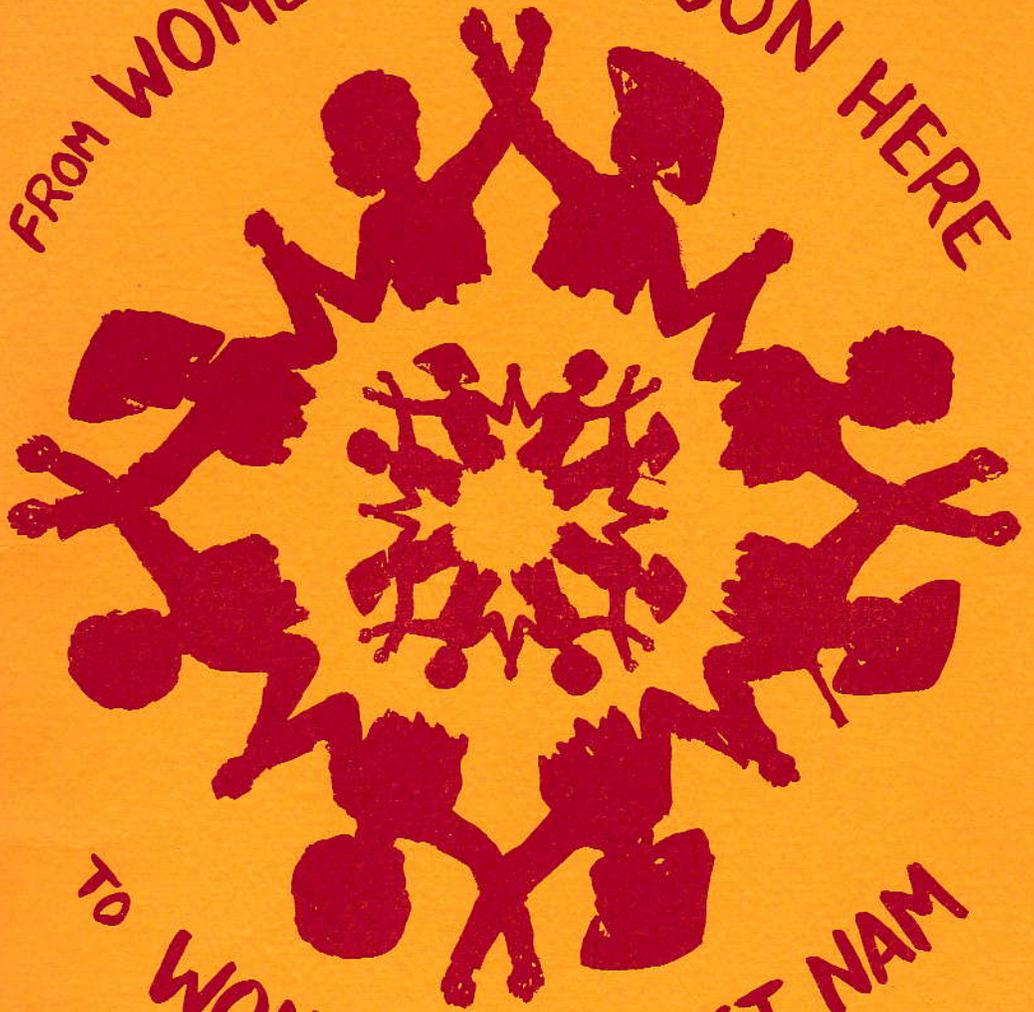


FROM WOMEN IN PRISON HERE



TO WOMEN OF VIET NAM

WE ARE SISTERS

The cover design is from scarves that the San Francisco Women's Union sent to women in Viet Nam.

Copyright c 1975 by Peoples Press. All rights reserved. Write to Peoples Press for permission to reproduce.

Special thanks to the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project.

Published by Peoples Press, 2680 21st Street, San Francisco, Ca. 94110.

