

# Letters to the Editor

## Training the Child for War

To the Editor:

The recently revealed new United States-Vietnam pacification program outlines plans to use "children of both sexes over the age of seven in supporting units," for an expanded civilian anti-guerrilla combat organization in rural areas.

Of all that can be said about our policies of war this formally stated intention to use children in the war in any fashion, connotes a particularly odious, inhuman and destructive intent. For this goes beyond the inevitable ravages of war and makes as policy the exploitation and subversion of children.

As child mental health professionals, we are horrified by the long-range moral implications of such training on a developing child. A child of elementary school age is right in the midst of learning how to control and deal with his aggressive, angry impulses and fantasies. He is also learning ways of rechanneling that energy into areas that are both constructive for him and ultimately for his society.

Learning to kill or abet killing in those formative years prevents the development of those individual controls and responses, crucial to the establishment of a peaceful society. If adults in our country have difficulty distinguishing between "justifiable and non-justifiable" aggression and violence, what might one expect of a

grownup who receives the proposed training as a child?

A young child is also in the throes of learning the techniques of relating peacefully and securely with peers and adults. To train him to spy, to inform and to betray is to interfere with the development of trust necessary for the formation of honest and open human relations. A free society such as ours can only flourish if each individual has learned to trust and believe in others.

If, indeed, children are the hope of the future—the ones to rebuild a new Vietnam out of the one being destroyed physically, socially and psychologically—these children need the sort of early experience that can give rise to healthy relations with others and ultimately a humane value system. The use of them in any "pacification" or "anti-guerrilla plan" directly and actively undermines the above possibility.

We implore our Government both to disassociate itself from and prevent the institution of such a primitive and degrading program. To do anything else is to be complicit in the basest corruption of youth and sets the stage for an even bleaker future for Vietnamese people and society.

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Boston, April 14, 1971

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