

What Does the Viet Cong Want?

How is it that the overwhelming majority of the people of South Vietnam support the National Liberation Front, the “Viet Cong”? A look into this question will help Americans who are bewildered at seeing so much of the world’s population supporting what we simply regard as “Communist totalitarianism.” If it were as simple as that, the Communists would find precious little support, and precious few members.

It is no coincidence that the mighty drive of 1967–68, which has established the Viet Cong in the position of winning the protracted war, was preceded by the adoption of an extremely important new political program; a statement of policy for the present and future NLF regime in South Vietnam. The policy statement was adopted last September 1, and was reprinted in full in the *New York Times* of December 15.

First, we should realize that the NLF are not simply communists, but a broad national coalition of numerous groups, including Buddhists, Catholic abbés, and middle-class parties; and in this coalition the communists play a leading role. Secondly, as a witness to this broad coalition, there is not a word in this lengthy political program about the establishment of a socialist society. On the contrary, the NLF platform is no more socialistic than those of the Democratic or Republican parties in the United States — and maybe a good deal less. Not only that: the major thrust of the program is the guarantee of the private property of business and especially

of the peasantry, who are the vast bulk of the Vietnamese population. In addition, the program proclaims and guarantees the freedom of religion, of national minorities to have their own language and autonomy, and of speech, press, assembly, association, demonstrations, and forming of political parties, as well as “inviolability of the human person,” freedom of residence and movement, and the secrecy of the mails.

On property rights, the NLF program promises “to protect the right to ownership of the means of production and other property of the citizens.” It adds that “the state will encourage the capitalists in industry and trade to help develop industry, small industries and handicrafts,” and will “give due consideration to the interests of small traders and small manufacturers.” Above all, the program repeatedly guarantees the right of peasants to their land, and promises to turn over any lands confiscated by the state (e.g., the “lands of the U.S. imperialists”) to the peasantry.

There are other important aspects of the NLF program which have won due attention from the press, such as guarantees of equal treatment to defecting troops and a pledge of a foreign policy of peace and neutrality. But in the long run, the guarantees to private capitalist and especially to peasant property are the most important, for these guarantees, set against the anti-peasant policies of the Saigon puppet regime, go a long way to account for the puzzling fact that the undeveloped countries of the world tend to support communists rather than the United States. It is because the communists proclaim their support for national independence and for the private property of the peasantry, while the U.S. invariably backs colonial and feudal landlord regimes that are hated throughout these countries.