of coordinated nationwide actions in late April. At Columbia, demonstrations intersected with an ongoing struggle against war research at the university and a campaign against a segregatory gymnasium to be built in Morningside Park, which ultimately led to a prolonged campus occupation, with African American students holding Hamilton Hall while white SDS students captured Low Library, turning it into a "liberated zone" in emulation of the NLF in South Vietnam.[545] "Two, Three, Many Columbias …," read the front page of *New Left Notes*.[546]

After Columbia, the ground was well prepared for the reception of May 68.[547] May seemed to show that radicals could not only occupy buildings, shut down universities, and battle the police, but trigger revolution itself. That month, John Jacobs and other radical Columbia SDSers, inspired by events at Columbia and in France, coined the phrase "Bring the War Home." Tom Hayden, present at the occupation, raised the war cry: "American educators are fond of telling their students that barricades are a part of the romantic past, that social change today can

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[544] Ibid., 458.

[545] Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (London: Verso, 1997), 7-12.

[546] "Two, Three, Many Columbias …" *New Left Notes*, May 6, 1968, 1.

[547] Significantly, as Carl Davidson, SDS Inter-Organizational Secretary, observed, the event conveniently coincided with major demonstrations in Germany in the wake of the attempt on Rudi Dutschke's life and the very beginnings of what was to become May 68 in France. For many, he claimed, this proximity to these other events supercharged the Columbia action in the minds of American radicals. "Inter-organizational," *New Left Notes*, June 10, 1968, 6.

only come about through the processes of negotiation. But the students at Columbia discovered that barricades are only the beginning of what they call 'bringing the war home.'"[548]

Revolution filled the air at SDS's National Convention in East Lansing, Michigan from June 9 to 16, 1968. In stark contrast to previous years, hammer and sickle emblems made an appearance, portraits of Lenin festooned the walls of the Student Union, and SDSers donned red armbands. One could hear such statements like "our movement is an element of the revolutionary vanguard painfully forming from the innards of America."[549] Tom Bell, Bernardine Dohrn, and Steve Halliwell submitted a proposal to turn SDS into a "professional revolutionary organization."[550] On June 10, Bernardine Dohrn, who, in response to a question in the plenary, professed, "I consider myself a revolutionary communist," was elected the new Inter-Organizational Secretary without opposition.[551] Not only had SDS made the leap to revolution, it now imagined itself as a front in the worldwide revolutionary movement, perhaps best captured in the concluding lines of the Convention's message to the Iranian Students Association: "Your fight against the Shah, the fight of German SDS against Kiesinger, of the French against de Gualle [sic], of the Japanese against SATO – these are a few of the current fronts of a single war. We are your allies and brothers.[552]

Bringing the War Home

In October 1969, American radicals brought the war home. Although united under the sign of revolution, those who traveled to Chicago that month remained bitterly divided over just what this slogan meant. Some, known as the Weathermen, took it literally. On the night of October 8, around 350 radicals, many outfitted with helmets, goggles and wielding lead pipes, poured out of Lincoln Park into the affluent Gold Coast neighborhood, waving NLF flags, smashing car windows, and destroying property en route to the Drake Hotel, home of the judge in

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[548] Tom Hayden, "Two, Three, Many Columbias," *Ramparts*, June 15, 1968.
[549] Quoted in Sale, *SDS*, 456-57.
[550] Tom Bell, Bernardine Dohrn, and Steve Halliwell, "Program Proposal," SDS National Convention, East Lansing, Mich., June 10-15, 1968 quoted in Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 80.
[551] Sale, *SDS*, 451.
[552] "Minutes of the National Convention," *New Left Notes*, June 24, 1968, 4.

the Chicago Eight trial. Over a thousand police officers intercepted their charge, driving squad

cars straight into crowds, beating protesters, and firing revolvers.[553] When the columns of tear

gas cleared, six Weathermen had been shot, 68 protesters arrested, and 28 policemen injured.[554]

The next day, as the Weathermen's "Women's Militia" set out to destroy the Chicago

Armed Forces Induction Center, another, rival group of radicals held a rally at the Federal

Courthouse with the Black Panther Party and the Puerto Rican Young Lords, then marched to the

International Harvester Plant and Cook County Hospital in solidarity with the workers there.

Although equally convinced that the time had come to bring the war home, this second, anti-

Weathermen group understood this to mean not waging urban guerilla warfare, but linking up with

the industrial working class, communities of color, and immigrants. The next day, in the largest

action of the weekend, this loose coalition of anti-Weathermen white radicals, the Panthers, and

Young Lords led an interracial march through a poor Latino neighborhood.

As the curious events in Chicago revealed, the strategy of creating "two, three, many

Vietnams," now pursued by tens of thousands of radicals throughout North America and Western

Europe, was as ambiguous as it was inspiring. As a general watchword, its meaning was quite

clear; but as a specific strategy, it left considerable room for interpretation. Two dominant views

emerged in the United States by 1969.

In June, SDS held its last convention.[555] Not only SDSers, but radicals of all shades,

including Mary Alice Waters of the YSL, Abbie Hoffman's Yippies, and Fred Hampton's Black

Panthers attended. Progressive Labor, which officially rejected black nationalism, condemned the

Vietnamese revolution as revisionist, and repudiated militant confrontation, claimed about one

third of all delegates. Consequently, those SDSers who saw their mission as forcing open a front

in the heart of imperialism believed that saving the revolutionary project in the United States

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[553] Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolution Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 74-86; Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 38-65.
[554] Ibid., 81.
[555] Sale, *SDS*, 557-78; Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oakland, AK Press, 2006), 82-91.

meant first defeating PL.[556] Since PL based its politics in a detailed knowledge of Marxist theory, the response had to take a theoretical form.[557]

A collective of radicals led by John Jacobs therefore submitted a position paper called "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows."[558] Since imperialism was now overextended, the Weathermen argued, revolutionaries everywhere had to adopt Che's strategy of "creating, two, three, many Vietnams," in order "to mobilize the struggle so sharply in so many places that the imperialists cannot possibly deal with it all." These many fronts "reinforce one another," since the "existence of any one Vietnam, especially a winning one, spurs on others."[559] African Americans already formed a "Vietnam" inside the United States; white Americans had to do the same. The problem, the Weathermen continued, rehashing tired New Left doxa, was the torpidity of much of the white working class, which benefited from its "white skin privilege" as well as the super-profits from American imperialism. The burden of revolutionary struggle therefore fell to the shoulders of radicalized white youth, who had to form a Revolutionary Youth Movement to force open another front against imperialism. This Movement, which would become the basis of a revolutionary red army in the United States, "will in turn become one division of the International Liberation Army, while its battlefields are added to the many Vietnams which will dismember and dispose of US imperialism."[560]

Armed with this vision, a few careful alliances, and some highly undemocratic maneuvering, the Weathermen ousted PL, elected themselves to the National Office, and declared the white radical left in favor of revolution. The following month, thirty of them took a "Weather trip" to Cuba where representatives of North Vietnam and the newly formed Provisional Revolutionary Government in the South guaranteed total victory.[561] "The greatest invention of the 20th Century has not been nuclear weapons, but people's war," a representative of the Viet Cong

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[556] Sale, *SDS*, 560.
[557] Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 49-51.
[558] Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 24-37; Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 80-82.
[559] John Jacobs et al. "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows," *New Left Notes*, June 18, 1969.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Sale, *SDS*, 592-93; Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 137.

explained to his enthralled audience. "The U.S. can never escape from the labyrinth and sea of fire of people's war."[562] The Weather delegation hoped to bring the people's war home with them.[563] The October 1969 Days of Rage in Chicago became the first battle:

> When we move with the people of the world, against the interests of the rulers, we can expect their pigs to come down on us. So we're building a fighting force to struggle on the side of the Vietnamese, the blacks, and oppressed people everywhere. There's a war we cannot "resist." It is a war in which we must fight. We must open up another front against US imperialism by waging a thousand struggles in the schools, the streets, the army, and on the job, and in CHICAGO: OCTOBER 8-11.[564]

"We showed them that Wednesday night," one participant boasted. "It was like unfurling a gigantic Viet Cong flag in the heart of Chicago."[565] In fact, the Weathermen, took the slogan "bring the war" home literally – "if [the US] demarcated free-fire zones in Viet Nam, we would map our free-fire zones in the U.S.; when they bombed Hanoi, we might just figure out how to bomb Washington; search and destroy might be played out both ways."[566]

Soon after, the Weathermen went underground to pursue a campaign of terror bombing. "All over the world," they explained, "people fighting Amerikan imperialism look to Amerika's youth to use our strategic position behind enemy lines to join forces in the destruction of the empire."[567] They were convinced not only that they had to play an indispensable role in the worldwide anti-imperialist front, but that they were alone in the United States, surrounded by a hostile public and an unreliable working class. They were partisans battling a society of collaborators, of "good Germans."[568] Everyone was guilty. For their first act, they planned to bomb a Non-Commissioned Officers' dance at the Fort Dix U.S. Army base as well as the Butler Library at Columbia

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[562] Quoted in "Year of Solidarity," *Revolutionary Youth Movement*, Summer 1969, 6 in New Left Collection, Box 66, Folder 1, Hoover; Sale, *SDS*, 592.

[563] See *New Left Notes*, August 29, 1969, 1-8, especially page 7.

[564] Reprinted in Sale, *SDS*, 600.

[565] Quoted in Tom Thomas, "The Second Battle of CHICAGO 1969: SDS - October 8-11," (1969), 10, PE 029, Box 23, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York.

[566] Bill Ayers, *Fugitive Days: A Memoir* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 146-147.

[567] The Weather Underground, "Communiqué No. 1," printed in *The Berkeley Tribe*, July 31, 1970. At this time some radical groups, from the Weathermen to the Panthers, began to spell "America" with a "k" in order to draw a comparison with Nazi Germany, since in German the word is spelled "Amerika." In some cases, radicals even spelled the work as "AmeriKKKa" to highlight the white supremacy they felt pervaded the entire country.

[568] Quoted in Tom Thomas, "The Second Battle of CHICAGO 1969," 8, Tamiment Library.

University; it backfired, killing three of their own.[569] Although the Weathermen avoided future deaths, they continued their guerilla campaign relatively unabated, at one point even bombing the Pentagon. Other revolutionary groups, such as the Symbionese Liberation Army, continued the struggle, going so far as murder.

While many on the white radical left despised PL, a number were equally repelled by what they saw as the Weathermen's careless adventurism, even if they agreed about bringing the war home. One of the leaders of this tendency, SDS National Secretary Michael Klonsky, penned a proposal at the 1969 Convention titled "Take the war to the people – and bring it home," in which he argued that radicals had to "understand the dialectical relationship that exists between the struggle in Vietnam and the class struggle in the US."[570] "Each blow we strike against US monopoly capitalism," he continued, "is of multiple benefit not only to the Vietnamese but to all other oppressed people as well."[571] Like the Weathermen, he saw African Americans leading the way in the United States, arguing that the "rebellions in Detroit, Watts, etc. have been the vanguard actions against US imperialism in Vietnam by bringing the war home. Two divisions of troops were sent to Detroit instead of to Vietnam to put down urban insurrections." And like Weathermen, he felt white Americans had to do their part by helping to build "a militant class-conscious movement against the war, here in the mother country," which could "be the straw that breaks the camel's back."

Unlike the Weathermen, Klonsky felt that guerilla warfare was impractical. He was joined by other SDSers, such as Les Coleman, Carl Davidson, and Sue Eanet, the latter of whom represented SDS at Berlin in 1968; Noel Ignatin's Chicago Revolutionary League; and Bob Avakian, Stephen Hamilton, and H. Bruce Franklin's Revolutionary Union – all of whom

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[569] Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 173-78; Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew*, 95-101; Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 127-34.

[570] Micheal Klonsky et al. "Take the war to the people – and bring it home," 1969, reprinted as "Take the war to the people" in *Revolutionary Youth Movement*, Summer 1969, 11, New Left Collection, Box 66, Folder 1, Hoover.

[571] Ibid.

regrouped as a loose coalition called the Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM II).[572] Against

the Weathermen, they argued that white skin privilege did not actually benefit white workers, but

only the white bourgeoisie, since even with their privilege white workers faced massive speedups,

falling real wages, plant relocations, and widespread layoffs. "To suggest that the acceptance of

white-skin privilege is in the interests of white workers," Noel Ignativ argued, "is equivalent to

suggesting that swallowing the worm with the hook in it is in the interests of the fish."[573] The

immense majority of white workers in the United States did not enjoy affluence, imperialist super-

profits, or complacent integration, but, Ignativ argued, were still a real fighting force.

Thus, for RYM II, while it was imperative to follow the Vietnamese example, one could

not imitate their struggles since terror bombing, camouflaged guerillas, and liberated zones made

little sense in the United States. Radicals had to translate the inspirational "lesson" of Vietnam for

American conditions.[574] For RYM II, this meant uniting "the struggles of oppressed and exploited

people in this country with the struggles of the Vietnamese."[575] As their position paper put it, they

had to connect with the "black and Puerto Rican liberation struggles," struggles in proletarian

neighborhoods, and in factories.[576] They had to go into workplaces, community centers, and poor

neighborhoods to do the hard work of organizing, forming coalitions with people of color, building

trust. In their view, that is precisely what bringing the war home meant in Chicago 1969, not

storming through streets breaking windows. So vital was this unglamorous, but still revolutionary

work to the worldwide anti-imperialist front, they argued, that abandoning it as the Weatherman

had would "have made us scabs on the Vietnamese."[577]

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[572] Sale, *SDS*, 566, 591-92; A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1988), 199; Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 83, 87.
[573] Noel Ignatin, "Without a Science of Navigation We Cannot Sail in Stormy Seas," 1969, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/debate-sds/ignatin.htm.
[574] "Solidarity with Vietnam," in *Revolutionary Youth Movement*, Summer 1969, 3, New Left Collection, Box 66, Folder 1, Hoover.
[575] "A Call to All Proletarian Youth and All Proletarian Youth Organizations," reprinted in *Revolutionary Youth Movement*, Summer 1969, 10, New Left Collection, Box 66, Folder 1, Hoover.
[576] Michael Klonsky et al. "Revolutionary Youth Movement II," 1969, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/debate-sds/rym2.htm.
[577] "A Call to All Proletarian Youth and All Proletarian Youth Organizations," 10.

For the Revolutionary Union (RU), which would eventually become the largest, most dynamic revolutionary communist formation in the United States, bringing the war home meant articulating it with the struggles of the American working class.[578] The "U.S. ruling class not only exploits our own working people; it extends its exploitation throughout the world by a system of imperialism," they explained in the first pages of their widely read theoretical statement, the *Red Papers*. "Today, Vietnam is the focal point of these struggles."[579] As the "peoples of the world," led by the Vietnamese, "seize the initiative," they weaken imperialism inside the United States, creating political openings for the American working class. Proletarian revolution was directly connected to the war in Vietnam; just as the Vietnamese revolution weakened imperialism in the United States, so an American revolution could weaken it abroad.

For groups like the Revolutionary Union, bringing the war home involved going to workplaces across the country to help organize the coming proletarian revolution. The RYM II position paper had already argued that an anti-imperialist front meant radicals had to "go into shops, plants, hospitals, to work, etc. not only for summer "work in" programs but more and more of us should be making longer commitments to live and work among the proletariat."[580] The RU, following Mao Zedong, made this a fundamental principle of its political identity.[581] RU even sent its members to work in critical industries, such as auto, coal, and steel, across the country.[582] Dozens of other radical groups, including the Trotskyist International Socialists, and later, the SWP did the same.[583] By the 1970s, thousands of young radicals went to work to made revolution.

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[578] Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 205-212; Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002), 95-102.

[579] Bay Area Revolutionary Union, "Statement of Principles," *The Red Papers* 1 (Spring 1969): 1.

[580] Klonsky et al., "Revolutionary Youth Movement II."

[581] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work," March 12, 1957, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_59.htm.

[582] Mike Ely, *Ambush at Keyston, Part 1: Inside the Coal Miners' Great Gas Protest of 1974* (Kasama, 2009).

[583] Salar Mohandesi, "'Becoming one with the people': l'établi américain hier et aujourd'hui," *Les Temps modernes* nos. 684-685 (July-October 2015): 120-46.

Vietnam is Everywhere

In Nanni Balestrini's 1971 novel, *Vogliamo Tutto*, a recently hired autoworker at FIAT's monster Mirafiori plant joins a spontaneous demonstration inside the factory:

> I get there and I join in the shouting, too. We were shouting the strangest things, things that had fuck-all to do with anything … Mao Tsetung, Ho Chi Minh, Potere Operaio. Things that had no connection to anything there but that we liked the sound of.[584]

"We wanted to shout things that had nothing to do with FIAT, with all that we had to do in there," he explained. Those who had "no idea" who Ho Chi Minh was began shouting "Ho Chi Minh." Soon after, when these demonstrations turned into a revolt at Corso Traiano, Milan, the protagonist vividly describes the street battles: "I saw that lots of policemen were scared and were running away. All around our guys started to chant: Ho Chi Minh. Forward, forward."[585]

As Ballestrini shows, after 1968 many radicals began to repurpose the Vietnamese struggle for their own needs, abstracting words such as "Ho Chi Minh," the "NLF," and "Vietnam" from their specific context. Ballestrini may have exaggerated when he had his character confess that no one knew who Ho Chi Minh really was, but he was correct to depict how "Ho Chi Minh" no longer simply referred to a specific person, but an idea. As Ballestrini's autoworker explains, Ho Chi Minh had nothing to do with FIAT, but everyone chanted his name to "create a moment of rupture." Those three syllables became a symbol of revolution. They came to signify the overturning of roles, the eruption of the new, the power of the oppressed.

In the minds of tens of thousands of radicals in North America and Western Europe, "Vietnam" had become much larger than itself. It no longer referred to that Southeast Asian country at war with the United States. Or at least, if it did, it had acquired meaning in surplus of its referent. By the late 1960s, one could say "Vietnam" had become *the* master symbol of an entire generation, as practically every struggle of the time articulated itself in the language of "Vietnam" in some way or another. In creating "many Vietnams" throughout North America and Western Europe, radicals succeeded in translating the Vietnamese struggle for their own imperialist contexts. But what did "Vietnam" really mean?

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[584] Nanni Balestrini, *Vogliamo tutto* (Melbourne: Telephone, 2014 [1971]), 87.
[585] Ibid., 187.

At its simplest, Vietnam, or related phrases such as "Ho Chi Minh," often personified

certain admirable human qualities such as intrepidity, indefatigability, confidence, or fortitude.

Above all, Vietnam embodied heroism, the adjective most commonly used by radicals to describe

their Vietnamese comrades. Their tenacity in the face of impossible odds astonished radicals

everywhere. General Baker, Jr., John Watson's onetime roommate and a central figure in the

black nationalist network of the 1960s, recalls traveling illegally to Cuba in 1964, where he met a

Vietnamese delegation:

> When we talked to the Vietnamese it was just before the Tonkin Gulf and the question of escalation was on everybody's mind. I remember asking the Vietnamese, "Do you think that if the United States bombs Vietnam, the Chinese are going to help you?" They tell me, "We don't need Chinese help to defeat the Americans." That shit just fucked me up. I just couldn't understand how these little-ass Vietnamese were going to handle an American invasion. But that was the adamant statement they made.[586]

Over the course of the 1960s astonishment gave way to veneration. When Balestrini's protagonist

battles the police, what possible meaning could chanting "Ho Chi Minh" have if not to show one's

courage, dedication, commitment? Shouting such phrases, common throughout North America

and Western Europe, were ways of channeling the bravery of the Vietnamese. This meaning of

Vietnam was so abstract, it could be used for literally any struggle, however tenuous its relation to

what was unfolding in Southeast Asia. For instance, queer radicals in a number of countries,

including France and the United States, further translated the famous "Ho Chi Minh" chant to suit

their own needs, shouting "Ho Ho Homosexual."[587]

Since Vietnam was above all a war, radicals also used the term to evoke how they, too,

were in a state of war. During the May 68, for instance, striking workers in Besançon put forth the

slogan "Combat in the *maquis* of the factories of France."[588] The *maquis* – literally the thick

shrubland of certain Mediterranean regions – referred here not simply to the experience of World

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[586] General Baker, Jr. quoted in Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remember from All Sides* (New York: Viking, 2003), 147.
[587] For the relationship between anti-imperialism and queer activism, see Emily K. Hobson, "Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990," (Ph.D. diss., American Studies & Ethnicity, University of Southern California, 2009).
[588] Cited in Groupe Medvedkine, *Classe de lutte* (SLON–Iskra, 1968).

War II resistance fighters in the thicket, but to guerillas in the jungles of Vietnam.[589] Italian workers in turn translated the expression into the simple, "Vietnam is in our factories," later reimported to France.[590] Expressions such as "The university is our Vietnam," or "The struggle at Fiat must become the Vietnam of the bosses of Italy," or even portmanteaus such as "Fiat-Nam," became common in Italy.[591] To describe the factory, university, or any site in this way was effectively to call it was a war zone, a site of pitched battles, shifting fronts, new campaigns.

Perhaps most importantly, radicals not only translated Vietnam for their own contexts, they projected their struggles back onto Vietnam in a way that amplified them. To their eyes, Vietnam was not simply a specific struggle, but appeared as the concentration of all struggles, in the same way, perhaps, that white light is composed of all the colors on the spectrum. Vietnam's polysemy allowed it to signify political projects as diverse as national liberation, socialist construction, cultural revolution, and women's liberation. For this reason, it was not uncommon for struggles at home to play out symbolically over Vietnam. Take, for instance, the women's liberation movement in France.

For instance, to bolster its antiwar message of charity and goodwill, the PCF invited women to express their antiwar politics through their "natural" maternal instincts. The Communist Party coaxed women into protesting the war by appealing to their "natural" maternal instincts. "Today we address ourselves especially," one flier went "to all the women, you mothers, also to you whose profession it is to care for, heal, and educate children. "[592] The PCF thus tended to reduce the Vietnamese to mere victims in need of sympathy, justifying its particular approach of

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[589] Kristin Ross also makes this point in *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 81.

[590] "ITALIE, Fiat: L'Indochine est dans ton usine," *Tout! Ce que nous voulons 1* (September 23, 1970), 2.

[591] Alessandro Silj, *Malpaese, criminalità, corruzione e politica nell'Italia della prima Republica 1943*-1994 (Donzelli: Rome 1994), 92; or see, Ettore Scola's 1973 film, *Trevico-Torino: Viaggio nel Fiat-Nam*.

[592] PCF, "Femmes de la région parisienne," May, 23, 1972, F Delta Res 151, BDIC.

solidarity: charity, goodwill, and pressure politics; and that reduction simultaneously forced

women back into the traditional gender roles of caretaker, mother, and nurturer.[593]

In response to this victim-centered approach to solidarity that forced women back into

traditional roles, revolutionary feminists insisted that the women of Vietnam were obliterating

these very roles in the act of revolutionary struggle. Indeed, for many radical feminists Vietnam

meant Women's Liberation itself. *Le Torchon Brule*, the first journal of the French Mouvement de

libération des femmes (MLF), often treated Vietnamese women as the vanguard of the liberation

struggle. As an MLF flyer explained,

> In Vietnam, women don't stay confined to their maternal and domestic role, they
> undertake, in their own right, the constant reconstruction, the defense of villages, or they
> enlist in the liberation army. They therefore wholeheartedly join in the fight, whether they
> pick up the rifle, or take on responsibilities … In actively struggling, in the same way as
> the men, for the liberation of the Vietnamese people, they move towards their own
> liberation, breaking with the image and the role that until now they've been assigned:
> passivity, domestic tasks, the sole functions of mother and spouse.

"There is ruin, death, suffering in Vietnam," the flier concludes, but also the seeds of something

new: "the laying of the foundations of a new world, liberating women and men."[594]

To be sure, women's liberation was indeed a cornerstone of the Vietnamese revolution.

After 1954, traditional gender relations in the North were rapidly overturned as women found work

outside the home; participated in political life; and won legal equality with men, equal pay, paid

maternity leave, access to free childcare, the right to divorce, and equal rights of use, ownership,

and disposal of property acquired before and during marriage. During the war, women in both the

North and the South continued to challenge gender boundaries. Playing an indispensable role in

the war effort, they carried supplies, built infrastructure, managed the village economy, organized

political opposition, staffed anti-aircraft guns, took up arms against the Americans, planted booby

traps, and at times even assumed leadership roles in the revolution.[595] Of course, important

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[593] For more on the PCF's antiwar activity, see Marc Lazar, "Le Parti communiste français et l'action de solidarité avec le Vietnam," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*, 241-51.

[594] Des groupes du M.L.F., "20 Janvier: Journée internationale pour le Vietnam: des groupes de femmes y participent, voilà pourquoi," no date (possibly 1972), F Delta Res 151, BDIC.

[595] Arlene Eisen, *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Kathleen Barry, ed., *Vietnam's Women in Transition* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Sandra Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence, Kansas:

barriers to full gender equity continued to exist, but North American and Western European feminists upheld these experiences as a model for women's liberation in their own countries.[596] "Our Vietnamese sisters hold out their hand," the first issue of *Le Torchon brûle* explained. "They show us the example."[597]

Indeed, the NLF and the DRV themselves invited this kind of semiotic play, allowing western radicals to read the Vietnamese revolution in ways that enlivened their own struggles at home. The *Courrier du Vietnam*, for instance, ran numerous articles on the role of women in the Vietnamese Revolution. Although much of it was veracious, some was propaganda, designed to inspire radicals abroad – the Vietnamese woman could set a revolutionary example to be translated into diverse national contexts.

As the experience of the MLF shows, this period was rife with projections, many of which involved Vietnam, yet these were all intended to be emancipatory. These projections even traveled in both directions. For example, in its open letter to women in the American anti-war movement, the South Vietnamese Women's Union for Liberation revealed a similar kind of productive misreading: "We have often told one another moving stories of American mothers, like Mrs. Evelyn Carasquillo and Anne Pine, throwing back to the US rulers the 'Bronze Star' medals of their sons who had died meaninglessly in Vietnam. These acts are the continuation of the conscious anti-war activities which have multiplied daily and formed an irresistible current."[598]

Or recall how in 1966 the *Courrier du Vietnam* not only named African Americans the second front, but convinced its readers that the latter were fighting the same violent struggle as the Vietnamese. "The United States faces two violent wars, one inside the country, the other in Vietnam," the article proclaimed. "Almost everyday," it continued, "struggles against racial segregation explode somewhere in the USA," which supposedly proved that the United States

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University of Kansans Press, 1999); Lisa Drummond and Helle Rydstrom, *Gender Practices in Contemporary Vietnam* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004).
[596] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), Part 3.
[597] "Sisterhood is Powerful!" *Le Torchon brûle* no. 1 (Spring 1971): 8.
[598] Nguyen Thi Dinh, President of the South Vietnam Women's Union for Liberation, "Open Letter to American women on the occasion of the 1971 Fall Offensive," October 11, 1971, 2 Women Strike for Peace, Series C2, Box 2, Peace Collection, Swarthmore College.

careened towards civil war, in the same way, for example, that black nationalists treated the

NLF's resistance as definitive proof that American imperialism approached terminal crisis.[599]

Lastly, "Vietnam" simply became a universal. In the words of the workers who successfully self-managed the Lip watch factory in Besançon, France for several months in 1973: "VIETNAM: is not the endowment of the Vietnamese. In Franc-Comtoise, you say 'Lip.'"[600] "Vietnam" did not even belong to the Vietnamese; it was a global tendency simply assuming different forms. Just as radicals redefined the relationship between "imperialism" and the United States as one of synecdoche, they did the same with "Vietnam" and Vietnam, positioning them as opposite poles in a Manichean struggle. Imperialism represented reaction, repression, counter-revolution; Vietnam connoted revolution, self-determination, and heroism. Vietnam became everything as everything became Vietnam.

In direct proportion as Vietnam began to appear everywhere, however, it began to vanish as a particularity. Although radicals liberated Vietnam from the news cycle, translating it into an everyday reality, adding its own particular color to almost every major social movement of the time, in most countries radicals withdrew from specifically antiwar activity after 1968. In fact, in France, radicals effectively abandoned Vietnam as such, devoting their attention to factory struggles, university organizing, or new social movements such as gay liberation or the women's movement.[601] This was not lost on some radicals, for example, who occasionally lamented how the left had "forgotten" Vietnam as a specific issue.

Even as the PCF, moderates, and some Christian groups continued to protest the war, Vietnam, as a specific issue, grew less visible after May 68.[602] Historians have variously suggested this was because the Vietnamese achieved their goals, or because radicals saw their

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[599] Chien Sy, "Le deuxieme front contre l'impérialisme américain," *Le Courrier du Vietnam*, August 29, 1966, 6.

[600] "L'Imagination au pouvoir: les affiches de Lip," *Libération*, August 10, 1973, quoted in Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" 290.

[601] Bethany Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" 277-78, 288-96.

[602] Ibid., 291-293. For the PCF, Marc Lazar, "Le Parti communiste français," 246-247; For the Christian movement, see Rousseau, *La Colombe et le napalm. Des chrétiens français contre les guerres d'Indochine et du Vietnam, 1945-1975 (*Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002) and Rousseau, "Du Vietnam héroïque à la défense des droits de l'homme," in *68: Une histoire collective, 1962-1981*, 481-86.

antiwar demands fulfilled, or even because Vietnam merely played an instrumental role – and now that radicals won their autonomy, and revolution appeared on the agenda, they had no further need for Vietnam.[603] In reality, radicals withdrew from specifically anti-Vietnam war activity precisely because they felt the best way to aid Vietnam was no longer to rally around Vietnam as such, but to translate Vietnam into a domestic idiom.[604] Radicals never abandoned Vietnam; they assimilated Vietnam so thoroughly it seemed to disappear.[605] As Fredy Perlman, an American present during the May events, reported on French radicals in 1968, "the war in Vietnam ceased to be an 'issue' and became a part of their own daily lives."[606]

The major exception, however, was the United States, since radicals found themselves inside the very country at war with Vietnam. But even here, despite a brief revival in 1970 when President Nixon announced the bombing of Cambodia, Vietnam as a specific issue generally declined in importance after 1969, precisely when many in the American radical left turned to revolution.[607] And with departure of radicals, who now pursued other struggles, what remained of the movement grew more moderate.[608]

Of course, some radicals in North America and Western Europe did not accede to revolution. Others, such as the Italian workerists, arrived at revolution, but not by way of Vietnam.[609] In general, however, many radicals in North America and Western Europe came to see revolution as not only possible, but necessary, and they arrived at this conclusion through anti-imperialist solidarity with Vietnam. And even while some radicals affirmed revolution theoretically, it was only Vietnam that gave substance to this dream. Other struggles no doubt pulled some radicals to revolution, such as the Cuban Revolution, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, and for a time, the Palestinian liberation movement, but Vietnam stood apart.

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[603] For example, Pas, "'Six Heures pour le Vietnam,'" 182-83.
[604] Keenan approaches this argument in "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us,'" 290.
[605] As the following chapter shows, however, for a number of reasons, Vietnam would once more became a central issue for European radicals in 1973.
[606] Perlman and Gregoire, *Worker Student Action Committees*, 94.
[607] Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 263
[608] Tom Wells, *The War Within*, 397-403.
[609] See, Steve Wright, *Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

In Vietnam, there was a definite adversary, insurmountable odds, high stakes, terrible costs, and ongoing struggle reported daily. There was also a sense of measurable progress, usually very hard to gauge in most revolutionary struggles. Above all, however, Vietnam possessed this power to inspire precisely because it was the most inherently *translatable* struggle of the period. Its revolutionary lessons could be easily learned, its example readily followed. Vietnam became a semantic tapestry, an immense storehouse of revolutionary symbols, ideas, experiences, and feelings for radicals throughout the world to draw upon. "There were layers upon layers in Viet Nam," one American radical later recalled, "meanings within meanings, wheels within wheels."[610]

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[610] Ayers, *Fugitive Days*, 101.

CHAPTER 5: THE DEMOCRATIC TURN

On June 20, 1970, sixty-seven-year-old Jean-Paul Sartre defied the government's new censorship laws by promenading down the avenue du Général-Leclerc in Paris hawking a stack of political newspapers. Although the police detained him for disseminating the recently banned radical paper, *La Cause du peuple*, Sartre was quickly released, evading the two-year prison sentence that other less famous activists could face for the same crime. Sartre expected as much, and his action aimed not only to protest the government's flagrant violation of civil liberties, but to lay bare for the French public the hypocrisy of the state's selective repression of the radical left, which had by then landed hundreds of young activists in prison.[611] As he put it, "the government could not try to turn the repressive laws of the bourgeoisie against [the radicals] without itself stepping outside the law, outside *its own* law."[612]

State repression of openly revolutionary organizations not only in France, but throughout North America and Western Europe, did not come as a surprise. As Sartre reflected in 1972, "since they wanted to overthrow the bourgeoisie by force, they were sooner or later going to fall before the arsenal of bourgeois law."[613] Governments revoked civil liberties, outlawed radical organizations, threw activists in prison, and terrorized social movements. In this context, radicals in the United States and France, from the Black Panther Party to the Gauche prolétarienne, had to reevaluate their strategies: how could they continue the revolutionary project in the face of such harsh repression? In response, most radicals, who had only recently shunned talk of reform in favor of violent revolution, paid closer attention to civil rights, built alliances with progressive organizations, and demanded liberties from the very states they sought to abolish.

Experiences of incarceration in the United States and France also pushed many radicals to reconsider the rights, status, and struggles of prisoners. Whereas many activists had initially overlooked prisons as sites of politics, internalizing the assumptions of bourgeois criminal

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[611] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Justice and the State," in *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 187.
[612] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Maoists in France," in *Life/Situations*, 164.
[613] Ibid., 163.

categories, they later began to turn their attention to organizing prisoners, learning from one

another in a transnational network that included the United States, France, and Italy. This

organizing in turn prompted a substantial rethinking of the repressive role of the law, the struggle

for reform, and the rights of the individual. In this context of repression and reassessment,

radicals now saw the struggle for what they called "democratic rights" as not only a legitimate

form of activism, but a strategically necessary phase of the revolutionary movement.

This chapter examines the origins and consequences of this "democratic turn." It first

synthesizes the history of fierce repression that the U.S. and French governments wielded

against revolutionary organizations, and shows how this repression led French and American

activists to forge new links across the Atlantic, but also among themselves. It argues that in both

the United States and France, some radicals responded to the wave of repression by moderating

their internal rivalries, reaching out to intellectuals, cooperating with progressive but not radical

organizations, and allying with other social classes. In placing themselves at the head of a new

democratic front fighting for the restoration of basic civil liberties, radicals were able to turn the

tables on the state, using repression to win popular sympathy. But in the process, what began as

a purely instrumental advocacy of civil rights slowly transformed the way radicals thought about

class struggle, rights, and revolution, fundamentally reshaping the radical imaginary in both the

United States and France in the early 1970s.

Repressing Revolution

Today, it is sometimes assumed that only a handful of North American and Western

European radicals truly believed in revolution in the 1960s and early 1970s. Even then, some

argue, this revolution amounted to nothing more than empty phraseology, innocuous cultural

experimentation, tragi-comic role-playing, or Oedipal psychodrama.[614] Nothing could be further

from the truth. As the previous chapter showed, after the transformative global events of 1968,

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[614] For an excellent critical survey, and thorough refutation, of many of these positions, see Kristin
Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2002), especially 1-
27, 138-215.

hundreds of thousands of radicals in North America and Western Europe rapidly moved from antiwar activism to committing their lives to revolution. And as the colossal wave of state repression that rose to crush them attests, their revolution was not a game.

In France, perhaps over a hundred revolutionary groups mushroomed after May 1968, representing every imaginable shade of the radical spectrum. Membership, difficult to gauge since many groups chose to forego party cards, varied tremendously. Some, like Vive la révolution, counted no more than four hundred comrades at best.[615] Others, such as the Ligue Communiste or the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France (PCMLF), may have had several thousand members at their height.[616] Most of them exercised significant influence beyond their core, enjoying not only the support of a sea of domestic sympathizers, but the active contributions of respected figures or foreign governments. For instance, the PCMLF, which the Communist Party of China officially recognized as its fraternal Maoist party in France, was heavily subsidized and internationally promoted by China. Meanwhile, groups like the Maoist Gauche prolétarianne could count on support from the philosophers Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault, filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Lanzmann, writers like Jean Genet, and musicians such as folk celebrity Dominique Grange and Rolling Stones front man Mick Jagger.[617]

In Italy, groups grew considerably larger than anywhere else on the continent. For instance, Lotta Continua, a leading extra-parliamentary group, claimed some 30,000 members by 1971, and even then represented only one pole in a vast ecosystem of radical organizations that included Avanguardia Operaia, Il Manifesto, Potere Operaia, and many others.[618] All of them included militant workers, counted memberships in the thousands, and, since many were deeply embedded in factories, neighborhoods, and universities, wielded the power to organize crippling mass actions. Countless other revolutionaries did not belong to these formal parties, but militated

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[615] Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Plon 1996), 129-37, 147, 179-89.

[616] For the PCMLF's numbers, see ibid., 147.

[617] For more on these alliances, see ibid*.,* 150-72 and Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), chapters 5 and 7.

[618] For the general radical ecosystem in Italy, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics*, 1943-1988 (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 311-16, 358-64.

in other ways, rallying to looser coalitions, new social movements, or, towards the end of the decade, as an archipelago of autonomous collectives known as "autonomia."[619]

While France and Italy were admittedly exceptional – both boasted vibrant workers' movements, a revolutionary past, and a pervasive Marxist culture – other countries witnessed this turn to revolution as well. In Germany, after the implosion of SDS, some students regrouped into highly disciplined parties known as K-gruppen. According to one estimate, by the mid-1970s perhaps 15,000 radicals belonged to these groups.[620] Chary of such doctrinaire organizations, tens of thousands of German radicals joined other initiatives.[621] Some remained in the more flexible *Basisgruppen*.[622] Others, such as those involved in the *Proletarische Front*, followed models imported from Italy.[623] A few pursued terrorism.[624]

Even in the United States, where in retrospect revolution seemed unlikely, tens of thousands of radicals devoted themselves to the cause.[625] Some groups were miniscule, and often confined to a single state or region – the Sojourner Truth Organization, for example,

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[619] For the history of autonomia in Italy, Marcello Tarì, *Il ghiaccio era sottile. Per una storia dell'autonomia (Rome:* Derive Approdi, 2011) and Lanfranco Caminiti and Sergio Bianchi, eds., *Gli autonomi: Le teorie, le lotte, la storia*, 3 volumes (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2007-2008).

[620] Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 255; Geronimo, *Fire and Flames: A History of the German Autonomist Movement*, trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 59-61.

[621] One of the most prominent of these initiatives would be the German autonomist movement, which was inspired by Italian autonomia. See, Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, especially Part 1. For a global take on autonomism, not only in Germany, but elsewhere, George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), 1-138. For accounts of the urban squatting and "autonomous" politics throughout Europe, see Bart Van der Steen, Ask Katzeff, Leendert Van Hoogenhuijze, eds. *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014).

[622] Brown, *West Germany and the Global* Sixties, 239-44, 252-53.

[623] Karl-Heinz Roth, "Extérieurs et intérieurs: l'autonomie ouvrière vue d'Allemagne," in *Pouvoir ouvrier à Porto Marghera*: *Du Comité d'usine à l'Assemblée de territoire (Vénétie – 1960-80)*, eds. Devi Saccheto and Gianni Sbrogio (Paris: Les nuits rouges, 2012), 220-33.

[624] The literature on radical terrorism in Germany is vast. Two good accounts are Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolution Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Jillian Becker, *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhoff Terrorist Gang* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2014).

[625] Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002), Part 1.

claimed perhaps no more than forty members.[626] Others, such as the Revolutionary Union (RU),

or the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), enjoyed a national presence and boasted over a thousand

members each in the mid-1970s.[627] The Black Panther Party peaked at around 5,000 members in

1969.[628] These figures may not seem impressive, but for every committed party member there

were likely many more radicals who sympathized. Some unaffiliated radicals donated to radical

groups, attended their events, or read their newspapers. By 1971, for example, the Party's

newspaper reached a top circulation of 250,000 copies a week.[629] Others simply organized their

own informal initiatives, which were often no less radical than those of the formal organizations.

Therefore, while formal organizations may have been small in numbers, taken in their

totality, they nevertheless made for an imposing force, exercising influence far beyond their

official membership. Party radicals committed their entire lives to revolution: many sought out

industrial jobs, attended regular party meetings, and threw themselves into whatever campaigns

were on the agenda. Dan La Botz, of the International Socialists, recalled life with his branch

leader, Kevin Katz:

> Forceful and persuasive, and absolutely dedicated to building a socialist movement in the
> United States, Kevin pushed to make us all professional revolutionaries. His view was
> that as full-time socialists we should give every waking hour to the cause, as he himself
> did. He established a pace of work that was demanding, even exhausting …[630]

This frenetic activity and herculean effort allowed radicals to shape struggles in workplaces,

unions, local politics, and neighborhoods despite their modest numbers.

Most significantly, governments in the United States and Western Europe were

themselves so convinced that these groups posed a significant threat that they responded in kind.

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[626] For the history of the group, see Michael Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization*, *1969-1986* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012).

[627] Ursula McTaggart places SWP peak membership at 1,140, *Guerrillas in the Industrial Jungle: Radicalism's Primitive and Industrial Rhetoric* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 117. Former member Mike Ely estimates the Revolutionary Union likely had a membership between 1,200 and 2,000 at its height, Mike Ely, *Ambush at Keyston, Part 1: Inside the Coal Miners' Great Gas Protest of 1974* (Kasama, 2009), 6.

[628] Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left since the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 150.

[629] Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Black Panthers and Their Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 121.

[630] Dan La Botz, *In Search of Myself*, unpublished memoirs, 138.

