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Caged by Saigon

by Fred Branfman [co-director, Indochina Resources Center]

[Article on political prisoners in South Vietnam]

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Official United States documents disclose that it is we who created South Vietnam's police system. It is we who decided that all Vietnamese 15 years old and older would be required to carry identification cards, we who linked these cards to a central computer containing 11.5 million bio-dossiers. It is we who built the prisons and supplied the generators used for torture by electric shock.

An American who visits Saigon today finds himself asking one basic question: What kind of mentality could produce this system of nationwide surveillance, arbitrary arrest, interrogation by torture, sentencing without evidence, imprisonment without mercy?

The answer is clear. And unsettling. It is a mentality which regards human beings as objects to be watched, traced, controlled. It is a mentality which arrogates the right to remove anyone judged a threat from the general population. It is a mentality which uses the language of liberty in public even as it sets monthly kill quotas in private.

For years many Americans believed that lack of democracy in Vietnam did not threaten freedom at home. Today we see the mentality which planned the Phoenix assassinations in firm control of the highest executive agencies of this nation.

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