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Life's Many Sides

Undeserved blames

By TON THAT THIEN

I have run into a number of readers who complained to me that I had written less frequently in recent weeks, or that I had sweetened up my pieces (some even asked the nasty question: have you turned coat?).

Those are very hard questions to answer, because I do not like to build my happiness on the unhappiness of others, as people say, even when those 'others' do not deserve such consideration.

But to tell the truth, being paid to write three times a week, and being honest in addition, I have done my duty by turning over to the editor three pieces weekly. That some of the pieces sent out by him for clearence were not cleared, and did not even come back to his desk—although our messenger assured us that he certainly had not dropped them in the street on his way home — was none of my responsibility. So please, have a heart, and do not blame me.

On the other hand, a man asked a colleague of mine whether the SDN had « switched its line ». From what, I do not know. Perhaps he had expected us to criticise for the sake of wrecking, or joking for the sake of malice.

To help you understand the question, I must add that it came the day after I wrote the story about the US doctors who had cured the cleft lips of many of our kids. I had done that simply because I thought the men deserved our praise, and as far as I am concerned, our gratitude — although the kids have nothing to do with me, apart from the fact that they are my compatriots — perhaps just because of that—. Anyway, if I were a doctor and had taken the oath of Hyppocrates, I would not have let an American doctor treat the same kids first if they happened to live in my neigbbourhood, because that would not do credit to Vietnam or to myself.

As to whether the SDN having a « line » or not, I believe that our «line» is just to speak frankly — to the extent that we are allowed to speak frankly —, and to try to explain Vietnamese ideas and feelings to English speaking readers. The SDN does not do it on behalf of the Government, because the government has a lot of newsprint, sound, and film and... electricity of its own. What we try to do, what I have tried to do anyway, is to convey to our English speaking readers what the Vietnamese man in the street says, feels and thinks. And no one would deny that to know the thoughts and feelings of the people outside the government is very important, in the long run. and perhaps in the short run also.

So please, do not blame me. Blame my people. And do not praise me, either. Praise my people. All I have tried to do is to 'articulate' on their behalf, to use that popular term. Right or wrong, they are the people of this country, and they matter. And right or wrong, they matter because they are my compatriots, and I am a part of what is called «the Vietnamese people.»

Letters to the Editor