Indeed, the U.S. government advanced a frightening expansion of its repressive state apparatuses. The police, the FBI, the CIA, and the Pentagon all collaborated to stem the revolutionary tide. Soldiers hardened from combat experience abroad, especially in Vietnam, trained local police officers. The state worked closely with corporations, such as RAND, to implement domestic counterinsurgency strategies. Congress passed new legislation, such as the Anti-Riot Act, which meted out harsher sentences to those suspected of inciting violence, and the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which expanded the FBI, augmented local police departments, and funded weapons research.[631]

Repression took many forms. The U.S. government began by raising an army of informants to spy on American citizens. In May 1969, the *New York Times* alleged that the FBI had "undercover agents and informers inside almost every [SDS] chapter."[632] By 1970, Army Intelligence had a network of some 1,500 agents across the country, some operating in the ghettos, others scrupulously observing various organizations.[633] But surveillance often joined with other, more egregious forms of repression. Local police, and above all the FBI's COINTELPRO, spread misinformation, tapped phone lines, aggravated rivalries between groups, raided offices, destroyed property, targeted specific individuals for selective enforcement of tax laws, arrested radicals on trumped up charges, and even turned to intimidation, torture, and murder.[634]

Unsurprisingly, a close relationship developed between the U.S. government's repression at home and its war in Vietnam. Vietnam had become a laboratory for the military, and many of

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[631] Nelson Blackstock, *Cointelpro: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988); Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), Parts 2 and 3; Aaron J. Leonard and Conor A. Gallagher, *Heavy Radicals: The FBI's Secret War on American's Maoists: The Revolutionary Union / Revolutionary Communist Party 1968-1980* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014); "Tracy Tullis, "A Vietnam at Home: Policing the Ghettos in the Counterinsurgency Era," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, New York, 1999), 111-16, 145-54.
[632] Barnard L. Colliers, "S.D.S. Scores Big Gains But Faces Many Problems: S.D.S., Though It Scored Several 'Victories,' Faces Potentially Grave Crises," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1969.
[633] Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 294; For more on the U.S. Army' surveillance of civilian politics, see Christopher Howland Pyle, "Military Surveillance and Civilian Politics, 1967-1970" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1974), chapters 1-4.
[634] Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 211-12.

the strategies, and even weapons, tested in Vietnam were soon redeployed in the United States.[635] Some police officers, veterans of Korea or Vietnam, adapted their combat skills to the domestic context.[636] Others like Commander Daryl Gates studied guerilla warfare in Vietnam to learn how to contain domestic struggles such as the Watts Rebellion.[637] Police departments acquired communications technology, ammunition, weapons, riot material, and sensors designed to track the NLF, all developed in Vietnam.[638] In 1968, for example, the Army began distributing CS gas to local police forces to use against radicals.[639] Helicopters, which featured prominently in Vietnam, also became a regular part of U.S. police operations.[640]

This wave of repression smothered all radical organizations, but the state persecuted antiwar activists in particular. The Vietnam Day Committee in Berkeley, California, for example, was an early target. After acquiring declassified COINTELPRO documents, antiwar activists later confirmed that the FBI "monitored all phases of VDC activity, regularly compiling comprehensive reports on VDC finances, membership and meetings."[641] The Bureau tracked VDC co-founder Stephen Smale's every move, even reporting on his speech at the "Six Heures pour Vietnam" event in Paris.[642] The FBI also attempted to directly "handicap" VDC operations through sabotage. Activists later proved that the FBI burglarized the VDC office, stole materials, collaborated with local police to harass targeted activists, jammed radios during marches, tampered with mail to cancel or change dates of proposed actions, sent false letters to other groups like SDS to turn them against one another, coordinated with rightwing groups such as the Young Republicans or the Young Americans for Freedom to plan counter demonstrations.[643]

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[635] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 44-46,
[636] Tullis, "A Vietnam at Home," 161.
[637] Daryl F. Gates with Diane K. Shah, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 122-26.
[638] Ibid., 138-39.
[639] Ibid., 140-45; Malcolm Dando, *A New Form of Warfare: The Rise of Non-Lethal Weapons* (London: Brassey's, 1996), 75-82.
[640] Tullis, "A Vietnam at Home," 145-49.
[641] Seth Rosenfeld, "Of Spies & Radicals," *Inside: The Daily Cal's Weekly Magazine*, June 4, 1982, 7.
[642] Federal Bureau of Investigation Report: Stephen Smale, January 27, 1967, 1 in Stephen Smale Papers, Box 3, Folder 39, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
[643] Rosenfeld, "Of Spies & Radicals," 7.

Tellingly, although the VDC had already begun to decline on its own by the spring of 1966, it took a terrorist attack to put an end to the organization. Just minutes past midnight on April 9, 1966 a bomb demolished the VDC headquarters, shattering windows within a one-mile radius. While there is no proof that the FBI had any hand in this attack, records indicate that the FBI did try to blame the bombing on Progressive Labor in order to destroy both groups at once.[644]

The VDC was not unique. The 1976 Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, also known as the Church Committee, later confirmed that the FBI had targeted "almost every anti-war group."[645] And as the antiwar movement grew more militant, state repression grew more violent, famously culminating in May 1970 when National Guardsmen murdered four students on the Kent state campus in Ohio and killed two and injured eleven at Jackson State College in Mississippi.

The extreme hostility towards antiwar radicals can partly be explained by the fact that many American politicians – including National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to National Security Affairs Walter Rostow, top military leaders, and above all President Lyndon Johnson – were convinced that the movement was part of an international Soviet conspiracy to overthrow the United States.[646] According to Johnson's advisor Richard Goodwin, the President was certain that "the communist way of thinking had infected everyone around him," and he ordered the CIA to prepare an investigation into the antiwar movement's international connections in October 1967.[647] Whatever its disagreements with Lyndon Johnson, the Nixon Administration shared the same suspicions, no doubt encouraged by J. Edgar Hoover's

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[644] Rosenfeld, *Subversives*, 317-20.

[645] Quoted in Rosenfeld, "Of Spies & Radicals," 8. The Church Commission condemned the FBI's operations in no uncertain terms, "Many of the techniques used would be intolerable in a democratic society even if all of the targets had been involved in violent activity, but COINTELPRO went far beyond that." Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Governmental Operations, "Final Report," Book Three (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 3.

[646] Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 203-12.

[647] Richard Goodwin quoted in Wells, *The War Within*, 203. The report found no evidence of a conspiracy, but Johnson and others remained undeterred.

continuous stream of memos alleging communist control of the antiwar movement – most of it was revealed to be based on faulty or fabricated evidence.[648]

The only activists who suffered worse than those involved in the antiwar movement were black radicals.[649] African Americans regularly confronted police brutality, watched local police patrol their communities like an occupying army, and saw their political organizations harassed by the state, with members often imprisoned on trumped up charges.[650] Indeed, the number of incarcerated African Americans rose significantly in the late 1960s.[651] The FBI hounded groups like the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), at one point even entrapping three radicals in a bizarre conspiracy to destroy the Liberty Bell, Washington Monument, and Statue of Liberty.[652] In the face of mass arrests, RAM soon went underground, and in late 1968, voted to dissolve the organization in order to embed themselves in other movements.[653] The black nationalist Republic of New Afrika had 140 of its supporters arrested in a single day.[654] SNCC also came under heavy fire as police arrested chairman H. Rap Brown for allegedly inciting a riot.[655]

Of all black radicals organizations, the Black Panther Party soon emerged as the state's primary target. On July 15, 1969, J. Edgar Hoover labeled the Panthers the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country."[656] Party offices were raided, news stories planted, rivalries intensified, and Panthers arrested. Huey Newton was imprisoned in October 1967. Eldridge Cleaver fled the country in the fall of 1968. On December 4, 1969 the FBI murdered Fred

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[648] Wells, *The War Within*, 315

[649] Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

[650] Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2006), 187-88.

[651] Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston, MA, Northeastern University Press, 1998), 250-58.

[652] Jerry Weinberg, "The Infamous Statue of Liberty Bomb Plot Case," *The Realist* 65 (March 1966), 9-10, 32.

[653] Maxwell C. Stanford, "Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of an Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society" (M.A., Thesis, Atlanta, Georgia, 1986), 143.

[654] Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 77.

[655] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 255.

[656] Quoted in Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 210, see footnote 45, page 444, for important historical details about this frequently quoted statement.

Hampton, chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. In November 1969, Chicago judge Julius Hoffman sentenced Bobby Seale, to four years imprisonment, and in 1970 he was on trial once again, this time for a murder he did not commit.

Yet in many cases, widespread state repression had the unexpected effect of bringing black radicals and white antiwar activists closer together. For example, antiwar students arrested during the 1967 Stop the Draft Week in Oakland were joined in Alameda County Prison just a week later by Huey Newton.[657] They shared not only the same prison, but also the same lawyer, Charles Garry. As growing numbers of antiwar demonstrators and draft resisters confronted arrest, brutality, and imprisonment, they became particularly attuned to the repression of the black movement.[658] Some black radical organizations, such as the Black Panther Party, were therefore eager to reach out to white antiwar activists facing repression.[659] Sensing a potential alliance, the Panthers specifically asked antiwar activists involved in those demonstrations to help organize the Free Huey Campaign, and the Panthers made an effort to defend the antiwar activists. Many white radicals, such as Bob Avakian, future leader of the Revolutionary Union, answered the call, and worked to "link these things and to build support, particularly among people who'd been active in the 'Stop the Draft Week,' for Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party."[660]

On January 28, 1968, at a UC Berkeley rally defending students arrested during Stop the Draft Week, Bobby Seale remarked:

> Black people have protested police brutality. And many of you thought we were jiving, thought we didn't know what we were talking about... But now you are experiencing this same thing. When you go down in front of the draft, when you go over and you demonstrate in front of Dean Rusk, those pig cops will come down and brutalize your heads just like they brutalized the black heads of black people in the black community. We are saying now that you can draw a direct relationship that is for real and that is not abstract anymore: you don't have to abstract what police brutality is like when a club is there to crush your skull; you don't have to abstract what police brutality is like when there is a vicious service revolver there to tear out your flesh; you can see in fact that

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[657] For more on the Oakland Seven, see Leaonard and Gallagher, *Heavy Radicals*, 21-24.
[658] Berger, *Captive Nation*, 68.
[659] Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 221-22.
[660] Bob Avakian, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist. A Memoir by Bob Avakian* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005), 160.

the real power of the power structure maintaining its racist regime is manifested in its occupying troops, and is manifested in its police department – with guns and force."[661]

Through shared experiences of state repression, different elements of the American radical left began to coalesce against repression.

Building the United Front

On February 25, 1970, Connie Matthews, the Black Panther Party's International Coordinator, approached famed writer Jean Genet in Paris about putting his talents to the service of black liberation.[662] With the Party under heavy attack, and many of its leaders in exile, prison, or awaiting trial, the Panthers searched for allies. At this "critical stage," in which the Party struggled to spread the movement against racism, repression, and incarceration, Angela Davis recalls how they "thought Genet, thanks to his fame, could help us reach White progressives."[663] One of the most vocal supporters of the Black Panthers in France, Genet was not content to simply raise awareness in his own country.[664] To the surprise of the Panthers, he left for North America only a few days later, clandestinely entering the United States through Canada. For two months Genet traveled the United States to rally support for not only the besieged Black Panther Party, but for black political prisoners in general.[665] For the Panthers, however, working with people like Genet was not just a way to fend off repression. They saw these careful alliances as part of a concerted strategy to turn state repression to the Party's benefit.

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[661] Bobby Seale, quoted in Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 111.

[662] For more on Mathews, see Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "Back to Africa: The Evolution of the International Section of The Black Panther Party (1969-1972)," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles Earl Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 228. For a representative example of her organizational work, see the description of her solidarity campaign for Bobby Seale and Masai Hewitt through Scandinavia in Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 312-14.

[663] Angela Davis, "'Tactfulness of the Heart': Angela Davis on Jean Genet and The Black Panthers," an excerpt from an unpublished speech delivered by Angela Davis at the Odeon seminar in Paris, organized by Albert Dichy for IMEC, May 25-27, 1991.

[664] Jean Genet recounts this experience in "Interview with Michele Manceaux," in Jean Genet, *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Alberty Dichy, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 42.

[665] Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 521-39.

While it is true that in some cases repression destroyed movements, in others, it allowed radical organizations to transform and grow. The Panthers, for example, successfully survived massive repression by using it to win sympathy. The repeated trials of black radicals, often over fabricated charges, before white juries, and in the courts of racist judges won many over to the Panther cause.[666] For example, when Judge Hoffman ordered Bobby Seale bound and gagged for contempt of court, he only attracted further support for the Panthers. By highlighting the inherent racism of the entire justice system, the Party could convince even those who disagreed with its revolutionary politics that African Americans could not receive fair trials in the United States.

The Panthers also succeeded in spinning armed confrontations with the police to their favor. For example, on November 12, 1969, the Los Angeles police launched a coordinated assault on the Panthers, arresting dozens, firing thousands of rounds of ammunition, and ordering a helicopter to bomb the Panther headquarters with dynamite. Even though the Panthers fired back, organizations overtly critical of the Panther call for revolution, such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP, nevertheless rallied to the Party's defense.[667] The Party's actions, they felt, were a justified response to the inadmissible violence of the state. The key to the Panther strategy, therefore, was transforming this sympathy into formal alliances, and then to use those alliances to organize support, win protection, and accumulate moral capital against the state. The Panthers forged links with lawyers, academics, writers, progressive organizations, such as the Peace and Freedom Party, as well as with celebrities such as Jane Fonda, Jean Genet, and Jean-Luc Godard. In this way, the Panthers used repression to fuel the growth of the party.[668]

Jean Genet's tour culminated on May 1, 1970 at Yale University where he addressed a crowd of over 25,000 about Bobby Seale's pending murder trial. "For Bobby Seale, I repeat, there

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[666] Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 252-53.
[667] The episode is recounted in ibid., 222-24.
[668] Ibid., 225, 396-98.

must not be another Dreyfus affair," he said, referencing his country's own racist past.[669] Calling

on the audience to "speak out across America" on behalf of the Panthers, he declared, "Bobby

Seale's life depends on you. Your real life depends on the Black Panther Party."[670] Immediately

after his impassioned speech, he fled the country, returning to France through Montréal, where

he attended the opening of a Black Panther information center to solidify an alliance between the

Party and Quebec separatists.[671] Genet drew parallels between the two sides, and his escort,

Panther spokesman, Zayd-Malik Shakur declared: "We understand that Quebec is colonized by

the same system that confronts us. Our party is not racist, but internationalist, and we think it is

essential to link up with other liberation struggles to form a world-wide anti-imperialist front."[672]

But as Genet's sojourn proved, the major task for radicals was now to find creative ways to

counter state repression, both in North America and in Western Europe.

Genet returned home as the embattled French left began, like the Panthers, to

experiment with its own united front. During the events of May and June 1968, the new Minister of

the Interior, Raymond Marcellin, utterly convinced of an international plot to subvert the French

state, banned eleven radical organizations, including the JCR and the UJCml.[673] In addition, he

tightened censorship laws, harassing radical publishers such as François Maspero, who

distributed revolutionary literature like the Tricontinental's quarterly.[674] In March 1970, he arrested

Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, the editor of the Gauche prolétarienne's paper, *La Cause du peuple*.[675]

On April 30, the state passed the "Anti-Casseurs" law, which held that anyone associated with

any demonstration in which persons were harmed, property damaged, or violence committed

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[669] Jean Genet, "May Day Speech," in *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Albert Dichy, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 38. Another version of this speech appeared in the March 28, 1970 issue of the *Black Panther*.
[670] Ibid., 39.
[671] White, *Genet*, 538; Pierre L. O'Neill, *Le Devoir*, May 6, 1970, 3, 6; George Radwanski, *The Montreal Gazette*, May 6, 1970, 10.
[672] James Plussey Stewart, *FLQ: Seven Years of Terrorism* (Montreal: Montreal Star in cooperation with Simon and Schuster of Canada, 1970), 54.
[673] Raymond Marcellin, *L'Ordre public et les groupes révolutionnaires* (Paris: Plon, 1969).
[674] Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 82-88; Julien Hage, "François Maspero, éditeur (p)artisan," *Contretemps*, no. 13 (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2005), 100-108.
[675] Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 65-66.

against police officers could be arrested for those crimes, no matter how tenuous the link.[676] Then on May 27, 1970, Marcellin officially banned the Gauche prolétarienne (GP), arresting Alain Geismar, one of its leaders, the following month.[677]

Outlawed, the "ex-GP," as it was now called, rethought its strategy in June 1970. A theoretical statement published in January 1971 reflected on the ex-GP's trajectory and articulated a new way forward. The statement argued that in the first phase, from the group's founding to May 1970, the GP had successfully sharpened the revolutionary perspective through "aggressive" struggle. But now that the balance of forces had shifted, it was time to "destroy" their old style of brazen confrontation. "We adopted the habit of dividing morale by introducing class struggle," but now "it is necessary to acquire the habit of uniting." The new objective was to "conquer the center," with a new style of work that emphasized "unity and the democracy of the majority."[678] The ex-GP now called for a united "democratic front" to expand and strengthen the opposition to the state's repressive turn.[679]

The concept of the "democratic front" derives directly from Chinese communism, and especially Mao Tse-Tung's argument that while the revolution would still be led by the working class, particular historical conditions in China meant that it required an interclass alliance of different social forces, such the peasantry, small business owners, and even certain national capitalists.[680] The ex-GP translated this idea for their own context, arguing that the new conditions of repression meant that revolution in France necessitated a similar alliance. This meant deescalating rivalries with other radical organizations, collaborating with prominent intellectuals, forming coalitions with progressive forces, and uniting with other social classes, including the petty bourgeoisie. To hold this potential bloc together, the front would fight for

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[676] Ibid., 65.

[677] For more on this repression, especially against the working class, see, Xavier Vigna, *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68: Essai d'histoire politiques des usines* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de rennes, 2007), 302-305.

[678] "A Propos d'une dissolution," *Cahiers Prolétariennes 1: Élargir la Résistance* (January 1971): 13.

[679] Benny Levy, "Un dirigeant politique," in *Les maos en France*, ed. Michèle Manceaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 210.

[680] Chen Duxiu, "Statement of the Chinese Communist Party on the Current Situation," June 15, 1922; Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967).

"democratic rights" – such as the freedom of assembly, speech, the press, and protection from arbitrary arrest or search and seizure – that would appeal to most social classes in France.

This democratic front would serve several concrete functions. Above all, it would offer protection. For instance, the ex-GP could only continue publishing *La Cause du peuple* by asking Jean-Paul Sartre, who was virtually immune to arrest, to serve as editor.[681] Second, with the official ban forcing the ex-GP underground, members risked losing contact with struggles; by linking with other legal organizations, however, they could remain connected to the movement. Lastly, allying themselves with more moderate groups and respected intellectuals in a struggle against threats to democratic freedoms could elevate their cause in the eyes of a public that had long been told that ex-GP radicals were terrorists. Far from becoming the enemy of democracy, the ex-GP could become its greatest champion. By uniting radicals, working people, intellectuals, and shop-keepers, this front, the ex-GP declared "is perfectly capable of taking back from the bourgeoisie that which it has stolen: liberty is an important task."[682]

The ex-GP took this new role seriously, putting itself in the service of many popular struggles. For instance, after a mining disaster at Lens left sixteen miners dead, Sartre and the ex-GP organized a popular tribunal that eventually found Houlières, the state-owned mining company, guilty of murder for neglecting the safety of the workers.[683] In the factories, the Maoists defended workers charged for kidnapping their bosses by arguing that these "sequestrations" were actually forms of popular justice.[684] At the same time, the group advocated for the rights of immigrants, organizing anti-racist campaigns.[685] And, to the consternation of many other radicals, the ex-GP even extended an olive branch to small shopkeepers, some of whom were still sympathetic to the xenophobic populism of Pierre Poujade.[686]

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[681] In fact, Sartre became the editor of several other banned radical publications, such as the VLR's paper *Tout!*
[682] "A Propos d'une dissolution," *Cahiers Prolétariennes*, 23.
[683] Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes*, 159; Jean-Paul Sartre, "Prémier procès populaire à Lens," in *Situations*, vol. 8 (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
[684] For sequestrations, Vigna, *L'Insubordination ouvrière*, 103-107.
[685] Daniel A. Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals: May '68 & the Rise of Anti-Racism in France* (Pontypool: The Merlin Press, 2012), chapter 3.
[686] Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes*, 113, 121.

Indeed, not all French radicals shared the ex-GP's perspective. While the ex-GP, along with the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France, tried to justify the new turn towards democratic struggles by arguing that France was undergoing a turn to "fascization," most other groups, such as the Ligue Communiste and the VLR, firmly disagreed.[687] They also felt that widening the "democratic front" to include potentially reactionary forces such as small shopkeepers would reproduce the pitfalls of the classic popular front of the 1930s. The ex-GP's concept of popular justice came under fire as well. The Ligue Communiste blasted the Maoists for having confused "popular justice" with "revolutionary justice."[688] Even Michel Foucault, who nonetheless collaborated closely with the ex-GP, raised concerns about the glorification of the popular tribunal promoted by the ex-GP leadership, famously arguing that the court is not "the natural expression of popular justice, but rather its historical function is to ensnare it, to control it, to strangle it, by re-inscribing it within institutions which are typical of a state apparatus."[689]

Nevertheless, since the massive state repression affected everyone, sympathetic intellectuals, progressive organizations, and other radical groups initially put aside their differences and heeded the call. As early as May 25, 1970, a panoply of otherwise fratricidal organizations – including the GP, Ligne Rouge, Ligue Communiste, Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), Lutte ouvrière, and Vive la Révolution (VLR) – gathered to discuss their common future.[690] While relations certainly remained tense, most radical groups at the time did embark on their own "democratic turns." This consensus appeared powerfully in the new Secours Rouge (SR).[691] The

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[687] It should be pointed out that the Black Panthers also grounded their united front politics in the argument that the United States was turning to fascism. For a critical description of this turn, see, Avakian, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*, 212-16.

[688] Georges Marion, "Bruay-en-Artois: À propos de justice populaire," *Rouge* 157, May 13, 1972, 7.

[689] Michel Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed., trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 1; Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York : Berghahn Books, 2004), 70.

[690] Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération,* vol. 2*: les années de poudre* (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1988), 176.

[691] The Secours Rouge, however, was just one body in a constellation of democratic groups. For example, the Amis de la cause du peuple, headed by Simone de Beauvoir, not only ensured the publication of the paper, but exposed the state's hypocritical stance on free speech. Another organization of this kind was the Agence de presses Libération (APL). Directly inspired by the

SR first emerged in the 1920s as a communist counterpart to the Red Cross, providing aid to all those struggling against oppression internationally. In October 1970, soon after the wave of repression, former French Resisters, Christian socialists, academics, and lawyers collectively reactivated the defunct SR.[692] The new SR temporarily drew together radicals from groups such as the ex-GP, the PSU and the Ligue Communiste. Indeed, open to everyone, the SR proclaimed itself a nonsectarian "democratic association" aiming to "assure the political and juridical defense of victims of repression and to give them and their families material and moral support with no exceptions."[693] The SR, which soon included radicals of all stripes, advocated for immigrants, activists, workers, prisoners, and everyone else faced with state repression.

The new SR's self-described struggle to "defend all fundamental rights" marked an important shift for the radicals in France.[694] In 1968, French radicals had equated the struggle for rights as mere reformism, but by the early 1970s, state repression had compelled them to adopt democratic struggles as a fundamental axis of their political work. This did not mean that these groups abandoned violent revolution, the overthrow of capitalism, or the dictatorship of the proletariat as final goals, or that they confined their efforts to the narrow field of parliamentary politics. Rather, they felt that, given the new balance of forces, radicals could no longer afford to behave as they did in 1968 or 1969, when many believed, in the words of Alain Geismar, that the revolution was only a few years away in France.[695] Thus, radicals preserved the goal of

American liberation news service, Libération, a broadly leftwing newspaper designed to counter false information about the movement, soon emerged as a way to "help the people prendre la parole." Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left*, 72-74; Rémi Guillot, "Les réseaux d'information maoïstes et l'affaire de Bruay-en-Artois," *Les Cahiers du journalisme*, no. 17 (2007): 218.

[692] For the revived Secours Rouge, see Bernard Brillant, "Intellectuels et extrême-gauche: le cas du Secours rouge," Lettre d'information n°32, Les années 68: événements, cultures politiques et modes de vie, CNRS, Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (May 1998); Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics,* 71-72; Jean-Paul Salles, *La Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (1968-1981): Instrument du Grand Soir ou lieu d'apprentissage?* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 93.

[693] Manifeste Secours Rouge, June 2, 1970, F Delta Res 576/5/8, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France.

[694] Secours Rouge, "Projet de resolution: sur l'orientation politique du Secours Rouge," 1971, 3, F Delta Res 576/5/8, BDIC.

[695] "Sans vouloir jouer aux prophètes: l'horizon 70 ou 72 en France, c'est la revolution." Alain Geismar, Serge July, and Erylne Morane, *Vers la guerre civile* (Paris: Éditions et publications premieres, 1969), 16.

communist revolution, and many, especially the ex-GP, still engaged in violent struggle, encouraging bossnappings, beating hated foremen, organizing acts of sabotage, battling police, and planning militant strikes. But they agreed that in this new democratic phase, they had little choice but to also struggle for democratic rights and unite with the broader public.[696]

This strategy began to appear outside of France as well. Faced with similar forms of repression, radicals elsewhere in Europe followed suit. Branches of Secours Rouge emerged in other countries, notably in Belgium, Italy, and Germany, helping to lay the scaffolding for a new international movement for democratic rights.[697]

Rethinking the Prison

One of the most transformative consequences of this democratic turn was a new concern with the status, rights, and struggles of prisoners, an issue most radicals had initially overlooked. In the aftermath of the May events, and even into 1970, most French radicals had tended to ignore the prisons. As an ex-GP circular complained in 1970, "concern for the prisoners <u>does not exist</u>," and many act as if "an imprisoned militant is a dead militant."[698] But with escalated repression throwing radicals behind bars, many groups finally began to regard the prison as a political space, committing themselves to sustained prison organizing for the first time. In June 1970, for example, the ex-GP created the Organisation des prisonniers politiques (OPP) to advocate for imprisoned militants.

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[696] For more on this bifurcated strategy – violent militancy on the one hand, and democratic unity on the other – in this ex-GP specifically, see, Jean-Paul Étienne, "La Gauche prolétarienne (1968-1973): illégalisme révolutionnaire et justice populaire," (Ph.D. diss., Université Paris-VIII, Paris, France, 2003).

[697] Secours Rouge, "Projet de resolution: sur l'orientation politique du Secours Rouge," 1971, 3-4, F Delta Res 576/5/8, Gauche prolétarienne: Secours Rouge, BDIC. "Histoire du SRI," http://www.secoursrouge.org/histoire-du-secours-rouge (accessed July 4, 2015). The new SR was, however, short-lived compared to the original organization, and while the various national bodies contributed greatly to social movements in their respective countries, the wave collapsed by the end of the 1970s.

[698] OPP, "Pour une politique juste vis-a-vis des camarades emprisonnés," 1970, 1, F Delta Res 576/5/8, BDIC.

For their first campaign in September, OPP worked with Secours Rouge to organize a

coordinated twenty-five-day hunger strike at six prisons, including a women's prison.[699] The strike

enjoyed mixed success. On the one hand, the Supreme Court of Appeals granted Geismar the

"political regime" status, according him certain privileges, such as the right to order books, receive

visitors, and write. On the other hand, as a political action, the strike had little overall effect on the

political situation. Reflecting on the action, OPP activists argued that the limited results of the

strike could be traced back to the general isolation of the strikers from those on the outside, not

just radicals, but lawyers, doctors, and families. For the next action, set for January 1971, the

OPP had to rethink its entire strategy.[700]

In December 1970, ex-GP militants Jacques Rancière, Daniel Defert, Christine Martineau

and others outlined a new direction for the group. To widen the struggle, and truly link prisoners

to the growing democratic front, Defert proposed to "form an investigative commission of experts

on the general situation of the prisons, and that we entrust the leadership to Michel Foucault."[701]

Foucault – along with other figures like Gilles Deleuze; Jean Genet; Jean-Pierre Domenach, the

editor of the progressive Christian journal *Ésprit,* who had taken a stance against the Algerian

War; and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, the historian of Ancient Greece also active in the earlier struggles

against the Algerian War – agreed, and a new democratic coalition was born.[702] On February 8,

1971, Foucault formally unveiled the new Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP):[703]

> There is little information published about the prisoners; it is one of the hidden regions of
> our social system, one of the dark zones of our life. We have the right to know. We want to

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[699] Secours Rouge, "Communiqué du Secours Rouge," 1970, F Delta Res 576/5/5/1, La Gauche prolétarienne: Secteurs (Prisonniers), BDIC.

[700] "Grève illimitée de la faim des prisonniers politiques," January 14, 1971 and "Cher Camarade …," 1970, F Delta Res 576/5/5/1, BDIC. For more on this history, see Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, 76-78. For more on the GP's and SR's early attempts at prison organizing, see the collection of documents in *Le combat des déténus politiques* (Paris: Maspero, 1970). For more

[701] Daniel Defert, "L'émergence d'un nouveau front: les prisons," in *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons: Archives d'une lutter, 1970-1972*, eds. Philippe Artières, Laurent Quéro, and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Paris: Éditions de l'IMEC, 2003), 317.

[702] For Gilles Deleuze's role in the GIP, see François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 309-13; for Jean Genet's role, see White, *Genet,* 567-69, 571-72.

[703] For the GIP, see Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, chapters 2, 5, 6, 7.

know. This is why, with magistrates, lawyers, journalists, doctors, and psychologists, we have formed the Groupe d'information sur les prisons.[704]

To learn about the prisons, the GIP drafted a questionnaire to circulate among prisoners, drawing heavily on the "workers' inquiry" model first proposed by Karl Marx in 1881, and later adopted by French Maoists in the late 1960s and early 1970s in factories and farms.[705] Organizationally, the group relied on the experiences of établissement – or the practice of sending activists to find jobs at specific workplaces to organize workers – to form investigative work teams for each prison.[706] With the help of doctors, lawyers, and family members, the GIP, working with the Secours Rouge, smuggled inquiries into the prisons. These investigations not only gathered valuable information; they gave voice to the silenced demands of the prisoners.

The GIP not only inspired other radical groups in France, such as VLR or the Mouvement de libération des femmes, but also began to connect with prison activist movements in other countries.[707] For French radicals, prisoner struggles in Italy emerged as a central reference point. After reading Lotta Continua's coverage of the rebellion at Le Nuove prison in Turin, Italy on Easter of 1971, a rebellion that sparked a wave of prison unrest across the peninsula, Daniel Defert and Jacques Donzelot of the GIP traveled to Italy. There, they initiated a fruitful collaboration with Lotta Continua, which left a profound influence not only on how French radicals understood prison organizing, but on the revolutionary struggle itself.

Italian radicals' turn to prison organizing began after a wave of workers' struggles reached an impasse after 1969. Known as the "Hot Autumn," this movement won pay raises, better benefits, and greater say in the operations of the factory, but was outmaneuvered when capitalists subsequently raised the cost of living and encouraged trade unions to institute a new

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[704] Michel Foucault, "Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP)," trans. Stuart Elden, *Viewpoint Magazine*, February 16, 2016.

[705] Defert, "L'émergence d'un nouveau front: les prisons," 318. For more on the history of worker's inquiry, see, Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, "Workers' Inquiry: A Genealogy," *Viewpoint* 3 (September 2013).

[706] On établissement, see Marnix Dressen, *De l'amphi à l'établi: les étudiants maoïstes à la usine (1967-1989)* (Paris: Belin, 1999); Virginie Linhart, *Volontaires pour l'usine: Vies d'établis, 1967-1977* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994); Robert Linhart, *L'Établi* (Paris: Minuit, 1978); Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, "A propos des militants établis," *Mouvements* 18 (2001): 148-52.

[707] For the Ligue Communiste, see Salles, *La Ligue communiste révolutionnaire*, 216-17.

council system.[708] Some Italian workers therefore began to devise an alternative organizing strategy. "In view of this," Italo Sbrogio, a factory worker at the Porto Marghera petrochemical plant, put it, "we put our back into it and said that the intervention inside the factories would have to be carried to the outside, to the 'social,' as well, broaching the issue of the rise of living costs."[709] The new strategy was to surround the factory by waging struggles on what was called the terrain of social reproduction, that is to say, schools, houses, civic centers, neighborhoods, and streets.[710] Housewives launched a vast movement of "autoreduction" to unilaterally reduce bus fares, electricity bills, or rents.[711] In some cases, Sbrogio recalls, "people lowered rents, occupied empty houses, paid less for their food. We organized all this by establishing local committees in the various parts of town. We even managed to organize a shopping strike which forced some supermarkets to cut prices for basic food."[712]

Lotta Continua was one of the strongest advocates of this new strategy, and went further by rethinking the role of prisons from this perspective.[713] Prisons, they argued, were sites of social reproduction, and prisoners' struggles were therefore intimately linked to the fight for lower rents, affordable food, and accessible transportation.[714] The French GIP was immediately inspired by this new conceptualization. In a report on their 1971 meeting with Lotta Continua, the GIP wrote that "the struggle of the inmates is taken up in a strategy of struggle in the

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[708] Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), part 3.

[709] Italo Sbrogio, "The history of the workers' committee of Porto Marghera," talk delivered on June 9, 2006 in Marghera, reprinted in *Porto Marghera: The Last Firebrands,* 39, https://libcom.org/files/firebrands_booklet_2_horizontal.pdf

[710] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 322-26. For more on the concept of social reproduction in the Italian context, see, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community," 1972; Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework (1975)," and "Counterplanning from the Kitchen (1975)," reprinted in *Revolution at Point Zero* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 15-22, 28-40.

[711] Bruno Ramirez, "The Working-Class Struggle Against the Crisis: Self-Reduction of Prices in Italy," *Radical America* 10 no. 4 (1975): 27-34.

[712] Sbrogio, "The history of the workers' committee of Porto Marghera," 39.

[713] See, for example, Lotta Continua, "Take Over the City," trans. Ernest Dowson, *Radical America* 7, no. 2 (March-April 1973): 79-112.

[714] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 323.

neighborhoods."[715] For the French, who steadfastly prioritized organizing at the point of

production, these Italian ideas about reorienting away from the giant factories to the surrounding

communities came as a revelation. Soon after, the GIP's close collaborator in France, Secours

Rouge, threw itself into a long campaign over housing.[716] Other radical groups in France were

similarly inspired by Lotta Continua, forging new links and translating their articles on the politics

of tenant struggles and social reproduction.[717]

But an even more important transnational influence on the French was the struggle of

African American prisoners. The ex-GP, the GIP, and other French radicals avidly read,

translated, and circulated material about the black prison movements, and the GIP devoted an

entire booklet to George Jackson after his murder on August 21, 1971. In fact, these struggles,

particularly the writings of the Panthers and Jackson, substantially challenged how many French

radicals understood the prison, class composition, and revolutionary politics.

When French Maoist groups first entered the prisons, they drew a line between the

"political" prisoners and the "common law" inmates, arguing that as specifically *political* prisoners,

they deserved what was known as "political regime" status. They aimed "to force the enemy to

recognize us as a political force and not as a band of criminals – as communists and not as

thieves. The people mobilize behind communists, not behind thieves … The car thief, the

common law criminal, reflects society; the communist transforms it."[718] As Michel Foucault later

put it:

> When Maoists were put in prison, they began, it must be said, by reacting a little like the
> traditional political groups, that is to say: "We do not want to be assimilated with the
> criminals of common law, we do not want our image to be mixed with theirs in the opinion

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[715] GIP, "Depuis la reunion des camarades du GIP ont rencontré …" April 1971, reprinted in in *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, 104.

[716] See, for example, their special issue devoted to housing struggles, *Secours Rouge* 2 (February 1972), F Delta Res 576/5/8 Gauche prolétarienne: Secours Rouge, BDIC.

[717] On the transnational links between Vive la Révolution and Lotta Continua, see Manus McGrogan, "Vive la Révolution and the Example of Lotta Continua: the circulation of ideas and practices between the left militant worlds of France and Italy following May '68," *Modern and Contemporary France* 18, no. 3 (August 2010): 309-28.

[718] "Pour l'union des prisons et des bases d'appui" [June 1970?], F Delta Res 576/5/5/1, BDIC.

of people, and we ask to be treated like political prisoners with the rights of political prisoners."[719]

This was, after all, the primary objective of the first strike in September 1970. However, as historians like Julian Bourg have noted, the combination of that strike's limited gains, along with subsequent prison inquiries, collaboration with "common law" prisoners, and engagement with Foucault's ideas helped push the ex-GP beyond this rather narrow conception of the prison.[720] It is often forgotten, however, that black prison organizing, especially the figure of George Jackson, played the most decisive role in this rethinking.

In his writings, Jackson, an African American Marxist and one of the three Soledad Brothers, demonstrated that the prison, just as much as the high schools, universities, factories, or the union offices, could be a site of politicization. He argued that prisons did not in fact suppress politics, but rather, were places where many people learned politics for the first time. The GIP came to see Jackson, imprisoned since the age of eighteen, as "one of the first revolutionary leaders to acquire his political education entirely in prison."[721] This in turn had a profound impact on the ex-GP, which began to argue, paraphrasing Jackson, that "the prisons are not only 'Marxist universities,' but training camps."[722] They saw the 1971 Attica riot, where incarcerated rioters had inscribed the words "prison is the school of revolution" on the prison walls, as definitive proof.[723]

Jackson, and the Panthers more broadly, also helped French radicals overcome their scorn for what was known as the lumpen proletariat, that is to say, the underclass of criminals, vagabonds, ragpickers, and others at the margins who were allegedly hostile to proletarian revolution. This bias revealed an inability to recognize the class dimensions of the prison, and

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[719] Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview," *Social Justice* 18, no. 3 (45), Attica: 1971-1991 Commemorative Issue (Fall 1991): 32.

[720] Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, 77-95.

[721] GIP, "La place de Jackson dans le mouvement des prisons," in *Intolérable: groupe d'information sur les prisons*, ed. Philippe Artières (Paris: Verticales, 2013), 212. First printed as *Intolérable 3: L'Assassinat de George Jackson* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

[722] "La bataille d'Attica," *La Cause du peuple-J'accuse* 9, September 23, 1971, 9.

[723] GIP, "La prison est l'école de la révolution," *La Cause du peuple-J'accuse* 9, 12. For an excellent history of the Attica revolt, see Heather Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016).

was directly responsible for the Maoists' initial decision to separate themselves from the common law prisoners. Jackson, now seen as "the first to carry out a class-based analysis of the prisoners," changed their view.[724] In an interview translated by the GIP, Jackson wrote, "All these cats in here are lumpen, that's all I've ever been." However, he continued, "you would be very surprised to see how these particular lumpen in here accept class war and revolutionary socialism." Jackson argued that prisoners were not selfishly individualistic, as traditional Marxist theory seemed to suggest, but rather that their isolation from community, family, clan, or national ties, engendered an intense longing for "community, commune-ity." "That's what helps define us as a class," Jackson explained.[725]

Indeed, Jackson continued, the prison, bourgeois law, and the judicial apparatus were themselves responsible for creating the very category of the lumpenproletariat. In 1971, the *Cause du Peuple* translated some of Jackson's writings in which he argued that even when released, prisoners were marked with a record, had enormous difficulty to find jobs, and were quickly arrested again, often charged with the crime of "the inability to keep paid work."[726] Another article in the *Cause du Peuple* argued that the prison, as the "privileged instrument" of the justice system, marginalized certain sectors of the proletariat, drained resources from workers facing trial, and, echoing Jackson, ensured that once convicts were released, they would face unemployment or highly exploitative and precarious jobs.[727]

Through the perspective of the black prison experience, French radicals such as Jean Genet began to see how the justice system branded certain people as always-already guilty. As Genet wrote in his preface to Jackson's *Soledad Brother*, "the black man is, from the start, natively, the guilty man."[728] In other words, the law itself had created an entire category of people designated as criminal, expendable, surplus. The insights gathered from the struggle of African

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[724] GIP, "La place de Jackson dans le mouvement des prisons," 212.
[725] Ibid., 212; the original interview is from Pat Gallyot, "George Jackson, a Beautiful Black Warrior," *Sun Reporter*, August 28, 1971, 2.
[726] "George Jackson," *La Cause du peuple-J'accuse* 9, 10-11.
[727] GIP, "La prison: enjeu d'un combat," *La Cause du peuple-J'accuse* 1 (May 24, 1971): 7.
[728] Jean Genet, "Introduction," July 1970, in *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970).

Americans, the GIP later realized, "overturn many commonly accepted ideas in the history of the working-class movement about the population in the prisons."[729] Paired with the GIP's own empirical discoveries in French prisons, these arguments forced many radicals to not only fundamentally rethink the idea of class, but also change their very political strategies. Instead of separating themselves from the petty criminals, whose existence they initially felt was nonpolitical, radicals now demanded the special "political regime for everyone."[730]

Reflecting on these shifting ideas in an article published in *La Cause du peuple*, the GIP argued that "the struggle of prisoners is not different, at bottom, from those that are carried out in the society from which they are 'excluded.'"[731] The new political project, therefore, was to overcome these artificially imposed divisions. Analyzing the GIP's discovery, theorist Alberto Toscano notes that unity now meant breaking a division that "was both imposed upon and eventually affirmed by the workers' movement, with its debilitating introjection of a bourgeois morality itself reproduced by legal and penal institutions: the division between the proletariat and the 'non-proletarianized plebs.'"[732] Instead of trying to *advance* the struggles of a visible, spectacular, mythic vanguard, that of the wageworker in the factory, radicals now considered rearticulating a fractured class by *reintegrating* the forgotten, invisible, so-called "backwards" figure, reorienting the focus away from independent class figures to the relationships *between* those figures – a task all the more pressing given the plurality of new social movements emerging at this time.[733]

This rethinking demanded a more nuanced engagement with the law. Through their experiences organizing around prisons, some radicals began to see the law as a more subtle, creative form of power, rather than a blunt instrument wielded by the bourgeoisie in reaction to movements. Foucault summarized the new thinking:

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[729] GIP, "La place de Jackson dans le mouvement des prisons," 211.

[730] Le peuple en colère [ex-GP], "Camarades," 1971, 2, F Delta Res 576/5/8, BDIC.

[731] GIP, "La prison: enjeu d'un combat," 6.

[732] Alberto Toscano, "The Intolerable-Inquiry: The Documents of the Groupe d'information sur les prisons," *Viewpoint* 3 (September 2013).

[733] In this vein, Defert notes: "I think one of the accomplishments of the GIP was to erase that notion of the lumpen-proletariat from political vocabulary." Cited in Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, 91.

> If one makes the distinction, if one accepts the difference between political law and common law, that means that fundamentally one recognizes bourgeois morality and law as far as respect for the property of others, respect for traditional moral values, etc., are concerned. The cultural revolution in its widest sense implies that, at least in a society like ours, you no longer make the division between criminals of common law and political criminals. Common law is politics, it is, after all, the bourgeois class that, for political reasons and on a basis of its political power, defined what is called common law.[734]

As they began to understand the law as a creative political force, activists demanded further inquiry. The ex-GP called for the creation of "study groups" to not only investigate different legal matters, such as arrests or violation of press laws, but to publish accessible brochures to help all militants familiarize themselves with the political function of the law.[735] Indeed, the ex-GP, along with other radicals, began to see the law as itself a site of struggle, and called for an "army of lawyers" allied with the left to "open a breach in the legal apparatus of the bourgeoisie."[736] Thus, through this transnational experience of prison organizing, some radicals began to see the subtle ways in which politics was at work even in those places they once ignored or wrote off as nonpolitical, such as the prison of the "common law."

French radicals initially made the "democratic turn" out of immediate strategic concerns, as a kind of political expedient in a changed situation. But as they followed this turn, they began to rethink many of their long held assumptions. The democratic turn did not just buy radicals time, space, and allies, leaving the core of their project unchanged; it transformed the very way radicals thought about class struggle, politics, and the revolution itself. This was clearly felt in the new confrontation with rights. Through prison organizing, radicals begin to rethink how rights might fit into their more general conception of revolution. The GIP, by no means a reformist organization, later reflected that their investigations into the prisons ended up speaking "less about the experience of prisoners, or their misery, than their rights – right to defend oneself against tribunals; the right to news, visits, mail; the right to hygiene and food; the right to a decent wage for work done, and the right to keep working when one been released …" The questionnaires,

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[734] Foucault, "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview," 32.
[735] "Pour l'union politique des prisons et des bases d'appui," no date, 4, F Delta Res 576/5/5/1, BDIC.
[736] Ibid.

which asked very specifically what rights prisoners had, and what rights they wanted, was, upon further reflection, seen as a way of "declaring these rights." Most profoundly, the GIP argued that while some of these rights had already been won, they were always being taken away, meaning that the struggle for rights would never be finished once and for all, a mere one way step on the way to revolution, but an ongoing, integral part of the revolutionary process.[737]

This process was not without its contradictions. While radicals increasingly adopted the new rights discourse, most did not embrace the notion of individual sovereignty, but continued to place their advocacy of "democratic rights" firmly within the framework of collective revolution. But attempting to reconcile a commitment to democratic rights with the overall struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat was bound to raise some serious questions about the meaning of both rights and revolution. This tension risked rendering the politics of some of these groups, especially the ex-GP, incoherent. For at the same time that the ex-GP assured the French public of its commitment to basic liberties, its militants assaulted security guards and foremen and plotted the overthrow of the French state.