To Hien Long, who wrote these lines, and to all other
women in prison:

*Sing out again so our hearts may burst into flame
And our burning blood may finally melt these chains.*

Dear Sisters,

I was invited by the Viet Nam Women's Union to visit their country. In the North and in travelling to the liberated areas in the South, I had an enormous number of beautiful, intense experiences. But the most intense times – the times when the connections between us were the strongest – were when we had the joy of sharing solidarity.

The messages which brought the Vietnamese women the most joy were these letters that women at CIW* wrote to their sisters imprisoned by the Saigon dictatorship. In 1973, women at CIW had attended a series of workshops about women in Vietnam; and during the summer of 1974 they wrote these letters when they found it would be possible to have them delivered direct to Viet Nam.

In order to translate the word "solidarity" into Vietnamese, you say *Doan Ket*. If you want to translate the word "unity," you must also say *Doan Ket*. In Vietnam, solidarity and unity are inseparable. Thuy, a national leader of the Viet Nam Women's Union, told us that she thought *Doan Ket* was the most important condition necessary for a people's victory over their oppressors. Over and over our Vietnamese sisters told us, "Your struggle is our struggle. Your victories are our victories."

They meant it seriously. At the headquarters of the PRG in Hanoi, I described CIW's behavior modification program to a group of South Vietnamese women – all of whom had endured years of hardship and were veterans in the struggle against foreign domination. These women openly cried for the pain of their sisters in CIW. Later, when I told them about the resistance in prisons in the U.S., they smiled, eager for more good news.

Another time, at the national headquarters of the Women's Union in Hanoi, a joyous gathering became somber, when I talked about the humiliation of women on welfare. Their joy returned when the conversation shifted to the success of poor women in organizing unions of domestic workers. In Viet Nam we met with

*CIW (California Institute for Women) is a state prison near Frontera, California.

women in small hamlets which had no electricity or running water; with women in villages near the 17th parallel who lived for two years underground while B52's pounded the surface; with women who were guerrillas, peasants, doctors, teachers. Each one never failed to send their greetings to the sisters in the U.S. — especially the ones struggling against U.S. imperialism. They always wished us success in our struggles and good health. They were incredibly encouraged by our humble words of solidarity. The small, symbolic gifts we brought became treasured representations of the international unity they insist has helped them resist U.S. imperialism.

We travelled south to liberated Quang Tri where our host was Bui Thi Mc, a member of the Executive Committee of the Women's Union for the Liberation of South Viet Nam and also Vice Minister of Health of the PRG (Provisional Revolutionary Government) of the Republic of South Viet Nam. She had four sons. Three of them died fighting and the fourth was severely wounded. A large part of her job is to organize the care of war victims. Death and human mutilation are constantly present for her. Yet her joy embraces you as she speaks. Her tone is full of love and confidence in the strength of our unity. She told us,

We're part of a world-wide family of militant women. We here in Viet Nam follow the women's liberation movement in the U.S. very closely. Your movement and ours are complementary. The ocean cannot separate our emotions of unity.

When I gave her a copy of the CIW letters, she explained that they would find a way to circulate them widely among women in prison. "It will be a great encouragement to our prisoners to know there are sisters in prison in California, America who feel enough solidarity to write to them."

Back in Hanoi, we met one woman named My⁵ (pronounced Meee) who was there for medical treatment after four years in Thieu's prisons. She sat next to us for a long time without



Mỹ is the second woman from the right. The other women are from the Viet Nam Women's Union and the PRG delegation in Hanoi. Scarves are a solidarity gift from the San Francisco Women's Union.

changing the distant expression on her face. She smiled only faintly when we were introduced as friends. Mỹ is now 24 years old. She was 16 when she decided to work with the National Liberation Front. By the time she was 19, she was arrested. She limps visibly and takes long pauses between her sentences. She seems to have to concentrate every bit of her energy to put into words:

They beat me systematically on the joints so I would be unable to walk or be of any use to the struggle. I had to sit for months in a narrow cell with my hands tied behind my back. They trampled on my body when they questioned me. I fainted many times. But I witnessed worse tortures than mine. A sister named Bay, who is probably still detained, had a live eel inserted into her vagina. Then they gave the eel electric shocks so the eel would move around violently inside her and destroy her. She got cancer of the uterus. She was 45 years old when I was released. I do not know if she still lives.

