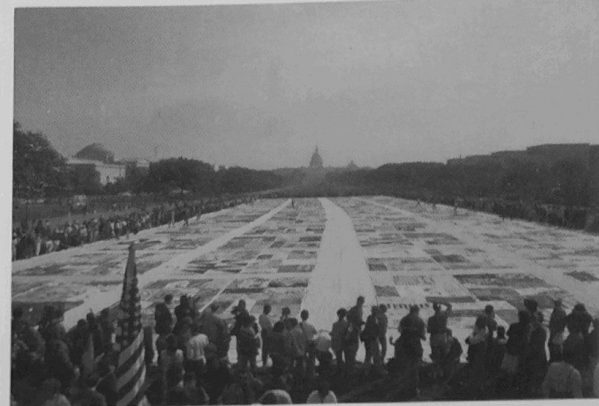


CALL



TO



ACTION



HANDBOOK FOR

Ecology, Peace and Justice

EDITED BY **Brad Erickson**

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Intervention and History

BILL HALL

War is a racket. . . . It may seem odd for me, a military man, to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent 33 years and 4 months in active service as a member of our country's most agile military force—the Marine Corps . . . And during the period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism

Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. . . . I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903

Looking back on it, I feel I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best *he* could do was to operate his racket in three city districts. We Marines operated on three *continents*.

—MAJOR GENERAL SMEDLEY D. BUTLER,
TWO-TIME WINNER OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR

Bill Hall's experience as a community activist spans the anti-apartheid, Central America, anti-nuclear, and Green movements. As assistant to the Director of Project Abraco, he worked in solidarity with the grassroots movements of Brazil and organized popular education on the Third World debt crisis and US intervention. He is currently an Associate of the Environmental Project on Central America (EPOCA) in San Francisco, and an editor of the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. Bill dedicates this essay to Linda Evans and all North American political prisoners jailed for their beliefs and associations.

IN THE NOVEL *1984*, author George Orwell portrays the daily pain and humiliation of life in a totalitarian nation of the future. Although the main character Winston Smith is a lowly bureaucrat, he nonetheless performs an administrative function vital to his society's dictatorial order. Each day at his desk Smith methodically searches through past newspapers and magazines to change names, dates and events. He removes information deemed politically objectionable by his superiors and destroys all record of it. Orwell's protagonist literally rewrites the past to suit the ideology of the present. History is lost into a bureaucratic "memory hole."

In part a response to *1984*, *Brave New World* presented a dictatorial society based not on the coercion applied to and administered by Orwell's Winston Smith, but instead on what author Aldous Huxley considered a far more insidious tool of control: consent. In *Brave New World*, totalitarianism has become so effective that repression is unnecessary. The oppressed submit to their masters willingly; they love their servitude. Censorship is unneeded, because there is no interest in hearing nonconformist views. The citizens of *Brave New World*, engrossed in the distractions of drugs or endless day-to-day entertainment, themselves allow history to slip down the memory hole.

The message of both novels is clear. Whether it is because of repression and censorship, or because of indifference and omission, a society that forgets its history loses its freedom. To allow our past to be written by others, and the truth to be lost to the memory hole, is to surrender our future to totalitarianism.

It is now more than 36 years since the US began its sponsorship of South Vietnamese dictator Ngo Dinh Diem, propping up a corrupt and violent regime dependent on growing infusions of US money, training—

and eventually troops—to stay in power. Fifteen years later support for Diem had ended in US defeat and withdrawal from Vietnam, with more than four million deaths. "The Vietnam War" is now considered part of our past. The war's lessons about our government, lessons that seemed so clear during the war, are fast being forgotten, lost down the memory hole of a society seemingly committed to repeating its own tragic history.

Today nearly half a million US troops occupy 40 foreign countries. The majority of US "defense" spending is devoted to overseas commitments. US training and weapons nurture war and repression in the Philippines, in El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Indonesia, Thailand, Chile, Zaire, Lebanon and dozens of other countries. The same policy-making elite that invoked "national security" in order to violate the 1954 Geneva peace accords (which called for free elections in a unified Vietnam instead of stepped up US intervention and a divided country) now invokes "national security" to continue waging war in the poverty-stricken islands of the Philippines. The same Pentagon that dumped more than 18 million gallons of dioxin-laden defoliants on Vietnamese land—land that still cannot produce food—now claims that "national security" demands we ship more bombs to the Salvadoran Air Force to reduce the countryside of El Salvador to desert. Today the same State Department that funded mercenary armies of Montagnard tribesmen with profits from heroin trafficking in Laos claims the moral high ground in an increasingly militarized war on drugs—and "subversives"—in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia. The same CIA Director, William Colby, who, as head of the CORDS (war-related US relief and "development aid") agency, directed the systematic assassination of tens of thousands of "Vietcong suspects" in Operation Phoenix,



In the US Capitol, Witness for Peace demonstrators protest the Reagan-Bush administration's Nicaragua policy of Contra aid, which the World Court and the Organization of American States also condemned. Names on the crosses are those of victims of the Contras.