This fraught relationship between rights and revolution grew even more serious when radicals looked abroad. As the next chapter will show, the concern with rights began to affect their organizing beyond French prisons, shaping the way radicals conceptualized international solidarity. For radicals soon learned that revolutionaries in South Vietnam faced far higher levels of state repression. The dictatorial government of General Nguyen Van Thieu revoked civil liberties, imprisoned hundreds of thousands of political dissenters, and tortured those suspected of revolutionary sympathies. Activists, as we will see, responded by grafting their new concerns with rights onto the antiwar movement, demanding the immediate release of the political prisoners. Yet in arguing that South Vietnam violated fundamental democratic rights, the defense of national liberation against imperialism increasingly took the form of criticizing the internal affairs of a sovereign state. In so doing, they not only began to lend legitimacy to a competing form of international solidarity that shared the progressive aspirations of anti-imperialism but rejected

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[737] GIP, "La prison: enjeu d'un combat," 6.

national sovereignty and collective rights in favor of human rights; this new iteration of

international solidarity accentuated some of the implicit contradictions between rights and

revolution in the strategy of the radical left in the 1970s.

CHAPTER 6: FREEING THE POLITICAL PRISONERS

On April 16, 1971, President Richard Nixon responded to questions about Vietnam at a panel interview at the annual convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. During the interview, Otis Chandler, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, broached the question of the U.S. prisoners of war in North Vietnam. Nixon responded bluntly: the North Vietnamese have, "without question," been the "most barbaric in their handling of prisoners of any nation in modern history."[738] Insisting that he would never abandon the POWs, he threatened, "As long as there is one American being held prisoner in North Vietnam," he would "retain that force."[739] The POW issue, in other words, had become a central justification for the prolongation of the war.

Indeed, at the very same moment that radicals in France and the United States began to make the rights of prisoners a central dimension of their revolutionary struggles, the U.S. government launched an ambitious strategy to transform the entire discourse on the war into one about the repression of American prisoners of war. While the plight of the POWs had always been part of the debate about the war, especially within the anti-war movement, under the Nixon Administration, the safe release of the American POWs would become a primary justification for the prolongation of the war in Vietnam. By 1969, most Americans had come to believe the war was a mistake, the international community had turned against the United States, and the Nixon Administration had lost moral legitimacy. Hoping to revive support, Nixon, backed by a loose coalition of conservatives, gambled that he could use the cause of the political prisoners to rebrand the American war as a just fight for humanitarian principles.

Antiwar radicals in the United Sates, then France, responded by pointing to the tens of thousands of political dissidents imprisoned, tortured, or disappeared by the U.S.-backed government of South Vietnam. Drawing on their considerable transnational experiences with prison organizing, they grafted their newfound concern with rights directly onto antiwar solidarity,

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[738] Richard Nixon, *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1971* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 540.
[739] Ibid., 541.

calling for the liberation of all political prisoners in South Vietnam. Indeed, after the United States

withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, thereby depriving anti-imperialist international solidarity

movements of their primary target, antiwar radicals made the liberation of the political prisoners

one of their primary concerns, demanding that South Vietnam free all its political dissidents,

restore civil liberties, and adhere to the Paris Accords. Hoping to revive the international antiwar

movement, French radicals used this common demand to unite the radical left at home and

abroad. These efforts culminated in a massive antiwar demonstration in May 1973, when over ten

thousand Western European and American radicals met in Milan, Italy.

Despite the focus on rights, anti-imperialists still framed internationalism around national

liberation, believing that socialist states, at least in the short run, remained the primary vehicles of

emancipation. Yet in arguing that South Vietnam violated fundamental democratic rights, anti-

imperialist solidarity increasingly took the form of criticizing the internal affairs of a sovereign

state. Thus, while most radicals did not convert to human rights in the early 1970s, their new

attention to rights, along with alliances with rival groups such as Amnesty International, created

the political terrain that allowed a competing form of solidarity to attract new audiences. In so

doing, anti-imperialists lent legitimacy to a competing – and at the time relatively marginal – form

of internationalism that shared the progressive aspirations of anti-imperialism but rejected

nationalism in favor of human rights.

Prisoners of War

In the early stages of the war the U.S. government said very little publicly about POWs

and MIAs. Believing that drawing attention to the prisoners could hamper the government's efforts

to secure their freedom, the Johnson Administration practiced what was known as "quiet

diplomacy."[740] But dissenting voices soon emerged from within the government. As early as 1967

several proposals from the military recommended the United States mobilize the POW issue for

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[740] Vernon E. Davis, *The Long Road Home: U.S. Prisoner of War Policy and Planning in Southeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2000), 197.

"counter-propaganda."[741] The Marine Corps, for instance, argued that it was imperative to counter North Vietnam's claims to treating American POWs humanely, believing they could easily win "world public opinion" in this matter.[742] According to the Army, the United States needed "a strategy which aggressively grasps the initiative for us and keeps the other side reacting in the desired direction."[743] The Air Force went furthest, advocating the United States seize this opportunity to influence both domestic and foreign audiences by targeting major institutions, national media, social clubs, and Congress. A Working Group for the Proposed Publicity Programs Working Group, created to evaluate these proposals, concluded that the POW issue would help the United States take the offensive in its losing ideological war.

Although the Johnson Administration resisted these proposals, by 1969 the U.S. government changed direction. The incoming Nixon Administration proved far more receptive to the military's proposals. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird took a personal interest in the issue, and, encouraged by conversations with "experienced DoD officials about the pent up urge to go on the offensive," he openly advocated change of strategy.[744] In fact, within only a few months of taking office, Laird publicly raised the issue, releasing a memorandum to the press condemning the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) for denying the POWs "basic rights."

This new direction away from "quiet diplomacy" was paralleled by considerable pressure from below. POW/MIA families, tired of staying silent, turned against "quiet diplomacy." Certain the U.S. government was not doing enough for the prisoners, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia initiated a very aggressive campaign to "publicize the plight of our men," publishing stories in newspapers across the country, bombarding Richard Nixon with telegrams on his inauguration, and later appearing on television shows.[745] In 1969, the League went national, Sybil Stockdale, wife of the highest ranking naval officer imprisoned in North Vietnam, became its coordinator, and the group forged powerful ties

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[741] Ibid., 133.
[742] Ibid.
[743] Ibid.
[744] Ibid., 532.
[745] Jim and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice During the Vietnam Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 30, 296-301.

with major Republican politicians, including Defense Secretary Laird, California Governor Ronald

Reagan, Senator Bob Dole, and President Nixon himself. For their part, these politicians

recognized they could not afford to alienate the families.

Above all, the U.S. government realized it could not afford to lose the ideological war.

After Têt, morale plummeted and opposition rose. In January 1969, for example, 52% of Gallup

respondents said the war was a mistake.[746] In July, Nixon's own ratings began to decline, leading

to a "public relations crisis."[747] In October and November, he would face the first two nationwide

demonstrations against his administration. With the majority of Americans against the war, the

U.S. government, which did not intend to withdraw from Southeast Asia, needed to not only justify

its actions, but revive prowar sentiment. With pressure from the grassroots, a new strategy from

the White House, and support from within the military, the U.S. government settled on the POWs

as the perfect issue to outflank the Vietnamese on the ideological front.

To be sure, it was the Vietnamese, then the American anti-war movement, who first

politicized the POWs. North Vietnam periodically released American POWs as early as 1965 to

foster goodwill, pressure the United States to negotiate, and cast the Vietnamese as the real

humanitarians.[748] But the Nixon Administration, following suggestions from the military, gambled

that it could use the POW issue to, in the words of Laird, "marshal public opinion" against the

antiwar movement at home and the DRV abroad.[749] Thus, the Nixon Administration hoped that, if

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[746] Gallup Poll conducted January 23-28, 1969, republished in "Americans Look Back on the Vietnam War, November 17, 2000, http://www.gallup.com/poll/2299/americans-look-back-vietnam-war.aspx (accessed July 7, 2015).
[747] Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kansas: Kansas University Press, 1998), 166.
[748] Michael J. Allen, "'Help Us Tell the Truth About Vietnam,' POW/MIA Politics and the End of the American War," in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 251-76.
[749] Quoted in Steven Casey, *When Soldiers Fall: How Americans Have Confronted Combat Losses from World War 1 to Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197. For more about the strategy of using the POW issue to defuse the anti-war movement, see H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), 48-49, 74.

approached correctly, the POW issue could be used to rally prowar support, transforming the

"silent majority," as Nixon later called it, into an active coalition.[750]

Thus, on May 19, 1969, the last birthday Ho Chi Minh would live to celebrate, the U.S.

government launched the Go Public campaign. At a press conference, Secretary of Defense

Laird called for the "prompt release of all American prisoners," denounced the North Vietnamese

for their treatment of the POWs, and put forward five concrete demands.[751] Although led by the

Nixon Administration, the campaign was a coming together of relatively independent efforts

involving the military, social clubs, veterans associations, the League of Families, conservative

politicians, wealthy philanthropists, the mainstream news media, and prowar ideologues. While

they all had different immediate interests, their common goal was an American victory in Vietnam,

and they all saw the POW/MIA issue as playing a crucial role in revitalizing the pro-war

campaign.[752] In fact, through the Go Public campaign, a new right-wing coalition began to take

shape.[753]

Few could have anticipated the scope of the Go Public campaign. In late July 1969,

prowar groups printed 5,000 bumper stickers with the words, "Don't let them be forgotten: POWs,

MIAs." Within four years there would be fifty million in circulation.[754] In October, three groups of

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[750] Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 227; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 167.

[751] Davis, *The Long Road Home*, 201.

[752] Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 262-38.

[753] Significantly, most POW/MIA families initially believed that only a total victory, rather than immediate withdrawal, as the anti-war movement and North Vietnam had long argued, would free the prisoners. Some were zealously prowar. For instance, Sybil Stockdale was a right-wing fanatic who once proposed annexing Vietnam as American territory. Working closely with the military, Stockdale even took advantage of her husband's capture to communicate military information with him through coded letters. But as the war continued, the prisoners continued to suffer, and anti-war sentiment grew, some families no longer felt that American victory was the only route to freeing the prisoners, and a few, like Virginia Warner, would even charge that the U.S. government and the prowar Right took advantage of them to "drum up war sentiment." Warner resigned as head of the Michigan branch of the National League of Families. Later, an antiwar POW/MIA organization calling for immediate withdrawal even emerged during the war. For Stockdale's annexation comment, Sybil Stockdale, "Living Our Lives on Hold," *Boston Sunday Globe*, July 9, 1972; for her use of coded letters, Jim and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War*, 309; for changing attitudes; For Warner, Virginia Warner quoted in Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 61.

[754] *Final Report of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia*, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, December 13, 1976, 136.

POW/MIA families flew to Paris to accost the "enemy face-to face."[755] In November, Congress unanimously declared November 9 a National Day of Prayer for POWs in Vietnam, and the House Subcommittee on National Security Policy formally condemned North Vietnam for violating the Geneva Convention's statutes on POWs.[756] *Reader's Digest* sponsored a "write in," instructing its readers to send letters to Xuan Thuy, North Vietnam's chief negotiator in Paris.[757] That same month, billionaire Ross Perot not only paid major newspapers to run full-page advertisements about the prisoners, he purchased time on 53 stations to run a half-hour propaganda film. By the end of November 1969 Perot had spent over one million dollars.[758]

The campaign continued unabated into 1970 and 1971. On May 1, 1970 Bob Dole teamed up with the League to organize an extravaganza, meretriciously titled, "An Appeal for International Justice," in Constitution Hall that featured one thousand POW/MIA families. On May 9, 1970, at the Salute to the Armed Forces Ball, the Victory in Vietnam Association (VIVA), unveiled its fundraising campaign to sell nickel and copper bracelets engraved with the names of POWs and MIAs. By January 1973, when the Paris Peace Agreements were finally signed, four to ten million Americans wore these bracelets.[759]

The Go Public campaign signaled an entire reorientation of U.S. policy in Vietnam. In a national broadcast on October 7, 1970, President Nixon presented a new proposal to end the war, announcing that one of the highest priorities would be the immediate release of "all prisoners of war, without exception, without condition."[760] To prove his commitment to freeing the prisoners, he even ordered a daring military raid to liberate the Son Tay prison camp outside Hanoi.[761]

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[755] Stockdale, *In Love and War*, 320. For an account of the trip, see pages 318-25.
[756] Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 50.
[757] Davis, *The Long Road Home*, 217.
[758] Ibid., 222.
[759] Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 57. For a sample of the kind of POW merchandize circulated at the time, which included everything from bumper stickers to billboard posters, see Tidewater Emblems, "untitled," no date, Committee of Liaison Files Box 2 (League 1971), Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.
[760] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation About a New Initiative for Peace in Southeast Asia, October 7, 1970," Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2708.
[761] Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 237-39. Although a military failure (the prisoners had been relocated prior to the raid), the news was well received by the American public.

Through these stunts, televised speeches, and the Go Public campaign, the Nixon Administration

and its allies hoped to make the entire war about freeing the prisoners. As Reagan once put it,

"The issue of the prisoners is the single most important issue involved in this long and savage

war and we want them back *now*."[762]

Nixon went further, menacing that "as long as there are American POWs" he would have

to "maintain a residual force in South Vietnam."[763] He even implied that the United States was still

in Vietnam precisely to free the prisoners of war. Critics highlighted the absurdity of this new

position, arguing that the war itself was creating the very thing it was now allegedly being waged

to end. When they suggested that if the United States really wanted to bring the POWs home, the

military should simply withdraw, Nixon maintained that announcing withdrawal would only play

into the enemy's hands, and that "we will have given enemy commanders the exact information

they need to marshal their attacks against our remaining forces at their most vulnerable time."[764]

Nixon took every opportunity to lambaste "the enemy's callous indifference," repeatedly

suggesting that the North Vietnamese used the POWs as "hostages for political or military

purposes" or as mere "negotiating pawns" in some "barbaric" game.[765] It was a cunning move.

For at the very same time that U.S. government violated civil liberties at home, and supported a

dictatorship in South Vietnam, it arraigned the North Vietnamese for infringing "basic rights." At

the same time that the pro-war conservatives disregarded the Geneva Accords of 1954 on

Vietnamese self-determination, they fulminated against the Vietnamese for breaking the Geneva

Convention of 1929 regarding prisoners of war. And at the same time that American imperialism

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[762] Ronald Reagan quoted in Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 236.

[763] Richard Nixon, "The President's News Conference on Foreign Policy, March 4, 1971," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon*, 1971, 389.

[764] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia April 7, 1971," *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2972.

[765] Richard Nixon, "Proclamation 4038 - National Week of Concern for Americans Who Are Prisoners of War or Missing in Action, March 19, 1971," *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=107030; Richard Nixon, "Statement About a Proposal for Internment of Prisoners of War in a Neutral Country, April 14, 1971," *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2979.

murdered hundreds of thousands in Indochina, its proponents sought to divert attention to the no more than several hundred captured soldiers.

Most insidiously, however, the Nixon administration aimed to redefine the POW/MIA matter as a purely humanitarian issue, to be treated independently of not only military, but also political concerns. As early as October 1970, Nixon argued that the "release of all prisoners of war would be a simple act of humanity."[766] Not only, he explained again in March 1971, had the Vietnamese contravened the statues of the Geneva Convention, but, on a "moral plane above and apart from these formal rules, all civilized peoples are subject to the basic humanitarian standards long established in international law and custom."[767] Appealing to universal "humanitarian standards," the United States hoped, could move the question of imprisonment beyond its specific historical context, turning it into a purely ethical issue.

The United States' growing concern with the plight of the prisoners of war in Vietnam moved in the exact opposite direction as radicals' equally new concern with the status of political prisoners in North America and Western Europe. For while radicals tried to repoliticize seemingly nonpolitical experiences, such as "common law" imprisonment, the United States tried to depoliticize the emphatically political experiences of the POWs. While radicals aimed to reactivate a language of rights in the service of global revolutionary transformation, the U.S. government aimed to confine all rights discourse to a notion of intrinsic humanitarian ethics that could ultimately preserve the status quo. Thus, the United States implicitly tried to outflank radicals on both the issue of the war and that of imprisonment by shifting the discussion to a different terrain, focusing on morality instead of politics, universal standards instead of historical contingency, and individual rights instead of the collective right to self-determination.

What About the Other POWs?

In 1969, the Black Panther Party disclosed that North Vietnam would release captured American POWs in exchange for the freedom of Chairman Bobby Seale and Minister of Defense

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[766] Nixon, "Address to the Nation, October 7, 1970."
[767] Nixon, "Proclamation 4038, March 19, 1971."

Huey P. Newton, then incarcerated as "political prisoners here in fascist Babylon." "If you have sons, husbands or friends who are prisoners of war in Vietnam," their paper enjoined, "send us their name, rank, and serial numbers."[768] The U.S. government declined the offer, but the Party persisted. "This proposed freedom of Political Prisoners in exchange for Prisoners of War," the Panthers continued, "could only be ignored by a government that has no concern for its poor, its peace-loving, its non-White, and its soldiers, and even less concern for PEACE."[769]

The Panther's call for a prisoner exchange was just one of many swift responses to the U.S. government's POW strategy. Some radicals exposed the POW campaign as a U.S. plot to, in the words of DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, "cover up its odious crimes against the Vietnamese people, its war acts against the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, and its schemes to prolong and extend the war of aggression."[770] Others, such as the Panthers, pointed to the thousands of political prisoners languishing in penitentiaries at home. Still others tried to outmaneuver the Nixon Administration by convincing the public that antiwar radicals and the Vietnamese were not only concerned about the POWs, but could allay their plight more effectively than the U.S. government. This was precisely why in August 1969, just months after the United States fired the opening salvos of the Go Public campaign, the DRV released three POWs directly to a representative of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, rather than government officials. Hoping to transform this gesture of goodwill into an ongoing campaign to meet Nixon's challenge, in January 1970, representatives from the DRV and a contingent of anti-war activists led by Cora Weiss and David Dellinger formed the Committee of Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam (COLIAFAM).

COLIAFAM tackled the POW issue from a resolutely anti-war perspective, arguing in its very first press release that the "safe return of American pilots held in North Vietnam can only

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[768] *The Black Panther News Service*, January 3, 1970 [November 1, 1969], 9.
[769] Ibid.
[770] Quoted in Allen, "'Help Us Tell the Truth About Vietnam,'" 265.

come with a decision on the part of the U.S. government to withdraw from Vietnam."[771] Until then,

COLIAFAM would cooperate with the North Vietnam to improve the situation as best as possible.

The committee produced a complete list of American POWs, convinced the DRV to allow POWs

to receive heavier packages, and provided the only functional channel for relaying mail to the

prisoners. COLIFAM was so successful that even Nixon's ally, the prowar League of Families,

ultimately voted down a proposal to boycott the Committee.[772] This did not stop the government,

however, which felt sufficiently threatened that it strove to smear and harass the Committee,

going so far as to seize 379 letters from POWs sent to COLIAFAM in September 1970.[773]

While pursuing all these other paths, radicals, beginning with American antiwar activists,

ultimately focused on one strategy to expose the hypocrisy of the U.S. government's concern with

POWs: drawing attention to the political prisoners rotting in South Vietnamese jails.[774] By the late

1960s, South Vietnam was rapidly becoming an authoritarian state under the firm control of

President Nguyen Van Thieu. In the August 1971 presidential election, he ran unopposed,

winning 94 percent of the vote in what many considered a rigged contest. Although already

repressive, his regime took a sharper autocratic turn in response to the DRV's 1972 spring

offensive. Thieu imposed martial law, ruling by decree, limited the rights of political parties, and

strangled basic democratic rights throughout the country, especially the freedom of speech.[775]

This destroyed what little popularity Thieu's dictatorial government could count on, leading him to

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[771] Committee of With Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam, Press Release, January 15, 1970, 1 in Committee of With Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam Records, 1969-1973 (DG 227), Box 5, Peace Collection.

[772] "POW group won't boycott Cora Weiss," Associated Press, October 18, 1972 in Committee of With Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam Records, 1969-1973 (DG 227), Box 3, Peace Collection.

[773] "Press Release Issued Thursday, Sept. 17 After 379 letters from POW's were seized night before from Robert Scheer at Kennedy," September 17, 1970, 1 in Committee of With Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam Records, 1969-1973 (DG 227), Box 5, Peace Collection.

[774] Most radicals, in fact, adopted many strategies at once. For example, in the very press release announcing COLIAFAM's formation, David Dellinger countered the new obsession with the POWs by denouncing the U.S. government for "ignoring the fate of thousands of prisoners in jails in South Vietnam who, with full knowledge and assistance of American personnel, are subjected to grotesque tortures …"' Press Release, January 15, 1970, 1 in Committee of With Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam Records, 1969-1973 (DG 227), Box 5, Peace Collection.

[775] Turley, *The Second Indochina War*, 214-15; George Veith, *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-1975* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), 27.

turn to violent repression to maintain order. Until the end of the war in April 1975, he would imprison hundreds of thousands of suspected dissenters – communists and anti-communists, Buddhists and Christians, poor farmers and outspoken intellectuals – without trial. In many cases, the guards tortured the prisoners, keeping them awake for weeks on end, mutilating their bodies, feeding them only grass to eat, or in some cases even blinding dissidents with caustic lime.[776] Gaolers locked thousands of prisoners in dreaded "tiger cages" no more than five or six feet long and four feet high. In the face of such repression a coalition of progressive South Vietnamese organizations, including the Union of Women, the Mouvement des Catholiques pour la paix, and the National Liberation Front, as well as the government of North Vietnam quickly organized on behalf of the prisoners.[777] In Saigon, Vietnamese activists even braved further reprisals to found a specific solidarity group, the Comité pour la réforme du régime de détention au Sud Vietnam.

A central component of this coalition's strategy was to publicize the issue internationally. For example, in 1970, the South Vietnamese Committee of Women's Action for the Right to Live, which unsuccessfully tried to meet with Vice President Spiro Agnew during his visit to the Republic of Vietnam, circulated an open letter to the Nixon Administration about the suffering of the political prisoners in the South, which the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom later distributed internationally.[778] "We are the mothers of the political prisoners detained in the various prisons of South Vietnam," they announced. "None of our children is convicted of a crime," the women continued, but all of "them are being imprisoned because they have dared spoken of Peace and Independence, a most profound desire of all the Vietnamese People after years and years of war."[779] The women concluded their open letter by demanding the liberation of their children from the "present inhuman system of imprisonment in South

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[776] Andre Menras and Jean-Pierre Debris, "Terror in Thieu's Prisons," 1973 in Committee of Liaison Files Box 2 (south vietnam prisoners) Part 9, Peace Collection.

[777] By 1973, the coalition had grown to over 30 political movements in South Vietnam, see their pamphlet "Prisonnier Politiques au Sud Vietnam: Listes de prisonniers, Appel des 30 mouvements," Saigon, 1973 in Committee of Liaison Files Box 2 (south vietnam prisoners), Peace Collection.

[778] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013), 248.

[779] Ngo Ba Thanh, Open Letter to Spiro Agnew, August 1970, 1, Women Strike for Peace Records (DG 115), Series C2, Box 2, Peace Collection.

Vietnam."[780] More damning, however, the Committee directly implicated the United States in these crimes. "Our children witness the presence of American Advisors at the prisons," they warned.[781] The United Sates, the Committee accused, not only funds, equips, and trains Thieu's police force, but the American military carries out its own arrests, sometimes handing over suspects to the South Vietnamese government without trial.

Although Thieu denied these accusations, irrefutable evidence appeared in the summer of 1970. Congressional aid Tom Harkin, accompanying a group of House representatives to Vietnam, visited antiwar journalist Don Luce in Saigon, where he happened to meet a group of former political prisoners claiming Thieu had locked them in hidden tiger cages on the island of Con Son.[782] One of them, Cao Nguyen Loi, drew Harkin a map, and Harkin convinced two representatives to investigate the Con Son penitentiary.[783] Once there, the delegation broke from the official tour, following their map to a secret entrance leading to tortured political prisoners. Luce, who served as translator, recalls how the "faces of the prisoners in the cages below are still etched indelibly in my mind: the man with three fingers cut off; the man (soon to die) from Quang Tri province whose skull was split open; and the Buddhist monk from Hue who spoke intensely about the repression of the Buddhists. I remember clearly the terrible stench from diarrhea and the open sores where shackles cut into the prisoners' ankles."[784]

From that point on, the suffering of the political prisoners became a recognizable issue. Harkin published his photographs in a July 1970 edition of *Life Magazine* and penned a lengthy story about the political prisoners in an issue of *The Progressive*. Don Luce provided further revelations about the violations of basic civil liberties in South Vietnam, the suffering of the political prisoners, and the dreaded tiger cages. The stories soon reached an international audience. The Front Solidarité Indochine (FSI), the successor to the Comité Vietnam National,

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[780] Ibid., 3.

[781] Ibid., 2.

[782] Humberto Sanchez, "Tom Harkin — From Tiger Cages to Pinochet," Roll Call, December 1, 2014, http://blogs.rollcall.com/wgdb/tom-harkin-human-rights-legacy-began-in-a-tiger-cage/?dcz (accessed June 22, 2015).

[783] Quoted in Don Luce, "We've Been Here Before: The Tiger Cages of Vietnam," April 5, 2005, *History News Network*, http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/11001 (accessed June 22, 2015).

[784] Luce, "We've Been Here Before."

led by the indefatigable Laurent Schwartz, helped publicize the issue in France. Drawing directly on Luce's research, as well as statements from Vietnam, the FSI published an article in 1971 on Thieu's regime, calling French radicals to "help the 200,000 political prisoners in South Vietnam."[785]

The struggle to free the political prisoners gained further momentum in 1972. Don Luce's Indochina Mobile Education Project and Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden's newly formed Indochina Peace Campaign (IPC) led the way in the United States.[786] They were joined by dozens of other newly formed antiwar organizations specifically devoted to the issue. These groups, such as the Bay Area Committee of Inquiry into Political Prisoners in South Vietnam and American Responsibility, circulated detailed pamphlets that often presented, among other things, statistics, letters from prisoners, or revelations about U.S. aid to Thieu's regime.[787] Some of these groups, such as the International Committee to Free South Vietnamese Political Prisoners from Detention, Torture, and Death drew on their strong international connections to coordinate efforts. These varied initiatives proved so successful that by the end of 1972 even most mainstream American newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, felt obliged to run lengthy stories on the issue.[788]

In January 1973 the campaign crossed a threshold when two Frenchmen formerly detained in South Vietnam published an eyewitness account of the brutality in the prisons. In 1968 André Menras and Jean-Pierre Debris traveled to Vietnam as teachers on a governmental exchange program. Although "nonpolitical" when they first arrived in Saigon, by the summer of 1970, they found Thieu's regime so oppressive that they staged a risky protest – they scaled the monument adjacent to the National Assembly, unfurling an NLF flag, and scattering leaflets

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[785] "Les Prisons de Thieu," *Solidarité Indochine* 2, 1973, 3.
[786] See, for example, *Indochina Report* 1, 1972.
[787] Bay Area Committee of Inquiry into Political Prisoners in South Vietnam and American Responsibility, "200,000 People Face Death in Thieu's Jails?," December 1972, Bay Area Committee of Inquiry, Peace Collection.
[788] "Widespread Torture in South Vietnam's Jails Reported," *New York Times*, August 13, 1972, 1.

demanding peace.[789] The government had them arrested immediately and thrown into Chi Hao

prison, where they remained until December 29, 1972. Upon returning to France, they furnished

the most authentic non-Vietnamese statements about the treatment of political prisoners in South

Vietnam. Their testimonies were immediately translated into many languages, and the two men

embarked on an international speaking tour to publicize the political repression in the South.

Menras and Debris worked especially closely with American activist groups, above all

Tom Hayden's IPC.[790] In March 1973, Studs Terkel interviewed the pair on the radio, where the

two described, in heavily accented English, the oppressiveness of Thieu's regime and the

gruesome tortures in the prisons.[791] Their accounts, along with the careful research of Don Luce,

who had just published a book called *Hostages of War: Saigon's Political Prisoners*, formed the

factual basis of much of the antiwar literature on the issue in the United States and elsewhere.[792]

After these revelations, practically every American antiwar organization made the political

prisoners a central feature of their activity. By 1973, even rival revolutionary organizations, such

as the Socialist Workers Party and the Revolutionary Union, joined the same cause.[793]

The campaign to liberate the political prisoners gave radicals the perfect response to the

Nixon Administration. How could the U.S. government, antiwar radicals asked, criticize the DRV

for its treatment of a few hundred POWs when it supported a brutal dictatorship that tortured

literally hundreds of thousands of prisoners in the South? Many American radicals explicitly

counterposed their political prisoner campaign to Nixon's Go Public campaign. "For years

Americans have worn name bracelets symbolizing their deep concern for the release of American

POWs," one group argued, but "a tragedy of a far larger scale continues for 200,000 Vietnamese.

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[789] Jean-Pierre Debris and Andres Menras, interview with Studs Terkel, March 9, 1973, 5:30-7:00, 12:00-18:00,
https://archive.org/details/popuparchive-1938547.
[790] Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 572.
[791] Debris and Menras, interview, 5:30-7:00, 12:00-18:00.
[792] Don Luce and Holmes Brown, *Hostages of War: Saigon's Political Prisoners* (Indochina Mobile Education Project, 1973).
[793] For the SWP, see above all "Accounts of Torture in Saigon jails," *The Militant* 31, no. 10, March 16, 1973, 11.

These are the **civilian** POWs in the prisons of South Vietnam."[794] Moreover, since the political

prisoners would remain imprisoned even after the United States agreed to withdraw in January

1973, the radicals held a lasting campaign in their hands. Thus, when Nixon triumphantly

welcomed the POWs home in early 1973, hoping to definitely close the issue, antiwar activists

pointed to the political dissidents still imprisoned in South Vietnam, chanting, "not all the prisoners

are home."[795] As the Black Panther Party's *Intercommunal News*, drawing on Menras and Debris'

testimony, put it "What about the Other POWs?"[796]

     Antiwar activists had effectively routed the U.S. government on the issue of the prisoners

by channeling the widespread concern over American POWs into one for Vietnamese political

prisoners.[797] In the process, they hoped to reorient the discussion about prisoners in Vietnam to

its proper political context, rather than the nonpolitical moralism the United States championed.

But in their struggle to outmaneuver the Go Public campaign, some antiwar activists came

dangerously close to simply mimicking the strategies, tactics, and arguments of their rivals.

     In a bizarre mirroring of the earlier prowar POW campaign, the new antiwar political

prisoner campaign sold bumper stickers, buttons, and even plastic bracelets with the names of

specific Vietnamese prisoners.[798] Where some prowar activists, including Joe McCain, captured

Navy pilot John McCain's brother, once sat in bamboo cages eating "POW food" to dramatize the

plight of the Prisoners of War, antiwar activists now circulated instructions for creating their own

model tiger cages to use in demonstrations.[799] And in place of the POW days of prayer, activists

organized the "International Days of Concern with Saigon's Political Prisoners" in September

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[794] Emergency Project for Saigon Political Prisoners, "Their Lives are in Our Hands," 1973, 2 in Committee of Liaison Files Box 2 (south vietnam prisoners), Peace Collection.
[795] "Not All the Prisoners are Home: Free the Prisoners, Stop Aid to Thieu, poster, 1973 in Committee of Liaison Files Box 2 (south vietnam prisoners) Part 8, Peace Collection.
[796] "What About the Other POWs?," *Intercommunal News Service*, March 24, 1973, 9, 11.
[797] On how Nixon's campaign also backfired as a negotiating strategy, Kimball *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 167.
[798] Indochina Peace Campaign, *And Still No Peace: An Indochina Peace Campaign Report*, 1973, 4; Political Education Project, *Our Taxes for Torture?: A Political Education Project Report*, no. 4 , 1973, 2.
[799] For McCain's protest, see Lyle W. Price, "Pig Fat and Pumpkin Mash: Thanksgiving a la PWs "Enjoyed" by Relatives," *The Independent*, November 27, 1970, 4.

1973.[800] In some cases, for example, activists appealed to moral conscience, spoke about

humanitarian standards, or circulated lachrymose tales and grotesque images of the broken

Vietnamese prisoners, which stood in stark contrast to the earlier days when radicals generally

represented the Vietnamese as heroic guerillas, not miserable victims whose "lives are in our

hands."[801] Thus, in their campaign to win broad public support and beat the U.S. government at

its own game, activists sometimes ran the risk of copying the kind of moralism deployed by their

enemies, thereby muddling the specificity of their political message.

Reorienting the Antiwar Movement

By the end of 1972 it seemed increasingly that the United States, the Democratic

Republic of Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government

(PRG), the successor to the NLF in the South, were approaching an agreement. But instead of

welcoming the coming negotiations as an opportunity to finally demobilize, antiwar activists in

North America and Western Europe redoubled their efforts to ensure that the United States would

sign the Peace Accords. On Nixon's second inauguration on January 20, 1973, just one week

before the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, antiwar radicals coordinated international

demonstrations across the globe. In Washington, D.C., 80,000 Americans held a "counter-

inauguration," involving a number of radical groups, such as the Vietnam Veterans Against the

War and the Attica Brigade, the youth affiliate of the Maoist Revolutionary Union.[802]

The following day approximately 15,000 activists, organized by the Comitato Italia

Vietnam demonstrated in Turin, Italy.[803] In France, an incredibly broad coalition of otherwise rival

groups – including the ex-GP, Ligue Communiste, the PSU, Ligne Rouge, Revolution!, as well as

Christian groups such as the Fraternité chrétienne avec le Vietnam – gathered in Paris, led in

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[800] Wells, *The War Within*, 572 and 575.
[801] Emergency Project for Saigon Political Prisoners, "Their Lives are in Our Hands," 1 in
Committee of Liaison Files Box 2 (south vietnam prisoners), Peace Collection.
[802] Wells, *The War Within*, 558 and 561-62
[803] "Torino: 15.000 compagni alla manifestazione per il Vietnam," *Lotta Continua*, January 23,
1973, 3.

large part by the new Front Solidarité Indochine (FSI).[804] They even drafted a collective statement, ominously warning demonstrators that every time an American President made some promise to end the war the "anti-war movement believed" him, and "demobilized itself."[805] The movement, they promised together, would not fall for that trap again. As another FSI pamphlet phrased it, "nothing is decided; nothing is finished."[806]

For the Americans, the Inauguration Day Protest would be the last major antiwar demonstration of the Vietnam War. Wracked by internal tensions, and faced with a public that simply wanted to put the war behind it, the movement as a whole declined significantly compared to the late 1960s. But even if the movement declined as an organized presence, it should be remembered that tens of thousands of radicals – through specifically antiwar groups such as the Indochina Peace Campaign, through revolutionary groups like Socialist Workers Party, or simply through local initiatives – continued to protest the war.[807] In surprising contrast, however, while the formal American movement had been steadily weakening since 1972, the organized movements in European, and above all in France, witnessed a remarkable resurgence. Indeed, the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, far from spelling the end of the movement, turned the war into an even more important issue for French radicals.

The Peace Accords represented a major turning point in the war. They signaled the departure of the United States from Vietnam, which, for the Nixon Administration, meant the end of the war, and hopefully the complete demobilization of the radical movements at home and abroad. On May 25, 1973, just a few months after the signing of the Accords, President Richard Nixon boasted of his victories to an auditorium filled with returned American prisoners of war.

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[804] For the FSI, see Laurent Jalabert, "Un mouvement contre la guerre du Vietnam: le Front Solidarité Indochine, 1971-1973," in *Vietnam, 1968-1975: La sortie de guerre*, eds. Pierre Journoud and Cécile Menétrey-Monchau (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011), 221-38; Bethany Keenan, "'Vietnam is Fighting for Us:' French Identities in the U.S.–Vietnam War, 1965-1973," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2009), 296-303.
[805] Front Soldiarité Indochine et al. "Contre les manoeuvres de Nixon Mobilization!," 1973, F Delta 0236: Vietnam. Guerre du Vietnam, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France.
[806] Front Solidarité Indochine, "Vietnam 1973," 1973, F Delta 0236: Vietnam. Guerre du Vietnam, BDIC.
[807] For a survey of the American antiwar movement after the signing of the Accords, see Wells, *The War Within*, 564-69, 571-78.

January 1973, he remarked, "saw the return of all Americans from Vietnam, all of our combat forces, the return of all of our prisoners of war, the end of the American involvement in Vietnam, a peace agreement which, if adhered to, will mean peace for Vietnam and Southeast Asia."[808] With the war over, Nixon argued, it was time to put the past to rest.

Of course, the war was not over.[809] The United States continued to bomb Cambodia, dropping over 250,000 tons of ordinances in 1973 alone, far more than the tonnage dropped on Japan during the entirety of the Second World War. Laos, which had been bombed since 1964, suffered even worse, becoming the most heavily bombed country per capita in history.[810] As for Vietnam, the country remained divided, with the United States continuing to support the extraordinarily unpopular, authoritarian regime it had spawned in the South. While the Peace Accords brought the North much needed respite, the threat of war still loomed large. In June 1973, for example, US Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger even threatened to resume bombing of North Vietnam if the Democratic Republic of Vietnam launched another offensive.

In retrospect, it may seem that with the United States formally out of the fighting, a North Vietnamese and PRG victory was a foregone conclusion. Nothing could be further from the truth. The North was devastated, Thieu's regime hardened into a police state, and American aid continued to bolster South Vietnam's military. At the start of 1975, for instance, South Vietnam had nearly three times the artillery, twice the number of armored vehicles, and double the combat

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[808] Richard Nixon, "Remarks at a Reception for Returned Prisoners of War," May 24, 1973, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3856.

[809] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 281-99.

[810] Matteo Fagotto, "Laos: Thousands suffering from the deadly aftermath of US bomb campaign," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/31/laos-deadly-aftermath-us-bomb-campaign-vietnam-air-attacks; Brett S. Morris, "Why is the United States Still Terrorizing Loas," *Counterpunch*, July 9, 2015, http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/07/09/why-is-the-united-states-still-terrorizing-laos; Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 1996); Joshua Kurlantzick, *A Great Place to Have a War: American in Laos and the Birth of a Military CIA* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2014). Since nearly one third of the bombs dropped did not explode, the United States has continued to claim Laotian victims well into the present. See Karen Coates and Jerry Redfern, *Eternal Harvest: The Legacy of American Bombs in Laos* (San Francisco, CA: ThingsAsianPress, 2013).

troops as the North.[811] While North Vietnam and the PRG no doubt scored a tremendous victory in January 1973, the struggle for a unified, independent, socialist Vietnam was far from over.

For the renascent antiwar movement in Europe, following the lead of Vietnamese revolutionaries, it was clear that the struggle had to continue. "Total support until the final victory," French radicals chanted after the signing of the Accords.[812] But while it was clear to radicals that, contrary to the United States' assertions, the Paris Peace Accords had not ended the war, the Accords nevertheless posed an enormous strategic dilemma. For now that the United States had formally withdrawn from the war, with the last combat troops set to leave the battlefield in March 1973, the international antiwar movements were deprived of their primary target. For years antiwar radicals had mobilized against the United States as the personification of imperialist aggression in Vietnam. Of course, everyone argued that, through the puppet regime in South Vietnam, the United States was still involved, but its role had changed. How could they continue to support the Vietnamese revolutionaries now that the U.S. military no longer bombed the North or terrorized the PRG in the South? Who was the new target?

For Vietnamese revolutionaries, who counted on the continued support of antiwar movements abroad, the answer was clear: radicals should call for the institution of full democratic freedoms in South Vietnam, criticizing in particular Thieu's treatment of political dissenters. In fact, as early as October 1972, Madame Zung, representative of the PRG in Paris, explained to French radicals that while the upcoming Accords would be a tremendous victory, there was still much to be done about Thieu's regime in the South. Indeed, at this point it had become clear not only that the United States would not replace Thieu's authoritarian rule in the South with a democratic governing coalition as part of the Accords, but that because of American withdrawal from the war, which left the South vulnerable, Thieu would escalate repression in the South. Vietnamese activists genuinely feared "imminent, generalized massacres in the prisons in the

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[811] Gabriel Kolko, "The End of the Vietnam War, Thirty Years Ago," Counterpunch, May 1, 2005, http://www.counterpunch.org/2005/05/01/the-end-of-the-vietnam-war-30-years-ago/. For more on the military balance, see William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 209-11.
[812] See also the Ligue Communiste's resolution on Vietnam solidarity, which took the slogan as its title, reprinted as "Soutien total jusqu'à la victoire finale!," *Rouge* 190, February 3, 1973, 16-17.

South," Madame Zung confided to Madeleine Rébérioux of the Front Solidartié Indochine on October 24, 1972.[813] Thieu's regime, she continued, was becoming ever more repressive in the hopes of finally "decapitating" the resistance, depriving the movement of its most "experienced cadres." Thus, with South Vietnamese radicals in significant danger, North Vietnam unable to liberate them through quick military victory, and the war likely lasting much longer than expected, the struggle now had to reorient itself towards the goal of "obtaining and respecting democratic freedoms."[814] Focusing the campaign on basic democratic rights could save the lives of the prisoners, protect the rights of dissidents, and isolate Thieu internationally.

The FSI, the premier radical antiwar organization in France, led the way. The immediate task, they wrote in the February 1973 issue of their paper, was to save "the some 300,000 political prisoners crammed in Thieu's prisons, these indomitable men and women who must be the cadres of the free Vietnam of tomorrow."[815] "Nothing is more important right now," the editorial continued, "than demanding their freedom. The Vietnamese revolution needs them. It's up to us to make sure that they are returned to the revolution." Although continuing to champion other demands – such as cutting U.S. aid to Thieu, withdrawing the remaining American military advisors from the South, or ending the bombardment of Cambodia – the FSI went on to make the campaign to liberate the political prisoners in South Vietnam the dominant form of Vietnam solidarity work for French radicals. The group wrote about the prisoners in its journal, circulated a comprehensive brochure across all the radical milieus, and organized numerous meetings throughout the country, often in close collaboration with Vietnamese radicals living in France.[816] At one of these meetings on February 5, 1973, in a message of gratitude, the PRG delegation in France formally thanked the FSI for focusing on the struggle to realize "democratic freedoms in the liberated zones" and win the "liberation of all the patriots by the Saigon regime."[817]

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[813] Bureau national, "Circulaire hebdomadaire," October 27, 1972, 1, F Delta 0292: Front solidarité Indochine: Circulaires du Bureau national, BDIC.
[814] Bureau national, "Circulaire hebdomadaire," October 27, 1972, 1, F Delta 0292: Front solidarité Indochine: Circulaires du Bureau national, BDIC.
[815] M.R. "Une Victoire historique," Solidarité Indochine 9, February 1973, 1.
[816] Saïgon: les prisonniers (Paris: Maspero, February 1973), O col 2213/6, BDIC.
[817] "Message du GRP au FSI," reprinted in *Rouge* 192, February 17, 1973, 16-17.

