

THE WORKING COMMITTEE OF THE COALITION TO RECLAIM THE INDOCHINA RESOURCES (CRIR)  
A PRELIMINARY REPORT

In the predawn hours of Monday, May 26, one of the most complete libraries of Indochinese literature, photos and films in the United States was stolen from the office of the Indochina Solidarity Committee (ISC), located in the Washington Square Church. The theft was committed by a group of people who had become associated politically with the Revolutionary Union (RU) and who at the time of the theft constituted a majority of ISC. We, the working committee of an informal Coalition to Reclaim the Indochina Resources, have demanded the return of the materials; that demand, already backed by a number of movement organizations and hundreds of individuals, was rejected. The following report is part of our effort to provide information and analysis of the theft and to build support for the return of the materials.

BACKGROUND

For over ten years the U.S. Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (USCANLFSVN), which later became Indochina Solidarity Committee, was part of the anti-war, anti-imperialist movement in solidarity with the liberation struggles in Indochina. Now after that war has been won, ISC has been destroyed as a result of a split.

For some time, growing political differences had developed within ISC and, concurrently, within the local chapter of Indochina Peace Campaign/New York City (IPC/NYC) (of which all ISC people were members). The major political differences arose because some ISC members had, in the last year or so, transferred their political allegiance to the politics of the Revolutionary Union, while others did not.

The Revolutionary Union, which had its origins in the 1968 SDS splits, is a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist-Maoist organization that is currently striving to form itself into the "new communist party" in the United States. This push has caused RU supporters to seek hegemony in many movement organizations around the country. RU supporters who believe that it is the most correct group to lead the working class at this time tend to treat those who disagree with their leadership as if that disagreement makes one the enemy. This has been evidenced by their style of unnecessarily ruthless and antagonistic methods of struggle with people of other political tendencies or beliefs. Such conflicts have resulted in RU takeovers of or thefts from a number of groups. Among others affected have been The Rest of the News, People's Translation Service, Thirdworld Newsreel in San Francisco, and some chapters and the national office of the VVAW/WSO. An overtly anti-worker theft occurred in El Paso. There, two RU cadre provided money and technical skills in the joint production of a film about the Farah strike with a Chicano workers center. The center, integrally connected with the Farah workers, provided access to the workers for filmed interviews which are the film's political substance. When the film was finished just recently, the RU refused to give or sell a copy of it to the workers center despite the fact that it includes original footage of the strike's first day shot by a worker and made available by the center.

We believe that people should investigate the line and practice of the RU for themselves. Our own, initial investigation has resulted in our belief that RU thefts from the movement in the last few weeks alone total thousands of dollars worth of equipment and other materials. A more complete investigation, leading to a paper documenting and detailing these and other similar RU activities, is underway.

USCANLFSVN was formed in 1965 by Walter Teague and several others and remained, until 1972, a voluntary association. Many hundreds of people contributed to its

work and helped gather its collections of revolutionary Indochinese materials. Gradually, from 1972 until late 1974, USCANL/FSVN/ISC became more collective. Among the new people who joined were Martha Chamberlain in 1971 and later, from 1971 until 1974: Gina Harman, Mike Stout, Felice Weintraub, Chris Galanos and Gary Hansjergen.

During the period of collective work, much was accomplished. But the underlying political differences grew and became increasingly disruptive in 1974. At some point Harman joined RU, and the other four became at least complete supporters of RU and its politics. This new allegiance came in direct conflict with the historic functioning of USCANL/FSVN/ISC (ISC, for short).

ISC had always been an independent solidarity committee, which did not take positions on matters unrelated to its primary work and carefully avoided positions contradictory to those of the Indochinese revolutionaries. In practice this meant that it worked for broad coalitions within the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements. Just as the Vietnamese, so too ISC worked as best it could with all people and organizations who opposed the war; for example ISC did not take public positions on questions that could put it at odds with the Indochinese, such as a position on the Sino-Soviet dispute.