RICH REINHARD, 1986, IMPACT VISUALS

now informs us that “international terrorism” necessitates political investigations and police-state tactics at home.

Only by recovering the history of US intervention in Vietnam from the memory hole can we begin to understand how the war continues in the form of US intervention today. And only by recovering that history can we learn our power to stop intervention.

The US government assaulted the Vietnamese resistance movement—a movement President Eisenhower said would have surely won free elections—with more firepower than it used in all of World War II. Yet the world's most powerful country was defeated at the hands of an army of illiterate—but committed—farmers. The White House considered using nuclear weapons to exterminate this enemy that it could not conquer. But that option was made impossible by

policy-makers' fear of opposition at home, as hundreds of thousands of people confronted Vietnam not with fear or denial, but with courage and rage. They rose up in a militant mass protest movement and threatened to shake the very foundation of order in our country. And they helped stop the war in Vietnam, and return some of the destiny of Southeast Asia to the people who live there.

The history of the Vietnam War and what it took to stop it shows that US intervention in the Third World is not just the result of “failed policies” or imprudent decisions. Intervention against efforts at greater democracy in the Third World—whether in Southeast Asia, Grenada, or Chile—arises from the lack of genuine democratic control in the US. From General Smedley Butler to more modern day “racketeers for capital-

ism," the interests of cheap labor, abundant resources and military dominion guide the decision-makers behind US foreign policy.

The history of the Vietnam War is also the history of how policy makers respond when their wars are challenged at home. As the opposition movement swelled into the millions, the government began to consider the US a kind of "second front" in the war in Vietnam, and unleashed a repressive campaign of domestic counterinsurgency to battle its enemies at home: the peace movement and all protest groups. COINTELPRO, the FBI Counterintelligence Program, sought explicitly to sow paranoia, cause division, destroy reputations with rumor and lies and "neutralize" activists and groups. It was a clandestine campaign to destroy opposition at home, and it went far outside the limits of law. Chief among the program's aims was suppressing activism at its early stages, as well as preventing coalitions from developing between anti-war activists and people challenging elite control of the society from other positions—the Black Power movement, Native Americans, Chicanos, farm workers and others. Not just a few, but dozens of activists were assassinated by the police, FBI and FBI-backed right-wing vigilantes as part of COINTELPRO. Repression set back—but did not eliminate—a powerful movement that had begun to unearth the roots of intervention.

When the Vietnam War protest movement did succeed in narrowing their latitude for action, the Nixons, Kissingers and Oliver Norths took it as a lesson. They concluded that US politics was suffering from "too much democracy"; a passive, pliant public was much preferable to the active and critical one the war had generated. If the nominal checks and balances of democracy were limiting the freedom of the Pentagon and CIA in any way, these men saw only one so-

lution: circumvent the checks and balances of democracy.

Covert actions, mercenary armies, self-financing, "off-the-shelf" operations, the "privatization" of foreign and domestic policy—all serve to remove more and more repressive activity from potential scrutiny by Congress and accountability to the electorate. The "covert actions" abroad (such as the Iran-Contra scandal) and "anti-terrorism" at home (such as the infiltration and break-ins of Central America peace groups) are pursued in secret not because their visibility would cause a "national security risk." Rather, the US ruling elite knows that if people were aware of these actions, there would be strong opposition from domestic "enemies" on the "second front."

Escalation of war in Vietnam failed to defeat independence fighters. Escalation of repression at home has likewise not rendered protest movements powerless. In Nicaragua, a country with only one (highly unreliable) working elevator and a population mostly under the age of 16, a revolution is surviving a US military and economic war, and remains committed to comprehensive social programs and environmental protection not only because of its own courage, but also because of the US peace movement's efforts. Clergy, students and human rights activists across the US were able to force the Reagan Administration to adopt the toughest anti-South Africa sanctions ever as the anti-apartheid movement surged in power in the US and around the world.