Remarkably, despite their disagreements, other antiwar radicals followed suit, focusing their efforts on the same issue. The Trotskyist Ligue Communiste, FSI's ally from the very beginning, collaborated most closely on the campaign. On February 26, 1973, for example, the FSI and the Ligue Communiste organized a day of solidarity with the prisoners in South Vietnam.[818] The Ligue, much larger than the FSI, went even further, sharing resources, publishing FSI articles in its newspaper, and even printing the FSI journal on its own presses.[819] Yet rival formations also made the plight of the prisoners the primary axis of their solidarity with Vietnam. Some ex-GP radicals not only demonstrated with the FSI, but also penned collective statements on occasion. Even those groups ferociously opposed to the FSI – such as the Maoist Prolétaire ligne rouge, which sponsored its own anti-imperialist formation known as the Mouvement national de soutien aux peuples d'Indochine (MNSPI), and the official, hardline pro-Chinese Party in France, the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France, through its competing anti-imperialist front group, the Centre d'information sur les luttes anti-impérialistes (CILA) – shared this concern over the liberation of the prisoners. Although at odds with each other, the MNSPI and CILA put aside their differences to collaborate on the campaign, producing, among other things, a coauthored booklet on the prisoners. The "problem of the political prisoners," they explained, "poses the question of the democratic freedoms trampled every day by the Saigon administration …" Radicals everywhere had to develop "concrete forms of support" for the prisoners and the struggles for democratic rights in South Vietnam.[820]

In the same way that after 1967 many radicals in France united around the belief that solidarity with Vietnam meant bringing the war home, in the changed conjuncture of 1973 they rallied around the idea that the best form of solidarity with Vietnam would be to struggle for the restoration of democratic rights in South Vietnam. As with the turn to revolution in 1968, the

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[818] "Lundi 26 Février: journée de solidarité avec les prisonniers au Sud-Vietnam," *Rouge* 193, February 24, 1973, 17.

[819] The main leader of the Ligue Communiste, Alain Krivine, co-signed the original call founding the FSI, Appel, no date, F Delta Res 761/12/4. For an example of their assistance in contacting other groups, Letter from Alain Krivine to PSU et al., March 4, 1971, F Delta Res 761/12/4, BDIC. For an example of the Ligue sharing its resources, Indochine, 1970-1092; Circulaire du Bureau National FSI, January 26, 1972, 1, F Delta Res 761/12/4: Indochine, 1970-1092, BDIC.

[820] CLIA and MNSPI, "Les Prisonniers politique au Sud Vietnam," November 1973, 3.

leadership of Vietnamese revolutionaries proved decisive. Through their heroic example, most powerfully demonstrated in the Tet offensive of 1968, Vietnamese revolutionaries convinced radicals everywhere of the possibility of revolution in the imperialist centers; and through their advocacy of democratic struggle in the South as the best way to destroy Thieu's regime from within, they guided radicals into making the rights of political dissidents their primary concern in 1973. Given the new balance of forces in Vietnam, with the United States certainly out of the war, but Thieu escalating repression and the DRV in no position to win a quick victory, it was likely the war would last much longer than they had expected. It made perfect sense to struggle to reorient their anti-imperialist solidarity.

Of course, while Vietnam always played a special role in the imagination of French radicals, it never exhausted radical internationalism. Therefore, just as the turn to revolution was inspired not simply by Vietnam, but also by events unfolding around the entire globe, so too did other international developments inspire the new turn to democratic struggles. In fact, many antiwar radicals in France – but also across North America and Western Europe – had already gained significant experience advocating for prisoner rights in other countries. For example, in 1969, many radicals drew international attention to the Burgos Trial in Spain where sixteen Basque radicals faced the death penalty for killing superintendent Melitón Manzanas. Groups like the French Secours Rouge, supported by figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, demonstrated in defense of their comrades, denouncing Francisco Franco's authoritarian regime.[821] And when the French Right, led by Georges Pompidou, tried to deflate the international movement, arguing that "France was not Spain," the SR pointed to France's own violations of democratic liberties, chanting "the cops are the same in Paris and Madrid."[822] The massive international pressure not only forced Franco to commute the death penalties, but further mobilized the domestic movement against repression. The struggle to defend prisoners abroad could work back on the movements at home.

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[821] For Sartre's reflections on the trial, see Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Burgos Trial," in *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 136-61.
[822] Rapport du comité d'initiative, September 1971, 6, F Delta Res 576/5/8: Gauche prolétarienne: Secours Rouge, BDIC.

The most prominent international campaigns, however, defended the rights of political dissidents in South and Central America, and especially Argentina during its military dictatorship. In the early 1970s, French radicals – including figures such as Marguerite Duras, Jean Paul Sartre, André Gorz, Régis Debray, Laurent Schwartz of the Front de Solidarité Indochine, and Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Krivine of the Ligue Communiste – founded the Comité de Défense des Prisonniers Politiques Argentins to secure the liberation of the prisoners, denounce torture, win international legal assistance, and offer "material and moral support to the prisoners and their families."[823] The committee, although initiated by the French, had strong international connections. Beyond a notable Italian contingent that included Pier Paolo Passolini and Rossana Rossanda, the committee also reached British radicals by way of its ties to the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, and even had links to American radicals through the U.S. Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners, which was then in the midst of a major campaign to defend the prisoners in Argentina.[824]

Indeed, many antiwar radicals in the early 1970s, such as FSI founder Laurent Schwartz, were deeply involved in solidarity campaigns to restore democratic liberties in both Latin America and Vietnam. As with the turn to revolution in the late 1960s, developments in Latin America and Vietnam frequently intersected with each other, with radicals often transferring the languages, strategies, and concerns from one context to the other. In fact, although international solidarity work with Vietnam temporarily overshadowed other campaigns in 1973, especially in France, many radicals later transferred their experiences from the campaign to liberate the political prisoners back to the other international campaigns, particularly those focused on Latin America. For example, when the FSI declined in late 1973, many of its personnel, led by Laurent Schwartz, redirected its organizational apparatus to defending the political dissidents in Chile after the coup.

But the reason why radicals, despite their many differences, came to focus their antiwar international solidarity on the struggle of the South Vietnamese prisoners had just as much to do

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[823] Comité de Défense des Prisonniers Politiques Argentins, "Argentine 72: Oppression, répression, tortures," 1972, 4, F Delta Res 2089: Comités Viêtnam de base, BDIC.
[824] Ibid., 47.

with developments at home. The "democratic turn," just as the earlier turn to revolution, emerged

from the encounter of events abroad with those at home in Western Europe and North America.

By 1967, important political shifts in the imperialist centers made it possible for the Vietnamese

example to resonate in the first place, enabling radicals to successfully translate the struggle into

their own contexts. In the same way, their transnational experiences struggling against

repression, fighting for popular justice, experimenting with united fronts, organizing with prisoners,

and rethinking the political importance of democratic rights allowed radicals to easily shift the

focus of their international solidarity to demanding the immediate liberation of the prisoners.

Given these previous experiences, radicals in North America and Western Europe could lucidly

connect the struggles of prisoners at home to the struggles of prisoners in Vietnam.

In fact, radicals not only grafted their concern with democratic rights directly onto the anti-

Vietnam war movement in 1973, they brought with them the insights gleaned from prison

organizing. For instance, at a press conference on the South Vietnamese prisoners in March

1973, Madeleine Rébérioux of the FSI argued that antiwar activists had to demand "the liberation

of all those incarcerated and not only the 'political' prisoners" since "the label 'common law' is

stuck to all those who oppose the regime, whoever they may be."[825] In this, Rébérioux drew

directly on the lessons GIP organizers and other radicals learned about how the law itself creates

divisions within those it oppresses, deciding what counts as political and what does not. Since

these discoveries were made through transnational circuits, radicals in other countries made the

same arguments about the common fate of the so-called "common law" and "political" prisoners.

As the Italian Comitato Vietnam dramatically put it, "'political' prisoners and 'common law'

prisoners: for Thieu as for Hitler, a single 'final solution.'"[826]

From Berlin 68 to Milan 73

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[825] "Conference de presse: pour la liberation de tous les détenus au Sud," *Rouge* 194, March 2, 1973, 18.

[826] "Le Gabbie di tigre non bastano più," *Lunga Marcia* 3-4, May-August 1973, 11.

In November 1971, several hundred radical students organized a contingent for a large antiwar demonstration in New York City called the "Attica Brigade." Later, when asked to explain their name, they wrote, "the struggles at the Attica Prison and in Vietnam are part of the same fight …"[827] This belief that the struggles of prisoners in the imperialist centers were linked to events in Vietnam was shared by radicals throughout North America and Western Europe. Since radicals everywhere had faced repression, which led them to reconsider the struggle for democratic rights and the plight of political prisoners, the call to organize around the liberation of the political prisoners in South Vietnam carried a deep resonance. And the transnational convergence on this issue even served as the basis for a brief revival of internationalism around the Vietnam War in 1973

The FSI, perhaps the most dynamic anti-Vietnam war group in Western Europe, took the lead in transforming these common concerns into an organized international movement. On March 3 and 4, 1973, the FSI brought together the Italian Comitato Vietnam, the English ISC, Swiss SKI, the Belgian FUNI, two German antiwar organizations, and a Danish group to discuss the possibilities for a coordinated antiwar campaign in Europe.[828] Emboldened by this initial interest in international unity, the FSI organized an even larger gathering of a dozen European antiwar organizations in Paris, including their rivals, the MSNPI. On March 24, 1973, the start of an entire week of organizing for the "liberation of all the prisoners in Saigon," and "the immediate implementation of democratic freedoms in South Vietnam," delegates met to revive the international antiwar movement.[829]

Emulating previous meetings, the delegates drafted a collective statement. They denounced the United States' continued "neo-colonial presence" in Southeast Asia and called for the combined victory of the three peoples of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. As for Vietnam specifically, they argued that Thieu's regime continued to violate articles 8 and 11 of the Paris

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[827] "Revolutionary Student Brigade," [no date, likely 1974-1975], 1 in Revolutionary Student Brigade, David Sullivan U.S. Maoism Collection TAM 527, Box 9, Folder 13, Tamiment.
[828] "Une réunion européenne des mouvements de solidarité," *Rouge* 195, March 9, 1973, 17.
[829] Front Solidarité Indochine, "Conférence de Press du F.S.I.," no date, F Delta Res 761/12/4: Indochine, 1970-1092, BDIC.

Peace Accords, which guaranteed the release of the prisoners and the restoration of democratic liberties, respectively. Months after the Accords, Saigon continued to violate the freedom of information, seize newspapers critical of Thieu, and quash progressive groups.[830] Indeed, while North Vietnam had already freed the American POWs, Thieu imprisoned even more political dissidents. In this context, the statement declared, Vietnamese revolutionaries still had a long struggle ahead, and it was up to Europeans to maintain their "militant international solidarity" by organizing "a vigorous mobilization to win democratic freedoms and the liberation of the prisoners as stipulated by the Accords."[831] Needing to coordinate their efforts, the groups agreed to organize "a European campaign to liberate the political prisoners" to culminate in a massive international march in Milan, Italy on May 12, 1973.[832]

Energized by the meeting, radicals redoubled antiwar activity in their respective countries. They organized protests in Paris on April 12, in Milan the day after, and in Belgium on May 5, 1973.[833] Elsewhere, antiwar groups, such as the Swiss Comité Indochine Vaincra, circulated the joint statement, advertising the forthcoming international demonstration in Milan, Italy.[834] In France, the Ligue Communiste billed the May 1973 meeting as the successor to the famous international gatherings of the 1960s. "For the first time since the Berlin demonstration in February 1968," they wrote, "anti-imperialist Europe will meet again in one same city, *en masse* in the streets."[835] Even though, as with the earlier meetings, Milan 73 was to be a primarily European convergence, Western European radicals not only invited American representatives, but some hoped that event could help the "antiwar movement in the U.S.A. redeploy its action."[836] Just as the U.S. movements inspired European antiwar organizing in the 1960s, perhaps the European antiwar movements could rekindle the U.S. movements in 1973.

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[830] Statement reprinted as "L'Europe anti-imperialiste avec Indochine," *Solidarité Indochine* 10, March 1973, 7.
[831] Ibid.
[832] "Un mois européen de solidarité," *Rouge* 198, March 30, 1973, 19.
[833] "L'Europe anti-imperialiste avec Indochine," 7.
[834] *Indochine Vaincra* 2, April 1973, 1. F P 3752, BDIC
[835] "L'heure du soutien," *Rouge* 204, May 11, 1973, 12.
[836] Ibid.

On May 12, 1973 some 50,000 radicals converged on Milan to demonstrate their

solidarity with the unfinished Vietnamese revolution. While groups from across the globe, from the

African National Congress of South Africa to the Palestinian Liberation Organization, supported

the meeting, most of the delegates unsurprisingly hailed from Western Europe.[837] Representing

the French, who played an enormous role organizing the event, a number of rival groups –

including the FSI, MNSPI, Alliance Marxiste Révolutionnaire, ex-GP, PSU, Fraternité Chrétienne

pour le Vietnam, Ligue Communiste, Ligne Rouge, PSU, and Revolution! – put aside their

differences to sign the joint appeal, and most sent delegations to Milan.[838] The Italians naturally

mobilized the largest national contingent, attracting revolutionary organizations from across the

entire spectrum, with the exception of the Italian Communist Party. Even the American

movement, caught between organizational decline and internecine strife, managed to participate.

Sydney Peck of the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice addressed the entire gathering on

the situation in the United States, as did Vernon Bellecourt, a delegate from the American Indian

Movement who had participated briefly in the recent occupation of Wounded Knee.[839] Many other

American radicals who could not attend, such as Jane Fonda and Angela Davis, delivered letters

of support, which those present read aloud.[840]

The event began with a massive march through the streets of Milan, with radicals

channeling the energies of the previous international antiwar meetings with chants such as "Berlin

68, Milan 73, the struggle continues!"[841] Afterwards, radicals met to discuss the major issues that

had brought them together, calling for the United States halt the bombardment of Cambodia, cut

aid to Thieu, and end its involvement in Laos.[842] But their focus remained the struggle to win

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[837] For the full list of participants, see "Organizzazioni aderenti alla manifestazione," *Lunga Marcia* 3-4, May-August 1973, 9.

[838] "Qui était à Milan?" *Rouge* 205, May 18, 1973, 19; FSI, "Bilan de la Manifestation européenne de Milan," May 18, 1973, 1, F Delta Res 0292: Front solidarité Indochine: Circulaires du Bureau national, BDIC.

[839] "La Manifestazione internazionale di Milano," *Lunga Marcia* 3-4, May-August 1973, 8; "30,000 demonstrate in Milan in international antiwar protest," *The Militant* 37, no. 21, June 1, 1973, 17.

[840] "La Manifestation internationale de Milan," *Indochine en lutte* 5-6, June-July 1973, 8.

[841] Ligue Communiste, "Indochine: l'heure est au soutien!," 1973, F Delta Res 151: Vietnam, BDIC.

[842] "La Manifestation internationale de Milan," 8.

democratic liberties in South Vietnam – a concern that only grew in importance after other

demands became less relevant, as when the United States stopped bombing Cambodia a few

months later. They were strongly encouraged in this by the PRG, which delivered the

demonstrators a letter thanking them for their "support in the past and in this new stage of our

struggle." In the words of PRG Minister of Information Phan Van Ba, the three major demands in

this new phase of the struggle remained respecting the cease-fire, liberating all political prisoners,

and guaranteeing "democratic liberties" in the South, a necessary precondition for "a truly free

and democratic general election" that might remove Thieu and unite Vietnam.[843]

Of course, many radicals did not attend the demonstration.[844] And even the radicals who

chose to participate remained bitterly divided. At the march itself Italian radicals from the Marxist-

Leninist PC(ml)I violently attacked the Fourth International contingent, denouncing them as

"Trotskyist fascists."[845] Yet surveying the literature, it is clear that by 1973, the vast majority of

antiwar radicals in Western Europe as well as the United States, from Trotskyists to Maoists,

libertarians to Stalinists, had come to agree that the best way to support the incomplete

Vietnamese revolution was to fight for the liberation of the prisoners, the restoration of democratic

rights, and the observance of the Paris Accords. But what did they mean by this?

Even if Thieu somehow relaxed his rule, reestablished liberties, and freed many of the

political dissidents, most radicals would not have been satisfied. In fact, most antiwar radicals

involved in the campaign fought not for the creation of a more democratic regime in the South,

but rather the overthrow of the Republic of Vietnam, which they saw as nothing other than a

political fiction created by American imperialism to obstruct full Vietnamese self-determination.

Their goal was a united, independent, socialist Vietnam.[846] Far from a single "issue," freeing the

political prisoners served as an intermediary demand in a much longer revolutionary process. As

the Comitato Vietnam put it, speaking on behalf of those at the Milan convergence, the "struggle

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[843] Phan Van Ba, "Messaggio di solidarietà del governo rivoluzionario provvisorio della repubblica del sud Vietnam alla manifestazione del 12 Maggio a Milano," *Lunga Marcia* 3-4, May-August 1973, 8.

[844] "Le 12 Mai à Milan! Manifestation internationale," *Rouge* 203, May 4, 1973, 19.

[845] "Berlin 68, Milan 73, le soutien continue," *Rouge* 205, May 18, 1973, 18.

[846] "L'Europe anti-impérialiste avec Indochine," *Solidarité Indochine* 10, March 1973, 7.

for the liberation of the political prisoners is not and cannot be considered a purely 'humanitarian'

battle" that activists could simply "delegate to some 'charitable' organization" whose motivations

had nothing to do with politics or "the class struggle." It is instead a "struggle of the first order," of

"great importance in the context of all the work to support the Indochinese peoples," and an

important step in the "future development" of the revolution.[847]

  Of course, this did not mean that radicals had no genuine concern for the prisoners, or

cared less about democracy than liberals. Rather, it meant that, given the specific balance of

forces, the best route towards the goal of a revolutionary Vietnam was the liberation of the

prisoners. For under the current regime, with thousands in prison and democratic freedoms

routinely violated, political organizing in the South had become arduous. If radicals in Western

Europe and North America could free the prisoners, they might come one step closer to

overthrowing Republic of Vietnam. After all, the very same logic pushed radicals to pursue united

fronts at home. Thus, the call to free the prisoners did not represent a retreat from the

revolutionary goals of international solidarity voiced in 1968, but rather a strategic readjustment in

response to changed historical circumstances. In both cases, radicals firmly rooted their

internationalist imaginary in a militant anti-imperialism based in collective self-determination.

Competing Visions

  While antiwar radicals may have been some of the most ardent supporters of the struggle

to restore democratic freedoms in South Vietnam, they did not monopolize the issue in North

America and Western Europe. As with the antiwar movement as a whole, activists of innumerable

political persuasions, from revolutionary anti-imperialists to progressive liberals, contributed to

this massive international campaign. Often, many of these initiatives intersected. For example, on

April 12, 13, and 15 nearly one hundred different organizations from half a dozen countries –

including the nonpolitical Amnesty International, the revolutionary Front Solidarité Indochine, the

revisionist Parti Communiste Français, the Christian socialist Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne, the

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[847] "Le Gabbie di tigre non bastano più," 11.

humanitarian Red Cross, and the legalist Comité des Juristes pour le Vietnam-France – gathered

in Paris for an International Conference for the Liberation of the Political Prisoners of South

Vietnam organized by American, French, and Vietnamese activists.[848] Despite their

disagreements, all signed a joint resolution denouncing the authoritarian regime in the South and

demanding the liberation of the prisoners.[849]

But in many cases, despite rallying to the same issue, various groups advanced not

simply different but actually *competing* visions. Many activists involved in the campaign to free the

political prisoners rejected the radical call to overthrow the South; they had instead very different

ideas about what it meant to free the political prisoners, how this should happen, and why this

mattered. Liberals, Christians, the official communist movement, and many others all proposed

their own alternative visions of international solidarity.[850] Of all the visions that entered the arena,

one in particular warrants considerable attention because, although completely marginal in the

early 1970s, it would in fact supplant all other forms of internationalism, especially that of the

radicals, by the end of the decade. While certainly heterogeneous, like the radical internationalist

imaginary itself, this alternative conception of internationalism is perhaps best associated with the

name Amnesty International.[851]

In May 1961, British lawyer Peter Benenson penned what would become Amnesty

International's founding statement. "Open your newspaper any day of the week and you will find a

story from somewhere of someone being imprisoned, tortured or executed because his opinions

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[848] Conference internationale pour la libération des prisonniers politiques du sud-Vietnam, "Liste des organisations et mouvements participant à la conference internationale pour la liberation des prisonniers politiques du sud-Vietnam," April 1973, 1, F Delta Res 613/65: Relations internationales : Viêt-Nam.
[849] For a brief summary of the event from the perspective of the radicals, see "Conference internationale pour la libération des prisonniers politiques du Sud-Vietnam," *Rouge* 201, April 20, 1973, 14.
[850] For a good example of a different internationalist vision, in this case, that of French Christians, see Sabine Rousseau, *La colombe et le napalm: Des chrétiens français contre les guerres d'Indochine et du Vietnam, 1945-1975* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 278-82.
[851] Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 129-33. Tom Buchanan, "'The Truth Will Set You Free': The Making of Amnesty International," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 4 (2002): 575-97.

or religion are unacceptable to his government," Benenson wrote.[852] "The newspaper reader feels a sickening sense of impotence," he continued, "yet if these feelings of disgust all over the world could be united into common action, something effective could be done."[853] Soon after, he founded Amnesty International to support victims of persecution worldwide, often through campaigns involving candlelight vigils, letter writing, and publicizing human rights violations.[854]

But Benenson did not simply call for an international body to advocate for the rights of those unjustly imprisoned; he and his collaborators adumbrated a distinct vision of international solidarity, one that would rival the internationalism of the radicals. As he clarified in his book, *Persecution 1961*, he hoped for an explicitly "non-political, non-sectarial, international movement …"[855] Amnesty's idea of internationalism, unlike that of the radicals, would refuse to align itself with national governments of any kind, and would even try to bypass bodies of international governance such as the United Nations, since these were composed of nations. In addition, Amnesty's internationalism would be entirely based on the fight for rights. But unlike the radicals, for whom rights were based in collective self-determination, Amnesty narrowly saw rights as residing in the individual alone.[856] Furthermore, while the radicals situated rights in the context of social struggles, Amnesty championed a notion of rights that placed them well outside the vicissitudes of history. Rights, for Amnesty, were universal human rights, valid in all cases. Lastly, and again unlike the radicals who grounded their vision of internationalism in politics, Amnesty anchored its internationalism in morality. Explicitly hoping to transcend politics, Amnesty cultivated a kind of moral authority that was objective, disinterested, universal, and global in

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[852] Peter Benenson, "The Forgotten Prisoners," *The Observer*, May 28, 1961.
[853] Ibid.
[854] On Amnesty's formation, see Jonathan Power, *Like Water on Stone: The Story of Amnesty International* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 119-25; Egon Larsen, *A Flame in Barbed Wire: The Story of Amnesty International* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 10-18.
[855] Peter Benenson, *Persecution 1961* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 152.
[856] Bradley Simpson, "Self-Determination, Human Rights, and the End of Empire in the 1970s," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 253.

scope, and therefore able to speak for all of humanity, rather than only particular classes, nations, or oppressed peoples.[857]

Thus, while both Amnesty and many radicals in North America and Western Europe threw themselves into the campaign to free the prisoners in South Vietnam, they did so with radically different objectives. Amnesty's preferred strategy was to send comforting letters to "adopted" individual prisoners, inform Thieu that the detention of said prisoner "seems in direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," and then to beg the South Vietnamese government for that specific prisoner's release.[858] The differences with the radicals were enormous. First, Amnesty's involvement bordered on the paternalistic. For instance, Amnesty instructed letter writers to reassure adopted prisoners that "there are people all over the world working for 'human rights' who think of you, and hope for your early release."[859] In this way, Amnesty reduced the political prisoners to victims in need of hope, adoption, and protection. Salvation would not come through autonomous militant struggle, but from the fact that other people in the West believed in human rights. Second, Amnesty tried to completely abstract the plight of the prisoners from the broader political context, turning the campaign into a purely moral affair. "Please take care NOT to advance political or religious positions," Amnesty advised in its instructions to letter writers. "Your mission is purely humanitarian. It is not to criticise or reform the government but to Protect and Help the individual person."[860] The only justification for international solidarity, and the only means of measuring that solidarity, was human rights. Lastly, in focusing on specific individuals, rather than the rights of the Vietnamese as a whole, Amnesty tried to make the campaign about the inviolable rights of the sovereign "individual person." This was a world apart from the radicals, for whom the basis of solidarity was the struggle for collective self-determination. While both sides spoke of rights in this campaign, they meant different things.

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[857] For the substitution of morality for politics in the rights discourses of the period, see Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 136-39, 145-47, 165-66, and 212-27. For Amnesty's moral authority, see Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, 9, 105-107.

[858] Amnesty International, "Sample Letters," 1973, Women Strike for Peace, Series B1, Box 16, Peace Collection.

[859] Ibid.

[860] Amnesty International, "Instructions," 1973, Women Strike for Peace, Series B1, Box 16, Peace Collection.

Despite this enormous gulf between Amnesty's conception of international solidarity and those championed by radicals in North America and Western Europe, in some cases radicals collaborated with Amnesty on the issue of the political prisoners to build as inclusive a campaign as possible. In March 1973, for example, the Front Solidarité Indochine, after mentioning Amnesty's contributions, argued that any initiative that could contribute to "the solution of this vital problem, must receive all of our support."[861] The FSI even promoted Amnesty International's Amsterdam conference on the political prisoners in October 1973.[862] Beyond this, some radicals felt that Amnesty's specific approach to the issue, although completely opposed to their own, might actually serve a useful tactical function. Since AI was explicitly nonpolitical, and based much of its authority on an illusion of objectivity, some radicals felt that Amnesty data and statements would have more authority in the eyes of the public than information from radical groups, which might be denounced as biased.[863] Thus, radicals from many different groups internationally, from the Bay Area Committee of Inquiry to the Italian Comitato Vietnam, drew on Amnesty International's research to give their own claims an air of legitimacy.[864] As the FSI put it, "internationally, Amnesty International was one of the first movements to denounce, with supporting evidence, the lot of the prisoners"[865]

While their tactical alliance with such an irreconcilable form of international solidarity helped radicals turn the tide against Thieu, the collaboration unintentionally benefited their competitors. For while Amnesty International, and the specific vision of internationalism it represents, may seem hegemonic today, the organization, along with others that shared its approach, was marginal throughout all of the 1960s and even the early 1970s. In 1969, Amnesty

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[861] "Briser l'enfer concentrationnaire Sud-Vietnamien: 15,000 incarcerations par mois!," *Solidarité Indochine* 10, March 1973, 5.

[862] "Le Repression au sud se poursuit, le soutien doit continuer," *Solidarité Indochine* 11, November 1973, 3.

[863] For more on the ways that Amnesty, as well as other human rights organizations, fabricate a spurious sense of objectivity, see Richard A. Wilson, "Representing Human Rights violations: Social contexts and subjectivities," in *Human Rights, Culture and Context: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Richard A. Wilson (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 134-60.

[864] Bay Area Committee of Inquiry into Political Prisoners in South Vietnam and American Responsibility, "200,000 People Face Death in Thieu's Jails?," December 1972, 1, Bay Area Committee of Inquiry, Peace Collection; "Le Gabbie di tigre non bastano più," 13.

[865] Front Solidarité Indochine, *Saigon: les prisonniers* (Paris: Maspero, 1973), 44.

counted no more than 15,000 members internationally.[866] In the early 1970s in the United States, Amnesty mustered no more than a few thousand members. The French section, founded in 1971, was even more miniscule. In 1973, it numbered only a few thousand members.[867] This was a mere fraction of the vast number of radicals across North America and the United States who still advocated revolution, self-determination, and anti-imperialist internationalism. In addition, the radicals' conception of international solidarity as based in the struggle for the self-determination of all peoples enjoyed a kind of hegemony among other progressives as well. But by promoting Amnesty through campaigns such as the one to free the South Vietnamese prisoners, radicals lent the more marginal organization credibility, drawing it closer to progressive, and even radical, audiences.

Radicals inadvertently promoted Amnesty beyond just sharing their audiences. While radicals continued to believe in self-determination in the early 1970s, they had modified their concerns, language, and even practices in a way that began to mutate their vision. Specifically, we saw that while radicals largely ignored the question of rights during the heady days of revolutionary fervor, after the wave of state repression, they adopted a kind of rights discourse. To be sure, when they spoke of rights, they meant something very different from groups like Amnesty International, evidenced by the fact that radicals rarely mentioned "human rights." Nevertheless, in the early 1970s the two sides began to converge. In 1968, when radicals threw themselves into revolution, while Amnesty shunned politics altogether, almost no one could confuse the two. But in the early 1970s, when both sides organized around the same issues with vaguely similar appeals to rights, points of contact emerged.

Similarly, not only were radicals far more concerned with rights, but when they grafted this newfound concern onto their anti-imperialist solidarity work, they began to parallel other visions of internationalism. Over the course of the early 1970s, and especially after the United States withdrew from the war in 1973, radicals targeted the government of South Vietnam.

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[866] Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 1968-69* (London, 1969), 29.
[867] Jean-Paul Besset, *Amnesty International: La Conspiration de l'espoir – Trente ans au service des droits de l'homme* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 1991), 54-55.

Instead of defending the national liberation of a people against imperialism, in their antiwar activity radicals now focused much of their energy on criticizing the internal affairs of a sovereign nation-state. When it came to Vietnam, fighting to overthrow global imperialism increasingly took the form of denouncing South Vietnam for ignoring basic democratic liberties, violating the fundamental right of its citizens, or failing to adhere to the Paris Accords. At least at level of appearances, the international solidarity of North American and Western European radicals now came dangerously close to that of Amnesty, for whom solidarity basically consisted of intervening in the domestic affairs of states to pressure them to observe universal rights.

To be clear, despite these shifts in emphasis, the adoption of a seemingly different language, and the apparent convergence with the human rights internationalism of Amnesty, radicals still adhered to the distinct framework of self-determination. The point, then, is not so much that radicals somehow personally transformed themselves into advocates of human rights, though in some important cases this certainly happened, but that radicals shifted their struggles, language, and concerns to a terrain that was more welcoming to the discourse of human rights. In other words, while they did not adopt the specific language of human rights, their own attention to rights discourse unwittingly helped to develop the intellectual terrain on which a properly human rights discourse could grow. And in building tactical alliances with this competing form of internationalism, radicals in the early 1970s rendered Amnesty's vision more palatable and comprehensible to their followers. Indeed, in this way, human rights could be perceived as a distinct, yet related form of internationalism, able to share some of the progressive aspirations of anti-imperialist internationalism even while rejecting the core principles of national liberation.

Of course, radicals had little to fear in the way of competition since their vision of international solidarity dominated the peripheral views of groups such as Amnesty International.[868] But when the radical imaginary entered into crisis later in the decade, the human rights forms of international solidarity represented by groups such as Amnesty International, which survived these crises unscathed, could appear as a viable alternative. In fact, despite

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[868] Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 133.

appearances, the radical forces had already begun its slow decline, and the years from 1972 to 1974 are often regarded as the final crest of the radical wave in most North American and Western European countries. In France, for example, the GIP disbanded in December 1972, the Minister of the Interior banned the Ligue Communiste in June 1973, and the ex-GP finally dissolved itself on November 1, 1973, just a month after the Black September terrorist organization murdered eight Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics and Salvador Allende was overthrown in Chile. As for solidarity with Vietnam, the movement declined precipitously everywhere after 1973 as anti-imperialist radicals threw themselves into other campaigns. The Milan 1973 meeting, thought by some to mark a new cycle of anti-imperialist international solidarity, proved to be the final great international meeting of radicals during the Vietnam War. Even in France, where radicals played the greatest role in reactivating international solidarity with Vietnam, the FSI died a quiet death in late 1973.

Of course, tens of thousands of radicals in North America and Western Europe continued to dedicate their lives to the idea of revolution throughout the decade. In Italy, for instance, a completely new cycle of revolutionary struggle emerged in the mid-1970s.[869] Moreover, even in spite of these setbacks, in 1973 or 1974 the radical imaginary still remained more popular than that represented by Amnesty International. But this would change in the final years of the 1970s when the bottom fell out of the radical imaginary, leading to an astonishing reversal few could have predicted in the early 1970s. When that happened, youth in search of new visions of internationalism could find a home in the nonpolitical internationalism of Amnesty and other organizations of its kind. But for that to happen, Amnesty's internationalism did not simply have to survive while other competing imaginaries collapsed. It had to remain comprehensible, attractive, and capable of effecting change for those who would have otherwise rallied to the radical imaginary, in some ways sharing its project or at least aspirations. In other words, if Amnesty's internationalism were completely different, a newer generation with progressive ideas might have ignored it. Amnesty would not have spoken to their needs.

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[869] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 381-83.

Thus, through the points of contact formed in the 1970s – exemplified by the common campaign to liberate the prisoners in Vietnam – Amnesty could emerge as distinct, yet not utterly alien. It could represent a new path, yet at the same time emerge as a credible successor to other visions, winning over all those who still cared about transforming the world. And this, of course, was always Amnesty's plan. As Benenson once put it, speaking of Amnesty's overall ambitions, "the underlying purpose of this campaign – which I hope those who are closely connected with it will remember, but never publish – is to find a common base upon which the idealists of the world can co-operate. It is designated in particular to absorb the latent enthusiasm of great numbers of such idealists who have, since the eclipse of Socialism, become increasingly frustrated; similarly it is geared to appeal to the young searching for an ideal …"[870]

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[870] He continues: "If this underlying aim is borne in mind, it will be seen that, a la longue, it matters more to harness the enthusiasm of the helpers than to bring people out of prison." Cited in Buchanan, "'The Truth Will Set You Free': The Making of Amnesty International," 591.

CHAPTER 7: ANTI-IMPERIALIST INTERNATIONALISM IN CRISIS

On December 21, 1978, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam shocked the world by invading Cambodia, its socialist neighbor. Writing in *Lotta Continua*, Marco Boato captured the immensity of the crisis for radicals everywhere. Our generation, he explained, "was defined as the 'generation of Vietnam,' and we "accepted that definition with pride and satisfaction, because with Vietnam we had experienced a new form of revolutionary internationalism."[871] Solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle, he continued, marked every step of the radical left's early development. In "1967 we took to the streets with Vietnam; in '68, we said 'Vietnam is here.'"[872] Given such deep investment in Vietnam, the internecine war in Southeast Asia could only have devastating consequences for radicals.

Of course, the Third Indochina War did not destroy the radical left on its own. Radicalism had already substantially declined as an organized force throughout most of North America and Western Europe before the winter of 1978, especially outside of Italy, where Boato wrote. Faced with an unsettling array of political challenges, both at home and abroad, many anti-imperialist radicals abandoned their activism, rejoined mainstream politics, or pole-vaulted to the other end of the political spectrum. In France, to a degree unparalleled elsewhere, prominent former radicals not only disavowed anti-imperialist internationalism in the 1970s; they embraced a new kind of human rights internationalism that prioritized the rights of the individual over those of the nation-state, morality over politics. There, Médecins Sans Frontièrs (MSF), a non-governmental humanitarian aid organization with roots in anti-imperialism, played the decisive role of a relay station, not only facilitating the transfer from anti-imperialism to human rights, but helping to transform human rights themselves into a robust form of international activism with some radical credibility. In this way, anti-imperialism not only found itself in rapid decline, but also faced an insurgent challenger for the title of international solidarity.

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[871] Marco Boata, "La generazione del Vietnam," *Lotta Continua*, January 9, 1979, 2.
[872] Ibid.

Although radicals in France, but also the United States, may still have been able to re-invent anti-imperialist internationalism for their changed postcolonial conjuncture, a series of devastating crises in the late 1970s triggered its collapse. Vietnam invaded Cambodia, China retaliated with its own incursion into Vietnamese territory, and a humanitarian crisis of catastrophic proportions engulfed the entire region. The Third Indochina War split radicals, but it also put into question the core assumptions of anti-imperialist internationalism. Since the early twentieth century, radicals had linked anti-imperialism with the concept of national self-determination. Though cognizant of nationalism's dangers, radicals fully embraced the nation-state as the necessary form of political emancipation from imperialism. The decolonization movements of the 1960s, and the enormous promises they seemed to carry, only encouraged this assumption. Yet a series of defeats in the 1970s, which reached a high point in the Third Indochina War, problematized this faith in the progressive role of the nation-state. Radicals watched as newly liberated countries not only turned against their own citizenry, but rapidly elevated their own interests above those of the international struggle, in some cases going so far as to wage expansionist wars with one another. Far from appearing as the strongest defense against imperialism, the nation-state seemed to be inherently imperialist. Despite their revolutionary credentials, Vietnam, China, and Cambodia descended into wars that looked eerily similar to the very imperialist aggressions radicals had been denouncing for decades.

This turn of events threw anti-imperialist solidarity into disarray, but it also further destabilized Marxism, the fundamental language of anti-imperialist internationalism since the late 1960s, and the primary resource for radicals trying to find a way out of their sanguinary quandary. Already undergoing a major crisis in the 1970s, Marxism's inability to adequately explain the bloodshed in Southeast Asia further highlighted its sharp limits in the new conjuncture, revealing in particular its failure to fully understand nationalism, the state, and the international system, among other conceptual blind spots. "The crisis of Marxism," Boato somberly explained, "is not measured by disputes over Proudhon, but by what is happening in Cambodia and Vietnam."[873]

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[873] Ibid.

Some radicals tried to continue as if nothing was happening. Others, above all the pro-Chinese, doubled down on the idea national sovereignty, producing a caricatured version of internationalism that amounted to nothing more than parroting the policies of a foreign nation-state. Thus, when Vietnam attacked the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, China's strongest ally, these radicals organized an international campaign to denounce the Vietnamese, casting them as genocidal murders. Given the immensity of the humanitarian crisis in Cambodia, they worked with humanitarian groups like MSF, who also came to turn against Vietnam. Even more astonishingly, in their quest to destroy the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, these pro-Chinese radicals found themselves objectively allied with the United States against the "imperialism" of the Vietnamese. Of course, most radicals did not follow this path, but they had little else to offer in place of the obviously deficient notion of anti-imperialist internationalism. The crisis was deeper than even the most prescient knew at the time, and it opened the space for a rival form of human rights to definitively seize center stage.[874]

The Radical Left in Disarray

Over the course of the 1970s, the radical left declined as an organized force in almost every North American and Western European country. In some cases, as in France, the reversal was drastic. Once regarded as the country closest to insurrection, by the end of the decade, revolutionary prospects in France seemed dim. The proximate causes were manifold, but in retrospect, it seems that radicalism fell into disarray because radicals proved unable to creatively reinvent their political project in the face of a vastly changed political conjuncture.

To begin with, the mass worker insurgencies that buoyed so many radical hopes met defeated. In the early 1970s, distinct sectors of the working class, led above all by the autoworkers, wages a relentless struggle across the hexagon. They experimented with a dizzying array of tactics, including everything from organized slowdowns to occupations to self-

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[874] The argument that human rights succeeded in large part because rival forms of international solidarity, or "utopias," failed, is drawn from Sam Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

management to "bossnappings." Taken as a whole, the offensive proved crippling. Between 1971 and 1975, for example, the annual number of strike days in France averaged four million.[875] As historian Xavier Vigna has shown, this mass worker "insubordination" left the world of the factory virtually ungovernable.[876] But capitalists, along with the French state, soon deployed a set of strategies to firmly close this cycle of struggle. The crudest response was of course repression: radical workers were fired, organizers turned over to the police, worker committees destroyed, strikes crushed, and in some cases agitators murdered. But while certainly effective, repression could not secure victory on its own.

Beginning in the early 1970s, French firms allied with the state explored ways to accommodate worker demands in an effort to defuse them. Initially, this meant passing a cornucopia of social legislation, such as four weeks paid holiday in 1969, a guaranteed minimum wage in 1970, and a law fixing maximum working hours in 1970.[877] But, as Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have shown, when these "quantitative" reforms failed to quell worker contestation, firms took the more dramatic step of "qualitatively" altering the work process.[878] Recognizing that the basis of the worker revolt was in fact a refusal of work itself, many firms experimented with a series of reforms designed to provide workers with greater creative control, gambling that a less alienating work environment would push workers to identify with work again. Many firms began to grant workers greater decision making powers, further autonomy at work, flexible hours, shorter contracts, and human resources departments.

Encouraged by these successes, firms began a wholesale restructuring of the Fordist regime of accumulation itself. The militant struggles of the 1970s revealed that the giant factories, which concentrated thousands of workers in the same place, putting them in control of the levers of economic power, could become a weakness for capitalists. Thus, by the late 1970s, French industry, following in the footsteps of the United States, reordered capitalist production relations in

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[875] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), 169.
[876] Xavier Vigna, *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68 : Essai d'histoire politique des usines* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007).
[877] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 182.
[878] Ibid., Part 2.

order to decompose the bases of class power. Firms were decentralized, factories simply relocated either to other parts of the country or abroad, working class neighborhoods dissolved through urban renewal projects, and longterm union contracts replaced by precarious working conditions. The factory universe, which had been the condition of possibility for the historical workers' movement, the basis of its culture, politics, and strategy since the twentieth century, and the horizon of revolutionary politics, was being dismantled. While repression, recuperation, and restructuring did not spell the inevitable end of the radical left, it did disorient radicals, all of whom were attached to a certain idea of worker revolt, forcing the radical left to reinvent itself on the spot.

In addition to the crisis of the historical workers' movement, new movements posed a second major challenge to the radical left in France. The 1970s witnessed a proliferation of what were sometimes called "new social movements," or movements – such as those centered on women, homosexuality, ecology, or against nuclear weapons – that focused on particular issues beyond the traditional cultures, organizations, and languages of the workers movement. Tired of seeing their specific concerns subordinated to narrowly defined "class" needs in the official workers movement, activists in these movements struggled to carve out an independent space for themselves, something strongly encouraged by radical left organizations that hoped to liberate social movements from the clutches of reformist politics. Yet at the same time, these movements risked renting the coherency of the left itself.[879] Their insistence on identity, personal experience, and autonomy risked foreclosing a united movement, reducing the left to congeries of innumerable fragments.[880] To remain relevant, radicals had to find a way to rearticulate these diverse, and sometimes opposed, movements, needs, and cultures into a new political movement.

Lastly, the mainstream political horizon in France had changed. Ever since General de Gaulle wrote the constitution of the Fifth Republic, the mainstream political process remained

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[879] Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 471.
[880] Ibid. 472-76

effectively blocked.[881] But after May 1968, de Gaulle's resignation in 1969, and especially after

the sudden death of his lieutenant, George Pompidou, in 1974, openings began to emerge.[882]

Hoping to fill the void, mainstream political parties, above all the newly founded Parti Socialiste

(PS) led by François Mitterand, reformed themselves in order to channel the political desires of

these social movements into parliamentary victory. The PS, which tellingly entitled its 1972

program "changer la vie," attempted to rally young radicals by absorbing their major demands,

such as the call for autogestion, or self-management, not only in the workplace, but in all aspects

of life.[883] The Communist Party (PCF) also reinvented itself by, among other things, drawing

closer to new social issues such immigrant rights, condemning the repression of democratic

freedoms in the Soviet Union, and forging a common program with the PS. While this

"Eurocommunist" flirtation proved short lived, the reforms proved successful as party membership

spiked from 410,000 in 1974 to 600,000 in 1977.[884]

These uncertain historical events provoked the philosopher Louis Althusser to diagnose

the entire conjuncture as having precipitated a "crisis of Marxism."[885] Indeed, in the 1970s,

radicals increasingly became aware of a series of contradictions, difficulties, and absences within

Marxism, the theory of so many anti-imperialist radicals. To begin with, the rapidly changing

composition of the working class raised significant questions about one of Marxism's most

fundamental concepts: What was the working class? What did it want? What did its changing

physiognomy mean for revolutionary strategy?[886] Relatedly, the explosion of the new social

movements, and the challenges of inventing new organizational forms adequate to these diverse

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[881] D.S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Socialist Party: Resurgence and Victory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), chapter 2.