As My⁵ began to describe another case, her voice drifted off into silence. When her pauses seemed definitive, the others explained that her memory "was not so good because of the torture." She told us she had been studying before she was arrested. Then she paused, unable to remember what she had been studying or what her youthful plans had been. At this point, tears appeared in the eyes of the other women in the room. One said that they only knew she had come from a peasant family.

I hesitated, feeling like I didn't want to ask another question. The others encouraged us to continue. They insisted that My⁵ herself wanted to strain her memory, no matter how difficult, to give us as much information as possible – information that might help to free the sisters still in jail. One of the women who My⁵ asks us to work to free is Le Thi Bay, her mother, 60 years old, who was arrested only because her daughter was arrested. She is not sure which prison her mother is in. My⁵ only knows that Thieu reclassified her mother as a common criminal so he would not have to free her. The Paris Agreements require that all political prisoners be released.

My⁵ continued,

They arrested me for information. But my deep love for our people and country helped me to keep my mouth shut.

My⁵ became most animated when she tried to describe the ways the women in prison defied the guards' attempts to isolate them from each other. Nothing could destroy their solidarity.

I gave the original copies of the CIW letters to My⁵. For the first time that day, she smiled really broadly and took my hand to hold tightly. As we posed for pictures, she never stopped fondling the back of my shirt; she gave me a long, surprisingly firm embrace and farewell kiss which she said was for all her sisters at CIW. "Please tell them how good their letters make us feel and please tell them we wish them good health and strength in their struggle."

The women in prison in Saigon gain their strength to resist from their hatred of the enemy, their unity and solidarity, and from the political certainty that their cause is just and that they will eventually win. Messages of solidarity – especially from fellow prisoners like the CIW letters – add to the certainty. They get strength from knowing that people everywhere are on their side. They also feel sure that their sisters inside prison in the U.S. are oppressed people, and they have learned that oppressed people are the most persistent, permanent, militant, and dependable fighters for peace, freedom and independence everywhere.

For the freedom of political prisoners everywhere,

Doan Ket

Arlene

Arlene Eisen Bergman

Paris, November 14, 1974



The woman on the left is Thuy, member of the Central Executive Committee of Viet Nam Women's Union. Que, an office worker at the Union, is on the right. They are sitting by the only tree left after the bombing of Dong Hoi—once a city of 10,000.

The letters from C.I.W.

At their request, the names of the women who wrote these letters have been changed.

To My Sisters and Brothers in Vietnam,

I seems amazing to me that I can write something here which you will read. It is also somewhat awkward because I doubt that I could ever fully express the love, respect and solidarity I feel for you. To tell you that your revolutionary example has been and will always be a great inspiration for us is not enough – words alone will never be enough to express our love. We only hope that we will prove ourselves in this struggle as you have in yours.

I would also like to express the love of a friend of mine for all of you – my friend would have written also, but she is kept apart from the rest of us here. Many of us here share in a great respect and love for the struggle of your people – we face a common enemy.

In struggle,
Lolita Cabral

This is your sister here at the California Institute for Women, sending you greetings and love, in struggle with you, and knowing that victory will be ours.

Continued Love,
Your Sister Awa

All the individual parts of our mutual struggle can keep hoping/working for victory separately and together. Thank you for your strength and pride –

In solidarity,
Love, Sin No.10653

I am a black woman in prison and I didn't support the United States' involvement in Vietnam. I can only send my heart and sympathy to the Vietnamese people.

Carol Johnson

I TOO AM JUST GETTING BEHIND THE STRUGGLE
SO MANY OF US ARE GOING THRU ~ YOUR STRENGTH
& COURAGE GIVES ME MOTIVATION TO KEEP LEARNING
DAILY ~ IN ~~THE STRUGGLE~~ SOLIDARITY & PEACE COME
QUICK ~ WE SEND MUCH LOVE ~
IN THE STRUGGLE

I too am in prison within the prison of Amerika. I wish to tell you of a personal experience: My oldest brother was told he must go either to Vietnam or to jail. He "chose" Vietnam. However, he was locked up in the army prison most of the time for refusing to fight. In 1968, he and seven brothers (in the U.S. Army) were killed - by bombs dropped from an Amerikan helicopter. This is a typical example of the system under which we now live.

