

# 'Obstinate Elements' and

SAIGON REEDUCATION is the talk of the town. "It's sensational," said a friend who burst into my room early one morning. "All the officers have to leave home for a month's course. They're going to be reeducated."

"Why's that so sensational?" I asked crossly.

"Well, don't you think it's harsh? They're going to be separated from their families for 30 days."

I replied that I didn't think it harsh at all. If a South Vietnamese general, or a colonel, or a major got only a month's reeducation at the end of the war, he should consider himself lucky. What other government had been so lenient?

"Yes," said my friend, who is always amenable to argument, "I suppose it is lenient."

Later, as I read the announcement, I began to see why everybody was talking. It is a remarkable docu-

ment, with everything taken into account.

You are told exactly how much money you will need to cover food for the period of the course, and you are advised to bring about six pounds of emergency rations.

In addition, the following items are required: a change of clothes, blanket, towel, mosquito net, mat, raincoat, pullover, toothpaste, toothbrush, bowl, cigarettes (but only if one is a smoker), paper, pen to take notes, health card and medicines.

A rather long trip is indicated—a remote region perhaps, with a cool climate. The Central Highland? As I read the list, I wished that I was going, too. There are assembly points for all the different categories—the generals, the colonels, the functionaries, the secret agents.

In many ways, it's what everyone who served under the old regime has been waiting for, and the authorities have done their best to

allay the natural suspicions.

We despise the methods of the former regime, they say. We are not going to execute you, torture or imprison you. But you need reeducation.

For the common soldier, this will be only a matter of three days. The rest, as they set out from Saigon with their raincoats and pull-overs, will reduce dramatically the number of "obstinate elements" in the city.

"OBSTINATE ELEMENTS" refers to those people who lived upon the Saigon war economy and who now either oppose the Provisional Revolutionary government, or, by failing to respond to its injunctions, passively impede it.

So far, they have been given every chance to mend their ways. If they do not respond, they are obstinate.

The other day, I came across some obstinate elements whose fortunes I have

traced from the day before liberation: a group of lieutenants and captains who have been waiting, in one particular restaurant, for disaster to strike. They haven't done anything except drink scotch and wait to be killed.

I had lost track of them for a few days, but found them again in one of the new restaurants that have opened. They are clear examples of obstinacy. "We are drinking in order to forget," they said with slurred syllables, "to forget the past and to forget the future."

They asked me what I thought about the new regime and in deference to their obstinacy I began with what I thought would be our lowest common factor. "At least," I said, "the war is over. Surely that is a good thing."

But no. "We were happy then," said one of the obstinates. "We were free. We could drink, go to the movies, have girls, buy clothes."

# Others Begin Reeducation

This was the essence of obstinacy. Surely only a member of the officer class could look back on the war with such nostalgia, and could define freedom in a way which excluded the majority of the population. The same man had complained, on the day before the Vietcong takeover, that the officers' uniforms had to be tailored before they could be worn, and that this, and the money for starching and ironing had to come out of the officer's own pocket. I look forward to hearing what he says when he returns from his month's reeducation.

LAST SUNDAY, I was purchasing some cassettes of Beethoven in the company of a German colleague. Also purchasing Beethoven was a National Liberation front officer who turned out to speak perfect German. He had studied chemistry in East Germany but was in Saigon as a political cadre.

We asked how one distinguished officers of the liberation forces from the men, in the absence of insignia. Was it true that the best method was to count the number of ball point pens in their top pockets?

No, said the cadre, he himself could always immediately distinguish a high-ranking officer in the street by the way he behaved. You could tell simply by looking into his eyes.

TWO CRAZES have swept postwar Saigon since liberation, besides the craze for holding hands in the street, which is copied from the NFL soldiers.

First, there have been a craze for getting married. Licenses are cheaper than before and since that ostentation is discouraged, many people who previously could not afford the ceremony are now making the wedding an intimate, informal affair.

Also, I am told that fami-

lies who might before have considered the prospective match unsuitable are slightly less choosy. Closure of the bars may be a contributing factor, too.

The second craze is for an Annamese soup called Bunbo. Spicy, with noodles and a little meat, it costs about half as much as other soups. A jeweler's shop opposite the Continental Home has cleared out its stock and installed a charcoal stove to serve soup, coffee and tea at rockbottom prices.

I had breakfast there with a Chinese teacher, of Confucian morality who produced an ingenious argument to the effect that the anti-Confucian campaign in China only served to make China more Confucian than before (I forget the exact details) and also that capitalism was exactly the same as socialism since both needed capital.

Tea, served by the elegant shop assistant came in tall

glasses with stems. The glasses still had their labels on, and had obviously been taken from the stock. To turn from jewelry and luxury goods to bunbo and tea seemed the antitheses of obstinacy. The soup, by way, was excellent.