[882] Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 534-42.

[883] Bell and Criddle, *The French Socialist Party*, 67-68, 81.

[884] The literature on the PCF in the 1970s is vast. For studies in English, see Jean Elleinstein, "Eurocommunism and the French Communist Party," in *In Search of Eurocommunism*, ed. Richard Kindersley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 66-79; George Ross, *Workers and Communists in France: From Popular Front to Eurocommunism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), part 3; D. S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 100-108; For a good historical overview of Eurocommunism, see Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 408-17.

[885] Louis Althusser, "The Crisis of Marxism," *Marxism Today* (July 1978): 215-20, 227.

[886] See, for example, André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class* (London: Pluto, 1982).

struggles, led some to the realization that Marxism lacks, in the words of Louis Althusser, a "real theory of the organisations of class struggle."[887] The party, once taken as axiomatic by most Marxists in the 1960s and 1970s, was quickly becoming an open question.

But perhaps the most important limit was the state. As Althusser put it, there does not really exist a "Marxist theory of the State."[888] To be sure, the changing structure of the state apparatuses in the 1960s and 1970s did prompt a major rethinking of inherited assumptions, of which the oeuvre of Nicos Poulantzas was the most important in France.[889] Even the otherwise sclerotic PCF abandoned the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in 1976 as part of an effort to reimagine the state. Yet the PCF's failure to invent a replacement spoke volumes. While many Marxists were finding conventional theories of the state inadequate, they proved unable to develop an alternative state strategy. With all these glaring limits, Marxism had without a doubt reached a "crossroads," which led many to either abandon it, or try to move beyond it.[890] But as Althusser himself concluded, Marxism had passed through many such crises before, and while the task of renewing Marxism was no doubt very difficulty, it was not necessarily impossible.

Nevertheless, taken together, transformations in workers struggles, mass social movements, the mainstream political horizon, and a crisis in Marxism left radicals in a quandary. Some, after years of frenetic activity fueled only by messianic faith in the coming revolution, dropped out of politics altogether. Others remained radical at heart, but abandoned the organized political world, rooting themselves in local issues, returning to the land in a kind of rural exodus, or diving into the various autonomist scenes.[891] Still other radicals, such as those in the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), the successor to the banned Ligue Communiste, attempted

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[887] Althusser, "The Crisis of Marxism," 220.
[888] Ibid., 219.
[889] See, especially, Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1978). For a good exploration of Poulantzas' thinking on the state, see Bob Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).
[890] The term is from the first sentence of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001 [1985]), 1. Indeed, the seeds of "post-Marxism," which their book came to represent, can be found in precisely this conjuncture. As they write in their preface to the second edition, "In the mid-1970s, Marxist theorization had clearly reached an impasse."
[891] On "autonomism" in general, Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 459-60.

to revise their communist politics in light of the changed conditions – they drew closer to the new social movements, embedding themselves in the women's and gay movements or supporting the struggles inside the army, and formed electoral alliances with other radicals to take advantage of the opened parliamentary terrain.[892]

Many radicals, however, returned to mainstream politics. Weary of subsisting on the political margins, a growing number of radicals were seduced by the growing possibility of a leftist parliamentary or even Presidential victory and threw their weight behind the PS. During the 1974 Presidential elections, for example, large swathes of the radical left voted for François Mitterand instead of either abstaining or putting forward their own radical candidates, as many had done in the past. When some diehards refused to vote, a number of prominent intellectuals, including Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and the anarchist Daniel Guérin, issued a collective manifesto in May 1974 exhorting radicals to participate in the election.[893] In an act that spoke volumes about how deeply the left had changed, Danny Cohn Bendit, famed student leader of the May events, rewrote the famous 68 slogan, "Elections are trap for idiots," as "Abstention is a trap for idiots."[894] Strategic electoral alliances with mainstream political parties rapidly evolved into cooptation as many radicals simply joined the ranks of the PS itself. In October 1974, the PS, hoping to absorb young radicals, invited representatives from practically the entire spectrum of the radical left to the Assises nationales du socialisme. Soon after, many radicals abandoned their erstwhile revolutionary parties to adhere to the PS. In December 1974, for example, Michel Rocard, a leader of the radical Parti Socialiste Unifié, formally joined the PS, bringing a sizeable section of his party with him.[895] Others from groups like the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire followed.

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[892] Jean-Paul Salles, *La Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (1968-1981): Instrument du Grand Soir ou lieu d'apprentissage?* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), part 2.

[893] "Contre l'abstention des révolutionnaires," *Libération*, May 15, 1974, 3.

[894] Daniel Cohn-Bendit, "Tribune libre: abstention piège à cons," *Libération*, May 18-19, 1974, 1.

[895] This process of mainstream absorption also occurred throughout North America and Western Europe, albeit in different ways. In Great Britain, for example, radicals joined the Labour Party to push it leftward. In Germany, they founded a totally new party in the 1970s, the Greens.

Some radicals responded to the challenges of the decade by turning against the left itself. In June 1976, for example, Maurice Clavel, a leading journalist and philosopher who had rubbed shoulders with radicals after May 68 and helped found the Agence de presse liberation with the ex-GP, gathered many former Gauche prolétarienne militants, including Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, Alain Geismar, and André Glucksmann, to discuss, in the words of historian Michael Scott Christofferson, "their disillusionment with political activism."[896] This gathering, which led to regular meetings as the "Cercle socratique," eventually prepared the way for the bizarre rise of the Nouveaux Philosophes.[897] A mass media phenomenon, the New Philosophers were a highly farraginous group of intellectuals whose only real point of commonality was that they traded on their radical past to justify a denunciation of the far left in the present. In a series of extremely popular books – including Christian Jambet et Guy Lardreau's *L'Ange* (1976), André Glucksman's *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes* (1975) and *Les Maitres penseurs* (1977), and Bernard-Henri Lévy's *La Barbarie à visage humain* (1977) – the New Philosophers abandoned revolution for ethics, denounced the organized left, and equated Marxism with the gulag. Regularly appearing on television, selling their books into the tens of thousands, and enjoying the support of famous intellectuals, from Michel Foucault to Roland Barthes, the New Philosophers became the most visible representation of the extent of radicalism's disarray.

Against the Third World

Since the radical left was not shaped exclusively by events at home, but through complex encounters between developments in North America and Western Europe and those in the Third World, it should come as no surprise that simultaneous transformations in the Third World played a crucial role in the radical left's political decomposition in the 1970s. For at the very same moment that radicals confronted a strange new political conjuncture at home, forcing them to

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[896] Michael Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 195.

[897] For the New Philosophers, Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left*, especially chapter 5; Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), part 4; Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 169-81.

rethink their political assumptions, developments abroad began to shake their faith in Third World revolutions. Despite initiatives like the New International Economic Order, the continued economic dependence of newly liberated countries on the imperialist core pointed to the limits of national sovereignty.[898] Countries like China, for example, abandoned internationalism, collaborating with the United States to destroy liberation movements in places like Angola.[899] In some cases, as in East Timor, newly independent countries refused to recognize the self-determination of minority peoples.[900] Throughout Africa postcolonial states spawned autocratic regimes or military dictatorships. In socialist countries, ruling Communist Parties regularly violated basic civil rights. Reports of human rights abuses arrived from Vietnam. In Cambodia, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge unleashed genocide. In short, radicals watched as the struggles that once inspired them to make revolution at home fell short of their goals, betrayed their promises, or turned into their opposites.

These astonishing events entered France through a series of highly publicized "revelations."[901] In his 1975 book, *Prisonnier de Mao*, Jean Pasqualini chronicled his life in Chinese labor camps. In 1976, Gérard Chaliand, who participated in the investigative commissions of the Russell Tribunal, published a richly documented survey of the Third World that began to unravel many of the myths held so dearly by the radical left. The following year saw the appearance of *Deuxième retour de Chine*, in which onetime Maoists Claudie Broyelle, Jacques Broyelle, and Evelyne Tschirart captured their generation's disillusionment with China.[902] Perhaps most devastating of all, in 1977 François Ponchaud, a Catholic missionary in Cambodia,

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[898] See the special issue of *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2016).

[899] Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002), 207-208, 217-19.

[900] Bradley Simpson, "A Colonial Hot War in Cold War Disguise: The Indonesian Invasion and Occupation of East Timor, 1975-1999," in *Hot Wars in the Cold War*, ed. Bernd Greiner (Hamburg: Hamburg Institute for Social Research, 2006).

[901] Eleanor Davey, "French Adventures in Solidarity: Revolutionary Tourists and Radical Humanitarians," *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire* 21, no. 4 (2014): 583-84; Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 120-23, 166.

[902] For the phenomenon of public self-criticism and disillusionment, see Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, 126-32; Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 163-65.

published *Cambodge année zero*, revealing the full extent of the Khmer Rouge's terror. In some

cases, such as the Cambodian genocide, these reports came as a complete shock. In others,

however, these "revelations" were far from new. In 1971, for example, Simon Leys had already

revealed the unsavory side of China, just as all radicals were well aware of Soviet crimes before

the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in 1974.[903] Yet these "revelations"

had such an enormous impact in the mid-1970s precisely because they found fertile ground at

home. Disorientation, exhaustion, and growing bitterness in France allowed these reports to

resonate. This confluence of the domestic and the international worked to destabilized anti-

imperialist internationalism.

Uncoincidentally, these events triggered a full-scale ideological offensive against anti-

imperialism that lasted well into the 1980s.[904] Jacques Juillard fired the opening shot on June 5,

1978 in the pages of *Le Nouvel Observateur*. The main target of his scurrilous attack was the

nation-state, the keystone of anti-imperialist internationalism. Juillard blamed the misguided

notion that the nation-state could act as the "expression of the freedom of the people" for the

seemingly endless accumulation of tragedies in the Third World.[905] Instead of the old "forty-

eighter idea" that national self-determination would lead to harmony between equal nations-

states, it produced only interstate conflict.[906] Instead of socialism, national liberation struggles

resulted in tyranny. Instead of guaranteeing the freedoms of its citizens, the idea of collective

sovereignty now justified boundless violence against unprotected individuals. For all his rhetorical

excess, Juillard had rightly identified the limit point of anti-imperialist internationalism: the

coupling of anti-imperialism with national self-determination. But Juillard's aim was not to help

renew anti-imperialism for a new postcolonial conjuncture; he, and those who quickly followed his

lead, wished to use anti-imperialism's Achilles' heal to demolish the entire far left, the very idea of

revolution, and even the Third World itself.

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[903] For Solzhenitzyn , see Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left*, chapter 2.
[904] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, 132-41, 215-26.
[905] Jacques Julliard, "Le tiers monde et la gauche," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, June 6, 1978, reprinted in *Le Tiers Monde et la gauche*, eds. Jean Daniel and André Burguière (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), 39.
[906] Ibid.

This is precisely why the assault took as its object not anti-imperialism itself, but the expansive and nebulous idea of "Third Worldism." In many respects, the attack itself created the very notion of "Third Worldism." For although the term "Third World" was ubiquitous, "Third Worldism" was almost nowhere to be found in the literature of the radical left in the 1960s. It only really appears in certain places in the early 1970s, but even then carried no meaning for Americans and was not widely used by French radicals until the mid-1970s. Indeed, anti-imperialist radicals never described their politics as "Third Worldist," but rather as "anti-imperialist." Of course, as Maxime Szczepanski-Huillery points out, even if the specific word cannot be found, this does not necessarily mean that traces of the concept were absent.[907] Since the late 1970s, the term has come to mean something to the effect of a belief in, or perhaps fascination with, the ideas, struggles, models, and aspirations of the Third World. According to this very loose definition, "Third Worldism" certainly existed in the 1960s and 1970s, but only as a general sentiment, not as a politics. Indeed, a definition such as this does not really enable a specific political project in the same way that anti-imperialism does. It is little wonder that few used the word. One can therefore speak of "Third Worldism" in the 1960s, but aside from some vague banalities, this term reveals little about the politics of the era.

There is, however, another, more specific definition of Third Worldism, one that does denote a specific politics rather than a sentiment. According to this definition, "Third Worldism" was the idea that since the primary contradiction in the world is between the First World and the Third, the revolution will only unfold in the Third World, spreading across the globe as the Third World encircles the First, in the same way, for example, that the countryside was said to have encircled the cities in the struggle for national liberation.[908] It must be insisted that this position was not only relatively marginal among radicals, but that it was in many respects opposed to anti-

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[907] Maxime Szczepanski-Huillery, "'L'idéologie tiers-mondiste': Constructions et usages d'une catégorie intellectuelle en 'crise,'" *Raisons politiques* 2, no. 18 (2005): 32.

[908] Lin Biao, *Long Live the Victory of the People's War: In Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japan* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), especially the chapter titled, "The International Significance of Comrade Mao-Tse Tung's Theory of People's War," where he claims, for example, "Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called "the cities of the world," then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute "the rural areas of the world."

imperialism. As Samir Amin, a major participant in the debates over "Third Worldism," explained in 1977:

> For Third Worldism is a strictly European phenomenon, Its proponents seize on literary expressions, such as "the East wind will prevail over the West wind" or "the storm centers," to illustrate the impossibility of struggle for socialism in the West, rather than grasping the fact that the necessary struggle for socialism passes, in the West, also by way of anti-imperialist struggle in Western society itself.[909]

This is why this political perspective found more traction in countries like West Germany where the possibility of revolution backed by mass worker struggle seemed unlikely. But even where the idea existed in the 1960s in 1970s, few referred to it as "Third Worldism" until the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, the broad definition of "Third Worldism" deployed by certain figures in the late 1970s – and still used by historians today – allowed critics of anti-imperialism like Juillard to accomplish several goals at once. They were able to flatten and homogenize a very diverse set of struggles, reduce a specific political strategy to a rather banal sentiment, and caricature radicals as a cohort of misguided dreamers. More insidiously, the term ahistorically anchored the existence of the radical left to the fate of a few tragedies in the Third World, discrediting the entire project of radical change. At the same time, by reducing the Third World to an immiserated land in need of Western aid, it helped erase the indelible impact of Third World struggles on the imperialist centers.[910] For example, in his contribution to the debate that ensued, Jean-Pierre le Dantec, the former editor of *La Cause du peuple*, argued that in projecting their desires for revolution onto the Third World, radicals had in fact "invented the 'Third World.'"[911] In denying the self-activity of Third World peoples, apostates like Dantec reasserted the centrality of the imperialist world, and by association, their own activism.

In fact, Le Dantec's intervention reveals that one of the most important functions of the "debate" on "Third Worldism" in France was to sanctify the conversion of a number of anti-imperialist radicals to a rival form of international solidarity. There is, in other words, a profound

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[909] Samir Amin, *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 11.
[910] Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 158-69.
[911] Jean-Pierre le Dantec, "Une barbarie peut en cacher une autre," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, July 22, 1978, reprinted in *Le Tiers Monde et la gauche*, 41.

connection between the fact that anti-"Third Worldism" reached such apoplectic heights in France and the fact it was here, more than anywhere else, that former anti-imperialist revolutionaries became some of the most vocal proponents of "human rights internationalism." Renouncing their anti-imperialist pasts in this spectacular, caricatural, but also self-aggrandizing manner allowed a number of French radicals to leap into a new faith.

The Human Rights International

A particularity of the French scene was that disenchantment with revolution, the idea of the nation-state, and the emancipatory potential of Third World struggles led a significant number of these erstwhile radicals to not only criticize anti-imperialist internationalism, but to help fashion a distinct conception of international solidarity based not in anti-imperialism, but in human rights. Rony Brauman, once a member of the Gauche Prolétarienne, recalled that reading *Cambodge année zero* was "the shock that made me break definitively with political radicalism."[912] Searching for a new form of internationalism, he joined an iconoclastic nongovernment humanitarian aid organization, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), rising through the ranks to become its president in 1982.[913] More than any other group, MSF came to play the role of a relay station in the transition from anti-imperialism to human rights in France. For while campaigns such as the one to free the South Vietnamese political prisoners reshaped the intellectual terrain in a way that drew anti-imperialism and human rights closer together, MSF helped some French radicals make the leap from one to the other.

MSF was born on December 20, 1971, just over a year before the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, when two smaller organizations merged: on the one side, the *Secours Médical Français*, created by the French medical journal TONUS; on the other, the *Groupe d'Intervention*

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[912] Rony Brauman, *Penser dans l'urgence: Parcours critique d'un humanitaire. Entretiens ave Catherine Portevin*. (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 11.

[913] For the history of MSF, Olivier Weber, *French Doctors: les 25 ans d'épopée des hommes et des femmes qui ont inventé la médicine humanitaire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995); Anne Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières: La biographie* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); Dan Bortolotti, *Hope in Hell: Inside the World of Doctors Without Borders, Updated Third Edition* (Buffalo, New York: Firefly Books, 2010). For ethnographic account, Peter Redfield, *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journal of Doctors Without Borders* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

Médicale et Chirurgicale en Urgence, a team of radicalized French doctors who had cut their

teeth in the Nigerian Civil War, which erupted after the country's Eastern Region declared

independence as the Republic of Biafra in May 1967.[914] To force the secessionists to capitulate,

Nigeria's Federal Military Government (FMG) blockaded supply routes, triggering a humanitarian

crisis. Relief organizations, above all the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),

organized volunteers. One of these was a young radical named Bernard Kouchner, the future

face of MSF. Like many of his generation, Kouchner began as a committed Marxist anti-

imperialist: he joined the Communist student union, protested the Algerian War, organized with

the Comité Vietnam National, and traveled to Cuba in 1964 where he met Che Guevara, to whom

he would dedicate his medical thesis.[915]

Like Che, Kouchner became a professional doctor as well as an anti-imperialist, and saw

in the Argentinian revolutionary a model of "humanist" socialism defined by international

solidarity, voluntaristic action, dedication to radical change, and compassion for those in need. In

the following decade, Kouchner and other "French doctors," combined these radical ideals, based

in anti-imperialist internationalism, with elements of traditional humanitarianism to invent a kind of

radical humanitarianism, known as *sans-frontiérisme*, that would transform international

solidarity.[916] Although MSF, reflecting its origins, remained a highly heterogeneous organization,

Kouchner's wing helped turn it into a vehicle for this new kind of humanitarianism.

But while solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles shaped the broader context in which

MSF eventually emerged, it was not so much anti-imperialism itself that spawned Kouchner's

brand of radical humanitarianism, but rather a particular contradiction within anti-imperialism most

powerfully personified by the Biafran struggle. The newly independent state of Nigeria, which had

couched its struggle against the British Empire in the language of national self-determination, now

denied that same right to a minority population within its own borders. Biafran leaders argued in

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[914] For a standard origin story, Bortolotti, *Hope in Hell*, 48-51. For a more nuanced account, Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, chapter 1.

[915] Davey, "French Adventures in Solidarity," 581. For Kouchner's biography, Daniel Pierrejean, *Bernard Kouchner: du Biafra au Kosovo* (Paris: Éditions Éditeur Indépendant: 2007); Michel-Antoine Burnier, *Les 7 vies du docteur Kouchner: biographie* (Paris: XO Editions, 2008).

[916] The best account of the rise of sans-frontièrisme is Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*.

their "Proclamation of Biafra" that secession was fully justified because all peoples had a right to

national self-determination, the colonial boundaries of Nigeria did not reflect existing tribal and

communal sovereignties, and because the FMG violated the democratic rights of minority peoples

such as the Igbo, thereby forfeiting the right to govern in their name. But the FMG, arguing that

secession jeopardized the viability of new nation-states, moved against this national liberation

struggle, revealing the limits of national self-determination, and accordingly, anti-imperialism

itself, which, after all, saw the nation-state as the primary vehicle for collective liberation.[917]

Should anti-imperialists defend the FMG's right to administer its own internal affairs and protect

the integrity of a united Nigeria against its balkanization? Or should anti-imperialists defend the

rights of Biafrans to achieve their own sovereign nation state against Nigeria's own imperialism?

The international context exacerbated the dilemma: was not the French government backing the

Biafrans in part because it hoped secession could weaken Nigeria, the largest, most populous,

and wealthiest African state; and was not Great Britain supporting the FMG in large part because

of its desire to control Nigeria's rich oil industry, much of it now lost to independent Biafra?[918]

While many anti-imperialists tried to ignore the thorny issue, Kouchner and the other

"French doctors" resolutely defended the Biafrans, whom they argued were "a people" with an

irrevocable right to national self-determination. In this way, Kouchner and his comrades helped

establish a defining aspect of MSF's agenda: in addition to aiding victims of natural disasters,

crises, and war, a certain fraction of MSF came to advocate for the rights of minorities within

newly independent states – such as the Bengalis of East Pakistan or the Kurds in Iraq. This

emphasis soon transformed into support for those people ignored by anti-imperialist radicals in

North America and Western Europe because their political struggles did not conform to

preconceived molds. "[I]f the struggle is said to be progressive (Cambodia), the progressives will

take notice," Kouchner said in 1976, pointing to the limits of radical solidarity, "if not, peoples can

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[917] Bradley Simpson, "The Biafran Secession and the Limits of Self-Determination," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, nos. 2-3 (2014): 337-54.
[918] John Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

very well die (Kurdistan)."[919] By the end of the decade, he had elevated this argument into a principle: politics should not be allowed to make the suffering of one people more deserving of solidarity than another; there are no "good or bad deaths."[920]

But Kouchner's response to the aporias of anti-imperialist solidarity came at the cost of effectively bracketing the politics of those who suffered, which risked decontextualizing oppression altogether. Indeed, as the 1970s wore on, the object of solidarity increasingly became the deracinated "victim," rather than the "people" in political struggle. Of course, in many cases figures in the Third World themselves encouraged this displacement. For example, Biafran leaders, who had hired a Swiss public relations firm to handle external communications, tried to cast the Biafrans as helpless victims in a bid to translate international sympathy into political recognition – the war was, after all, deliberately portrayed as genocide.[921] Thus, some peoples, such as the Biafrans, Kurds, or the people of East Pakistan, came to be seen as an aggregation of miserable, individual objects, not a singular, heroic, political subject like the Vietnamese. In this way, some currents within MSF helped reorient solidarity to offering aid to individual victims regardless of the political context.

Under Kouchner's leadership, MSF also heralded a revolution in the mediatization of solidarity. During the Biafran War, the ICRC not only exercised strict impartiality, but required all volunteers to sign agreements promising confidentiality. But as Kouchner later put it, some of the "French doctors" felt that by "keeping silent, we doctors were accomplices in the systematic massacre of a population."[922] Upon their return to France, Kouchner and Max Récamier violated their agreement by publishing an article in *Le Monde* describing what they had seen, giving rise to the key concept of "témoignage," or bearing witness. In addition, Kouchner and others channeled

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[919] Cited in Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, 175.
[920] Ibid, 47.
[921] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, 39; Morris Davis, *Interpreters for Nigeria: The Third World and International Public Relations* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977). For the Biafran genocide, see the special double issue, "The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, nos. 2-3 (2004), especially the issue introduction by Lasse Heerten and Dirk Moses.
[922] Quoted in Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: IB Taurus, 1993), 125.

the anti-imperialist activism of the time to form a Comité de lutte contre le génocide au Biafra and

tapped all their media contacts to popularize the plight of the Biafrans.[923]

In the following years, Kouchner went further, experimenting with the mass media.

Humanitarians had long used vivid images, emotional appeals, and riveting news stories, and

radical activists had always resorted to spectacular actions. But Kouchner, like the New

Philosophers with whom he increasingly allied himself, began to wed solidarity to the mass media

to a degree far beyond anything either humanitarians or radicals had contemplated. In his mind,

orchestrating a media uproar, or a "tapage médiatique," as he later called it, to carve out airtime,

coax celebrity endorsements, win the attention of pop stars, secure private funding, and sir up the

emotions of viewers was now just as vital to the success of a humanitarian campaign as the

actual relief work, if not more so. Historian Michael Barnett has gone so far as to write that for

Kouchner the "primary purpose of relief was to generate publicity and international action; that is,

MSF's relief operations might save some lives directly, but the real value in the operations was

their ability to attract concerted action."[924] Of course, this non-neutral, mediatized radical

humanitarianism was certainly not born of a single rupture, and many in MSF opposed it. Indeed,

MSF did not formally abandon the principle of neutrality until 1977, and Kouchner's media antics

split the organization in 1979. Nevertheless, even many of his opponents eventually adopted

Kouchner's brand of mediatized international solidarity.

Lastly, Kouchner and others helped further transform international solidarity through what

they later termed *le droit d'ingérence*.[925] After Biafra, Kouchner and other "French doctors,"

argued that humanitarians, as well as states, had a right to intervene in the internal affairs of a

nation-state. They made certain to inscribe this concept in the very name of the new organization:

the suffering of victims supersedes all national borders. To be sure, this kind of forcible

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[923] "Création à Paris d'un comité de lutte contre le genocide au Biafra," *Le Monde*, December 14, 1968, 4.

[924] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 151.

[925] André Glucksmann and Bernard Kouchner, "La preuve par le Cambodge," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 785 (November 26 - December 2, 1976): 132. Kouchner later promoted the closely related, though distinct notion of *le devoir d'ingérence*. Mario Bettati and Bernard Kouchner, *Le devoir d'ingérence* (Paris: Denoël, 1987).

intervention in the name of humanity was not new.[926] But Kouchner's wing of MSF did enrich the concept: they coupled intervention with idea of "engagement" popular among French radicals, recasting humanitarianism as a form of "militant" action.[927] They used the idea of *urgence* to reframe humanitarian intervention as a kind of state of emergency in which the need for swift medical action could justify the suspension of official rules and regulations.[928] And they clamored not only for the intervention of states, but also for the right of private individuals with no real jurisdiction to cross sovereign borders to protect victims.

It is not surprising that such a strong interventionist line developed in France. While Biafra triggered tense discussions in other countries over the right to interfere, the concept of intervention found easy acceptance in France largely because it was legal.[929] In addition, MSF's radicalized humanitarianism could be seen as an attempt to rearticulate historically French notions of universality and solidarity in a postcolonial context – of course, as others have pointed out, this meant that Kouchner's insistence on the right to intervene in the Third World tracked eerily close to France's sordid history of civilizing missions.[930] Yet despite such firm roots in the French context, the notion of the *droit d'ingérence*, some have argued, did make its way beyond France, in large part through the efforts of Kouchner after his appointment as both Minister of Health and *action humanitarie* in 1988 and his subsequent involvement with the United Nations.[931]

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[926] Fabian Klose, ed. *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[927] Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, 46, 64; Bertrand Taithe, "Reinventing (French) Universalism: Religion, Humanitarianism, and the 'French Doctors,'" *Modern and Contemporary France* 12, no. 2 (2014): 149.

[928] Taithe, "Reinventing (French) Universalism," 149.

[929] Philippe Guillot, "France, Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Intervention," *International Peacekeeping* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 31.

[930] Taithe, "Reinventing (French) Universalism," 149; Lasse Heerten, "The Dystopia of Postcolonial Catastrophe: Self-Determination, the Biafran War of Secession, and the 1970s Human Rights Moment," in *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, eds. Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 31. Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 155-69.

[931] Tim Allen and David Styan, "A Right to Intervene? Bernard Kouchner and the New Humanitarianism," *Journal of International Development* 12 (2000): 825-42.

Over the course of the 1970s, this radical humanitarianism encountered an ascendant human rights discourse. The convergence was made possible by the particular international conjuncture, which included the unique legacy of Biafra in France.[932] As Brauman later explained, "The revelations of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Helsinki conference, the proliferations of dictatorships in Latin America, the crisis in revolutionary ideologies after failure of the socialist experiments in the Third World, and the 1977 award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty International," all contributed to the popularity of human rights discourse in France.[933] By the end of the decade, the MSF's radicalized humanitarianism and the kind of human rights most visibly represented by Amnesty International achieved a kind of temporary fusion. In 1979, for example, MSF cofounder Xavier Emmanuelli openly spoke about "the questions of human rights." "[W]e are speaking today," he continued, pointing to the model of Amnesty, "of orienting Médecins Sans Frontières' action towards this field of morality and justice."[934]

The encounter transformed both elements.[935] Human rights allowed MSF to ground humanitarian intervention in the conceptual framework of universal rights, justifying their belief in the primacy of the individual victim over national sovereignty. At the same time, the fusion boosted human rights in the late 1970s. Since MSF emerged out of the far left, with a number of its members having belonged to anti-imperialist formations in their youth, the organization's pedigree helped further infuse human rights with the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s. As Kouchner repeatedly stated, MSF was an heir to 1968, which cunningly suggested that human rights might be as well. And despite its political ambiguities, Kouchner's wing of MSF managed to preserve some of its radical credentials by siding with the same radical struggles, such as those of the Palestinians or the Sandinistas, that anti-imperialists supported in the 1970s.[936]

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[932] Ibid., 15-32.

[933] Rony Brauman, "The Médecins Sans Frontières Experience," in *A Framework for Survival: Health, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Assistance in Conflicts and Disasters*, ed. Kevin M. Cahill (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993), 209.

[934] Xavier Emmanuelli, quoted in Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, 213.

[935] Of course, this was a tenuous encounter, as human rights and humanitarianism remained distinct. MSF's relation to human rights, for example, fluctuated considerably.

[936] Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 146-47, 154.

But more than attributing human rights with a progressive aura, MSF offered human rights an attractive model of radical activism. Of course, human rights groups like Amnesty International already had their own forms of activism, such as letter writing, but these seemed uninspiring compared to the dynamic activism associated with the anti-imperialist radicals of the 1960s and early 1970s. MSF, by contrast, appeared as a human rights organization that could channel much of the daring, confrontational, and personally transformative activism of the anti-imperialists. With this basis in radical activism, MSF helped elevate human rights into a substantial form of international solidarity that could not only compete with anti-imperialism, but perhaps even beat it at its own game.

Indeed, this is precisely what happened in 1978. MSF's growth, the rise of a new rights discourse, the growing marginalization of the radicals, and above all disasters in the Third World prompted a few thinkers to call for a new "international of human rights" to replace the failed anti-imperialist internationalism of the earlier decade. Juillard's attack on "Third Worldism," for example, ended with just such call. Channeling the anti-totalitarian discourse exemplified by the New Philosophers, he set collective self-determination against individual liberty: "*The rights of peoples have become the principal instrument in strangling human rights*."[937] As such, the interstate rivalries, ideological divisions, and political struggles that defined the Cold War were over. "There are certainly two camps in the Third World," he explained, but "these two camps are not the American and the Soviet."[938] They are those of "torturer states" and "martyred people."[939] In other words, the struggle was now between suffering individuals and nation-states.

In this context, Julliard argued, international solidarity had to be overhauled. He therefore proposed a new internationalism: integrating the victims of the world into "an Internationale of human rights, which is the sole response to the Internationale of States."[940] This, he added, was the "only possible" path, since "any other attitude would make us accomplices of the

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[937] Jacques Julliard, "Le tiers monde et la gauche," 38-39.
[938] Ibid., 39.
[939] Ibid, 40.
[940] Ibid.

executioners."[941] When Juillard came under attack for his provocative comments, none other than Bernard Kouchner, the man who had helped turn MSF into a model for the kind of human rights international Juillard called for, rushed to his defense, just as he had defended the New Philosophers. Slamming the far left, Kouchner asserted that the only acceptable form of international activism was the "relentless defense of all minorities," the fight against "all oppressions."[942] The defense of the human demanded the overturning of all inherited political coordinates, especially those of the radicals.

As criticism of Juillard's article showed, not all radicals abandoned anti-imperialism for the emergent human rights international. Despite their diminished numbers and exacerbating internal rivalries, revolutionary groups, such as the Trotksyist LCR or the pro-Chinese Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste (PCML), successor to the PCMLF, resisted the new wave of reaction. Radical intellectuals such as Nicos Poulantzas, Jacques Rancière, and Gilles Deleuze criticized the anti-revolutionary trend personified by the New Philosophers. Others, like Régis Debray, denounced human rights as the new face of imperialism:

> The dominant ideology of "human rights," which contains a bizarre blend of the political decomposition of May and the most classic imperialist practice, both represents and travesties (like all judicial ideology) a relation of social forces. It indicates simultaneously the growing awareness in the industrial West of the extreme fragility of its world domination and its will to defend it by any means, economic, technical or military. For precise economic reasons, respect for the white man's rights passes by way of the violation (systematic in principle but variable in its methods) of the right of brown, black, yellow and red men.[943]

To be sure, anti-imperialist radicals, not only in France, but throughout North America and Western Europe, were in an extremely precarious position in the 1970s. Nevertheless, radicals might have been able to reinvent revolutionary politics, and with it, a new kind of anti-imperialist internationalism, in spite of these defeats. But in the final years of the 1970s and especially in the early 1980s radicals faced a series of domestic and global crises that would completely shatter

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[941] Ibid.

[942] Bernard Kouchner, "Les bons et les mauvais morts," *Le Nouvel Observateu*r no. 712 (July 3, 1978), reprinted in *Le Tiers monde et la gauche*, 51.

[943] Régis Debray, "A Modest Contribution to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Tenth Anniversary," *New Left Review* 115 (May-June 1979): 65.

the very idea of anti-imperialist internationalism. As history would have it, Southeast Asia once more became an epicenter of change for radicals, though this time, in the opposite direction.

The Crisis of Revolutionary Internationalism

On December 21, 1978, two divisions of Vietnamese soldiers crossed the border into Cambodia, claiming to support an autonomous uprising of Cambodians against the Khmer Rouge. Four days later, another 150,000 soldiers followed. Despite Chinese aid, the Kampuchean military suffered a crushing defeat, and Cambodian leader Pol Pot ordered a general evacuation to the west of the country. After a series of lightening victories, Vietnamese troops marched through the streets of Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979. The following day, with victory over its socialist neighbor secure, the military announced the formation of a new coalition government under the aegis of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). Though nominally independent, it was clear who controlled the government.

This astonishing turn of events did not come from nowhere. Even if Vietnamese and Cambodians fought together against France and then the United States, relations were far from amicable. The Vietnamese, who had always played the most visible role in the struggle against imperialism in Southeast Asia, felt they should exercise a kind of revolutionary hegemony in the region. For their part, the Khmer Rouge, the xenophobic ruling party of Cambodia, resented the Vietnamese. Recalling Vietnam's historical dominance over the Khmer people, the loss of a significant part of Cambodia's territory to its neighbor during the colonial period, as well as the Vietnamese communists' often paternalistic, controlling attitude towards militants in neighboring countries, the Khmer Rouge espoused a fanatically anti-Vietnamese line. In fact, on May 1, 1975 less than twenty-four hours after the fall of Saigon, the Kampuchean Revolutionary Army – which in April defeated the Khmer Republic, a dictatorship supported by the United States – promptly invaded Phú Quốc, the largest island in Vietnam, claiming it as Cambodian territory. Just ten days later, the Cambodian Army invaded another island. In retaliation, the Vietnamese Army swiftly recaptured them both and then invaded Koh Wai, one of Cambodia's own islands. Despite

declarations of unity, these disputes only continued over the next four years, and the rivalry between Cambodia and Vietnam deteriorated further.[944]

To make matters worse, this rivalry grafted directly onto the Sino-Soviet split. During the war, Vietnamese revolutionaries studiously avoided taking sides in the conflict. Yet after Chinese aid dwindled in 1968, and the People's Republic of China (PR) reached a rapprochement with the United States in 1972, Vietnam increasingly tilted towards the Soviet Union. The fall of Saigon in 1975, and the prospect of a strong, united Vietnam, made China anxious, leading Beijing to increase its support to Cambodia to provide a counterweight to Vietnam's potential dominance in the region. The Khmer Rouge, heavily influenced by Maoism, firmly aligned itself with its Chinese patron. Feeling encircled, and battered from years of war, the Vietnamese drew closer to China's rival, signing a treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviets in November 1978, which guaranteed Soviet support in case of Chinese invasion. Only a few years after finally winning peace, Southeast Asia had once more become a geopolitical powder keg, though this time, between governments that all called themselves socialist.

These geopolitical maneuvers, along with diplomatic breakdown, border skirmishes, and even a brief Vietnamese retaliatory invasion of Cambodia in December 1977 were not lost on radicals abroad. Few, however, expected the massive Vietnamese invasion that overthrew the Khmer Rouge. Even fewer suspected that the Vietnamese incursion, ostensibly to aid rebelling Cambodians, would end in occupation. Fewer still could believe that the PRC would retaliate the following month. Indeed, the People's Liberation Army, with encouragement from the United States, decided to "teach Vietnam a lesson" by invading its southern neighbor with over 200,000 soldiers on February 17, 1979.[945] In response, the Soviets deployed troops on the Sino-Soviet

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[944] For a detailed but biased account of the split between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese, see Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), part 1. For a history of Cambodian politics since the Second World War, see David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For a more general history of Cambodia, see Marie Alexandrine Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, trans. Mark W. McLeod (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
[945] Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1992), 133-41.

and Mongolian borders. World war appeared imminent. Sensing the risks, the PRC withdrew after three weeks, declaring its limited, punitive incursion a success. Nevertheless, the conflict continued: the Khmer Rouge waged guerilla war against the Vietnamese military, the SRV effectively occupied Cambodia for the next decade, and much of the international community, led by the United States, imposed a crushing embargo on the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.[946]

This astonishing turn of events stunned radicals in North America and Western Europe, especially in countries like the United States and France where anti-imperialism had been so essential to their identity. In the 1960s and early 1970s, unity on the wars in Indochina was practically a given. Of course, radicals had always found something to disagree about. Should they defend the DRV or publicly denounce it? Should they support the NLF or was another organizational force possible? Could the revolution produce genuine socialism, or was it doomed to devolve into a kind of "state capitalism?" Many of these disagreements grafted onto preexisting political divisions between Maoists, various shades of Trotskyists, and other radical tendencies. Yet, despite these differences in analysis, slogans, and tactics, when anti-imperialist radicals had to choose between American imperialism or the Vietnamese liberation struggle, Thieu or the Provisional Revolutionary Government, Lon Nol or the Cambodian insurgents, the Kingdom of Lao or the revolutionary Pathet Lao, the answer was obvious.

But now, in 1979, radicals found themselves faced with a very different situation. The lines, relatively clear in the past, now blurred, the old certainties faded, and the heroes became indistinguishable from the villains. The official communist movement, following the USSR's lead, unequivocally defended Vietnam. Yet some radicals shared this assessment as well. For example, one French activist argued in a letter to *Rouge*, the LCR's paper, that "there is nothing questionable" about the Vietnamese "lending a helping hand to the struggle of the real Khmer

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[946] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood at War: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos since 1975, 2nd Edition* (London: Verso, 1990); Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds., *The Third Indochina War: Conflict Between China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, 1972-79* (New York, Routledge, 2006).

communists" in the civil war with Pol Pot's regime.[947] Citing France's disastrous non-intervention

policy during the Spanish Civil War, he argued the duty of real internationalists was precisely to

involve themselves in wars of this kind.

Most radicals, however, adopted a more ambivalent approach. The PSU, for example,

welcomed the fall of Pol Pot's "tyrannical, atrociously bloody" and "fascist" regime, but objected to

Vietnam "deliberately violating the sovereignty of an independent state."[948] The LCR, which saw

the invasion as the logical product of the "socialism in one country" doctrine allegedly pursued by

Vietnam's "Stalinist bureaucracy," denounced Vietnam for violating the socialist principle of

internationalism and, in an echo of the antiwar struggle, demanded "immediate withdrawal."[949] At

the same time, however, the LCR argued that most of the blame fell on China. The PRC, along

with Cambodia, had conspired to contain the Vietnamese revolution; encircled, the Vietnamese

had no choice but to turn to the Soviet Union to break free. After the Chinese invasion, the

Ligue's critical support for Vietnam grew.

But some radicals, especially the pro-Chinese, not only excoriated Vietnam, they even

rallied to Pol Pot's defense. When the PRC invaded Vietnam, pro-Chinese groups like the French

Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire (PCR) rushed to justify China's actions: confronted with

Vietnam's expansionist provocations, on full display in Laos and Cambodia, the PCR argued,

China had no choice but to launch a "defensive action" to push back the "aggressors."[950] In fact,

China was not only defending its right to national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the PCR

continued, its swift action helped "push back the danger of world war," and in this sense, was in

full accord with "the interests of the people of the world."[951] Invasion was internationalism.

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[947] [First name illegible] Klaufer, "à propos de Vietnam-Cambodge," *Rouge* 848, January 29, 1979, 9.
[948] José Sanchez, "Cambodge: La cerise et le noyau," *Tribune socialiste* 809, January 12-17, 1979, 13.
[949] Daniel Bensaid, "Les troupes vietnamiennes doivent quitter le Cambodge," *Rouge* 837, January 12-14, 1979, 5.
[950] Jean-Pierre Champagny, "Après plusieurs mois de provocations vietnamiennes soutenues par l'URSS l'armée chinoise riposte aux aggressions," *Le Quotidien du Peuple*, February 20, 1978, 7.
[951] Ibid.

These same fault lines emerged within the much smaller American radical left. There, groups such as the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) argued that while the Vietnamese Communist Party's Stalinism deserved international condemnation, "*the responsibility for the bloodbath in Indochina falls squarely on Washington*."[952] For the SWP, the Chinese invasion of Vietnam was actually part of an ongoing international counterrevolutionary campaign led the United States to overthrow the Vietnamese revolution. Thus, although critical of Vietnam, like the LCR, its fraternal party in France, the SWP demanded an end to "the imperialist campaign against the Vietnamese revolution!"[953] Other groups, like the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), openly defended the Khmer Rouge, arguing that the "struggle of the Kampuchean people and government for liberation and independence" is "a just and heroic struggle."[954] Other American radicals, especially those not in formal groups, were simply bewildered by the war.

To be sure, this was not the first time that radicals in both the United States and France had split so sharply over an international issue, but the disagreement over the wars in Southeast Asia assumed a different magnitude. This had to do in part with radicals' deep identification with Indochinese struggles, and particularly those of the Vietnamese, in the 1960s and early 1970s. After all, the Vietnamese struggle played a decisive role in the formation of the radical left in France and the United States, served as the basis for international unity, and helped turn radicals towards revolution. Radicals were so wedded to Southeast Asia that confronting the crisis there necessarily meant confronting their own identity and founding assumptions.

But the Third Indochina War, as it is sometimes called, proved so cataclysmic not only because it provoked sharp disagreements, or even because it triggered a kind of identity crisis, but because it completely undermined the theoretical basis of anti-imperialist internationalism. After all, what could internationalism possibly mean when socialist movements that once united against U.S. imperialism now went to war against each other? As historian Benedict Anderson

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[952] "US war drive: root of Indochina fighting," *The Militant* 43, no. 9, March 9, 1979), 1.
[953] Mary-Alice Waters, "Hands off Vietnam! Peking's invasion aid Washington's drive against Indochinese revolution," *The Militant* 43, no. 8, March 2, 1979, 5.
[954] ''The Enemy is Drowning in People's War:' Interview with Kampuchean Deputy Ambassador," *Revolutionary Worker*, June 15, 1979, 6.

observed, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, and the subsequent Chinese response, was completely unprecedented: the war "represented the first *large-scale conventional war*" between socialist governments.[955] The war showed that anti-imperialist internationalism had in fact not culminated in a network of sovereign nation-states working together to build socialism, but in imperialism and anti-internationalism.