As a child, I was brainwashed - but now, through sisters here and abroad, I learn more every day. We have a difficult problem concerning unity among ourselves - especially racism - a main product of Amerika. We are working - dedicating ourselves to overcoming this (and other problems), as we are all under the common oppressor. We strive to learn as well as teach. We have a hope that won't ever die - that one day, soon, we shall see a great change - a change that must be. Living here creates anger and bitterness. However, we sisters are motivated by LOVE - a love from deep within us. Our people must and will grow - the time for action is now!

Power to the People,
Karen Lessinger

It is beautiful to know that there are so many of us now who are aware, and will change the corruption that is surrounding us everyday. We are one in the struggle; and your strength and courage is an inspiration to all of us here in this prison.

Much love to you,
Sherric

I am not the government nor will I ever be as long as it remains as it is in the present.

In the struggle,
Ruby No. 8702

I am sending my love and solidarity to you, the Vietnamese people. I feel also the same as other women here have already said. Your struggle is full of courage, and it has given us much and taught us much too. I'm sorry that this (USA) government was ever in Vietnam or any other country as war mongers to rip you off. Many women here feel that we need to work and struggle for unity between the American people and the Vietnamese.

In solidarity,
Robin Vitelli

I am a black woman in prison and I didn't support the United States involvement in Vietnam. I can only send my heart and sympathy to the Vietnamese people.

I am just learning about your struggle but I am behind you 100%. I do not support the action of the U.S. Government (ruling class leaders).

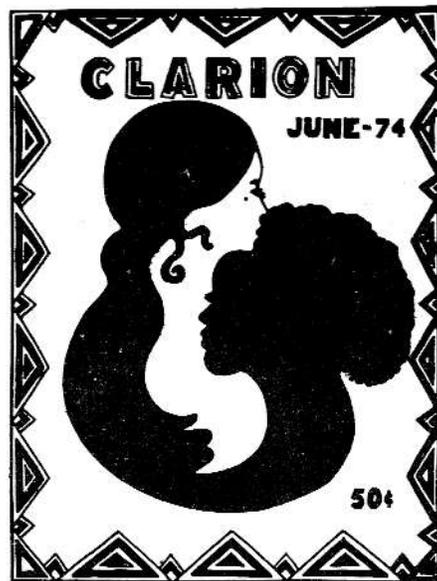
Power to the People,
Sylvia Caribini

We send you our profoundest love and greet you as shining examples of the strength and beauty of an armed people. If we falter and become demoralized, we have only to remember the protracted struggle of the Vietnamese people. Your victory is ours and ours will be yours.

We will win!
Carolyn Cox

It's an honor to send our love and solidarity to your people -- your example strengthens us daily in our fight. I sit here so far away, yet you are right next to my heart and soul, making a reality of our vision of freedom and bringing us even closer.

Towards unity between the Vietnamese
and American peoples,
Harriet Troi



Cover of magazine published
by women inside C.I.W.

To My Vietnamese friends,

We have had the opportunity to listen and see slides of your people and land while we are locked up in this prison. Your struggle is a source of hope and direction to us. Someday our people will unite and share our victories on common soil. I send special greetings and solidarity to the hundreds of thousands of political prisoners in the southern part of your country.

Patria o Muerte
Ever onwards,
Justina Devlin No.3487

Sisters,

*Know that we are with
you, we believe and we
come to you as sisters,
our love and strength
and beliefs, that soon we
shall come together as one
people, as it should be.*

*In Love & Strength
C.V.W*

I too am just getting behind the struggle so many of us are going thru - your strength & courage give me motivation to keep learning daily. In solidarity & peace come quick - we send much love.

In the struggle,
Simone

Sisters,

Know that we are with you, we believe and we come to you as sisters. Our love and strength and beliefs, that soon we shall come together as one people, as it should be.

