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By Fred Branfman

WASHINGTON—The B-52 saturation bombing of Hanoi is one of the greatest atrocities of our time, and one which, like Guernica or Coventry, is symbolic of a new age of technological destruction.

During a visit to Hanoi last month, I was surprised by the vast numbers of people inhabiting the city, even after the evacuation. During the day the streets were filled with bicycle riders; at night, people—mainly women, children and old people—laughed and talked on their stoops and in their homes.

Hanoi has few buildings more than two to three stories high, and, as a result, heavily populated areas spread out for miles in all directions from the center. I was struck by the relative poverty of its inhabitants, most of whom live in wooden or mud structures which are closely packed together. Population density is actually lower in the center of the city, where large, French-built government offices

are located. The majority of the population throngs in the very "suburbs" which have been the focus of the attacks.

The B-52 is a weapon of indiscriminate terror. A typical mission of three aircraft is not even described as bombing selected targets, but rather as saturating a "box" half a mile wide by one-and-a-half miles long. When the bombers drop their thirty tons—eighteen separate bombs—from 30,000 feet everything in that "box" is destroyed. People in its vicinity suffer concussion, shock and vomiting. The earth can be felt to shake, panes of glass will break miles away.

In Hanoi, where such a "box" may contain as many as 5,000 people in addition to whatever "military" targets are also there, each B-52 raid may kill and maim hundreds of civilians, level hospitals, schools and entire blocks.

Bombing dozens of such "boxes" with B-52's is quite simply an act of mass murder. It is precisely the kind of wanton destruction of cities, towns and villages outlawed by the sixth of the Nuremberg principles.

The Nuremberg principles do not permit the bombing of large urban centers simply because military targets may be present. In the case of Hanoi, however, the former U.S. Attorney General, Ramsey Clark, and dozens of other visitors to Hanoi have reported that military targets there are few and far between. In the Pentagon Papers, a Department of Defense study (done in 1968) states that, apart from the Haiphong Port, there is not a single target within Hanoi and Haiphong that has any appreciable significance in supplying men and material from North to South.

The Pentagon Papers also make clear that the purpose of bombing Hanoi is not the stated one of destroying military targets. Arguing for bombing the cities, the former Air Force Secretary, Harold Brown, wrote on March 4, 1968, "The aims of this alternative campaign would be to erode the will of the population by exposing a wider area of North Vietnam to casualties and destruction." That is, terror bombing.

The reports that an American pris-

oner-of-war camp was struck are particularly dramatic evidence of just how indiscriminate these attacks have been. As the same March, 1968, Defense Department study noted, "Heavy and indiscriminate attacks in the Hanoi area would jeopardize the lives of these prisoners and alarm their wives and parents into vocal opposition. Reprisals could be taken against them and the idea of war crimes trials would find considerable acceptance in countries outside the Communist bloc."

President Nixon has already dropped over four million tons of bombs on Indochina, more than any leader in history. Over six million human beings were killed, wounded or made homeless during his first four years in office, according to Pentagon and U.S. Senate estimates.

That he has now turned to destruction of Indochina's largest urban centers is more than a cause for concern.

What is next? Destroying the North's dike system? Using nuclear weapons? Obliterating Saigon should the National Liberation Front attempt another Tet-style offensive? And what

of other third world nations in Asia, Africa or Latin America, should revolts spring up against U.S.-supported regimes?

Many people regard the latest bombing of Hanoi as if it were just another escalation—however serious—to be supported or opposed according to one's opinion of the war. It is not uncommon to hear moderate observers say that we cannot really judge until we have more information about what was actually hit, more data to assess the President's assertion that it was done to prevent a new North Vietnamese offensive.

This approach is more unfortunate. One needs no more information than what already has appeared to understand what carpet-bombing B-52's do to a city of 500,000. And one need not be a dove to decry terror bombing of a major city, the least military of targets in North Vietnam. One need only be human.

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