Radicals were devastated. Whatever its intentions, Vietnam, once the leader of a revived internationalism, had become its gravedigger. As Daniel Bensaïd of the LCR explained, the first fall of Phnom Penh, just a week before that of Saigon in 1975, was the "highest symbol of the struggle against imperialism and the rallying point of militant internationalism across the world."[956] But the second fall, at the hands of the Vietnamese just five years later, marked the collapse of internationalism. In unilaterally invading Cambodia, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam "beat back all internationalist solutions to the Indochinese question," foreclosing genuine international solidarity.[957] Watching the peoples of Southeast Asia, once allied in a struggle for total victory, only added to the enormous crisis in which radicals had already found themselves in the 1970s. But more than that, it raised major questions about the constituent ideas of anti-imperialist internationalism.

The Anti-Vietnam International

While many radicals recognized the gravity of the situation, and what it meant for radical politics as a whole, some radicals, above all those who looked to Mao's China, simply doubled down on anti-imperialist internationalism. Although Maoist, anti-revisionist, and pro-Chinese formations mushroomed throughout North America and Western Europe in the 1960s, a coordinated international did not initially take shape there.[958] One of the largest stumbling blocks

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[955] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 1.
[956] Daniel Bensaïd, "Le deuxième chute de Phnom Penh," *Rouge* 835, January 9, 1979, 1.
[957] Ibid.
[958] For a useful, though incomplete, litany of pro-Chinese, Marxist-Leninist, and Maoist formations in North America and Western Europe, see Robert J. Alexander, *Maoism in the Developed World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001). For the development of such formations in the United States and

was that in the 1960s these radicals formed many, rival formations in the same country that refused to fuse. In France, for example, by the early 1970s there were perhaps over two-dozen parties that took their inspiration from China.[959] Most of them jealously guarded their autonomy, disagreeing on almost everything except their common support of the People's Republic of China. In fact, Maoist groups would frequently denounce *each other* for revisionist errors, having misunderstood Mao's teachings, or acting disloyally to China.

In this context, it made little sense for China to explicitly favor one party over the others. Thus, while the Chinese Communist Party did bestow the "franchise" on one national pro-Chinese party in each country, effectively making that formation its "official" representative, this designation ultimately carried little weight, at least in the 1960s, since China continued to support, publicize, and even fund a variety of pro-Chinese parties in the same country. Although aware of the risks, China nevertheless did encourage unity of some kind, often inviting Maoists and anti-revisionists to attend China for special events, where they were regaled as foreign dignitaries.[960] In addition, some parties even developed special lateral relations with one another, such as the French Gauche prolétarienne and the Belgian Université-Usine-Union, a concord usually based on the fact that they happened to share a particular interpretation of what the "Chinese example," in itself a highly ambiguous reality, actually signified.[961] Moreover, in some cases, rogue radicals such as Hardial Baines even tried, though always unsuccessfully, to link up these allied groups in their own trans-Atlantic Maoist international. Thus, despite all these initiatives, a formal anti-revisionist international did not emerge in the 1960s.[962]

France specifically, see A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Praeger), chapters 3 and 5.

[959] Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Plon 1996), 147.

[960] Ibid. 145-47,

[961] Manuel Abramowicz, "Au Coeur de la galaxie marxiste-léniniste de Belgique," in *Dissidences 7*: 107.

[962] There were much more earnest attempts to build an international in Southeast Asia, however, especially before the decimation of the Indonesian Communist Party, one of China's strongest supporters, in 1965. Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 208.

The preconditions for a functional pro-Chinese international emerged only after the PRC began to pursue a radically different foreign policy in the mid-1970s, officially expressed in the Theory of the Three Worlds.[963]According to the Theory, the globe was now divided into three distinct worlds: the First composed of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union; the Second including all the lesser powers, especially those of "Britain, France, West Germany, and Japan;" and the Third comprising the rest of the developing world.[964] According to China, in this new situation, the competition between the two superpowers for global hegemony was leading to instability, imperialism, and even world war. It was therefore up to the Third World to build the largest possible international front to repel the "imperialism, colonialism, and hegemonism" of these two superpowers, especially the Soviet Union, which China soon identified as the main threat to world peace.[965] While the Third World, naturally led by China, constituted the core of this front, it could count on the help of countries in the Second World: faced with the growing threat of war, and needing to defend their "national independence" from the superpowers, it was in the best interest of those Second World countries to join the international front.[966]

Despite its seemingly revolutionary rhetoric, the Theory effectively justified China's abandonment of global revolution in favor of pursuing domestic development, building tactical alliances with other countries, and above all, containing its greatest rival, the Soviet Union. In arguing that the contradictions between nations had definitely replaced contradictions between classes, the Theory of the Three Worlds allowed China to reinscribe anti-imperialist internationalism within the framework of geopolitics, state rivalries, and international diplomacy. For pro-Chinese parties around the world, this meant downplaying class struggles at home in favor of national unity in the face of "hegemonism." In Western Europe, many radicals promoted a

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[963] Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 214-15; Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, 22-23. For an incisive discussion of the general theoretical gesture of dividing the globe into "three worlds," see Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), chapter 8.
[964] "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism," in Renmin Ribao (People's Daily), November 1, 1977, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/theory-3-worlds/.
[965] Ibid.
[966] Ibid.

kind of ultra nationalism in the hopes of pushing their respective Second World countries into an alliance with the Third World against the First. In Scandinavia, six pro-Chinese parties held a joint meeting where they announced that, since the two superpowers were using Nordic waters as staging ground, encroaching on the "national sovereignty" of several countries, their task was to "mobilize the peoples of the Nordic countries to defend their countries' right of self-determination …"[967] In France, the PCML even allied with Gaullists, monarchists, and extreme right organizations such as Action Française to defend French national sovereignty against the United States and the Soviet Union.[968] Internationalism had become national chauvinism, and anti-imperialism now meant joining with the bourgeoisie to defend the right to independence.

Many pro-Chinese radicals were unsurprisingly dismayed. Some argued that China, after having denounced the Soviet Union for raising its national interests before those of revolutionary internationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, was now doing precisely the same, which led to a major split in the international pro-Chinese movement and ruptures within individual parties.[969] Many radicals, however, remained ardently loyal to China. The PRC, trying to use the split in its favor, began to encourage a kind of pro-Chinese international, hoping that a tight network of parties across the world could help bolster its stature internationally. After 1976, a remarkably coordinated pro-Chinese international began to take shape, stretching from Argentina to East Germany to Cambodia. But, in contrast to the 1960s, China took special interest in cultivating an international network not so much in the Third World, but in North America and above all Western Europe, the core of the Second World, and hopefully a key ally in the fight against the United States and especially the Soviet Union. For their part, loyal parties in North America and Western Europe were only too eager to build the new international.

Forging the international often proceeded along prosaic routes. One way pro-Chinese parties connected was to showcase one another in their publications. For example, in 1976, the

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[967] "Communiqué From the First Joint Meeting of Nordic Marxist-Leninists," in *Documents from the First Join Meeting of Nordic Marxist-Leninists* (Norway, January 1975), 6 in David Sullivan US Maoism Collection TAM.527, Box 13, Folder 50, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York.
[968] Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes*, 256-60.
[969] Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air,* 214-21; Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes*, 264.

October League, China's official arm in the United States, ran a series of articles introducing American readers to the fraternal parties in Western Europe, since, following the Three Worlds Theory, that region was to become a major battleground in the fight against "hegemonism."[970] Moreover, the League explained, "U.S. Marxist Leninists have a lot to learn from the communist movement in the countries of the second world. In many cases, they have longer and broader experience in both the class struggle and the struggle against modern revisionism. The workers in all countries have always learned and supported each other, and it is in this proletarian internationalist spirit that this series is written."[971] In December, they published a lengthy, two-part interview with Jacques Jurquet, leader of the Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste (PCML), who discussed the struggle against "modern revisionism" in France.[972]

From there, parties regularly congratulated one another on formal achievements, creating the appearance of a coherent pro-Chinese world. Whenever a party reached a milestone, such as adopting a new program, holding a national conference, or celebrating the anniversary of the party's founding, parties from across the globe would publicize the achievement and issue dozens of letters of support. Thus, in June 1977, when the October League formally reorganized itself as the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) – led by Mark Klonsky, onetime national secretary of the Students for a Democratic Society, and including a number of respected communists, such as Carl Davidson and Harry Haywood – the PCML saluted them on the front page of its paper, pontificating, "the creation of your party, in the very heart of one of the two most aggressive imperialisms of the present epoch is a harsh blow to the international bourgeoisie."[973] In gratitude, the Communist Party (ML) reprinted the PCML's statement, along with over a dozen letters of support from other countries, in the pages of its newspaper. All pro-Chinese parties did

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[970] For the October League, which would later become the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), see Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, 102-103, 228-34.

[971] "War and Revolution on the Rise," *The Call*, September 20, 1976.

[972] "French Marxist-Leninists Steeled in Battle Against Revisionism," *The Call*, December 6, 1976, 6.

[973] "Saluons la creation du Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste," *L'Humanité rouge* 713, June 25, 1977, 2.

the same for every marginally formal event. In this way they helped create the sense that they were more numerous, organized, and coordinated than they actually were.

Lastly, parties penned joint statements. Although often little more than restatements of the official Chinese stance on a given issue, empty rhetoric, or quotations from Lenin, Stalin, or Mao, these performances helped forge unity. Thus, the October League and the Canadian Communist League released a joint communiqué in May 1977 supporting one another's struggles.[974] Or in 1978, the Austrian Communist League and the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Turkey published a common statement reconfirming the need to build an international front to fight the "Soviet social imperialists and the U.S. imperialists …"[975] These kinds of actions even worked to unite rival pro-Chinese parties in the same country. For example, by the end of 1978, the PCML and the Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire (PCR), were not only releasing common declarations, or even sharing resources, but even entered negotiations to fuse into a single party.

While all these gestures may appear foolish, they were in fact necessary. For what pulled this international together was unanimity on the *correct ideological line*. Its organizing principle was the centrality of the People's Republic of China, its theoretical core the Theory of the Three Worlds, and its primary function to project China's official position on any given issue. Whatever the event, the PRC could expect a united chorus to echo its line throughout the world. In this way, the International's tight coordination compensated for its numerical weaknesses. Indeed, with the exception of Norway, which boasted a Maoist party with 5,000 members, a widely read newspaper, and strong ties to intellectuals, most national pro-Chinese parties were rather small, never more than 1,000 members at their height. But they amplified their power by operating as a kind of echo chamber, trumpeting the same line at the same time in every major country in North America and Western Europe. It is precisely this machine that went into action during the Third Indochina War.

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[974] "Join Communiqué Issued by the October League and the Canadian Communist League," *The Call*, May 23, 1977, 6-7.
[975] Reprinted as "Communiqué commun des partis marxistes-léninistes (TKIP et KBO), *L'Humanité rouge* 931, September 16-17, 1978, 2.

When Vietnam invaded Cambodia, the pro-Chinese parties sprung into action. Since the

Khmer Rouge was China's closest ally, these parties immediately turned their guns against the

SRV. They denounced Vietnam for violating Cambodia's national sovereignty. They compared

Vietnam's offensive to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the U.S. war in

Vietnam. They even tried to blame Vietnam for the mass suffering caused by the Khmer Rouge,

charging that it was the SRV, not the Khmer Rouge, that was perpetrating genocide. The

Canadian Communist League, which had sent a representative to Cambodia just days before the

invasion, charged that Vietnam had deliberately planned to "let people starve."[976] In the United

States, Carl Davidson, writing for the CPML's paper, called the invasion a "war of

extermination."[977] In France, the PCML – whose leader, Jacques Jurquet, visited Pol Pot in

September 1978 – claimed that Vietnam had knowingly unleashed a "holocaust" in Cambodia.[978]

Going even further, some parties alleged that Vietnam planned to colonize the occupied

territories once they had eradicated the native Cambodians, as the Nazis hoped to do in Eastern

Europe. Intent on pursuing a kind of "settler colonialism," the PCML argued, "Vietnamese

colonists are progressively replacing the Cambodian peasants."[979] The PCR added that Vietnam

would not stop with Cambodia, but planned to colonize all of Southeast Asia.[980]

While one could dismiss these accusations as the propagandistic ravings of marginal

extremists, in some countries pro-Chinese radicals overcame their fringe reputation to play a role

in the discourse surrounding the Southeast Asian crisis. In France, the PCML seized the lead,

encouraging its members to organize among all sectors of society – in the unions and

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[976] "Why Vietnam and the USSR invaded Democratic Kampuchea," *October* 6, Spring 1979, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ca.secondwave/october-kamp.htm.
[977] Carl Davidson, "Should we speak out on Hanoi's atrocities?," *The Call* 8, no. 28, July 16, 1979, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/davidson-baez.htm.
[978] "Rapport sur la situation actuelle et nos tâches," *L'humanité rouge* 1168, November 16, 1979, 2.
[979] "Cambodge: les methods de Hanoï pour exterminer un people," *L'Humanité rouge* 1181, December, 5, 1979, 5.
[980] "Les non-alignés maintiennent leur refus du "fait accompli" Vietnamien au Cambodge," *Le Quotidien du peuple* 919, May 19-21, 1979, 11.

universities, within the religious and intellectual milieus – to shape public opinion over the war.[981]

Cognizant of the need to downplay their extremist reputation, the PCML pursued the widest

possible popular fronts while deliberately effacing its own involvement in the campaign.[982] On

January 10, 1979, for example, the PCML organized a solidarity demonstration in Paris with the

PCR and the Comité des Patriotes du Kampuchea démocratique en France, a group of

Cambodians residing in France.[983] Later that month, the PCML gathered signatures for a call to

solidarity with the Cambodian people, which they published in *Le Monde*. We who "supported the

struggles of the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian people against American aggression," the

statement read, "condemn the occupation of this country by the Vietnamese army, denouncing it

as an infringement of the independence of a State and of a people."[984] In addition to confirming

their radical credentials, recalling the Vietnam War in this manner allowed these anti-Vietnam

activists to legitimate their campaign by grounding it in the very same principles of national self-

determination that guided the anti-imperialist struggle against the United States.

These activists also looked to the antiwar movement for organizational models. The

PCML, for example, later established a Comité Kampuchea, explicitly based on the Comité

Vietnam National and Comité Vietnam de Bases, in which some of these anti-Vietnam activists

had once participated.[985] Following the anti-Vietnam War struggle, the new anti-Vietnam

campaign made international solidarity a priority. Drawing on the networks of the pro-Chinese

International, activists, again led by the PCML, organized a conference for "international solidarity

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[981] Claude Liria, "Cambodge aujourd'hui: lutte pour la survie d'un peuple," *L'Humanité rouge*, November 29, 1979, 6.

[982] "La tactique de notre parti pour impulser er developper la soutien politique de notre peuple a la juste cause nationale du peuple du Kampuchea," no date, 2, F Delta Res 613/66: Relations internationales: Cambodge, Laos, Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France.

[983] "Rassemblement," *L'Humanité rouge* 1006, January 11, 1979, 1.

[984] Reprinted as "Appel pour le soutien au Cambodge contre l'agression Vietnamienne," *Kampuchea Vaincra!: Journal du Comité Kampuchea*, no. 1 (February 1979): 4.

[985] "Appel," *Kampuchea Vaincra!*, 2. It should be noted, however, that the pro-Chinese and Maoists were not united in their efforts, even if they all supported the Khmer resistance against Vietnam. Alain Badiou's group, the Union de Communists de France Marxistes-Léninistes (UCFML), for example, created its own rival base committee, the Comité Kampuchéa Vaincra (CVK). "Pour un Comité Kampuchéa Vaincra!," supplement to *ML* no. 33-34, no date, F Delta Res 613/66, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France.

with Cambodia" in Stockholm in November 1979, gathering over 250 delegates from 31 countries. To make sure the conference would reach as wide an audience as possible, pro-Chinese activists also encouraged sympathetic journalists, artists, scientists, academics, priests, and politicians to endorse the event. They secured the support of luminaries such as Albert Memmi, the famous anticolonial theorist, Alain Badiou, the philosopher, and Joris Ivens, the filmmaker.[986] Folk singer Joan Baez sent a message to the conference, as did the French Resister Charles Tillon, while the Swedish writer Jan Myrdal delivered a rousing speech.[987] "Our solidarity work," he said, could "signify the life or death of an entire generation in Kampuchea, maybe even for the Khmers as a nation and people as well …"[988]

In Stockholm, then at another organization meeting in Paris soon after, activists formed an international movement, the Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge, and organized a series of other events, including two more international conferences in Tokyo, which involved Samir Amin, and Paris.[989] In true anti-imperialist fashion, the movement's official platform condemned Vietnam for violating Cambodian national sovereignty, demanded immediate withdrawal, and insisted on the Cambodian people's "right to self-determination."[990] It also called on activists to support all Cambodian efforts without exclusion – which really meant supporting the Khmer Rouge – for the "liberation and independence of Cambodia."[991] Significantly, the Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge tried to legitimate its demands by appealing to the United Nations Charter's principle of non-intervention.[992] The conference, international movement, celebrity sponsors, and conscious attempt to code the campaign in the mainstream language of rights helped the pro-Chinese become a part of the discussion.

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[986] "Une audience qui s'elargit," *L'Humanité rouge* 1168, November 16, 1979, 3.
[987] "Conference mondiale de Stockholm sur le Cambodge," *L'Humanité rouge* 1169, November 17-18, 1979, 2.
[988] "Extraits de l'intervention de Jan Myrdal à la tribune de la conference," *Solidarité Cambodge* (February 1980): 4.
[989] Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge, Communiqué, January 12, 1980, F Delta Res 613/66, BDIC; *Kampuchea Conference: Tokyo 1981*, June 1981 and *Kampuchea Conference: Paris 1982*, June 1982, F Delta Res 613/66, BDIC.
[990] "Plate-Forme: Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge," *Solidarité Cambodge* (February 1980): 7.
[991] Ibid.
[992] Ibid.

The pro-Chinese parties also reached out to those non-governmental humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC, UNICEF, and MSF now turning their attention to the disaster unfolding in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese invasion, which aggravated years of social dislocation under the Khmer Rouge, triggered a demographic catastrophe. Cambodians freed from the work camps rushed to escape, while those beyond the reach of the Vietnamese fled in panic, spurred on by Khmer Rouge propaganda promising that Vietnamese troops would slaughter everyone in their path. The retreating Khmer Rouge abducted thousands more at gunpoint, driving them into crowded camps on the Thai border to serve as slave laborers, human shields, or soldiers for the resistance.[993] The Thai government, although happy to provide sanctuary for Khmer Rouge forces, forcibly repatriated thousands of refugees, in one case literally driving them off a cliff into mines; and when some returned to the border, Thai soldiers opened fire.[994] Although humanitarian organizations, such as MSF, had operated in the region before the invasion, they now made Southeast Asia a priority.[995]

But the situation inside Cambodia was even worse than on the border. When the Vietnamese liberated the collectives, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians abandoned the recently planted crop to return to their home villages, and with the ongoing war, harvests elsewhere were destroyed in the fighting and the main 1979 crop went unplanted, virtually ensuring a famine.[996] Humanitarian organizations begged the new People's Republic of Kampuchea to allow them into the country.[997] While the Vietnamese and Cambodian authorities initially welcomed foreign aid, they soon changed their mind, arguing that international aid would act as "a cover for intervention and aggression."[998] They not only downplayed the magnitude of

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[993] Rony Brauman, "Refugee Camps, Population Transfers, and NGOS," in *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Jonathan Moore (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1998), 178.

[994] Marie Alexandrine Martin, *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*, trans. Mark W. McLeod (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 215-16; William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 82-94.

[995] Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 82-83.

[996] Shawcross, *Quality of Mercy*, 96.

[997] Ibid., chapters 5, 6, 8.

[998] Quoted in ibid., 143.

the crisis, but imposed strict requirements: fearing both foreign intervention and the chance that aid would fall into the hands of Khmer Rouge forces amassing in the border camps, they forbade humanitarian organizations from entering Cambodia unless they surrendered control of distribution to the new government and promised to abandon the refugee camps on the border. They had reason to worry: the Khmer Rouge had appropriated large quantities of medical supplies, some relief organizations like the Red Cross were directly working with camps controlled by the Khmer Rouge, and the U.S. government had already hatched plans to use relief operations to find ways to help the Khmer Rouge fight Vietnam.[999]

Nevertheless, Vietnam's actions aggravated the crisis, infuriating the humanitarians, which in turn led the pro-Chinese to regard them as potential allies in the fight against Vietnam.[1000] The humanitarian campaign, the PCML put it, "is the terrain of an important political battle that we must not abandon."[1001] At the international level, the Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge recognized not only the importance of the humanitarian front, but also the immense popularity of the issue, soon making the call for immediate medical relief the central pillar of its program.[1002] In France, the PCML used both its newspaper and public events to explain how Vietnam blocked humanitarian groups such as the Red Cross, UNICEF, and MSF from entering Cambodia, encouraging activists to put pressure on Phnom Penh to allow international relief, pushing readers to link up with humanitarian groups like MSF, and regularly exhorted their followers to donate to groups like the International Red Cross and UNICEF.[1003] Indeed, since these latter two organizations were working in camps with the Khmer Rouge, the PCML warmly

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[999] Brauman, "Refugee Camps, Population Transfers, and NGOs," 179; Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 183-84.

[1000] On the challenges aid agencies faced in Cambodia, Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 149-51; Brauman, "Refugee Camps," 177-81.

[1001] Liria, "Derrière les déclarations humanitaries …," 4.

[1002] "Plate-Forme: Mouvement Solidarité Cambodge," *Solidarité Cambodge* (February 1980): 7; Solidarité Cambodge: Programme d'aide médicale et sanitaire, 1981-82 (February 1981), no page numbers, F Delta Res 613/66, BDIC.

[1003] Claude Liria, "Derrière les déclarations humanitaries …," *L'Humanité rouge* no. 1159, November 2-4, 1979, 4; "Soutien-Cambodge," *L'Humanité rouge*, April 26-May 7, 1980, 4.

identified them as part of the overall "solidarity campaign," and called their work "positive" for the struggle.[1004]

The PCML also had nice words for MSF. In November 1979, *L'humanité rouge*, the PCML's paper, interviewed an MSF worker who had just returned from Cambodia. Given the organization's principle of neutrality, the MSF activist chose to remain anonymous, but offered some damning remarks about the new government in Phnom Penh. "There is a paradox that one must emphasize: there are volunteers, there are people, there is money, there are donations," in short, everything to help Cambodia, and yet, "all of that is blocked."[1005] The situation grew so intolerable that just one month later, MSF decided to break with neutralism to directly intervene in Cambodian affairs. "Today, in Cambodia, children starve to death before tons of rice," began their rousing call to action, published in all the major newspapers.[1006] "But the hundreds of doctors, surgeons, and nurses whom we are holding ready," MSF continued, have for months found themselves "forbidden from entering the country."[1007] Tired of waiting on the Vietnamese authorities, MSF took matters into its own hands, organizing a campaign, the Marche pour la survie, to forcibly enter Cambodia to save the dying. The PCML quickly reproduced excerpts of the call, obviously quite pleased by this clear attack on Vietnam.

Although MSF criticized Vietnam most vocally, it was not alone. While humanitarians realized that the Khmer Rouge had caused the impending cataclysm, the situation had degraded so badly that by late 1979 they began to shift the blame to the Vietnamese. This redirection, along with the dramatic rhetoric surrounding Cambodia, increasingly made it seem as if the Vietnamese were deliberately murdering the Cambodians. Aid agencies blasted the airwaves with advertisements warning of "two million more before Christmas."[1008] Francois Bugnion of the Red

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[1004] "Soutien sans réserve au peuple cambodgien!," *L'Humanité rouge* no. 1159, November 2-4, 1979, 4.

[1005] Claude Lira, "Témoignage de 'Médecins sans frontières' sur la situation au Cambodge," *L'Humanité rouge*, November 10-11, 1979, 2.

[1006] "'Médecins sans frontières' appelle à une 'marche pour la survie,'" *Le Monde*, December 20, 1979, 3.

[1007] Ibid.

[1008] Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 145-46.

Cross compared Cambodia to Buchenwald. In France, Claude Malhuret, who had been active on the Thai border since 1976 before becoming MSF's president, spoke to the rightwing *Le Figaro* about an impending "massacre" in Cambodia, comparing the Vietnamese invasion to the Armenian genocide.[1009] Kouchner spoke of the "extinction of Cambodian children," proclaiming that [g]enocide is happening every evening, over supper." Unsurprisingly, the New Philosophers joined the chorus, with Bernard-Henri Lévy speaking of a new "final solution."[1010]

In this context, pro-Chinese attacks were no longer disregarded as fanatical ravings. Indeed, groups like the PCML, which quoted testimonies, statistics, and statements from humanitarian groups to allege that the Vietnamese were committing genocide, capitalized on a major slippage in the public discourse.[1011] For if there was indeed an ongoing genocide or holocaust, as everyone seemed to suggest, then who was perpetrating it? With the Khmer Rouge firmly out of power, and the Vietnamese at the helm, there could really only be one answer. Thus, in blaming the Vietnamese, the pro-Chinese were only spelling out that which was already implicit in the language of the humanitarians, human rights activists, and increasingly the public at large. The campaign against Vietnam, which began on the fringes of the political spectrum, had become completely mainstream by 1980.

In their campaign against Vietnam, pro-Chinese groups found objective allies in the very imperialist governments they once denounced. In France, government officials began to blame Vietnam, and the Foreign Minister warned that the Cambodians were "on the edge of extinction."[1012] But it was the U.S. government that led the charge. Still smarting from its humiliating defeat, the United States relished in Vietnam's discomfiture, accusing the Vietnamese of looting peasants, destroying food stocks, hoarding outside aid, and deliberately trying to kill Cambodians. Moving past denunciations, the U.S. government actively isolated Vietnam in the

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[1009] Gérard Marin, "Le S.O.S. de 'Médecins sans frontiers': la course contre la mort," *Le Figaro*, July 20, 1979.
[1010] Bernard-Henri Lévy, "Une brigade international pour le Cambodge?" *Le Matin de Paris*, January 14, 1980, 12.
[1011] Claude Liria, "Le people khmer ne doit pas mourir!," *L'Humanité rouge* 1137, October 2, 1979, 2.
[1012] Quoted in Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, 193.

international arena, effectively authorized China's punitive invasion in February 1979, and

orchestrated a massive international embargo to suffocate Vietnam for the next decade – of all

the countries in Western Europe and North America, only Sweden and France continued to help

Vietnam rebuild after four decades of almost continuous war.[1013]

Still not satisfied, the United States backed the Khmer Rouge in its guerilla war against

the Vietnamese. While it still remains unclear whether the United States directly armed the Khmer

Rouge, U.S. representatives did nix an ASEAN proposal to disarm the party while National

Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski himself admitted that he "concocted the idea of persuading

Thailand to cooperate fully with China in its efforts to rebuild the Khmer Rouge."[1014] On the

international terrain, the United States lobbied the United Nations to recognize Pol Pot's recently

deposed government as the official representative of Cambodia, deliberately avoiding the word

"genocide" in its statements in order to present the overthrown party as the victim of an

inexcusable Vietnamese incursion. Overriding the expostulations of the Soviet Bloc, on

September 21, 1979 the United Nations General Assembly formally recognized Pol Pot's

Democratic Kampuchea – a regime that relocated millions of people for torture, forced labor, and

ultimately mass extermination, resulting in the annihilation of perhaps twenty-five percent of

Cambodia's population – as the rightful voice of the Cambodian people.

Perhaps unthinkable a decade earlier, pro-Chinese radicals found themselves siding with

the United States against what they now called Vietnamese imperialism. While they welcomed

the U.S. government's role in weakening Vietnam, the association looked bad, forcing them into

political contortions. For example, in its article hailing the U.N. decision to recognize Democratic

Kampuchea as a victory for the principles of "independence, sovereignty, non-interference, and

the safeguarding of peace," the PCML carefully listed how each country voted, yet studiously

avoided mentioning the United States, the very country that had actually led the charge to defend

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[1013] Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, 222.
[1014] Quoted in Gregory Elich, "Who Supported the Khmer Rouge?," *Counterpunch*, October 16, 2014, http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/10/16/who-supported-the-khmer-rouge.

Pol Pot.[1015] The American CPML found itself in an especially unpleasant bind. Following China's

lead, the party had to congratulate the decision, which owed much to American imperialism; yet

showing any support for the U.S. government contradicted most of the party's domestic

campaigns, such as the fight for Puerto Rican independence. There could not be a more

illustrative, yet also tragic, image of how deep the crisis of the anti-imperialist internationalism ran.

Ant-Imperialist Internationalism in Crisis

The Third Indochina War presented radicals with an intractable question: why did

revolutionary struggles in Cambodia, Vietnam, and China, once united around the ideas of anti-

imperialism, internationalism, and socialism, go to war against one another almost as soon as

they achieved victory, turning these foundational ideas into their very opposites? Despite the

gravity of the question, some denied that there was a problem to begin with. Others largely

blamed the entire fiasco on American imperialism, which, while true in some respects, seemed

more like an evasion than an answer. A few offered more honest answers, which often meant

locating the problem within the anti-imperialist struggles themselves, rather than trying to deflect

blame. The RCP, for example, identified the "bourgeois outlook" of nationalism as the cause.[1016]

The LCR blamed the state itself, arguing that "logic of the state's interests" had led the

Vietnamese to reduce internationalism to geopolitics, international rivalries, and territorial

disputes.[1017] Indeed, while there were many possible causes, the most perspicacious radicals

were beginning to point to the nation-state as a major reason for the implosion of anti-imperialist

internationalism.

As we have seen, in the 1960s, many radicals from a number of distinct currents,

especially those most active in the antiwar movement, coupled anti-imperialist internationalism

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[1015] Claude Liria, "Le vote en faveur du Cambodge," *L'humanité rouge* 1133, September 26, 1979, 3.

[1016] "What Went Wrong with Vietnam: Part 4: Conclusion," *Revolutionary Worker*, July 20, 1979, 7.

[1017] Bensaïd, "Le deuxième chute de Phnom Penh," 1.

with the right to national self-determination.[1018] Internationalism meant supporting the struggles of oppressed nationalities, national liberation struggles were to produce nation-states that would ensure collective sovereignty, and these states were in turn supposed to transition into dictatorships of the proletariat that would open the path for socialism. Of course, these anti-imperialist radicals were aware of the dangers of nationalism, understood that the dictatorship of the proletariat had to radically supersede the conventional nation-state, and firmly believed that socialist states would eventually have to "wither away" into more emancipatory forms. Nevertheless, despite these dangers, in the context of the Third World, nation-states were said to serve a progressive historical role in the struggle for global socialism.

The changing conjuncture in Southeast Asia in the 1970s raised serious questions about this strategy, unraveling the presumed connections between the nation-state and liberation, socialism, anti-imperialism, and internationalism. The Vietnamese invasion unearthed the full extent of the Khmer Rouge's crimes, demonstrating that the notion of collective sovereignty promoted by these revolutionary nation-states could not guarantee individual emancipation. China's conservative turn in the 1970s, in which the PRC dismantled communes, embraced the free market, and solidified a Party bureaucracy, raised serious questions about the connection between the nation-state form and socialism. Cambodia's constant border attacks, Vietnam's invasion, and then China's incursion indicated that instead of serving as the bulwark against imperialism, the nation-state might itself possess inherently imperialist tendencies, regardless of the politics of those in power. And the internecine conflagration showed that individual nation-states always seemed to end by elevating their own national interests above those of internationalism. While struggles of the 1960s led radicals to connect the nation-state with anti-imperialism, the culmination of those very struggles in the 1970s seemed to suggest that the two terms might actually be antithetical. Indeed, while not fully apparent at the time, looking back, this crisis showed the specific function of states in social formations propels them towards imperialism of some kind. In the words of theorists John Milios and Dimitris P. Sotiropoulos, all states, even

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[1018] See chapter 2.

socialist ones, have an "outward-looking impulse of national expansion."[1019] Thus, the Third

Indochina War, the later Iran-Iraq War, and other such conflicts cannot be seen as the result of

interference by "Western imperialism"; their cause must be located in the specific nature of the

states themselves.

Thus, the wars in Southeast Asia pointed not only to the bankruptcy of the concept of

national self-determination, but to the limits of Marxism's understanding of the nation-state. It is

revealing, for example, that all sides in the war justified their actions through the idea of national

sovereignty. The Khmer Rouge justified mass population transfers by arguing that they formed a

necessary part of the project to forge a new nation. Both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese

claimed they were merely defending themselves from infringements on their rightful national

territories. Vietnam asserted that the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge was not the product of a

foreign intervention, but of an autonomous revolutionary uprising of the Khmer people fighting for

their "right to self-determination."[1020] The SRV justified its occupation of Cambodia by saying the

new government requested Vietnamese support to help protect the country's national sovereignty

from interference by the deposed Khmer Rouge and the Chinese.[1021] The Chinese claimed that

their invasion of Vietnam was simply a counterattack designed to protect Chinese sovereignty

from Vietnamese border attacks.[1022]

In diagnosing the crisis, Benedict Anderson argued that "none of the belligerents has

made more than the most perfunctory attempts to justify bloodshed in terms of a recognizable

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[1019] John Milios and Dimitris P. Sotiropoulos, *Rethinking Imperialism: A Study of Capitalist Rule* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 111.

[1020] This was the official Vietnamese position. See, for example, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Phan Hein's speech delivered to the 34th Session of the U.N. General Assembly on September 28, 1979, a transcript and translation of which is available in Sino-Vietnamese Conflict TAM PE 029, Box 20, Tamiment.

[1021] "At the request of the People's Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea and on the basis of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the two countries, the Vietnamese troops are in Kampuchea to help the Kampuchean people oppose the [sic] Peking's attempts of reimposing the Pol Pot regime and ensure peace and security. This stems from the spirit of traditional solidarity between the three peoples of Viet Nam, Laos and Kampuchea …" Ibid., 14.

[1022] "Counterattack in Defense of Our Frontiers," *Beijing Review* 22, no. 8 (February 23, 1979): 9-11.

Marxist theoretical perspective."[1023] While the belligerents did advance certain concepts, these were wholly inadequate to the theoretical problem. None of the states involved were capitalist, and yet they behaved in ways very similar to capitalist nation-states – they made geopolitical alliances with neighboring states, jealously guarded their borders, exerted influence over other nation-states, crafted a national populace, and placed the self-interest of the state above all else. In short, they seemed imperialist, but since radicals had always conceptually anchored imperialism to capitalism, the term, they thought, could not truly explain the behavior of these socialist states. Chinese Marxists, who had earlier confronted a similar problem in the form of Soviet revisionism, proposed the concept of "hegemonism" as a solution. Unrelated to Antonio Gramsci's idea of "hegemony," this concept simply referred to a nation-state's desire to expand its power, either by applying pressure on other states, or through direct expansion, irrespective of that country's modes of productions, level of class struggle, and so forth. Thus, the Chinese saw the Third Indochina war as the product of the Soviet Union's "big hegemonism" and Vietnam's "little hegemonism."[1024] The Vietnamese, lacking their own explanation, adopted the concept as well, blaming the war on "Peking hegemonism" allied with American imperialism.[1025] While the concept may have described some of the geopolitical dimensions of the war, it did not *explain* why states, whether socialist or capitalist, felt compelled to expand in this way. The only thing "hegemonism" truly revealed was Marxism's great difficulty in explaining the nation-state.[1026]

But it was not just Southeast Asian Marxists, but also French and American radicals who had a difficult time making sense of the problem, even if they began to see the nation-state, or more narrowly, nationalism, as major problems. When the RCP explained the situation in Southeast Asia by arguing that too many individuals with the bourgeois world outlook of nationalism had joined the Vietnamese Party, it said very little about the structure of the state

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[1023] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1.
[1024] See, for example, "Kampuchea: The People Fights On," *Beijing Review* 22, no. 5 (February 2, 1979): 25-26.
[1025] See Phan Hein's speech, which is one of many examples of this position.
[1026] It is also no coincidence that it was precisely at this time that there emerged a spate of academic studies on the nation and nation-state, many, but not all, influenced by Marxism. For a good overview of the questions, debates, and literature of this period, see, Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1996).

itself, reducing the problem to the ideas of individuals. When the LCR rightly noted that the problem was the state, but then proposed the alternative of a "socialist federation of Indochinese States," it, too, revealed a limited understanding of the nation-state – after all, how was a federation of states any different if it were ultimately composed of other smaller states?[1027] Were not all states comprised of other states? And where did nationalism fit into this?

This theoretical limit is precisely why radicals encountered such difficulty in reinventing internationalism. Changing circumstances at home and abroad had always forced radicals in the United States and France, indeed, throughout North America and Western Europe, to periodically reinvent international solidarity. But in the late 1970s, radicals proved unable to fashion a historically apposite response, as they had in the early 1960s, in 1968, or in the early 1970s. The domestic situation went from bad to worse, especially as the 1980s arrived. Internationally, revolutions seemed to be in retreat almost everywhere. And the Third Indochina War, which was in fact only one in a long series of crises, shook anti-imperialist internationalism to its very core, completely destabilizing its basic assumptions and constituent categories, such as the idea of the right to national self-determination. While earlier moments required a recalibration of internationalism, the crises of the late 1970s were so thorough that they demanded a *refoundation* of anti-imperialist internationalism itself. Still, the blow was not necessarily lethal, and radicals could have tried, through very hard intellectual, political, and organizational work, to create a new kind of international solidarity. But on the whole, most radicals, because they were demoralized, completely weakened at home, stupefied by the turn of events abroad, or simply intransigent, did not succeed. Once the dominant form of international solidarity, by the late 1970s anti-imperialist internationalism was in crisis, opening the field for a new kind of solidarity to take the lead.

[1027] Bensaïd, "Le deuxième chute de Phnom Penh," 3.

CHAPTER 8: SAVING THE BOAT PEOPLE

In July 1981, just a few years before his death, Michel Foucault spoke on behalf of yet another cause. Surrounded by enormous photographs of suffering refugees, this time he spoke for the "boat people" fleeing Southeast Asia.[1028] In the late 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Indochinese fled communist governments in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam; over the next quarter century, their numbers would swell to nearly three million. While some fled by land, many took to the seas in teeming, decrepit boats. Countless drowned, starved to death, or were murdered by pirates. Those fortunate enough to survive the perilous journey to neighboring Southeast Asian countries were thrown into overcrowded camps upon arrival. Under considerable strain, and unable to take any more refugees, some of these countries began to push incoming boats back to sea. By early 1979, all of Southeast Asia found itself gripped by a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions.

At Geneva, Foucault announced the creation of an International Committee of Piracy, headed by Bernard Kouchner. While Foucault's support for a people in need was unsurprising, the way he now chose to theorize international solidarity certainly was. Instead of drawing on the ideas that marked his earlier activism with the Maoists – ideas such as popular justice, class struggle, and plebian revolt – Foucault now grounded his internationalism in the notion of the "private individual." He gestured to a new "international citizenship," whose duty it was to "always bring the testimony of people's suffering to the eyes and ears of governments," to "speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its author, whoever its victims." He called for a new right, "that of private individuals to effectively intervene in the sphere of international policy and strategy."[1029] And he finished his speech, subsequently published under the title, "Confronting Governments: Human Rights," by pointing to concrete initiatives that he believed embodied this

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[1028] David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 437.
[1029] Michel Foucault, "Confronting Governments: Human Rights," in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Power*, eds. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1994), 474-75.

new kind of individualist, interventionist internationalism – the French and German campaigns to send ships to rescue the boat people, as well as the work of international human rights and humanitarian organizations such Amnesty International, Terre des Hommes, and Medecins du monde.[1030]

If the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia helped shatter an already declining anti-imperialist internationalism, then the concomitant refugee crisis offered the rival human rights internationalism a remarkable opportunity to fill the void of international solidarity. While what remained of the anti-imperialist left contributed little to resolving the refugee issue, the human rights internationalists sprang into action. Former French revolutionaries now turned humanitarians, like Bernard Kouchner, Claudie and Jacques Broyelle, or André Glucksmann, worked with Vietnamese refugees, Eastern European dissidents, and human rights groups such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to launch a campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam. Channeling the social movement strategies of the 1960s, they formed a committee to save the boat people, won over prominent intellectuals, including Michel Foucault, and chartered a hospital ship to rescue the boat people at sea. Their campaign, which amounted to interfering with the internal affairs of a sovereign nation-state, inaugurated a new kind of ostensibly "non-political," moral humanitarian interventionism that promised to surpass Cold War ideological divisions.

Their campaign spread internationally, entering the United States through the efforts of Joan Baez and Ginetta Sagan, leaders of the West Coast branch of Amnesty International, but now directors of their own human rights organization. The pair not only popularized the struggle against human rights violations in Vietnam for American audiences, but also worked with the Carter Administration, revealing how this new human rights internationalism remained deeply implicated in politics, despite its claim to stand above governments. The Carter Administration, for its part, jumped at the issue, sensing a perfect opportunity to simultaneously divert attention away

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[1030] For a detailed analysis of Foucault's later thinking on the problem of rights, see Jessica Whyte, "Human rights: confronting governments?: Michel Foucault and the right to intervene," in *New Critical Legal Thinking: Law and the Political*, eds. Mathew Stone, Illan rua Wall, and Costas Douzinas (New York: Routledge, 2012): 11-31.

from the Vietnam War, make Americans feel good again, and restore the United States' leadership role in the international community. Of course, human rights played an ambiguous role in the Carter Administration: some used the new rights discourse as a way to criticize pro-U.S. dictatorships, while others wielded human rights as an anti-communist bludgeon against countries like Vietnam. In Southeast Asia, the latter approach tended to dominate. Indeed, in that part of the world, the United States found that with human rights it could accomplish what a decade of war had failed to do.

Indeed, only five years after the fall of Saigon, the United States had used human rights to successfully rebrand itself as the moral conscience of the new age, while the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, still devastated by over three decades of war, languished in isolation, crippled by sanctions, abandoned by much of the international community, and condemned by a new generation of activists for violating human rights. Despite its attempt to expose human rights as a new form of imperialism, the SRV could do little to explain itself in the face of undeniable evidence of massive internal repression, definitively losing the ideological war it had worked so hard to win in the 1960s. While the idea of anti-imperialism assured its international victory in the 1960s, that of human rights sealed its defeat a decade later. Vietnam had won the war, but lost the peace.

The remaining radicals in France and especially in the United States, where human rights internationalism had become state policy, attempted to fight back, but little could be done. Genocide in Cambodia, a refugee crisis in Vietnam, an internecine war between China, Cambodia, and Vietnam had completely discredited the foundational ideas of the radical left – anti-imperialism, national sovereignty, and collective self-determination. While its criticisms of human rights may have been convincing, the anti-imperialist left had nothing to offer in its place. Its own form of international solidarity was moribund. In this context, a new generation of potential activists turned to human rights.[1031]

[1031] This argument, that human rights displaced anti-imperialism not so much because the latter morphed into the former, or because individual anti-imperialists converted to human rights, but rather because anti-imperialism entered crisis while human rights did not, is inspired by Sam

Humanitarian Intervention

On the night of November 9, 1978, a rusty freighter crawled into Port Klang, Malaysia. Its cargo: 2,164 Vietnamese refugees. The Malaysian authorities, unwilling to take more refugees, ordered the vessel to turn back. For several weeks, the cramped ship remained anchored beyond the port limits, under heavy guard. Imprisoned at sea, the refugees struggled to survive as food, water, and medicine dwindled, while disease and misery engulfed the ship.