In love and strength,
C.I.W.
Cheryl Browning

It is beautiful to know that there are so many of us ^{not} who are aware, and will change the corruption that is surrounding us everyday. We are one in the struggle; and your strength and courage is an inspiration to all of us here ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ prison. Much love to you.

Strength to your struggle -- McAdoo

Peace is not enough. Sisters all around the world are in struggle. Love also,

Much revolutionary love
From your sister in struggle,
Joan Serkin

The people of the United States government are not all the people. Sisters who have endured the sufferings that our imperial government has brought you remember that we are in struggle here in our country so that your sufferings won't happen again.

Love/Struggle
Lily Upjohn

What can I say? We are Sisters.
I love you for your strength
and dedication in the struggle.

I'm sorry for a corrupt
government that raped
your people and land. I'm
in prison but I will
struggle to change things,
no matter where I am.

I wish you life and Freedom.

In Unity,



The artist Buu Chi is in Chi Hoa prison, South Viet Nam

Dear Le Thi Huong,*

I am a prisoner of California in the United States. A group of women visiting here have brought awareness of the bad treatment you as a political prisoner of Viet Nam have received. The shackles, tiger cages and torture beyond description is known to me. I want you to know, I shall do everything I can to help in bettering conditions and a release for you and your sisters in prison. Please write me if you can. I would like very much to know who you are.

Sincerely,

-----, No. xxxxx

-----, California

*Le Thi Huong is imprisoned in Puolo Condor. She is one of the many women listed in a booklet, *WOMEN UNDER TORTURE*, about women prisoners under Thieu's regime.

HỘI LIÊN HIỆP PHỤ NỮ VIỆT-NAM
UNION DES FEMMES DU VIET-NAM
VIET-NAM WOMEN'S UNION
ՀԻՄՆԱԿԱՆ ԲԻԵՏԻԱՄԱ
越南婦女聯合會
11, Hàng Chiếu, Hanoi - Viet-Nam

TO Sisters in California Institute for Women October 5, 1974

Dear Sisters,

With great emotion and deep sympathy we have read your letters brought by Arlene Eisen Bergman, who, in addition, told us many details about your hard conditions and struggle in prison.

We are very moved and ready to give our ardent support to all the sisters who are living under the claw of the brutal beast - U.S. imperialism. We have a common enemy, dear sisters; that's why we share our hardships and happiness. That is why every activity against the enemy, every victory won by you constitutes a source of great encouragement and assistance to our Vietnamese people. Your victories and struggle are a source of gladness for us.

Now, in the South of our country, there are still 200,000 political prisoners detained illegally by the Thieu clique. Our friend Arlene, after her visit to our country will certainly tell you about the concrete situation and struggles of our prisoners. We ask her to embrace you all on behalf of the Vietnamese sisters here. Thank you sincerely for your support and enthusiasm. Our revolutionary love and combatantship to you. On behalf of our Vietnamese sisters, we send you our most ardent militant greetings and highest expressions of solidarity and sisterhood and love.

We are always beside you in our common struggle for peace, justice and freedom.

The Viet Nam Women's Union*

Vo Thi-The member of Central Executive Committee

*There are 5 million active members in the Viet Nam Women's Union.

Thieu's Prisons

Today there are at least a quarter of a million political prisoners in Thieu's jails in South Viet Nam. Nearly half are women. Many have children with them. Some were arrested because they rejected the sexual advances of Thieu's soldiers; some in indiscriminate round-ups. Others were arrested because they campaigned for peace or showed support for the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Viet Nam. Hardly any of these women have had trials and none have definite sentences.

There are special prisons for women where they force prisoners to make army uniforms and mosquito nets in exchange for a single bowl of rotten rice each day. All prisoners in Thieu's jails suffer from inadequate food, unsanitary conditions, lack of medical care and barbaric torture. They design special torture techniques for women: inserting live cels or broken coke bottles into prisoners' vaginas, applying electric shock to nipples and genitals, and rape.