Ending military aid to "allies" and keeping the Marines in their barracks and not on the beaches can be achieved, but it takes an outspoken and militant anti-intervention movement. It takes a movement that understands that a more humane government in Nicaragua or South Africa may or may not choose to call itself "socialist"; the

point is that if steps are being taken to defend justice and human rights, then we should support whoever is taking those steps. It takes a movement that can condemn US intervention without ignoring Soviet intervention, a movement that rejects the history written for us and instead reclaims its own. It takes a movement unafraid to speak the truth, unhesitant to seek listeners in all corners of society and unashamed to reach out to the compassion and love that lies dormant deep within so many people in this country.

To see its task clearly, the anti-intervention movement must relearn its history and again attack the roots of exploitation and power that anchor intervention in our economy and political system. To gather the strength needed to win, the movement must forge alliances with all of those working against the same system of power. The banner of this movement is *solidarity*, the solidarity of the poor against the rich, of the powerless against the powerful, solidarity

that knows no borders, no division by race or nation.

Whether our country's will to struggle has for the time being been ripped from us, or whether it is merely abandoned for more entertaining pursuits, we must seek out ways to live without Orwell's memory hole, ways to recover human identity and compassion in an age of denial and barbarity. In the words of Eduardo Galeano, an Uruguayan writer and activist once forced into exile by a US-backed dictatorship: "I think that fighting to change the world, to restore it, gives sense to the human adventure. In this fight I recognize myself in others. In this fight I become a compatriot and contemporary of those who are moved to action by the will for justice and the will for beauty. I am their compatriot though they were born in another country. I am their contemporary though they lived in another age. And thus I feel and know that I am a breeze of a wind that will continue when I am no longer. . . ."

ACTION*

- Monitor the alternative press for news behind the headlines of US foreign policy. Respond among friends and acquaintances to such mass media propaganda as the "War on Drugs," "overpopulation," "terrorism," and "national security." Look to the root causes and political uses behind such misinformation.
- Recover the history of US intervention and movements in opposition to it, by consulting books, films, radio shows, and other sources, as well as seeking

out the stories of people involved. Begin a small resource library of books and tapes with your friends. Gather a small group of friends to read or go to lectures together and then discuss the implications.

- Investigate the economic motives that underpin US foreign policy, in order to understand how lack of democracy and justice at home relates to militarism abroad.
- Write letters to the Editor.

*Action section by Bill Hall

- Get on as many mailing lists of peace and solidarity groups as possible; get to know what the movement looks like in your area.
- Participate in discussion about strategies, outreach, methods and priorities.
- Promote coalition building and linking of issues around broad demands for greater democracy and justice.
- Phone radio talk shows to inform other listeners.
- Write your representative and Senators.
- Get in touch with and volunteer with peace and solidarity groups in your area. If you can't donate your time, donate money. If you can't donate money, then let your support be known in other ways.
- Train yourself in civil disobedience protest and participate in blockades, sit-ins and occupations for a change in policy.
- Let everyone you know hear about your commitment to social change, and address people's fears and ignorance about it. Try to keep others informed, and challenge their misunderstandings. Such small efforts can have tremendous reverberations where people have not considered these issues before.
- Encourage others to get involved.
- Zero in on hesitations you might have about liberation struggles in the Third World. Are your concerns based on informed advocacy of democracy and justice? Or are you failing to critically examine assumptions given to you by television and our government?
- Write to activists in the US who are imprisoned for their political beliefs and efforts.
- Send material aid to liberation movements.
- Travel to the Third World.
- Support refugees in your community.

RESOURCES

Organizations

Action in Support of the Mexican Garment Workers

c/o AFSC
1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Supports Mexican women who formed a dynamic union after the 1985 earthquake with tours, material aid and letter-writing.

American Committee on Africa

198 Broadway
New York, NY 10038
(212) 962-1210

Supports African people in their struggle for freedom and independence. Initiates projects to inform and mobilize Americans to support African freedom through changes in US foreign policy. Publishes the free ACOA Action News, twice annually.

Amnesty International

322 8th Avenue
New York, NY 10001
(212) 633-4200

International human rights group that focuses on the release of prisoners of conscience and the abolition of torture and the death penalty. Their bi-monthly periodical, Amnesty Action, costs \$25/year.