The Vietnamese aboard the *Hai Hong*, whose suffering was promptly televised to anguished audiences across the world, were only the latest arrivals in a torrent of refugees fleeing Vietnam. After unifying the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) in 1976, the new communist state initiated a sweeping program of socialist reconstruction to recover from the accumulated devastation of three decades of war. The South in particular posed a challenge. Years of occupation deformed the region's economy, making South Vietnam heavily dependent on a now absent U.S. military. Drugs, prostitution, gambling, and other illicit activities ran wild. Capitalist social relations refused to whither away. The Communist Party therefore launched an aggressive campaign to transform the region, which involved expropriations, reeducation camps, forced collectivization projects, and harsh punishments for offenders. In light of this, many Vietnamese considered emigration, and by mid-1977, a rising wave of refugees began to take their chances.

Disproportionately involved in commerce, and in general wealthier than other Vietnamese nationals, the Hoa, or ethnic Chinese, were the hardest hit by this campaign. The Communist Party viewed Cholon, the bustling Chinatown of Ho Chi Minh city, as a "strong capitalist heart beating inside the Socialist body of Vietnam," and acted accordingly.[1032] Party officials ransacked Cholon, searching homes, confiscating money, and closing businesses. The growing political split between Vietnam and the People's Republic of China only exacerbated the repression, leading

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Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

[1032] Quoted in Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War After the War* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 234.

some in the Party to view the ethnic Chinese in the country as a dangerous fifth column.[1033] For

this reason, the Hoa, who numbered 1.5 million, were the most inclined to leave Vietnam, and in

fact comprised the vast majority of the "boat people."

Escape was no easy matter. In some cases, refugees were forced to pay exorbitant

prices – to smugglers, corrupt Vietnamese officials, and criminal organizations – to board some of

these boats and later ships. Those who took to the sea risked drowning, starvation, or pirate

attacks. The ones who survived were herded into deplorable camps, waiting for neighboring

Southeast Asian countries, in concert with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

to determine what to do with them. By the end of 1978, over 61,700 boat people lived in such

camps, and the Southeast Asian governments began to resist taking on more.[1034]

Mounting evidence of political repression, forced collectivization, and mass flight reached

North America and Western Europe in early 1978, though the issue was taken up most forcefully

in France. France was home to a vibrant Vietnamese community, which had long played a crucial

role in circulating information about Vietnam. A number of journals, such as *Que Me*, founded in

1976, loudly condemned repression abroad. Some Vietnamese expatriates, such as Doan Van

Toai, were themselves refugees. When he arrived in Paris in 1978, Doan Van Toai, imprisoned

by both Thieu and then the Vietnamese Communist Party, shared documents from prisoners

attesting to conditions abroad. Alleging there were over 800,000 political prisoners under

Communist rule, he immediately launched a campaign. In this, he, along with many other

Vietnamese refugees in France, were strongly inspired by the human rights campaign waged by

Soviet dissidents. "Our goal," he explained, "is to launch a campaign like those organized in the

West in support of Soviet prisoners."[1035] Indeed, Vo Van Ai, founder of *Que Me*, recalls that the

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[1033] "Concerning the 'Boat People,'" *World Marxist Review*, September 1979.
[1034] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus & The International Response* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 32.
[1035] "Les martyrs de l'Utopie," *La Libre Belgique*, December 24-25, 1979.

strongest and earliest supporters of the campaign against what were now being called human rights violations in Vietnam were the many Eastern European dissidents taking refuge in Paris.[1036]

Doan Van Toai formed a Comité de défense de détenus politiques au Vietnam, published a book documenting his experiences in Communist prisons, and gave numerous interviews for publications across Western Europe and North America. French journalists followed up on these revelations by producing a trickle, then a stream, of reports condemning developments abroad. Of course, rightwing papers, such as *Le Figaro*, opportunistically republished these stories to scold erstwhile activists and shame the left. But even more left-leaning publications, such as *Le Matin* or even Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps modernes*, ran articles. On October 5, 1978, *Le Monde* published its own editorial, "Peace Crimes," condemning the repression in Vietnam. "Between the Cambodian genocide and the Vietnamese repression there is, of course, an enormous difference of degree. But the inspiration, alas, is the same kind. In both cases it is to level, to eliminate, all differences that exist."[1037] The editorial launched a public discussion over repression, human rights, and the refugee crisis, which involved many activists who had played an essential role in the antiwar movement.

Many of the journalists reporting on repression abroad were former critics of the war who had spent time in Vietnam. For example, writing for *Le Monde*, Roland-Pierre Paringaux, who once denounced Thieu's regime in the South, now turned his pen against the new regime. In a front-page article in *Le Monde* titled, "Human Rights Violations in Vietnam," Paringaux asked: "Does the situation justify the present Communist regime of Hanoi behaving today exactly as the anti-Communist government of Saigon used to do and routinely resorting to repression and preventative detention on mere suspicion or on the strength of a denunciation, which it has elevated to a civic duty?"[1038] Recalling the international campaign to save the South Vietnamese

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[1036] Vo Van Ai, "Isle of Light: A Look Back at the Boat People and the European Left," *World Affairs*, March/April 2014, http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/isle-light-look-back-boat-people-and-european-left.

[1037] "Crimes de paix," *Le Monde*, October 5, 1978, 1.

[1038] Roland-Pierre Paringaux, "La violation des droits de l'homme au Vietnam," *Le Monde*, October 5, 1978.

prisoners, he lamented, "The well-known militants who, under the old regime, courageously devoted themselves to defending political prisoners, have all gone silent."[1039]

As it turned out, some of these former antiwar radicals were about to begin a vast campaign to target Vietnam for human rights abuses. When news of the *Hai Hong* broke, these radicals saw a perfect "opportunity" to take the campaign to the next level. Drawing on their organizing experiences, they felt that, "to act," they needed "a symbol like the *Hai Hong* and its dramatic effect."[1040] That very night, the Broyelles called Bernard Kouchner, and two meetings were quickly organized, the first in the office of *Continent*, a publication by Soviet dissidents in Paris. The group – which consisted, among others, of the Broyelles, Kouchner, Alain Geismar, André Glucksmann, Bernard Henri-Lévy, Vo Van Ai, and Ilios Yannakakis, an ex-communist militant exiled first in Prague, then Paris – discussed the best way to respond. Henri-Lévy, channeling the antiwar tactics of the 1960s, suggested they attack the Vietnamese embassy.[1041] Although they rejected his idea, the group ultimately decided to borrow another page from the 1960s radical playbook – sending a boat to Vietnam.

In 1967, over thirty French antiwar organizations, including various Christian groups, the PSU, Communist Party, and the Comité Vietnam National, organized a campaign to send a boat to Vietnam filled with medical equipment, bicycles, motors, and other supplies.[1042] Contributing to the campaign, the Association médicale franco-vietnamienne, of which Kouchner had been a member, penned a text, circulated by the Comité Vietnam National, explaining how the "Victory of Vietnam" also meant "quinine and a surgical kit in every village" as long as the war against the

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[1039] Ibid.

[1040] "Entretien avec Jacques Broyelle," October 18, 1990, Paris, in Louis-Winoc Christiaens, "La Défense des droits de l'homme en France à travers les comités politiques (1969-1979). Un cas pratique: le comité 'Un bateau pour le Vietnam,' 1979" (Mémoire DEA, Université Charles de Gaulle, Lille III, 1990), 82.

[1041] Olivier Weber, *French Doctors: Les 25 ans d'épopée des hommes et des femmes qui ont inventé la medicine humanitaire* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1995), 206.

[1042] "Un Bateau Pour le Vietnam," *Tribune Socialiste* no. 356, January 25, 1968, 16; For further details on the campaign, see the CIMADE records, F Delta 2149/1236: Vietnam, La Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France.

Vietnamese people continued.[1043] Just over a decade later, these erstwhile radicals decided to do the same. But this time, instead of sending supplies to Vietnamese revolutionaries fighting American imperialism, they would use the ship to literally rescue the boat people fleeing from the communists.

With that, a committee was formed, called "Un bateau pour le Viêt-Nam." Claudie Broyelle served as president; Françoise Gautier, a former Amnesty International activist, became treasurer; Olivier Todd, the antiwar journalist, helped with public relations; and Bernard Kouchner was tasked with gaining the support of Médecins sans frontières.[1044] On November 11, 1978, they released their first statement: "[we have] to do more: [we must] go find these escapees. A boat in the South China Sea must, at all times, find, locate the Vietnamese who have taken the risk of leaving their country."[1045] And despite the logistical, organizational, and legal challenges, the committee did in fact succeed in acquiring a ship, whose name, the *Île de Lumière*, or the Ile of Light, perfectly captured the temerity of the campaign.

Leaning on their experiences in the antiwar movement, the committee circulated petitions, held public meetings, published articles in major newspapers, appeared on television, raised funds, and connected with famous intellectuals. Their efforts proved remarkably successful. To take only one measure, the committee was able to convince 166 persons, from most shades of the political spectrum, to sign their names to their call to action, including such preeminent figures as Michel Foucault, Raymond Aaron, Roland Barthes, Michel Rocard, and Lionel Jospin. For maximum mainstream publicity, they won over Brigitte Bardot as well.[1046]

The committee also enjoyed international support. Irving Brown, who headed the European Office of the AFL-CIO, not only threw his weight behind the campaign, but convinced other American labor leaders such as George Meaney, President of the AFL-CIO, and Paul Hall, President of the Seafarers International Union, to sign the call as well. According to Vo Van Ai,

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[1043] Comité Vietnam National, "La victoire du Vietnam, c'est aussi de la quinine et une trousse chirurgicale dans chaque village," no date, F Delta Res 2089: Comités Viêtnam de base, BDIC.
[1044] "Entretien avec Jacques Broyelle," 83.
[1045] Reprinted in Weber, *French Doctors*, 207.
[1046] For a full list of signatories, see Christiaens, "La Défense des droits de l'homme en France," 123-24.

through Brown's efforts, the AFL-CIO promised to provide a crew for the hospital ship free of charge.[1047] Brown also took the initiative to widen the campaign by hosting an international conference, convincing Leo Cherne, head of the International Rescue Committee, and Bayard Rustin, the noted civil rights leader, to speak. But disagreements within the committee disrupted these plans, as some of the organizers feared that including the AFL-CIO – whose President, George Meany, only admitted the war was a mistake in December 1974, long after American withdrawal – would give the campaign too much of an anti-communist flavor.[1048]

Indeed, the core group was far from homogenous in its aims. Kouchner, for instance, was hoping to use the campaign as the springboard for a new kind of human rights organization. Others, such as André Glucksmann, wished to give the project a more explicitly political – and anti-communist – direction. There were differences among the politicos as well. Jacques Broyelle, for example, had become fiercely anti-Vietnamese, going so far as to argue that, "we would have been better to have been on the side of the Americans in the Vietnam War than on the side of the North."[1049] While everyone in the campaign was uncompromisingly critical of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, few initially accepted such a harsh view.

Despite these important differences, the organizers shared a central idea – concerned individuals had the right, in fact the duty, to intervene to stop human rights abuses, and that this principle would be the basis of a new internationalism. This was, after all, what their campaign had proposed to do. Chartering a ship to rescue Vietnamese nationals in the South China Sea, in some cases perhaps even in Vietnamese waters, was tantamount to intervening in the affairs of a sovereign state.[1050] As it turned out, instead of cruising the seas fishing for refugees, the *Île de Lumière*, manned by Kouchner and a team of doctors, ended up anchoring off the coast of the Malaysian island of Poulo Bidong to serve as a kind of hospital ship. This was less egregious than invading foreign waters, but the intention was there, and a new idea had taken shape.

[1047] Vo Van Ai, "Isle of Light."
[1048] Ibid.
[1049] "Entretien avec Jacques Broyelle," 86.
[1050] Paul Berman, *Power and the Idealists: Or, the Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath* (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2005), 237.

The action unsurprisingly raised a whole series of thorny questions. What jurisdiction did

these activists have in Southeast Asia? Who could they claim to represent? Could international

law be used to justify an action of this kind? What would be the legal status of those refugees

rescued in this manner? These unresolved questions were precisely why the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, as well as many in MSF itself, opposed the action.[1051] Indeed, the

campaign triggered a major split in MSF as many objected to the interventionism of the project, its

excessive reliance on the media, the strategy of allying with national governments, and

Kouchner's megalomania, and Kouchner went on to form his own rival organization, Médecins du

Monde (MDM).[1052]

Despite the obstacles, the committee accomplished a tremendous breakthrough. The

effort to save the boat people marked a decisive moment in the development of a new kind of

humanitarian interventionism, one of the first major campaigns of the new human rights

international. Even the committee's detractors eventually followed suit. MSF's next campaign, for

instance, was to ignore the conventions of interstate law and march straight into Cambodia to

provide direct relief to refugees. A new idea of international solidarity – one that prioritized the

individual, based itself in the right to intervene, relied heavily on celebrities and the media, and

increasingly moved towards alliances with Western governments – had taken root.[1053]

Central to this new human rights internationalism was the sense that it could supersede,

and in fact completely reconfigure, the political divisions that had marked the Cold War.[1054] As

Jacques Broyelle later admitted, the boat people campaign "was conceived on a grand scale and

on a new ideological base," one that aimed to "go beyond ideological cleavages."[1055] As Ilios

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[1051] Weber, *French Doctors*, 215.

[1052] Ibid., 234-40; David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 310; Xavier Emmanuelli, *Les Prédateurs de l'Action humanitaire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991), 29-33.

[1053] For MSF, MDM, and the complex history of humanitarian universalism, internationalism, and interventionism in France, see Bertrand Taithe, "Reinventing (French) universalism: religion, humanitarianism and the 'French doctors," *Modern & Contemporary France* 12, no. 2 (2004): 147-58.

[1054] Whyte, "Human rights: confronting governments?" 19-20.

[1055] "Entretien avec Jacques Broyelle," 90.

Yannakakis put it, the initiative aimed to "break the distinction between left and Right."[1056] Thus, the organizing core, though ultimately composed of those who had been on the left, "deliberately" asked figures on the right to join the campaign.[1057] "People of the Right, people of the left, former revolutionaries," Broyelle remembered, "everyone was there."[1058] The campaign promised a much-needed ideological reconciliation after years of political polarization.

Nothing captured the feeling of beginning a new chapter more powerfully than when the campaign organizers, led by Glucksmann, succeed in reuniting Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aaron at the Élysée Palace on June 20, 1979. After refusing to speak to each other for decades, Sartre and Aaron, schoolmates who had subsequently come to represent two competing strands of French political thought, the anti-communist liberal and the Marxist radical, finally came together for the boat people. Sartre, once one of the most visible defenders of Vietnamese national liberation, now spoke of the "moral duty" to "save lives."[1059] Ideology had to be put aside in the face of human suffering. Glucksmann described the event as "the end of the Cold War in our heads." Left and right were now transcended by human rights.

Despite the fanfare, the encounter brought not reconciliation, but rather defeat, something poignantly captured in Aron's rather patronizing greeting, "bonjour mon petit camarade," to an infirm Sartre, so shriveled and blind he had to be ferried around by Glucksmann.[1060] Indeed, after years of relative obscurity, Aron, and the liberal politics he represented, had returned, while the radical anti-imperialism of Sartre had withered and would finally die the following year. The meeting, Jacques Broyelle admitted years later, was "not about a convergence, a consensus, a symbol of rapprochement."[1061] It marked the "victory of Aron's

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[1056] "Entretien avec Ilios Yannakakis," May 29, 1989, June 30, 1989, November 22, 1989, January 17, 1990, and September 1990, Paris, in Christiaens, "La Défense des droits de l'homme en France," 98.
[1057] "Entretien avec Jacques Broyelle," 93.
[1058] Ibid. 90.
[1059] Weber, *French Doctors*, 242.
[1060] Michel-Antoine Burnier, "Aron lui lance: Bonjour, mon petit camarade," *Libération*, March 11, 2005.
[1061] "Entretien avec Jacques Broyelle," 89.

thought. Period."[1062] And this was precisely the power of the new rights discourse – it could pass a clear victory as mere reconciliation, advance its own politics as simple morality, a partisan idea as supersession of ideology itself. In short, it had achieved hegemony.

Internationalizing the Campaign

The French movement against human rights violations in Vietnam, which had become condensed in the campaign to save the boat people, inspired similar, though smaller initiatives across Western Europe and North America. In February 1979, German activist Rupert Neudeck traveled to Paris where he learned of the Comité un Bateau pour le Vietnam, met Bernard Kouchner, Geismar, and the Broyelles, and promised to launch a fraternal campaign in the Federal Republic of Germany.[1063] Borrowing from the French strategy, he and his wife, Christel, courted famous intellectuals, like Heinrich Böll, founded committee, and chartered a freighter called *Cap Anamur*, the French name for the cape on the Turkish coast, to save refugees on the high seas.[1064] It's estimated that the German ship rescued over 8,000 Vietnamese refugees over the course of the 1970s.[1065] Neudeck collaborated very closely with Kouchner, and helped introduce some of his ideas of humanitarian interventionism into Germany at this time.[1066]

But the movement against human rights violations in Vietnam achieved perhaps its greatest international success in the United States, winning the support of the federal government itself. The campaign entered North America through two veteran antiwar activists, Joan Baez and Ginetta Sagan. Baez, the famous American folk singer, had spoken against the war from the very beginning. Though never a revolutionary, she did not shy away from direct action. In October 1967, she was arrested during the Stop the Draft Week protests. And in late 1972, she traveled to

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[1062] Ibid., 90.
[1063] Rupert Neudeck, *Die Menschenretter von Cap Anamur* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 24.
[1064] Lora Wildenthal, "Humanitarianism in Postcolonial Contexts: Some Western European Examples from the 1960s to the 1980s," in *Colonialism and Beyond: Race and Migration from a Postcolonial Perspective*, eds. Eva Bischoff and Elisabeth Engle (Zurich: Lit, 2013), 104.
[1065] "Remembering the First Wave of Boat People in Germany," *Deutsche Welle*, December 3, 2003.
[1066] Neudeck, *Die Menschenretter*, especially chapter 2.

North Vietnam to deliver mail to POWs on behalf of Coliafam, barely surviving Nixon's "Christmas bombing" campaign in Hanoi.

That same year, Baez recalls, she met Ginetta Sagan, who appeared at her doorstep with a "big messy bundle of documents" under arms, "telling me about something called Amnesty International and its work on behalf of all political prisoners, regardless of ideology, race, or religion."[1067] Sagan, tortured as a political prisoner by Mussolini, immigrated to the United States where she joined Amnesty International USA in 1967. Soon after, she founded its West Coast branch, which first met at her home. As one of West Coast branch's primary organizers, Sagan threw herself into a number of political initiatives, including the international campaign to liberate the South Vietnamese political prisoners. The West Coast branch, for example, organized a three-week speaking tour for Jean-Pierre Debris and André Menras.[1068] And Sagan was also invited to the Stockholm Conference on Vietnam, from March 29-31, 1974.[1069]

Baez and Sagan, who in 1973 joined the AI USA Board of Directors, worked together to build Amnesty International throughout the West Coast. Through their tireless efforts, the West Coast branch could come to boast more than half of AI USA's total membership in 1974.[1070] In the following years, the two participated in dozens of campaigns to free political prisoners from Greece to Argentina to the Eastern Bloc. And through their activism, they filled their Rolodex with an impressive array of international contacts, which included figures like Andrei Sakharov.

After the fall of Saigon, Baez and Sagan began to cast a more critical eye on Vietnam. In 1976, for example, Baez signed a letter encouraging the Vietnamese government to improve its human rights record. While it led to a split with activists like Cora Weiss, little came of it. Only a year after the war, there was limited hard evidence of human rights violations, many of the most committed activists were unwilling to criticize a struggle they had spent the last decade

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[1067] Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With: A Memoir* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 178.
[1068] Flyer, untitled, no date [possibly March 1973], Box 36, Ginetta Sagan Papers, Hoover Institution, Palo Alto, California. See also, "Witnesses from a Prison in S. Vietnam," *Amnesty Action*, March 1973, 1.
[1069] "Stockholm Conference on Vietnam," March 3, 1974, Box 5, Folder 3, Ginetta Sagan Papers.
[1070] Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 195.

supporting, and, most importantly, the general language of human rights had not yet become common currency. All that would change in 1979, by which time Carter had made human rights a centerpiece of his foreign policy, Amnesty International had won the Nobel Peace Prize, the suffering of the boat people flashed across millions of television screens, and evidence of rights violations in Vietnam mounted. In the new climate, Baez and Sagan would lead the charge again.

Baez admits that her idea to organize the American human rights campaign against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam actually came from two refugees, Nguyen Huu Hieu, a Buddhist monk, and the indefatigable Doan Van Toai, who toured Canada and the United States for two months in late fall 1978.[1071] A representative from Amnesty International attended one of Doan's talks at Berkeley that fall, and put him in contact with Joan Baez, who agreed to help.[1072] She immediately set to work, forming "a research group of five people, including Ginetta."[1073] Sagan recalls how the team relied, in particular, on "the invaluable help of "European journalists, scientists, refugees, and intellectuals," some of whom they had befriended through the earlier international campaign to liberate the political prisoners under Thieu's government.[1074]

Of all their European contacts, the French proved the most indispensable. Indeed, the research group effectively headquartered itself in Paris. Baez recalls actively "seeking out well-known French journalists of the left who as early as 1976 had begun to realize and denounce Hanoi's policies."[1075] Sagan, who had studied at the Sorbonne from 1949-1951, devoured all the French literature she could find on the subject. Baez paid equally close attention to the French scene, following "the French debate over Communism, Marxism, New Philosophy, Indochina, and all the rest."[1076] In fact, Baez would develop deep ties with the French intellectual community, remaining in touch with Doan Van Toai; building connections with MSF; meeting some of the

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[1071] Joan Baez, letter template, 1979, Box 6, Folder 7, Ginetta Sagan Papers.
[1072] Doan Van Toai, "Vietnam: How We Deceived Ourselves," *Commentary*, March 1986, 42.
[1073] Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With*, 274.
[1074] Ginetta Sagan, "Human Rights violation in Vietnam," draft, circa 1979, Box 6, Folder 2, Ginetta Sagan Papers.
[1075] Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With*, 274.
[1076] Berman, *Power and the Idealists*, 240.

French humanitarian activists, such as Claudie Broyelle; and returning to Paris to throw benefit concerts for Indochinese refugees.

Their research abroad left them so convinced of the human rights violations in Vietnam that Baez and Sagan decided to expand to the United States the campaign unfolding in France. Although they had by this point formed their own humanitarian organization, Humanitas/International Human Rights Committee, they channeled much from Amnesty International. Following AI's conventions, they ultimately decided to launch the campaign with an open letter. Drawing on Doan's testimony, reports by journalists like Paringaux, and the human rights debates of French activists, Baez and Sagan penned a letter condemning Vietnam, which they circulated, along with a packet of supporting materials, among noted American antiwar activists for signatures. They received nearly a hundred signatures from people such as Staughton and Alice Lynd, Cesar Chavez, Daniel Berrigan, Allen Ginsburg, and I. F. Stone.

Before releasing their open letter, Sagan and Baez approached the Vietnamese ambassador. "Either Hanoi make a written promise that Amnesty International representatives would be allowed into Vietnam within six months, with free access to go where they chose," or, Baez continued, "we would print our full-page letter."[1077] The Vietnamese government, suspicious of foreign intervention after decades of war, rejected the proposal. On May 30, 1979, Baez, after having raised over $53,000, published the open letter in four major newspapers, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

The published appeal showcased all the ideas of the new human rights internationalism. There is the expected appeal to an idea of universal rights, and the belief that all governments must submit to "the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights." One also spots theoretical concepts, such as "totalitarianism," recently re-popularized by thinkers like the New Philosophers. Most interestingly, the letter also tried to suggest that all these concerns had in fact always been there, that the new

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[1077] Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With*, 279.

campaign for human rights against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam faithfully upheld the

commitments, aspirations, and guiding ideas of the earlier antiwar movements:

> It was an abiding commitment to fundamental principles of human dignity, freedom and self-determination that motivated many Americans to oppose the government of South Vietnam and our country's participation in the war. It is that same commitment that compels us to speak out against your brutal disregard for human rights.[1078]

Of course, this was anachronistic thinking. In reality, the new emphasis on individual freedoms,

universal human rights, or international covenants marked a significant rupture with much of

antiwar organizing in the 1960s, especially among radical activists. Indeed, earlier movements

thought almost exclusively in terms of national liberation, collective self-determination, and anti-

imperialism. Baez's rhetorical move was to not only render human rights self-evident, but to

attach to the new campaign the legitimacy of the earlier one.

But her attempt to establish such a firm continuity between the two movements actually

belied another major difference between them. In her letter, Baez alleges that the burden of

struggle had always been placed firmly on the shoulders of Western activists. "As in the 60s," she

wrote, "we raise our voices now so that your people may live."[1079] Nothing could be further from

the truth. In the 1960s, radical activists believed that Vietnam not only led the struggle, but fought

for activists in the West. This idea was perhaps best captured by Jean-Paul Sartre in November

1966: "Their fight is ours… The defeat of the Vietnamese people would politically be our defeat,

the defeat of all free people. Because Vietnam is fighting for us."[1080] Indeed, the slogan, "their

struggle is ours," became the watchword of the Comité Vietnam National. According to this view,

North American and Western European activists were not the ones who had to save the

Vietnamese, as Baez now suggested in 1979, but rather it was the Vietnamese who, in their

heroic struggle against imperialism, would save the peoples of North America and Western

Europe. Although arguing for continuity, human rights internationalism actually inverted many of

the fundamental assumptions of anti-imperialist internationalism.

[1078] Joan Baez, "Open Letter to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," May 30, 1979.
[1079] Ibid.
[1080] "A la Mutualité, cinq mille personnes ont participé aux 'Six Heures du monde pour le Vietnam,'" *Le Monde*, November 30, 1966.

Perhaps most importantly, the letter, and the human rights campaign it set in motion in the United States, claimed to be beyond politics. As Baez explained in an article for *The Washington Post* soon after publishing her open letter, "It is a time to put conscience before ideology."[1081] When promoting their efforts, Baez and Sagan insisted that "Humanitas is a non-partisan, non-political, non-governmental human rights group."[1082] In reality, the new kind of human rights activism they championed was deeply political – especially in the narrowest sense of that term. Contrary to their public statements, Baez and Sagan worked very closely with the American politicians and U.S. government. In October 1979, for example, Baez and Sagan worked with an aid of Eunice Kennedy Shriver to organize a fundraiser for the boat people in Washington, D.C. Ted Kennedy attended the event, as did Chip Carter, son of the President.

Sagan, it seems, was one of the first to speak with President Jimmy Carter about human rights. While on the campaign trail in 1975, the future President stayed at the California home of Sagan's Amnesty International colleague, Rodney Kennedy, whom Carter would later appoint as Ambassador to Sweden. There, he met with Sagan. "Carter then told me," Sagan explained in a 1978 article, "that he admired Amnesty's work and promised that if he were elected he would make human rights and decency in foreign policy a priority."[1083] Soon after his stay, Carter wrote to Sagan, affirming their partnership, I "really admire the work you are doing. During the campaign ahead your advice & active support will be very valuable to me."[1084] Despite its claim to operate independently of national governments, Amnesty, along with other such human rights organizations, substantially benefited from ties to the American President. As Sagan put it, "Carter's initiatives mean a great deal" in terms of "AI access to governments" abroad.[1085]

Their campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam further developed these close links between human rights internationalism and the United States government. In fact,

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[1081] Joan Baez, "The Toll of Violence in Vietnam," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1979.
[1082] Joan Baez and Ginetta Sagan, draft letter to Father Ando, Refugees International, no date, Box 15, Folders 12-14, Ginetta Sagan Papers.
[1083] Rosanne Weissman, "Ginetta Sagan: The 'Little Mouse' that Roars," *Air California Magazine*, September 1978, 38.
[1084] Jimmy Carter to Ginetta and Leonard Sagan, July 26, 1975, Box 9, Folder 11, Ginetta Sagan Papers.
[1085] Weissman, "Ginetta Sagan," 38.

Humanitas directly appealed to the President to increase pressure on Vietnam. Nowhere was this clearer than the rally Baez organized on July 19, 1979 in Washington, D.C. That day, she hosted a concert at the Lincoln Memorial, at which 12,000 supporters appeared, and then led a march to the White House carrying lit candles. Baez had written a letter to the President before the event, explaining that "the march was not in any way a protest, but rather a show of support from the American people who would back him in any humanitarian effort he made on behalf of the boat people."[1086] In particular, she "suggested sending the Sixth Fleet our on a rescue mission."[1087] While Carter declined the invitation to attend the concert, later in the evening, as marchers chanted "save the boat people" outside the White House, he surprised everyone by walking across the Presidential lawn, climbing the iron fence, and announcing that he had decided to send the Sixth Fleet to rescue boat people in the South China Sea.

In this way, the French campaign to save the boat people at sea now enjoyed the unexpected support of the United Sates military. By summer of 1979, what began as a small activist campaign organized by Vietnamese exiles, French journalists, and former revolutionaries, now transformed into a massive international movement involving not only other humanitarian organizations, but also major national governments, beginning with the United States. Governments across the globe echoed the call to save the boat people, politicians organized international meetings, major newspapers carried front-page stories. Other ships joined the *Île de Lumière* at sea, including vessels from the Italian Navy and the U.S. Sixth fleet.[1088] The United Sates military now led the charge in the campaign against violations of human rights in Vietnam. In this way, the very force those young radicals had protested so vehemently only a decade earlier had now become their most important ally in the fight for human rights.

Winning the Peace

[1086] Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With*, 282-283.
[1087] Ibid. 283.
[1088] Maria Chiara Perri, "'Così salvammo la boat people' Diario dal Vietnam 30 anni dopo," *La Repubblica Parma*, November 22, 2015.

After President Jimmy Carter left Joan Baez's rally for the Boat People outside the White House on July 19, 1979, press secretary Jody Powell stayed behind for another hour to speak with activists. Reflecting the convivial atmosphere of the rally, someone handed him a popsicle during the extemporaneous question and answer session that soon followed. Repeating a central theme of the Carter Administration, Powell lamented the general malaise gripping the American public. Americans, he said as he bit his popsicle, had grown pessimistic, no longer even trusting their own government. "If you look at people's attitudes," he continued, "it's frightening." "The number of people that think all politicians are crooks has tripled since the Watergate era."[1089]

Powell spoke to a fundamental crisis in American politics. By the mid-1970s, many of the guiding beliefs, certainties, and values of Americans had come undone. On January 11, 1973, the stock market tumbled, foreshadowing a major recession that would bring the exceptional postwar economic boom to a definitive end. On August 9, 1974, in the face of now incontrovertible evidence of crimes, cover-ups, and conspiracies, President Richard Nixon became the only President in U.S. history to resign the office. On April 30, 1975, after billions of dollars, tens of thousands of American lives, and millions of Indochinese casualties, the Vietnam War ended in stunning defeat. Reeling from these events, many Americans were now left increasingly economically insecure, distrustful of their government, uncertain of the United States government's role in the world, and convinced the America had lost its moral compass.

Jimmy Carter hoped to change that. Running on a politics of morality, he aimed to not only restore faith in government, but heal the shame, guilt, and despair many American's felt after the trauma of Vietnam. He began his moral crusade on his very first day in office, choosing to walk, rather than drive, from the Capitol to the White House for his inauguration, as if to show ordinary Americans that he was no different from them. In the opening line of his inauguration speech, he called for unity in the great task of moving beyond the traumas that had scarred the country. "For myself and for our Nation," he began, "I want to thank my predecessor for all he has

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[1089] "Carter pledges U.S. Navy aid to Vietnamese boat people," *The Bulletin*, July 20, 1979, 19.

done to heal our land."[1090] Wishing to move past the rampant corruption, immorality, and deception of the past, he outlined the fundamental tenants of his Administration: "Our government must at the same time be both competent and compassionate."[1091] In his speech, he spoke of fostering greater transparency, moderating the Cold War, and leading by example.

Most importantly, President Carter signaled a major departure in international relations from the Vietnam War era. He spoke of maintaining a "quiet strength based not merely on the size of an arsenal but on the nobility of ideas." The centerpiece of his new arsenal would be the notion of human rights, which he implied signified not only a new foreign policy program, but a new age for humanity. "The world itself is now dominated by a new spirit. Peoples more numerous and more politically aware are craving, and now demanding, their place in the sun," he continued, "not just for the benefit of their own physical condition, but for basic human rights." Accordingly, he promised, "Our commitment to human rights must be absolute…"[1092]

The Carter Administration had recently, and somewhat unexpectedly, discovered that human rights could serve as the cure to the widespread malaise that characterized American politics – and especially U.S. foreign policy – in the 1970s.[1093] Human rights could manage the legacy of Vietnam by shifting everyone's attention away from the horrors of that war, redefine the U.S. government's role in the world after Richard Nixon's *realpolitik*, and, above all, restore American virtue. Yet the different currents that came together to make Carter's Presidency possible had different ideas about exactly how human rights could be used to offer Americans a way to finally feel good about their country, its ideals, and its role in the world. For some conservatives, which included both Democrats and Republicans, human rights could help reestablish the legitimacy of America's war on international Communism, offering the perfect weapon to circumvent a politics of isolationism, guilt, and compromise after the debacle of Vietnam. For some liberals, on the other hand, human rights offered the United States a way to

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[1090] Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1977, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6575.
[1091] Ibid.
[1092] Ibid.
[1093] My analysis of the role of human rights in American politics is heavily indebted to Barbara Keys' excellent study, *Reclaiming American Virtue*.

recover the country's honor after a period of Cold War immorality that included not only the

Vietnam War, but also continued U.S. support of brutal dictatorships.

Because of these different impulses, human rights came to play a highly ambiguous, and

at times contradictory, role in the Carter Administration's foreign policy. Figures like Patricia

Derian, head of the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights, regularly criticized pro-U.S.

dictatorships for human rights violations.[1094] Derian, for example, pushed to ban the sale of tear

gas to the Shah of Iran, who used it to crush demonstrations against his autocratic rule. Other

figures, like Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs,

proved very reluctant to openly criticize such allies. For instance, Holbrooke personally deleted

criticism of the Shah from one of Carter's speeches.[1095] This conflict played out over different

areas of foreign policy, with partisans of each approach winning the upper hand in different parts

of the world. In some regions, especially Latin America, figures like Derian scored important

victories. With regards to Argentina, for example, the Carter administration worked to reduce aid

levels, cut off military assistance, and generate public pressure against the dictatorship. But in

Southeast Asia, one of the hottest spots of the Cold War, those who saw in human rights a

weapon against communism clearly seized the upper hand.

Vietnam, which played a very special role in American consciousness, became a prime

testing ground for the anti-communist variant of Carter's human rights policy. Before his

presidency, "Vietnam" was practically synonymous with American dishonor, cruelty, and failure.

For the vast majority of Americans after 1975, sending troops to fight in Vietnam had been a

mistake. In the eyes of much of the international community, the United Sates had committed

egregious crimes: denying a people their right to self-determination, killing millions, and

completely dislocating all of Southeast Asian society in a war the United States could not win.[1096]

A stain on America's virtue, the Vietnam War had severely weakened the U.S. government's

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[1094] Keys, *Reclaiming Virtue*, 259-64.
[1095] Ibid., 261.
[1096] For more on this see John Kane, *Between Virtue and Power: The Persistent Moral Dilemma of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), chapter 15.

claims to be the leader of the free world, the defender of democratic values, or the world's

selfless policeman.

Since Vietnam lay at the very heart of the United States' predicament, a central aspect of

President Carter's plan to restore the United States' positive image on the world stage involved

radically changing the way the world thought about the United States' role in Southeast Asia.

Thus, only two weeks after his inauguration, Carter broached the question of normalizing

relations with the SRV. The greatest initial obstacle was the myth that there were still POWs in

Southeast Asia. Like Richard Nixon and the POWs before him, President Gerald Ford had

wielded the MIA issue as a political weapon, refusing to discuss the issue of normalization on the

grounds that Vietnam had not accounted for all the soldiers missing in action after the war.[1097]

Carter, by contrast, hoped to move past the matter. After the "Woodcock Commission" returned

from Hanoi in 1977, President put the issue to rest by declaring publicly that the Vietnamese "had

done their best to account for the service personnel who are missing in action."[1098] Negotiations

could begin in earnest.

The Vietnamese, for their part, were eager to establish diplomatic relations, and talks

began in earnest on May 3, 1977. Discussions, which involved several Congressional visits to

Vietnam, culminated on September 27, 1978 when Holbrooke secretly met with Deputy Foreign

Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Both sides agreed to normalize relations without preconditions.[1099]

But not everyone in Carter's Administration assented. Zbigniew Brzezinski – Carter's National

Security Advisor, a hardline anti-communist, a onetime member of Amnesty International's board

of directors – argued that normalizing relations with Vietnam would complicate the

Administration's primary goal of normalizing relations with the USSR's enemy, China.[1100] In other

words, warming up to the Vietnamese, allied to the Soviets, would alienate the Chinese,

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[1097] H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), 129.
[1098] *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 76, April 18, 1977, 359.
[1099] Judith Kumin, "Orderly Departure From Vietnam: Cold War Anomaly or Humanitarian Innovation?," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2008): 110.
[1100] Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 2008), 143.

undermining the United States' geopolitical strategy of isolating the Soviet Union. Opposition to normalization was seconded by anti-communist Democrats such as Senator Henry Jackson, one of the strongest proponents of the conservative notion of human rights.[1101] For Jackson, who had tried to preserve the anti-communist goals of American imperialism by grounding Cold War discourse on universal human rights rather than "American values," normalizing relations meant bowing to communism.[1102] On the advice of Brzezinski, and with people like Jackson in mind, Carter turned against normalization only two weeks after Holbrooke and Nguyen Co Thach reached an agreement. [1103] Feeling betrayed, and increasingly concerned about China's designs on the region, the SRV turned completely to the Soviet Union, signing a twenty-five year friendship and cooperation treaty on November 3, 1978.

Despite all the talk of moving past the Cold War, leading by example, and pursuing a politics of morality, when it came to Southeast Asia, the Carter Administration's lofty visions ultimately came second to the geopolitical imperatives of the Cold War. Carter's foreign policy goal was to find a way to change how both Americans and the global community saw the United States' role in Southeast Asia. Although consonant with the rhetoric of healing that characterized his Administration, the early strategy of normalization provided ineffective because it ultimately contradicted the larger geopolitical goals of the United States in that region of the world. Thus, the Carter Administration had to find another, more effective way to simultaneously erase the memory of the war, make Americans feel good about themselves, and restore the United States government's global credibility without compromising U.S. imperialism.

Enter the boat people. It seems the idea of seriously involving the United States in the boat people issue actually came from Holbrooke.[1104] Holbrooke, despite earlier efforts to normalize relations with Vietnam, was also one of those figures in the Carter Administration who praised human rights but felt they should always be subordinated to American foreign policy. As

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[1101] Ibid., 144.
[1102] Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue*, 104.
[1103] The United States would not recognize Vietnam until 1995.
[1104] Walter Mondale, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics*, with David Hage (New York: Scribner, 2010), 212.

noted above, while he often turned to the language of rights, he applied them very selectively, especially in Southeast Asia. For example, despite massive human rights violations, dictator Ferdinand Marcos was frequently let off the hook because the Philippines were so important to U.S. geopolitical interests in the region. This kind of hypocritical stance on human rights was not lost on the public, and often created problems for the Administration. But with the boat people fleeing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, there was no such contradiction. For here was an issue that was perfectly consonant with the Carter Administration's emphasis on human rights, but did not disrupt U.S. strategic interests abroad. In fact, when it came to the boat people, singing the praises of human rights could the best way to further American imperialism.

There was, however, some resistance to the idea to throwing the state's weight behind the issue. The Pentagon felt it was out of its jurisdiction, some in the State Department argued that embracing the issue would be tantamount to interfering with the affairs of a sovereign state, and others in the National Security Council raised the question of money. Yet Holbrooke had a strong ally in Vice President Walter F. Mondale, who had visited a refugee camp in Thailand in the spring of 1978. Mondale did not see the issue as simply another refugee problem, but as "a sinister and largely racist plot, putting people to sea in something that approached genocide and a form of revenge for their support of the United States during the Vietnam War."[1105] But he also thought the issue could provide an excellent opportunity to rectify America's image abroad. "Quite apart from the humanitarian case, I saw an important foreign policy argument," Mondale explained.[1106] That proved enough to convince Secretary of Defense Harold Brown as well as Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.

Beginning in late 1978, the United States took a series of well-publicized steps to alleviate the refugee crisis. On February 28, 1979, President Carter created the post of U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs.[1107] On June 28, 1979, at an international summit in Tokyo,

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[1105] Mondale, *The Good Fight*, 212.
[1106] Ibid., 213.
[1107] Jimmy Carter, "Ambassador at Large and United States Coordinator for Refugee Affairs Nomination of Dick Clark," February 28, 1979, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31973.

President Carter pledged to double the number of Indochinese refugees to the United States from 7,000 to 14,000 a month. "We can and will work together," he promised, "to find homes and jobs for Indochinese refugees."[1108] To handle the influx, the U.S. Department of State created a new Office of Refugee Affairs on July 30, 1979. That month, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance suggested moving 20,000 refugees to a refugee processing center in the United States itself, possibly Fort Chaffee in Arkansas. While only "symbolic," he argued the project would nevertheless make for a dramatic gesture on the international stage.[1109] President Carter ultimately nixed the plan, but by the end of September of 1979, the United States could nevertheless boast that it had admitted a total of 248,436 refugees since the spring of 1975.[1110] Mondale proved correct: by acting on this issue, the United States had stumbled onto a way to restore its virtue in the very part of the world where it had so recently been associated with dishonor.

This remarkable transformation was best captured at the International Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Southeast Asia called by United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim for July 20-21, 1979. Sixty-five governments accepted his invitation to Geneva, including Vietnam and the United States. To prove its commitment, the United States sent a "high-level delegation" to the Meeting, which included Mondale, the Attorney General, Coordinator for Refugee Affairs Richard "Dick" Clark, the Governors of New Jersey and Iowa, a number of Congressional representatives, and Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor, author, and humanitarian.[1111]

[1108] "Nation will admit 14,00 refugees," *The Tuscaloosa News*, June 28, 1979, 5.
[1109] Memorandum for the President from Cyrus Vance, "United States Initiatives at the United Nations Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees," July 18, 1979, 6. 153.J.8.5B Walter F. Mondale Vice Presidential Papers.
[1110] U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program: Report to Congress," December 31, 1979, 2.
[1111] Memorandum for the President from Cyrus Vance, "United States Initiatives at the United Nations Sponsored Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees," Draft, 1. 153.J.8.5B Walter F. Mondale Vice Presidential Papers; Mondale, *The Good Fight*, 215.

Mondale's speech in Geneva was a coup.[1112] With rhetorical subtlety, he reminded his audience that "Forty-one years ago this very week, another international conference on Lake Geneva concluded its deliberations."[1113] He spoke of the Evian conference, where thirty-two countries gathered to find a solution to the plight of Jews fleeing persecution from the Third Reich. Yet no agreement was reached, he lamented: "At Evian, they began with high hopes. But they failed the test of civilization."[1114] He then transitioned to the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia, warning, "Let us not re-enact their error. Let us not be the heirs of their shame."[1115] In effect, Mondale implicitly compared Vietnam to the Third Reich, the flight of the boat people to the Holocaust. Mondale then slammed Vietnam for its "callous and irresponsible policies," charging the SRV for "failing to ensure the human rights of its people."[1116]

After depicting the Vietnamese as the villains, he made the United States the hero:

> The United States is committed to doing its share, just as we have done for generations. "Mother of exiles" it says on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty at the port of New York. The American people have already welcomed over 200,000 Indochinese.[1117]

Beyond taking them in, he added, the United States "is acting vigorously to save refugees from exposure and starvation and drowning and death at sea." "[T]he President of the United States has dramatically strengthened his orders to our Navy to help the drowning and the desperate," he told his captivated audience.[1118] Most importantly, Mondale hoped to convince the world that the United States was worthy of once again leading the international community. Unlike during the Vietnam War, which, despite some allied assistance, the United States led on its own, blind to international pressure, Mondale now called for a truly united, multilateral effort.