Every morning prisoners defy orders to salute the Saigon flag, maintaining their dignity even though it means they may face beatings or torture. Prisoners have found ingenious ways to hold literacy and special education classes in prison. The more educated prisoners teach those with less education. The prison floor is blackboard and desk, and exercises are scribbled on small scraps of paper and used over and over again. Even though all education is forbidden, hundreds have graduated from prison schools. In the face of torture, starvation, rats, vermin, disease, women inside these jails become living models of the infinite capacity and possibility for human beauty and resistance.

The Paris Peace Agreement explicitly provides for the release of all political prisoners. To avoid the Treaty obligations, the Saigon government has used falsified dossiers to change the status of political prisoners into "common criminals." Continued transfers from one prison to another and secret murders of groups of prisoners are tactics the Saigon government uses to cover up the 200,000 political prisoners still in jail. The continued detention of these prisoners is in direct violation of the ceasefire agreement.

This is one of the many violations which led the PRG to break off negotiations with the Thieu government. On October 8, 1974, the PRG issued a statement demanding an end to all military involvement and all intervention by the U.S. government in the internal affairs of South Viet Nam. They also called for the replacement of the Thieu regime with a government willing to seriously implement the Paris Agreements.

Many governments and people throughout the world have declared their support for the October 8th statement. This solidarity and the determination of the Vietnamese people will finally guarantee the freedom of South Viet Nam's political prisoners.

Inside C.I.W.

There are more than 15,000 women in State Prisons and Federal Penitentiaries in the U.S. There are 700 at the State Penitentiary for women in California - the California Institute for Women (CIW). The spartan "campus" of CIW sits in the desert southeast of Los Angeles at Frontera, California. Each day, over 200 women slave at jobs paying four to sixteen cents a day, doing clerical work and making uniforms to supply the men's prisons. Most of these women earn less than \$10 per month for full-time work. The rest of the prisoners work full-time at "state assignment jobs" that maintain the prison: cooking, laundry, yard duty.

Few women refuse to work since such defiance guarantees the displeasure of the Parole Board. It is the Parole Board which decides how much of her indeterminate sentence a prisoner will serve. Figuring out what will impress the Board becomes a constant preoccupation of most prisoners. California Penal Law sets an indeterminate sentence on every convicted felon. She must then prove herself "rehabilitated" before receiving a release date from the Board. This procedure gives the State added power in controlling the women and also a certain flexibility in deciding when to release prisoners into a bloated pool of angry unemployed people. Mothers are often forced to give up custody of their children as a condition of parole.

There are hardly any middle class women at CIW. Most of the inmates pled guilty because they couldn't afford to pay a lawyer. Narcotics is the most common conviction, followed by homicide, forgery and robbery. 70% of the inmates have been in CIW before. It has been impossible for them to get jobs and survive on the outside without violating the terms of parole.

All women at CIW are required to be in attack group therapy twice a week. Attack group therapy teaches women to turn on each other and become snitches by awarding "rehabilitation" points for "constructive criticism" of other women. In 1973, women in CIW successfully resisted a new behavior modification program that would have forced "problem women" to undergo attack group therapy two or three times a day. Prison officials were forced to abandon the program but are constantly threatening to reinstate it.

Bad conditions are typical of prisons in the U.S. and CIW is no exception. Medical care is inadequate. Women are often punished for being sick and sent to solitary confinement if their pleas for medicine become too annoying to the guards. Yet tranquilizers are dispensed generously - dulling and numbing women into submission. Prison authorities also try to control the women by provoking racial antagonisms. (CIW is 10% Brown, 34% Black, and 56% White.) They also ignore the sexual manipulation of the women by the male guards.

To join the struggle

For sisters in prison in the U.S.

* Find out about prisoner and prison support organizations in your community. The local American Friends Service Committee is a good place to call. Also, a list of organizations is in the appendix of Jessica Mitford's book, *Kind and Usual Punishment*.

Women's groups can set up regular visiting programs for women prisoners in their state. Programs are especially needed to provide parolees with jobs, housing and emotional support.

* Attend demonstrations for prisoners' rights and freedom for political prisoners.

