

Votes that count

The other day I mentioned that the Vietnamese are voting at last, voting with their feet. It is a drama deserving a great deal more attention than the press and public have given it.

Within the past fortnight a million human beings left their homes, their land, their ancestral graves, everything except a few back-pack belongings.

They set out with no assurance of finding safety at the end of their trek or that death wouldn't catch up with them along the way. They left because they preferred even that highly uncertain future to the certainty of life under Communism.

That fact should be brought home to shame every American who has lent his voice to the myth that the Viet Cong represents the yearnings of the Vietnamese people. Those who preached that destructive lie should not be allowed to ignore the truth now.

And let's not accept the fatuous rationale that the refugees are simply fleeing from war, not from Communism. Anyone who says that is either unwilling or unable to think straight.

Pleiku, Kontum and Hue were handed over to the Communists without a fight. If the residents of those cities preferred life under the flag of Hanoi, they had only to do what Parisians did when Hitler's troops pulled out of Paris. They had only to wait and welcome their liberators with flowers and kisses. They had only to sit tight and for them the war would be over.

Instead they deserted those cities as if a plague were descending. They weren't running from war. They headed into an almost-certain war zone, in desperate hope that they might yet escape Communist rule.

There is no form of voting more sincere than that, and the world should take solemn note of it.

They headed south, not north, and along the way they were repeatedly ambushed and shelled by their self-proclaimed liberators. Even the New York Times, which has given Hanoi the benefit of every doubt, was

obliged to concede as much when its own man met the refugees, saw their blood-stained clothes and collected their stories.

For six days a battered column of defenseless humanity was pinned down by Communist mortars and rockets almost within sight of its destination, the semi-safe city of Tuy Hoa.

From a helicopter overhead, Daniel Southerland of the Christian Science Monitor witnessed one ambush. He wrote:

"... The road was raised above the surrounding fields, making each vehicle a neatly silhouetted target. The guerrillas had before them what amounted to a shooting gallery."

The most logical explanation for the slaughter is that the Communists would rather have those people dead if not Red. They were embarrassed by the totality of the exodus, for it gave the lie to their claims of popular support.

When such an atrocity occurs, you wait for the world's outcry. But in this case you wait in vain.

Where are all those high-principled world statesmen who spoke out so eloquently against American involvement in Vietnam? Where is their denunciation of this barbarity? Their silence brands them as hypocrites.

Where is Jane Fonda and America's other moralistic magpies? What cat has got their tongues now?

From the UN's Kurt Waldheim comes not a word condemning a Communist atrocity that has left a trail of blood for 250 miles down from the Highlands. Waldheim's reaction was an incredible I-told-you-so potshot at Henry Kissinger. The man must have a wad of pettiness where his heart should be.

And our Congress, having decided to write off the Vietnamese, grows impatient because they aren't willing to be written off.

The Vietnamese could flee into the sea and drown to avoid Communism, and the world would look the other way, pretending not to know. It's a shameful performance that history will condemn.