Mondale lived up to the Administration's highest goals by appealing to moral conscience. In respect to Vietnam, Mondale had substituted morality for politics and history. His speech did

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[1112] Marty Kaplan, "The Best Speech I Ever Wrote," *Huffington Post*, August 30, 2009.
[1113] Speech by Vice President Walter F. Mondale to the United Nations Conference on Indochinese Refugees, Geneva, July 21, 1979, 1. 153.L.14.3B Walter F. Mondale Vice Presidential Papers.
[1114] Ibid.
[1115] Ibid., 2.
[1116] Ibid., 3.
[1117] Ibid., 2.
[1118] Ibid., 4.

not make a single substantial reference to the Vietnam War. In fact, listening to his speech, one would have never known the Vietnam War had ever happened. And yet Mondale's words received thunderous applause. As Mondale later recalled, he felt the campaign to save the boat people campaign, of which his famous speech was an integral part, "changed the way the world looked at America – after some pretty difficult years for us abroad – and I'm proud of it."[1119]

Thus, only four years after the Fall of Saigon, the United States had managed to rebrand itself as a virtuous nation. Astonishingly, when it came to Southeast Asia, the United States redeemed itself not by making a lasting, meaningful peace with Vietnam, but by using the peace to launch another offensive. The Carter Administration would help Americans move past the Vietnam War not by making amends, paying the reparations it promised, or normalizing relations with the country it had devastated, but by using the issue of the boat people, and the language of human rights, to turn Vietnam into a villain and the United States into a hero.

Responding to Human Rights

Two words had accomplished what eight million tons of bombs never could. A decade earlier, despite the U.S. government's best efforts, Vietnamese revolutionaries enjoyed the solidarity of antiwar movements across the globe, counted on the support of numerous foreign governments, and felt comfortable knowing they had secured the moral high ground. Now, despite having triumphed against an immoral war, the SRV watched as friendly governments turned their backs, a new kind of international activism took aim, and the United States emerged as the moral conscience of the age. It is ironic that the Vietnamese revolutionaries, who always argued that the war would have to be won not only in the jungles, but also in the minds of people everywhere, would face their worst defeat not in the battlefield, but at the level of ideas. Having won the ideological war in the 1960s by couching its struggle in the ideas of anti-imperialism and national self-determination, the Vietnamese revolution would be defeated in the late 1970s by the idea of human rights.

[1119] Mondale, *The Good Fight*, 216.

Vietnam finally realized the gravity of the situation and mounted an ideological counter-

offensive in 1979. Since the flashpoint of the debate over human rights was precisely the refugee

crisis, the SRV began by defending itself on the boat people issue. In 1979, after having issued a

number of rather dubious arguments in its defense – that those fleeing were simply "economic

refugees," impatient with the extreme poverty of the country; that many of the Hoa refugees were

actually agents working with China to subvert Vietnam from within; or that many of those trying to

escape had collaborated with the old regime but had been unable to flee with the U.S. military

back in April 1975 – the government presented an official, and in many respects more convincing,

response in the *Vietnam Courier* pamphlet, *Those Who Leave: The "problem of Vietnamese*

refugees."[1120]

Here, the SRV claimed that the present refugee crisis was not an isolated issue

disconnected from history, as the U.S. government tried to argue, but had deep roots in the

region's past, above all the legacy of three decades of war:

> It is clear that a problem of this kind, owing to its human and political implications, cannot
> be treated in a simplistic way by means of a few humanitarian tirades sprinkled with
> political slogans on human rights. It can only be grasped within the present context of
> Vietnam, which is facing multiple problems left by several decades of war and more than
> a century of colonization.[1121]

After all, between 1954 and 1973, when the Paris Peace Accords were finally signed, the

combined effects of war and forced relocation had displaced ten million Vietnamese. By the time

Saigon fell in April 1975, "nearly half the entire South Vietnamese population had been uprooted

at least once in the previous two decades."[1122] To make matters worse, the Vietnamese

government explained, approximately 65 percent of these southerners flooded into cities, leaving

agricultural production in the countryside in disarray.[1123] When the United States withdrew,

overcrowded metropolises like Saigon, which had come to depend parasitically on the U.S.

military, risked becoming unsustainable. Vietnam was left with an enormous demographic crisis

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[1120] *Those Who Leave: The "problem of Vietnamese refugees"* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1979),
27 and 31.
[1121] Ibid., 5.
[1122] Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 17.
[1123] Ibid., 9

on its hands. In a very direct sense, the SRV charged, the refugee crisis really began with the Americans.

But the SRV knew that to win the ideological battle, it could not just spread the blame, but also had to try to resolve the issue.[1124] Indeed, despite what Vice President Mondale's speech in Geneva suggested, the SRV had taken some positive steps to alleviate the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia since early 1978. For example, after the Vietnamese military freed prisoners from Pol Pot's camps, nearly 150,000 liberated Cambodians streamed into neighboring Vietnam, prompting Vietnam to ask the UNHCR to help manage situation. In fact, the SRV had absorbed far more refugees than neighboring countries, putting paid to the idea that the government was deliberately trying to thin its population by expelling undesirables. Vietnam, in other words, was actually involved in major humanitarian relief efforts.

As for Vietnamese nationals hoping to leave, Vietnam showed itself open to finding a collective solution, even with the United States. In August 1978, for example, the Vietnamese government, after having invited Senator Ted Kennedy to send another delegation to the country, assured the American representatives that Vietnam "considered it its duty to act positively on legitimate family reunion cases."[1125] During an international meeting on the refugees in December of that year, Vietnam agreed to collaborate with other countries, as well as the United Nations, to find "[m]ore regular and orderly procedures … in order to facilitate humanitarian solutions."[1126] Then, on January 12, 1979, the SRV announced that: "In accordance with its humanitarian policy and the laws in force, the Government of the Socialist Republic if Vietnam is prepared, as of today, to grant exit visas to all Vietnamese who, by written request, express the desire to leave."[1127] On May 30, 1979, about a month and half before Mondale's speech comparing Vietnamese to the Third Reich, the SRV, in collaboration with the UNHCR's Deputy High

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[1124] Kumin, "Orderly Departure From Vietnam," 110-17.

[1125] H. Kamm, "Vietnam's Premier says he wants US friendship," *New York Times*, August 8, 1973, 3.

[1126] UNHCR, "Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Southeast Asia, Convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations at Geneva on 20 and 21 July, 1979, and Subsequent Developments," A/34/627, November 7, 1979, paragraph 5(I). Hereafter, UNHCR 1979.

[1127] Ibid. Annex 1, Background Note dated July 9, 1979, prepared by the UNHCR for the Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia, paragraph 5.

Commissioner, Dale de Haan, signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Orderly Departure, which promised that "[a]uthorized exit of those people who wish to leave Vietnam and settle in foreign countries – family reunion and other humanitarian causes – will be carried out as soon as possible and to the maximum extent."[1128]

Thus, by the time of the Geneva conference in July 1979, Vietnam had already taken significant steps to resolve the issue. At the conference, Vietnam worked with other countries to develop a new set of measures such as third-country resettlement, regional processing centers, and an agreement to promote orderly departures. In addition, after Geneva, the SRV assured the international community that "for a reasonable period of time, it would make every effort to stop illegal departures."[1129] Vietnam kept its word. The numbers of refugees fleeing Vietnam dropped from 59,941 in June to 17,839 in July to a 9,734 in August.[1130] By the end of the year, writes W. Courtland Robinson, "arrivals averaged only 2,600 per month."[1131] As for resettlement, soon after the conference, Vietnam, the UNHCR, and other countries led by the United States implemented the Orderly Departure Program, which allowed for a direct transfer of refugees from Vietnam to countries of resettlement. Resettling over 650,000 people over the next fifteen years, the ODP, Judith Kumin writes, became not only the UNHCR's "first attempt to use orderly migration to solve a refugee crisis," but the "first effort at preventative action."[1132]

While these multilateral efforts helped contain the flow of refugees, they did little to exonerate Vietnam in the eyes of the international community. Some argued that Vietnam's very solution to the crisis – halting illegal departures – was itself a violation of human rights. After all, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed unequivocally, "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own …"[1133] Others, such as the United States

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[1128] *Those Who Leave*, 39.
[1129] UNHCR 1979, paragraph 16.
[1130] Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 58.
[1131] Ibid., 58.
[1132] Kumin, "Orderly Departure From Vietnam," 117.
[1133] UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), Article 13.

government, argued that despite the attenuation of the crisis, the fact remained: Vietnam still

violated human rights.

The SRV therefore felt obliged to challenge the idea of human rights directly, since it was

precisely through the idea of human rights that the United States was able to turn the boat people

issue into a concerted campaign against Vietnam.[1134] Human rights, the SRV began to believe,

could be used to make a moral issue out of anything, putting countries like Vietnam on the

defensive. This was precisely how bellicose governments like the United States, or international

human rights groups, which had never been elected by anyone, had no independent funds to

their name, and could claim no jurisdiction in Southeast Asia, could somehow judge, and

condemn, sovereign nation states such as Vietnam. Today, it was the boat people; tomorrow it

would be something else. To win the ideological war, Vietnam had to respond to human rights

itself.

Vietnamese representatives mobilized a series of related, though at times contradictory,

arguments against the idea of human rights. One major argument was to show that human rights

had become a kind of weapon in the hands of imperialist countries like the United States. Several

Vietnamese commenters very perspicaciously suggested that the United States had effectively

embraced human rights as a way to resolve its major crises in the 1970s. For example, in a

speech called, "Defence of Human Rights or U.S. Policy of Interference in the Internal Affairs of

Other Countries?" Ngo Ba Thanh, who had earned a masters in comparative law at Columbia,

completed PhDs in Paris and Barcelona, and worked at the Legal Affairs Office of the UN

Secretariat, argued in December 1979 that the combined effects of domestic strife, economic

recession, Watergate, and the Vietnam war had not only created a profound moral crisis in the

United States, but called "into question US leadership of the modern world, to which the US

leaders have been aspiring to ever since the Second World War."[1135] Faced with the danger of

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[1134] Robinson, *Those Who Leave*, 32.
[1135] Ngo Ba Thanh, "Defence of Human Rights or U.S. Policy of Interference in the Internal Affairs of Other Countries?," reprinted in *Vietnam: Which Human Rights? A Dossier* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1980), 106.

losing its international standing, she argued, Americans "decided to take defence of 'human rights' as the starting point for regaining this leadership."[1136]

Human rights, according to this argument, were simply part of a duplicitous strategy to regain American hegemony after the failure of Vietnam. As Ngo Ba Thanh put it, the new doctrine of human rights allows countries like the United States to "set themselves up as international judges empowered to hand down judgments on the conduct of other countries, on their internal affairs."[1137] And of course, she concluded, "Washington unilaterally claims for itself the right to declare where, when, how, and by whom human rights have been violated."[1138] The Socialist Republic of Vietnam's official statement on the boat people was even more blunt:

> This campaign is no novelty. It has indeed started in Washington where the American leaders, unable to use Vietnam's tribulations to erase from people's minds the immense responsibilities of their government and stubbornly refuse to honour their air pledge, seek to give a good conscience to the American people. Jimmy Carter has found the method: human rights. Vietnam, the victim of American barbarity, will thus find itself in the dock while the USA will smartly join the ranks of the defenders of law and justice. There have been former friends of Vietnam who had lent a hand to this legerdemain trick; some in good faith and without being aware that t hey are being manipulated; others knowingly.[1139]

In other words, human rights were a one-sided weapon used by countries like the United States and therefore had to be completely opposed.

Instead of rejecting human rights outright, another line of reasoning tried to relativize them. According to this view, human rights did not have a singular, universal meaning, but necessarily meant different things in different contexts. For example, just as anti-imperialist revolution had to unfold differently in Western Europe or North America than in Vietnam, so too did human rights. For a society freeing itself from the ravages of over a century of colonialism, occupation, and war, human rights meant, above all, struggling to build a functional, independent society. Human rights meant repairing communications lines, combatting illiteracy, setting up "a health care system which reaches down to the village," "helping clear large tracts of land mines," or giving "jobs to hundreds of thousands of unemployed people." It was therefore absurd to hold

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[1136] Ibid.
[1137] Ibid.
[1138] Ibid., 108.
[1139] *Those Who Leave*, 33.

Vietnam, a war-torn country of peasants, to the standards of a developed country like the United States. According to this materialist argument, human rights, whether the Vietnamese or the Americans wanted it or not, had to unfold differently in Southeast Asia. And if the situation were properly historicized, it could be shown that far from violating human rights, Vietnam was their greatest upholder.

A final, major argument against allegations of human rights violations contended that human rights actually constituted a terrain of struggle between different social forces. There were, according to this view, two distinct interpretations of human rights, the bourgeois and the proletarian, the capitalist and the socialist, the individualist and the collectivist, the purely juridical and the more broadly socio-economic. As Ngo Ba Thanh put it, the new proponents of human rights, with the United States at the head, only championed the rights of the abstract individual, and above all, the right to private property. Thus, she continued, "the 'free world' calls 'free' one who is without a job, does not have enough to eat, lives in poverty, is constantly threatened by unemployment, is deprived of the most elementary medical assistance, or sleeps in a hovel."[1140] The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, on the other hand, advocated a view of human rights that placed primacy on more "fundamental" socio-economic rights, such as the right to self-determination, to work, social security, and education. The two interpretations, she argued, represented a broader "ideological struggle" on a global scale. Partisans of the collectivist interpretation of rights had, she suggested, scored a tremendous victory in 1948, when they included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights not only "civic and political rights," but also key "socio-economic rights." Since then, however, partisans of the individualist conception of rights, led by the United States have not only tried to limit the Declaration's scope, but are sparing "no efforts to make this Universal Declaration of Human Rights into a purely formal legal document with no concrete provisions to guarantee the effective exercise of human rights."[1141]

According to this argument, Vietnam not only promoted a different idea of human rights, but one that was more expansive and therefore qualitatively better. Indeed, if taken to its logical

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[1140] Ngo Ba Thanh, "Defence of Human Rights," 118.
[1141] Ibid., 114.

conclusion this argument suggested that in emphasizing basic socio-economic rights, Vietnam was providing the best guarantee for the civil rights with which the United States was so obsessed. The rights of the individual could never guarantee the rights of the collective, but a collectivist emphasis on socio-economic rights ensured the growth of the essential rights of the individual. "History has shown," Ngo Ba Thanh argued, for example, "that by freeing the workers from exploitation and the oppressed peoples from arbitrary rule on the national and social levels, socialism has effectively ensured genuine freedom and democratic rights for the individual."[1142] The problem, however, was that the collectivist interpretation of rights championed by socialist countries like Vietnam had in fact not only failed to ensure the rights of the individual, but was in part responsible for their violation. Why else would hundreds of thousands risk everything to escape?

While the refugee crisis was in part caused by the war with the United States, the Vietnamese government bore the brunt of the responsibility. The government's solution to the massive demographic and economic dislocations caused by years of war was forced relocation. For example, the Second Five-Year Plan, announced in December 1976, inaugurated massive demographic transformations, with the government planning to move some ten million people. By 1978, the SRV, hoping to reclaim lands through collectivized agriculture, had resettled over four million people to what were called "new economic zones" or NEZs.[1143] While they were given the necessary tools, along with a six-month grain supply, to survive, this often proved inadequate. Many of these NEZs failed, the reduced agricultural output further crippled the national economy, which in turn prompted many Vietnamese to flee. Not only had many Vietnamese been stripped of their civil liberties and forced to relocate, or be re-educated, they were now poorer as per capita income actually declined since the start of the Second Five-Year Plan.[1144] All this

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[1142] Ibid.
[1143] D. R. SarDesai, *Vietnam: Past and Present, Fourth Edition* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2005), 129.
[1144] Ibid., 132.

completely unraveled the government's claims that by guaranteeing socio-economic rights it could ensure individual freedoms. Sadly, it could do neither.[1145]

Yet the problem could not be reduced to a few mistaken policies; the nation-state itself seemed to set the Vietnamese communists down this path of repression. As theorists such as Nicos Poulantzas argued in the late 1970s, one of the primary functions of the state is to maintain cohesion within a given social formation.[1146] In capitalist social formations, the state disaggregates heterogeneous social forces and potentially antagonistic dominated classes within its territorial borders into individuals, recomposes their unity as a more or less homogenous "national people," while necessarily marking some individuals as outsiders. At the same time, the state allows the dominant classes to not only organize themselves, but to articulate their interests as those of the entire nation. In this way, the state reproduces a given social formation in a way that preserves the power of the dominant classes.

Although this function of the state was understood to be a function of the capitalist state, the events in Vietnam confirmed that even when the nation-state is coded as socialist, the same process of homogenization holds. Indeed, while radicals felt that the nation-state produced by the national liberation struggles of the oppressed would be the best way to fight imperialism, protect the interests of the oppressed, and allow them to transcend their heterogeneity by composing themselves into a unified subject, they soon watched as the socialist nation-state embarked on the same violent process of homogenization and exclusion.[1147] On the one hand, building a unified Vietnamese people meant oppressing the many ethnic minorities, including the Moung, Tay, and Hoa, within Vietnam's new borders. Indeed, on December 29, 1975, less than a year after liberation, the victorious Vietnamese communists, who, as good Leninists, had always paid lip service to the right to self-determination of the many oppressed minorities, officially dissolved

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[1145] Some of this was outside the SRV's hands – Vietnam experienced terrible weather and suffered disastrous floods, while much of the foreign aid, especially that promised by the United States, failed to materialize. But, at base, the SRV's boundless optimism, and perhaps in arrogance, led it misunderstand the distinctive economic structures of the South, and the forced transformation of society had backfired.
[1146] See especially, Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1978).
[1147] For the double-edged nature of "subaltern nationalism," see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 106-109.

the national autonomous regions of Vietnam, creating a fully unified nation-state.[1148] And it is not without significance that the vast majority of the refugees were ethnic minorities. On the other hand, building social cohesion meant targeting all those who threatened the specific socialist idea of national unity, hence the suspension of civil liberties, the persecution of dissenters, and the establishment of re-education camps to produce proper national subjects.

Radicals saw how, in the context of the Third Indochina War, the nation-state became imperialist, even when those in the government had been the leaders of anti-imperialist struggle; now they watched as the nation-state, thought to be the vehicle of emancipation, almost immediately began to turn on its own subjects. The repressive nature of the Vietnamese state in turn raised serious problems since it grounded the entire notion of collective rights, which the Vietnamese firmly counterposed to that of individual rights. For if the state was the guarantor of collective rights, but had inherent tendencies towards violent homogenization, exclusion, and repression in the name of social cohesion, did this mean that collective rights were themselves inherently oppressive? Did this mean that collective rights, within the context of Vietnam's socialist nation-building project, precluded genuine individual rights?

Lastly, not only had Vietnam clearly violated those basic civil rights, such as the freedom of speech or movement, that North American and Western European radicals themselves had struggled for in the 1970s, it did so in an intellectual climate where the rights of the individual were increasingly taking precedence over that of the collective. If we are to accept the SRV's own definition of human rights as a terrain of struggle between two distinct views, by 1979, the individualist conception of human rights championed by groups like Amnesty International or states like the United States was beginning to win. In this changed context, the violations of certain civil liberties in Vietnam seemed especially egregious now that everyone had developed a heightened sensitivity to them. Thus, whatever its criticisms of the limitations of the new human rights rhetoric, Vietnam could not possibly explain away its own behavior, and after the

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[1148] For a good history of the "nationalities question" in Vietnam, see Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), chapter 5.

intellectual transformations of the 1970s, no legitimate emancipatory politics could afford to countenance such violations.

Anti-Imperialism on the Margins

Although responses to the rise of human rights varied by country, the anti-imperialist radical ;eft in North America and Western Europe found itself on the defensive everywhere. This was especially the case in France, where the campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam achieved hegemonic proportions. There, even committed anti-imperialists such Laurent Schwartz, the main organizer of the Comité Vietnam National and the Front Solidarité Indochine, signed onto the Boat for Vietnam operation. Yet Schwartz simultaneously took great pains to fight what he saw as a "political campaign filled with hatred against the Vietnamese government" led by "left-wing intellectuals who now hated the same Viet-Nam which they had adored and idealized before."[1149] Indeed, in spite of his strong support for the boat people, Schwartz became probably the most visible, and credible, public defender of Vietnam in France. He wrote a response to Paringaux's provocative *Le Monde* article, gave regular interviews on the topic, and co-authored a highly publicized piece in *Le Monde* with veteran antiwar organizer Madeleine Rebérioux defending Vietnam.[1150] His efforts elicited very sharp polemics from Doan Van Toai, Jacques and Claudie Broyelle, and Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, among others.[1151]

Significantly, however, in trying to vindicate Vietnam, Schwartz and Rebérioux found themselves deploying the language of human rights, concluding, for example, that they had to simultaneously "help the third world and defend human rights throughout the world."[1152] In fact, Schwartz and Rebérioux proposed that one major solution would be for the Vietnamese government to accept an investigation by an objective mission, preferably led by Amnesty

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[1149] Laurent Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, trans. Leila Schneps (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2001), 439.

[1150] See especially, "Laurent Schwartz, "Nous solidariser avec le Vietnam mais défendre aussi les victimes," *Tribune Socialiste* 809, January 12-17, 1979, 12.

[1151] For example, Doan Van Toai, "Pourquoi?" and Jacques Broyelle, Claudie Broyelle, and Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, "La différence" both in *Le Monde*, October 22-23, 1978.

[1152] Laurent Schwartz and Madeleine Rebérioux, "Le dilemme vietnamien," *Le Monde*, December 17-19, 1978.

International. Not only was this the same solution proposed by Baez and the champions of the rival human rights internationalism, the suggestion revealed how Schwartz and Rebérioux – along with other French radicals – still believed that Amnesty International was somehow unpartisan, or as Schwartz later put it, " apolitical and neutral."[1153] In other words, they could have conceivably admitted that Vietnam had violated civil liberties without making recourse to conceptions of human rights, or relying on humanitarian groups. In this, they revealed how even many of the critics of human rights in France had to accept its terms, proving just how hegemonic, in the deepest sense of the word, human rights had become.

Other French radicals, such as the militants of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire – who had been the strongest backers of the Front Solidarité Indochine, and the Comité Vietnam National before that – tried to combat the language of human rights, but in so doing only revealed the incapacitation of the anti-imperialist left as a whole. Their initial response to the boat people campaign, which was typical of much of the organized anti-imperialist left, was to simply ignore it. In fact, their paper, *Rouge*, did not run a single article on the refugee crisis until the very end of June 1979, something pointed out by an irritated reader in a letter to the paper. *Rouge* finally published a few articles on the topic by Michel Thomas, which strongly opposed the boat people campaign as a new form of imperialist intervention. The campaign to save the boat people, Thomas argued, is in fact nothing but "a very large-scale anti-communist political operation," inspired by "Mister Carter's conception of human rights."[1154] As for the crisis itself, it is a direct result, in fact another episode, of the war, first waged by the French, then by the Americans, against the Indochinese people. Thomas ended by blaming Giscard d'Estaing, Carter, and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt for each refugee killed, drown, or starved, calling on them to accept more refugees, organize an airlift, and above all, pay Vietnam reparations.[1155]

[1153] Schwartz, *A Mathematician Grappling with His Century*, 435-34. Later, Schwartz, who enjoyed very close relations with Vietnamese leaders, such as Pham Van Dong, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, was eventually able to convince the Vietnamese government to allow an Amnesty delegation in December 1979.
[1154] Michel Thomas, "Boat People: des victimes de la guerre américaine," *Rouge* 873, June 29 - July 5, 1979, 5.
[1155] Ibid., 6.

While briefly criticizing the Vietnamese Communist Party, the paper said little about

Vietnam's rights record, an attitude that prompted a major debate, as a number of readers,

including members of the Ligue, took issue with the official line of the organization. One reader,

"Jean-Francois B.," a former member of the Comité Vietnam National, began by arguing that

today, in 1979, it was very difficult, "if not to say impossible," to think politics without confronting

the issue of the Indochinese refugees, in the same way that it was impossible to have thought

politics in the 1960s outside of the war in Vietnam.[1156] For this reason, he found it inexcusable

that, first, *Rouge* had ignored such a vital issue, one that cut to the heart of the anti-imperialist

left, and second, that when the Ligue finally confronted the matter, it did so with platitudes. For

"Jean-Francois B.," Rouge's answer just boiled down to exclaiming that it was all "imperialism's

fault."[1157] But what was imperialism? What was the left's responsibility? What did this say about

internationalism? In avoiding these questions, the radical anti-imperialist left was revealing its

theoretical and political limits.

Another reader, "Gabriel M.," a member of Ligue, began by arguing that Thomas' article

on the refugee crisis was basically "Stalinist," that is to say, in some respects, *Rouge*'s line on the

boat people was very similar to that of the PCF and the Soviet Union.[1158] This was a serious

charge precisely because one of the defining traits of the radical left in the 1960s and 1970s had

been a criticism of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the radical left in France emerged in large part

because Vietnam allowed it to present a distinct, internationalist and revolutionary alternative to

the position of the Communists. But now, over a decade later, one of the most important voices of

the radical left in France seemed to assume a position on Vietnam very similar as that of its

existential rival. Where did that leave the radical left?

Lastly, "Gabriel M." echoed a crushing point made by "Jean-Francois B." "Thomas'

attitude," he charged, "is a bit like that of someone passing by a woman being raped and explains

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[1156] Jean-Francois B., "En première ligne contre ceux qui assassinent l'espoir communiste," *Rouge* 876, July 20-27, 1979, 10.
[1157] Ibid., 11.
[1158] Gabriel M., "Le droit de denouncer hanoi," *Rouge* 876, July 20-27, 1979, 11.

that her rapist is only a product of society and then scampers off."[1159] While certainly an

exaggeration, his point was that, in the face of a crisis, one that demanded some kind of concrete

internationalist response, all that the radical left had to offer was an abstract argument about

imperialism. While true in some respects, bromides such as these only exemplified the real crisis:

anti-imperialist internationalism had run out of solutions. Thus, while some radicals managed to

resist the rising human rights internationalism, they not only had little to offer in its place, their

criticisms of human rights made the radical left in France as whole appear impotent, unable to

provide anything but empty, formulaic criticisms that resolved nothing.

The boat people campaign received a very different response from American radicals,

although in the end, anti-imperialists in the United States found themselves in the same quagmire

as their French comrades. Because of its unprecedented role in popularizing the issue in the

United States, much of the debate over human rights violations in Vietnam focused on Joan

Baez's public letter against Vietnam. Some, mostly pro-Chinese radicals, opportunistically

defended Baez in order to attack China's geopolitical rival in Southeast Asia. Indeed, the

Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), the official pro-Chinese party in the United States and one of

the most vocal defenders of the Khmer Rouge, ran a full-page interview with Baez over human

rights violations. When other radicals excoriated Baez, CPML radicals such as Carl Davidson

rose to her defense, even though, they admitted to readers, the letter "didn't reflect a socialist or

Marxist view."[1160]

In fact, most antiwar radicals in the United States roundly condemned Baez's letter, and

with it, the campaign's broader allegations of human rights violations in the SRV. Some, such as

noted antiwar journalist Wilfred Burchett, who had recently spent ten weeks in Southeast Asia,

questioned the veracity of Baez's sources. "To the best of my knowledge," he wrote in *The

Washington Post*, "all the accusations in the Joan Baez letter and their imputations are

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[1159] Ibid., 12.
[1160] Carl Davidson, "Should we speak out on Hanoi's atrocities?" *The Call* 8, no. 2, July 16, 1979, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/davidson-baez.htm.

baseless."[1161] He showed that much of the information presented in the public letter was in fact based in rumor and generalizations, and concluded that the "'open letter' reveals complete ignorance of the realities of today's Vietnam."[1162] Indeed, Doan Van Tai turned out to be a far less credible source than assumed, and Sagan had to concede that, regarding the number of prisoners in Vietnam, "I really don't know. The number was arrived at by mathematical approximation."[1163]

Others, such as Don Luce, who had been instrumental in bringing the plight of the political prisoners under Thieu to public attention in the early 1970s, took issue with the invocation of human rights. The best way to resolve the immense tragedy of the boat people, Luce argued in an article in *The Progressive*, was to start by properly historicizing the refugee crisis, rather than using the language of human rights to score political points. "When the 'boat people' are discussed in the United States, it is often in terms of the human rights issues they represent," he wrote. "That is a convenient way of ignoring American complicity in creating conditions that produced this enormous mass of refugees."[1164]

As Luce's article implied, one of the main reason why most American radicals, in contrast to their French peers, strongly opposed the campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam was because human rights had become the doctrine of the United States government. While French President Giscard D'Estaing eventually sympathized with activist efforts to save the boat people, U.S. President Jimmy Carter had made human rights the cornerstone of his entire foreign policy. For American radicals, then, supporting human rights in the United States meant complying with U.S. imperialism. This is precisely why many radicals took such a vociferous stand against not only Baez, but also human rights as a whole. While in France, even many on the radical left accepted the language of human rights in some way or another when discussing the boat people, in the United States, many radicals tried to decouple the two. As radical lawyer

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[1161] "Wilfred Burchett Answers Joan Baez," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1979, A7.
[1162] Ibid.
[1163] Quoted in "Propaganda War over Vietnam?," *The Real Paper*, July 14, 1979, 6.
[1164] Don Luce, "The boat people: America can best help them by recognizing its complicity," *The Progressive*, September 1979, 28.

William Kunstler, who had defended the Black Panther Party, the Weather Underground, and the Attica Prison rioters, put it, "I do not believe that the existence or nonexistence of violations of human rights in Vietnam is relevant to this discussion."[1165]

But precisely because of the high stakes of human rights in the United States, some on the American left bent the stick too far the other way, practically denying that anything was wrong in Vietnam. Kunstler, for example, went on to add: "I would never join in a public denunciation of a socialist country."[1166] One group, which counted some people close to the Communist Party, challenged Baez with their own open letter in the *New York Times*. Outdoing the Vietnamese government itself, they boasted: "Vietnam now enjoys human rights as it has never known in history as described in the International Convenant [sic] on Human Rights: the right to a job and safe, healthy working conditions, the right to join trade unions, the right to be free from hunger, from colonialism and racism. Moreover, they receive—without cost—education, medicine, health care, human rights we in the United States have yet to achieve."[1167]

Some radicals, such as the Revolutionary Communist Party, tried to take a more nuanced approach. On the one hand, the RCP argued that the "classless view of 'human rights'" only served American imperialist interests. In this, the U.S. government received "valuable aid from people like Baez and groups like Amnesty International."[1168] On the other hand, the RCP equally criticized people like Kunstler, Fonda, and the author of *The New York Times* letter for pretending that the government of Vietnam was free of blame. For the RCP, the Vietnamese Communist Party had in fact undermined the revolution. "That the betrayal of the struggle for socialism by Vietnam's revisionist leaders has led to actions and policies that deserve condemnation is beyond condemnation," the RCP admitted.[1169] The problem was that those honest enough to accept this fact, like Baez, had done so in a way that only furthered U.S imperialism. "Many who opposed the war in Vietnam are now disgusted with actions of Vietnam's

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[1165] Quoted in Davidson, "Should We Speak out About Hanoi's Atrocities?"
[1166] Ibid.
[1167] "The Truth About Vietnam," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1979.
[1168] "Baez Sings 'Battle Hymn' for U.S. Imperialists," *Revolutionary Worker*, July 6, 1979, 6.
[1169] Ibid.

present rulers, and justly so. But the Baez letter attempts to channel this disgust in a direction

which is not only favorable to the U.S. imperialists but is even supported and verbalized by

them."[1170] The solution, in other words, was to articulate a left-wing criticism of events in Vietnam

that did not resort to human rights.

But the RCP did not offer much of an alternative. In 1984, the party, along with seventeen

Maoist organizations across the world, did create a new kind of international – loosely Maoist, but

independent of China – that attempted in part to resist the idea of human rights. The most

significant member party of this Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) was the

Communist Party of Peru, also known as the Sendero Luminoso. Speaking for the RIM, the

Sendero Luminso, deliberately opposed their internationalism to human rights:

> We start by not ascribing to either the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the
> Costa Rica [the American Convention on Human Rights], but we have used their legal
> devices to unmask and denounce the old Peruvian state. . . . For us, human rights are
> contradictory to the rights of the people, because we base rights in man as a social
> product, not man as an abstract with innate rights. "Human rights" do not exist except for
> the bourgeois man, a position that was at the forefront of feudalism, like liberty, equality,
> and fraternity were advanced for the bourgeoisie of the past. But today … it has been
> proven that human rights serve the oppressor class and the exploiters who run the
> imperialist and landowner-bureaucratic states … We reject and condemn human rights
> because they are bourgeois, reactionary, counterrevolutionary rights, and are today a
> weapon of revisionists and imperialists, principally Yankee imperialists.[1171]

Yet, the RIM was extraordinarily marginal, virtually nonexistent as a force in the United States.

And in Peru, the only place where it carried any weight, its anti-human rights vision was

completely undermined by the Sendero Luminoso's extremely violent trajectory.

Thus, while the radical left in the United States, and to some degree in France, could

occasionally voice sharp criticisms of human rights internationalism, it had little else to offer.

Some blindly defended Vietnam in spite of clear evidence of civil rights violations. Others

criticized Vietnam, but had no other viable alternatives to present. Still others resisted the

campaign against human rights violations in Vietnam yet still accepted its basic terms. Thus,

while many radicals could point out the dangerous role of human rights interventionism, when it

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[1170] Ibid., 12.
[1171] Partido Communista del Perú, "Sobre las dos colinas," 1991,
http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=699.

came to acting on concrete issues, such as the refugee crisis, they fell back on bromides, blaming everything on "imperialism." The hard truth was that when it came time to move from theoretical criticisms to effecting viable international solidarity, the anti-imperialist left offered no real alternative to that of human rights. And this is precisely why human rights emerged as the dominant form of international solidarity – it survived when its rivals burned out.

Thus, while it is true that a number of former radicals, above all in France, turned coat, abandoning anti-imperialism for human rights, on the whole, the decline of anti-imperialism and the concomitant rise of human rights had less to do with individuals from the old guard switching sides en masse, than with newer activists flocking to human rights as the most effective form of international solidarity. The diehard anti-imperialists, in other words, stayed firm, but in the face of the major historical transformations in the 1970s, and the resulting inadequacy and incoherency of anti-imperialist international, they could no longer recruit young people in the way they did in the 1960s. Future generations of activists would instead find a home in the "human rights international."

CONCLUSION

On February 6, 1980, about 150 human rights activists attempted to force their way into Cambodia to help put an end to the humanitarian crisis rocking the country. Despite the perilous situation, where the combined effects of famine, genocide, and war displaced hundreds of thousands of starving, homeless, and sick Cambodians, the Vietnamese authorities, suspicious of outside intervention after nearly a century of colonialism, occupation, and war, refused to allow foreign relief organizations to enter the country. In response, humanitarian activists condemned the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for violating human rights and organized a massive international campaign against Vietnam, in which the United States government, a number of human rights organizations, and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge curiously all found themselves on the same side. While the United States government organized punitive international sanctions against the SRV, and the Khmer Rouge waged guerilla warfare against the occupying Vietnamese army, international human rights organizations raised awareness, collected money, and flocked to the Cambodian border to provide relief.

Although the situation had begun to improve by early 1980, a number of human rights groups – led by the American International Rescue Committee and the French Médecins Sans Frontières – decided to escalate the campaign to "revive flagging world interest" in the issue.[1172] In February, they organized a march to Poipet Bridge, the main checkpoint between Cambodia and Thailand, to force open a land bridge into Cambodia. Carrying a banner that read, "Please allow us to help the people of Cambodia," the marchers – which included such noted figures as Elie Wiesel, who was now chairman of President Carter's Commission on the Holocaust; Leo Cherne, chairman of the International Rescue Committee; Bayard Rustin, the civil rights leader; Claude Malheurt of Médecins Sans Frontières; Alexander Ginsburg, the Soviet dissident poet; Fernando Arrabal, the Spanish playwright; a number of French politicians, including the mayor of Paris; and Joan Baez, a key organizer of the West Coast branch of Amnesty International USA,

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[1172] John Burgess, "Cambodians Ignore Border March by Celebrities," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 1980.

and now the director of her own human rights organization, Humanitas – hoped to use the bridge to transport doctors, nurses, relief workers, and a convoy of twenty trucks filled with food, medicine, and supplies into the country.[1173] "This is a major effort to persuade people of the urgency of doctors, nurses and medical supplies being brought into Cambodia," Joan Baez explained. "It does not address itself to politics or warfare."[1174]

The "March for Survival" was an odd spectacle: a handful of North American and Western European human rights activists with tacit support from the French and U.S. governments but no real jurisdiction were effectively attempting to invade a sovereign country in the global South on the grounds that they had a duty to protect the fundamental human rights of individuals against governments. Although the activists ultimately failed to reach their objective, the campaign marked the culmination of a decisive shift in international solidarity. Instead of emulating the heroic guerilla, activists now saw only third-world victims; instead of mass mobilizations, human rights groups now relied on celebrities, politicians, and philanthropists; and instead of bringing the ideas of what was then called the "Third World" home, North American and Western European activists now imposed their own notions on those abroad. Just over a decade after the Tet Offensive, the high point of anti-imperialist internationalism, international solidarity now involved pressuring foreign governments to conform to international law, sending relief workers to save victims in poor countries, and collaborating with western governments to levy sanctions against third-world states.

Compared to the disasters of anti-imperialist internationalism in the 1970s and 1980s, human rights internationalism promised to offer a new way forward. Indeed, a number of important campaigns have been won under the sign of human rights. But on the whole, the record of human rights internationalism has not been stellar. Despite some important exceptions, in the second decade of the twenty-first century human rights internationalism has largely come to mean lobbying governments, making impersonal financial donations, taking spring break off to

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[1173] Henry Kamm, "Marchers With Food Aid Get No Cambodian Response," *The New York Times*, February 7, 1980.
[1174] Quoted in Burgess, "Cambodians Ignore Border March."

build a school in a random foreign country, or going to war. Let us not forget that President George W. Bush justified the Iraq War in part by appealing to human rights. Looking back, we are in a good position to evaluate the results of that war: the United States' mission to stop "outrageous human rights abuses," has now resulted in untold devastation, over half a million deaths, perhaps four million displaced persons, irreparable environmental damage, the destruction of cultural artifacts, complete political dislocation, mass poverty, and the rise of the most vicious jihadist organizations. While we cannot reduce human rights to the actions of the U.S. government, we cannot ignore the connection – in the same way that we cannot turn a blind eye to anti-imperialism's relationship to certain dictatorships.

Given the fate of human rights, as well as the continued existence of imperialism, there is a temptation to return to the idea of anti-imperialism. But as this dissertation has shown, while anti-imperialism, at least in its specific form in the 1960s and 1970s, no doubt helped millions liberate themselves from imperialism, it also brought immense sorrow. In many countries, anti-imperialist revolutions led to military dictatorships, massive indebtedness, the destruction of democracy and self-management, internal repression, the impoverishment and oppression of working people, sexual and gender oppression, forced relocations, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, and even other imperialist wars. The causes are manifold, and obviously differ according to each national context. But a central claim of this dissertation has been that anti-imperialism's equation with national liberation – that is, the struggle for a sovereign nation-state as the specific vehicle of emancipation – had a part to play. My argument is that whatever the intentions of those leading the revolution, the nation-state has in-built oppressive tendencies. Of course, the insitutitional materiality of the nation-state in question matters – different states are oppressive in different ways. But historical experience clearly indicates that on the whole, the nation-state cannot be the subject of any truly emancipatory politics.

The experience of anti-imperialism in Southeast Asia, where socialist revolutions dedicated themselves to abolishing all forms of oppression, is a perfect example. The fate of those revolutions reconfirmed, for example, that one of the central functions of the nation-state is

to reduce the heterogeneous multitude residing within its borders into the singular "people," which always involves the identification, and elimination, of "others." No nation-state is exempt from this process. In Vietnam, the government repressed the rights of ethnic minorities, particularly the ethnic Chinese. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge took this logic to its ultimate conclusion: genocide. But just as states tend to homogenize internally, they also possess a tendency to exert power externally. Immediately after the liberation of Vietnam and Cambodia, the two went to war over borders. In this way, the Third Indochina War showed that far from serving as the bulwark against imperialism, the nation-state possesses deeply imperialist tendencies. Whatever the politics of those in power, national governments will always seek to extend their power by influencing other governments, expanding their borders, or playing diplomatic games. Indeed, we should not limit imperialism strictly to the actions of the United States government; we must recognize that all states can be imperialist.

Of course, while anti-imperialism's foundational assumptions were shaken to the core, this did not mean that individual anti-imperialists ceased to exist. Indeed, they lived on, even into the present. But without a serious assessment of its failures, anti-imperialist internationalism has become either meaningless or a kind of zombie. Almost like the concept of fascism, it has little real meaning anymore. When it is given a specific political content, it is often ludicrous. Indeed, if millions experienced anti-imperialism's collapse as a tragedy, today it lives on as a farce. One now sees sectarian groups waving North Korean flags at demonstrations, arguing that anti-imperialist internationalism means defending North Korea's right to nuclear weapons as a defense against U.S. imperialism. Others, rightly critical of U.S. intervention in Syria, nevertheless bend the stick the other way, defending Syrian President Bashir al-Assad as an "anti-imperialist." The list goes on.

Thus, if we are to return to the idea of anti-imperialist internationalism, we must rethink and *reinvent* it. That means, first and foremost, decoupling anti-imperialism from national liberation. What would a non-nationalist anti-imperialist internationalism look like? In answering this question, we must recall that even though it became orthodoxy, the alliance between anti-

imperialism and the right of nations to self-determination was contingent, not inevitable. After all, before the October Revolution, many Marxists, like Rosa Luxemburg, advocated other ideas. Later, when nation-states came to replace crumbling empires, other polities could have been possible. Overthrowing imperialism, in other words, need not always mean fortifying the nation-state. In fact, today, in the twenty-first century, for anti-imperialism to survive, it must mean something other than the national project.

Of course, political projects cannot be invented by myopically looking to the past. They must be reinvented based on the conditions of the present. In the case of anti-imperialist internationalism, this means careful investigations into how imperialism has changed since the 1960s and 1970s. How has the end of the Cold War, the rise of multinational corporations, the consolidation of supranational institutions, the transformation of nation-states, or shifts in regimes of capitalist accumulation changed imperialism? What forms of internationalism are apposite given the changed historical conjuncture? This is, of course, a project that extends well beyond what a history dissertation can deliver. Nevertheless, the value of this project is that it has traced the history of anti-imperialist internationalism, analyzed its rise in the 1960s, uncovered its basic assumptions, surveyed its repertoire of forms of solidarity, tracked its transformations over time, and explained its collapse. In this sense, it has helped clear the path for a revived anti-imperialist project. The real work has only just begun.

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