* Write to prisoners. Lists of prisoners who want correspondence are in *Midnight Special*, and other underground newspapers.

* Investigate and expose behavior modification programs and medical experimentation on prisoners.

* Mental institutions are also prisons. Support the rights of mental patients.

* Contact the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, (528 Lincoln Street, Santa Cruz, CA. 95060) for information about C.I.W.

For sisters in prison in Viet Nam.

* When the U.S. signed the Paris Peace Agreement, January 27, 1973, it became legally bound to end its interference in the internal affairs of Viet Nam. But the American government continues to keep Thieu in power by financing his army, his prison system and all the apparatus of police-state terror. Thieu has never accepted the Paris Agreements and, after more than two years, it is clear that the only way to have peace in Viet Nam is to oust

Thieu from government, cut all aid to the Saigon regime, and install a government which will abide by the Paris Agreements . . . the Paris Agreements state that all political prisoners should be freed.

* **CUT ALL AID TO THE SAIGON REGIME:** While unemployment, inflation and corruption reach crisis levels inside the U.S., the U.S. government sends millions of dollars to Saigon, and Kissinger is pressing for new funds for Saigon. When we demand jobs, free child care, our rights to decent medical care, an end to monopoly profits in the food industry, we must also insist that not one more dollar go to Saigon.

* **SUPPORT THE FORCES OF PEACE IN VIET NAM:** The Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam and the Third Force represent the overwhelming majority of South Vietnamese people. People inside the U.S. can support them with public messages endorsing the Paris Agreements, and the demands of the P.R.G. and the Third Force for the ouster of the Thieu regime.

*Put pressure on Congress not to authorize another cent for corrupt regimes in Indochina. (Useful address: Coalition to Stop Funding the War, 120 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. tel: (202) 546-6751.)

*Write to government officials in Washington and Saigon demanding an end to the torture and imprisonment of Thieu's political opposition. (Useful address for more information: Coalition to Free South Vietnamese Political Prisoners, 2302 Ellsworth St., Berkeley, Ca. 94704. tel: (415) 849-3120.)

*Learn more about the current situation in Viet Nam, then teach your friends and co-workers with talks, films, slides. (See recommended reading page.)

*Be prepared to publicly express your disapproval of Ford's continued violation of the Paris Agreement, with public demonstrations if necessary. Everything we do makes a difference.

Further Reading

Bergman, Arlene Eisen, *Women of Viet Nam*, Peoples Press, 1974. (Address: 2680 21st Street, San Francisco, Ca. 94110.) Book about women's liberation in Viet Nam, includes chapter on women in prison.

Debris, Jean Pierre and Andre Menras, *We Accuse*, Indochina Peace Campaign (IPC). (Address: 181 Pier Avenue, Santa Monica, Ca. 90405.) Debris and Menras spent two years inside Thieu's prisons. IPC also publishes a bi-weekly newspaper, *Indochina Focal Point*, and a pamphlet on women political prisoners, "Women Under Torture."

Children of the Dragon, Peoples Press, 1974. A story-textbook for children about life in Viet Nam.

Eleven Poems of Political Prisoners, Union of Vietnamese in the United States. Available from Peoples Press.

no title at all is better than a title like that, Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, (Address: 528 Lincoln Street, Santa Cruz, Ca. 95060.) Artwork and writing by women in CIW.

Many Vietnamese newspapers and pamphlets are available from China Books, 2929 24 Street, San Francisco, Ca. 94110.

Burkhardt, Catherine, *Women in Prison*, Doubleday, 1973.

Mitford, Jessica, *Kind and Usual Punishment*, Knopf 1974. Appendix lists addresses of prisoner support groups across the country.

The Anvil, newspaper from the United Prisoners Union, (Address: Glide Church, 330 Ellis Street, San Francisco, Ca.)

Midnight Special, a prisoners' newspaper. Address: National Lawyer's Guild, 23 Cornelia Street, New York, New York.

DOAN KẾT



SOLIDARITY

PEOPLES PRESS
2680 21ST ST.
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

50¢