

Blood-Bath Talk

Writing recently in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Richard Boyle, the last American reporter to leave Cambodia, offers an analysis of events there sharply at odds with that presented by most of the American media. "From what I saw," Boyle wrote, "the Khmer Rouge tried to avoid the slaughter of innocent civilians. . . . Stories of a blood bath, as reported by other news agencies, cannot be verified, and there is every indication that many of the accounts are outright lies." Khmer Rouge troops told Boyle that those Cambodians forced to leave Phnom Penh "would be allowed to return after they spent some time in the country growing rice to feed the people," that the compulsory emigration was necessary "to avoid starvation." Only the airlift of rice by Americans, he reported, had prevented starvation under Lon Nol's regime.

While it is always possible that a reporter's sources were inaccurate or that eyewitness reporting was misleading, the evidence is that in Cambodia the much-heralded blood bath that was supposed to follow the fall of Phnom Penh has not taken place. As for Vietnam, reports from Saigon indicate exemplary behavior, considering the situation. "There has been no evidence of a blood bath or mass reprisals as [was] so freely predicted abroad," George Esper of the A.P. writes from that city.

The most authoritative information thus far received leads to the conclusion that the American people were propagandized about the menace of unrestrained slaughter in Indochina. "The prediction," Frances FitzGerald writes in *The Washington Post*, "was never founded in reality." It was, however, founded in propaganda purposes and, as such, it was clever. No one could prove there would be no blood bath—it is always impossible to disprove a prediction. But the American Government could stimulate racist and ideological fears by saying that intelligence—which, again, could not be subjected to proof—justified those fears. Now that the prediction has been shown to be false, misconceptions carefully planted over years must be dislodged; more pieces like Boyle's and Esper's should be widely printed.

The revolutionaries in both countries seem to have acted responsibly, perhaps more so in Vietnam because their revolution is a mature one, its leaders seasoned by experience and historical perspective. With them, it should be possible to establish normal relations without much delay or difficulty. When Vietnam gains its rightful seat in the United Nations, reconstruction efforts—preferably by the U.N.—should begin. Reparations are due, and Washington should provide the largest share.

As signified by their letter in this issue, the members of the new government of South Vietnam want sound relations with the United States. They recognize that many Americans opposed successive administrations' destruction of their country. Their reported decision to make Saigon a free-trade city and to postpone unification for at least five years provides further evidence of their maturity and independent intentions. The leaders of the new Indochina seem ready to begin an era of accord with this country. The least Washington can do is to respond to these gestures, having ceased to rattle sabers and perpetuate old lies.