

- These are ideas of a responsible college-educated Filipino woman on a question of international and national interest.

HOW TO HELP VIETNAM

I have listened to the doves and the hawks. I have made my own studies on the matter. I went to Vietnam very recently to see for myself the conditions there and to sound out for myself what the people there really want and really need. I came home with some distressing findings. What is at stake in Vietnam is not democracy. Democracy cannot be at stake where it has not taken root. A people that has no democratic tradition cannot fight for that cause. Neither, do the people there understand communism, they cannot believe in it, they cannot fight for it.

What is happening there is the pitiful plight of a people, just now awakening from centuries of darkness under a foreign rule, the same black night that engulfed us during the 300 years of Spanish domination, just now coming to the realization that

they as a people are entitled to their own little bit of ground under their own little bit of sky, with a government that is their own and responsive to the needs of their own people, but in the process of this search for their place in the family of nations, being caught up in the power struggle between the great powers which now refuse them the right of self-determination because these great powers want to preserve that little bit of sky for their own sphere of influence.

This is the painful truth. The Vietnamese do not want the Russians, nor the Chinese, nor the Americans. They just want to be left alone.

• • •

While in South Vietnam, I was informed that a popularity poll among a cross-section of the South Vietnamese people on the countries there at present helping the Vietnamese showed

the Philippines topping the list. The Americans are way down that list; this in spite of the fact that the United States has poured almost a quarter million men and billions of dollars into the Vietnam war; in fact is almost single-handedly carrying the burden of supporting both the Vietnamese government and the fight against the Viet Cong. This is hard to understand when we consider that against that quarter-million American and those billions of dollars, we have a contingent there of 69 army doctors and nurses under an appropriation of one million pesos, and these doctors and nurses have not suffered any casualty in spite of the fact that they do not even have a security unit to guard them from the Viet Cong.



The favorite argument of those in favor of sending troops to Vietnam is the classic: When your neighbor's house is on fire, would you not help put out the fire? This is solid, irrefutable argument because it is really sentiment and emotionalism, but it does not

apply in the case of Vietnam. Vietnam is not a house on fire. It is a house divided; a house whose ownership is under dispute between two groups of contending brothers. The fight has become bloody, and fatal to many, but I maintain that we have no right to meddle in the same manner that when we have dispute in our own house, we would not want a neighbor to come barging in and helping one side. Let us be committed, as we are, unreservedly, wholeheartedly and without pretense to democracy, but let us grant other people the right to self-determination, as we claimed self-determination when 68 years ago, in Kawit, Cavite, we proclaimed our right to be free and chose a government, republican in form, and a way of life that is democratic for our people and our country. The best we can do for Vietnam, the way the people of Vietnam want us to help, is to minister to their sick and their wounded. This we have been doing and this we should continue to do. In this manner, whichever side wins their fratricidal strife,

we are sure to preserve the goodwill of the winners and the gratitude of the survivors, for we did not participate in their family dispute.

* * *

But to pursue the argument further, granting that this sentiment is argument. Let us grant that our neighbor's house is on fire. Should we go barging in to shoot the arsonist? That would be taking the law in our own hands, a very anti-democratic precept. What we should do instead is again to help minister to the burned and the maimed, provide what we can spare in clothes and extra food, and in general help make life easier for the homeless family.

While I maintain that the fight in Vietnam is not between communism and democracy, I admit that the menace of communism is inseparable from the Vietnam issue. And this, history, both

distant and recent, has shown us: that communism thrives, regardless of the most representative measure against it, where the economic wants of the people are unmet, where governments are not responsive to the needs of the people, where graft and corruption have eaten up the body politic to such an extent that no hope remains for the have-nots to improve their lot except by embracing an alien ideology that offers some hope, however unrealizable and however distant.

And this I believe. The place to fight communism for the Filipinos is here on our own shores. Being a woman, I believe that we must put our own house in order before we should attempt to put other people's houses in order, granting that we have the right to do so. — *Senator Eva Estrada-Kalaw, Speech at Filoil convocation, April, 1966.*