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Life's Many Sides

STIF and WANS

By TON THAT THIEN

My colleagues Bao has written in support of the STIF movement. I would like to go on record for the same, although with one reservation: I hope that no violence or illegitimate means will be resorted to.

It is quite all right for one to enter a bar, sit down order a drink, and turn a deaf ear to the melodious and lulling 'you buy me one drink', and another to treat someone roughly. Many of these melodious voices sing also to Vietnamese boyfriends, pimps, cowboys, and what not, and any incident risks becoming something difficult to control in a city which is already too tense for comfort. We would like to see the GIs treated fairly and not be turned into villains by people who have no right to put national honour and dignity to their personal contemptible ends, which is profiteering.

When a GI wrote to me some time ago to explain why some of his countrymen wrecked bars and beat the hostesses and bar owner, I agreed with him that those men (the GIs) should get our sympathy, but I suggested that they should not take the law into their own hands, especially the law of a country which is not quite theirs.

STIF is different. It is perfectly legal, perfectly legitimate, and if I may say so, perfectly intelligent. The best place to hit a profiteer is his pocket. And so I hope the movement will continue. Not only in regard to just drinks and hostesses, but in regard to everything else, including houses and hotels. The Vietnamese, who suffer from profiteering, cannot but welcome anything that would help bring prices down. In technical terms, the market has been a seller's market because demand is inelastic and, in turn, this because of the lack of discipline and solidarity on the part of the buyers, Vietnamese and Americans. What we ought to do is to turn the market into a buyer's market and give maximum elasticity to demand. If we all do this, we shall certainly be applauded by the Minister of Economic Affairs also.

There is no reason why we should allow anyone to suck us with our eyes wide open. It is all right for newcomer to fall into the profiteers' claws. But there is really no excuse for the guy who has been here long enough. And even in the case of the newcomer, the PAO, or whoever is responsible for briefing the arriving GIs, should warn them about the pitfalls of Basin Street and Cholon. I know that every American diplomat arriving for duty in Saigon gets a small booklet telling him about what to expect. Surely self-respecting Vietnamese would not feel offended at all if such a booklet is issued also to GIs to warn them about the teeming leeches which would suck them dry. The war which is going on and which has claimed so many lives, both Vietnamese and American, is partly due to the existence and proliferation of these leeches. Neutralize them, and we shall save a lot of American and Vietnamese blood and money.

I therefore suggest that, in addition to STIF, we start a movement called WANS, meaning: we are not suckers. And let decent Vietnamese and Americans cooperate in this, the war in the rear, so to speak. There is no reason why any Americans or Vietnamese should die to fatten a bunch of leeches.

Just one more thing: not all the bars and not all the hostesses, just as not all the merchants belong to this category. They are having a difficult time remaining honest. A WANS movement would help them too.