

By WILLIAM WALLACE FORD

AMHERST, Mass.—The American people are being asked to believe that Vietnamization is working, and that within the foreseeable future we will be able to bring all our forces home. It must be realized, however, that this dubious possibility is contingent upon our being able to leave in Saigon a strong government sympathetic to our purposes, a result we have been unable to achieve through seventeen years of unremitting effort.

American casualties are indeed reduced, to a weekly toll of thirty or forty killed and a hundred or so wounded, and much is made of this, as if these were almost tolerable figures.

But what of the poor people we claim to be helping? Nothing is said of them, as though dead, crippled or homeless "gooks" are of small concern to us. More South Vietnamese military were killed in combat last year than during the year before, and certainly their losses recently have been heavy. Meanwhile our bombing is being increased as the American ground action "winds down," and the 300,000 South Vietnamese civilian dead, the more than one million South Vietnamese civilian wounded, the 105,000 civilian amputees, the 258,000 orphans, and the six million civilians driven from their homes, as of an estimate last year, are in greater number now.

The greatest casualty, for us, is the loss of faith in ourselves and our institutions. "One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all," we say, but this ideal is farther from realization here at home than before, and has no relevance whatsoever to our actions in Southeast Asia.

We see the truth debauched, our constitutional processes degraded, our constitutional guarantees eroded, our

suspensions of one another increased, and the hope of our young people shattered. There is no war, short of one for national survival, worth this price.

A "lasting peace" will not be made for Southeast Asia until it is made there, not in Washington.

The prisoner-of-war matter is a bogus issue. We will get our prisoners of war back when we negotiate a peace and withdraw all forces from Vietnam, and not before. Extending the war, through Vietnamization, will surely extend the period of their distress and add to their numbers, and it is naive to hope otherwise. The Geneva Convention does not require return of prisoners until hostilities have ceased.

It is probable that the greatest force driving us to continue this war is our still blind fear of Communism.

If we fall to Communism it will be through failure to develop a better system here at home, a development surely not aided by our waste of men and money and moral force on this dreadful business in Southeast Asia.

We must get out of this war, not sometime, but now!

And we'd better not hold our breath, and pray, and expect the President to do it for us. Presidents are notoriously unwilling to be "the first to lose a war" (as though that were an issue here), though why they are willing to risk losing a nation is not clear.

The remedy lies with Congress. If the concerned citizens all over the country, all 73 per cent of them, will get after their Congressmen and their Senators and say to them, "Pass the Vietnam Disengagement Act of 1971, or we'll find someone who can," they'll get results.

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# Not Sometime, but Now!



Martin Steingesser