Gradually, it became more difficult for ISC to function collectively. The five who adopted RU's politics began to take more antagonistic positions toward various political tendencies that the RU had disagreements with. This meant that ISC resources were not readily available to feminist groups, or groups associated in any way with Trotskyist or Prairie Fire politics, or groups supportive of the Soviet Union - no matter what the quality of their work in opposition to the war and in support of the Vietnamese. Increasingly, the five found fault with coalitions and tendencies that gave what they felt was too much consideration to the self-determination of third world people. For example, they opposed the right of third world women in organizing the United States/Vietnam Women's Conference to select the third world delegates.

As the political stance of Harman and the others hardened, it became less possible for ISC to work with unity and respect in other coalitions. Private criticism and derision toward those who differed with RU became common. Eventually the five started using their majority to block anything that didn't fit with their new political priorities although this 'democratic' process could not change the fact that ISC is, and always has been, more than just a collection of seven people.

The fact is that there would be no materials were it not for the work of many persons other than those who now presume control of them. By themselves Walter Teague and Martha Chamberlain have worked more years on ISC than Harman, Weintraub, Stout, Hansjergen and Galanos together. Many others, not now or ever members of ISC, worked to accumulate those materials and resources. Without a doubt that work was not done so that the resources would be available only to persons acceptable to these five (especially so long as acceptability for them conforms to unnecessarily restrictive RU politics). Without a doubt Harman and the others, or even all of RU, did not do anything like most of the work involved or even constitute a majority of those who did any work at all.

After a final breakdown in collectivity, which occurred during preparations for the Victory Celebration in Montreal on May 18-19, Teague and Chamberlain proposed to the others that a public split be avoided and that the organization be disbanded with one last newsletter stressing the victories and announcing what future work each person was to be doing. They suggested that the resources be equitably distributed according to usefulness, etc. The others adamantly rejected the proposal

and instead said that they were going to keep the name and organization and that Chamberlain and Teague should resign immediately. The five were urged to consider the proposal for a week after which discussion would resume. Martha and Walter parted, and there were no further discussions until after the materials were taken.

#### THE THEFT ITSELF

On Monday, May 26, in the early morning hours, the RU supporters in ISC and others stole the major important resources from the ISC office in the Washington Square Church. They also took many valuable items belonging to the church and to individuals. Lists of these are available from the working committee.

About two o'clock PM, Walter and Martha discovered that the others in ISC had changed the lock on the office; when they tried to enter, the other ISC people and some of their friends came with sticks and threatened Walter, Martha and the staff of the church should they try to enter. They told Martha and Walter that they had been voted out of ISC and would be kept out of the office by force. There are no such expulsion procedures in ISC.

After refusing entry to the minister of the church, the RU supporters did accept his offer to mediate and finally admitted that they had taken items from the ISC office. Later they agreed that Walter could enter the office with Gary to inventory what was left and to discuss what each side thought right to do with the various resources. They admitted taking valuable church and personal items but were unwilling to return or to release to anyone the Indochinese materials. They did finally return some church equipment and a tape deck belonging to Walter, but kept a mimeograph and shortwave radio that belonged to other individuals. They also kept much other valuable equipment that others helped provide to ISC. From that Monday until Saturday night the five and their friends held on to the gutted and dysfunctional ISC office. They barricaded it and carried around lead pipes and similar weapons. Also from Monday until Saturday, many long-time supporters of the work of ISC came to the church to prevent anything else from being taken out. During this time they were joined by members of the church who volunteered to stay around the clock to protect the church and remaining materials.

Chamberlain and Teague and the others refused to negotiate away any more of ISC's remaining resources, partly because the others already had thousands of dollars worth of equipment as well as important political items, but also because they refused to capitulate to threats and intimidation. The minister finally had to insist that the others in ISC leave the church with only their personal possessions and the office was closed to all.

The mass meeting on Sunday, June 1, was attended by over fifty people representing a broad spectrum of the New York anti-war and progressive movement. This coalition agreed to denounce the theft and to build pressure for the return of the materials, temporarily to the custody of an uninvolved (if not unconcerned) group (The War Resisters League was ultimately chosen), after which the movement as a whole would then decide the best and proper place for these resources to be accessible for all.

The coalition established a working committee which has itemized the remaining organizational materials in the ISC office and turned them over to the War Resisters League. Gina Harman has been contacted by telephone and given one week to return the materials. The week has long since passed and the materials have not been brought back.

By their theft of the Indochina materials, the five people from ISC have proven

their disdain for the years of work of hundreds of people, and have abrogated to themselves the right to determine the use of materials that in reality belong to the whole movement. Unless a group representing the movement at large has custody of these resources, many good and serious activists will be denied access to them or will be given access to them under only the most restrictive and sectarian terms. Certainly this denial will include all the old members of ISC and those who have strong disagreements with RU. It will clearly include all those individuals who worked against the removal of more materials from Washington Square Church and all who have joined in demanding their return. And since the allegiance of the five is to RU, and since RU's behaviour is increasingly sectarian, it will probably include people in the growing number of groups that the RU is antagonistic with.

Refusal to return these items can only prove the exploitative nature of their actions. They are now declaring that they, and they alone, are the ISC. They will probably publish an ISC newsletter and have claimed that everyone will have access to the materials at some point in the future, except those who are working for the return of the materials. The same people are also working under the name of IPC/NYC even though they were expelled from IPC for "sectarian, disruptive and antagonistic behavior," by the national IPC Standing Committee, in a letter dated May 13.

The five and their political friends who were expelled from IPC are now planning to form an Indochina friendship association which will be made up mostly of their own people and for which the Indochina resources will be very useful. We hope this opportunism will be condemned. What is needed is the formation of a true friendship association in which all activists and future supporters of U.S./Vietnamese friendship may join without having to accept the RU's line on such questions as the Sino-Soviet split, the national question, women, homosexuality, their limited concept of the united front, or the RU's recent approach to coalition which has caused so many splits and breakdowns.

Our criticisms of the actions of those in ISC and the others that support the Revolutionary Union are not criticisms of the call for revolution and socialism. We join in that call and are dedicated to work for a classless and progressive world, but we do not think that the RU, functioning as it now does, will lead that revolution. Rather, at this point they are becoming increasingly destructive of the movement we should all support and build.

An organization is not communist or deserving of revolutionary leadership because it says that it is; the practice of those who accept its discipline is determinative. Whatever the formal relationship between RU and the other four, Gina Harman is openly a member. There is no question that she supports the taking of the materials; the presumption is that RU does. If it didn't, then she wouldn't; that is what discipline is all about. It is our position that Harman's support of and participation in the theft is not the practice of the cadre of a truly revolutionary organization. The RU can't have it both ways; unless it disciplines Harman (and uses its influence with the others) to return the materials, it will be accountable for the theft.

In the last few days hundreds of people and many groups have signed the petitions demanding the return of the resources. With the growing awareness of a nationwide pattern of such ripoffs, many groups are becoming increasingly concerned. If those who are holding onto these resources do not heed the movement's call, many groups are considering further actions to expose and rectify these destructive politics and tactics.

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The working committee urges you to do the following:

1. Call (982-0068) or write the five demanding that they return the resources; write "ISC", c/o Mike Stout, 126 Macdougall Street, New York, NY 10012
2. Sign (as an individual or organization), circulate and return to us the attached petition.
3. Have your organization send the working committee (with a copy to the five) a letter endorsing (as an organization) the petition's demand.
4. If you haven't done so already, stop working jointly with the five until the materials are returned.
5. Within your organization or study group discuss the revolutionary validity of activities such as these whether engaged in by members of a cadre organization or not.
6. Send us information (thoroughly investigated and documented where possible) of similar activities.
7. Send us your differences with our approach; send us your suggestions and any information as to the location or use of the materials.

Thank you for your support.

The working committee of

The Coalition to Reclaim the Indochina Resources (CRIR)  
c/o Washington Square Church  
135 West 4th Street  
New York, NY 10012

June 26, 1975

PETITION

In the middle of the night, approximately 2 AM on Monday, May 26, one of the most complete collections of Indochinese literature, photos and films in the U.S. was stolen from the office of the Indochina Solidarity Committee (ISC) located in the Washington Square Methodist Church. This was done by some people from ISC who are members or associated with the Revolutionary Union (RU).

We demand that the materials be put in the temporary custody of the War Resistor's League. After their return, a representative grouping of the anti-war and anti-imperialist movement will decide how these resources will be used.

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Please return to The Coalition to Reclaim the Indochina Resources  
c/o Washington Square Church  
135 West 4th Street  
New York, New York 10012