

Viet-Report February 1966

## THE PROFESSOR, THE POLICEMAN, AND THE PEASANT

### PART ONE

**America brings Democracy to the "backward nations" in increasingly ingenious ways. In Part I of his analysis of the role of the Michigan State University Group in South Vietnam, Martin Nicolaus documents the 1955-1962 effort at "pacification" -- through "research," "technical assistance" and "guidance." In question: the MSUG Division of Police.**

**Out of MSU, too, came a little-known but ever more influential public servant: the professor as international social worker. Part II (March Viet-Report) will explore this world of the MSUG Division of Public Administration.**

*By Martin Nicolaus*

On a day in April 1960 in a small town in South Vietnam, the following event took place: an American professor interviewed the chief of the local secret police in the latter's headquarters, while (according to the professor's report) "curled up on a mat in the corner was a twenty-year-old peasant in tattered clothes. His feet were in manacles, the left side of his face was swollen and his eye and cheek were badly bruised." The youth was "suspected of Vietcong membership." <sup>1</sup> He had been interrogated by the secret police chief. The professor, who was doing basic research under contract to the U.S. government and to the Saigon government, noted these facts but asked no further questions about the peasant. Neither the police chief nor the professor indicated that the peasant's presence disturbed them or struck them as strange.

Yet it does seem strange for an American professor to have an amiable interview with a secret police chief in the latter's interrogation center, and even more strange that the interview took place while a young man who had been convicted of no crime lay bruised and manacled in the corner. A closer examination of the event yields even more alien facts: the interrogation room had been paid for, and the police chief's equipment, including the manacles that held the peasant, had been supplied by an American university, -- the same university that paid the professor's salary. The professor, the policeman and the peasant were here assembled in exactly their intended roles, playing the parts the university had designed for them: the professor researching, the policeman interrogating, the peasant silent, bruised. This indeed seems like

an extraordinary episode in the annals of American academia. And the fact that the professor did not think the event was worth special comment--that seems inexplicable, inexcusable, scandalous.

Nevertheless, it happened, and it happened regularly. Not that the professors regularly encountered manacled peasants in their interviews; that was not a typical event. Still, this encounter in April 1960 is like a microcosm of the larger drama that had been unfolding since 1950 and ended only in 1962. The peasant lying manacled in a corner of the room symbolizes perhaps in an exaggerated way, perhaps not, the predicament of a great many South Vietnamese peasants: they were all being bound, beaten or manacled in one way or another, although not all of them took it as silently as this one, as the professors well knew. The secret police chief was also playing a typical role -- getting information out of peasants was his job. The professor, too, was doing his job: asking some questions, not asking other questions, writing down the responses, and not expressing opinions outside his field of professional competence. And the manacles, together with related equipment, were supplied to the police by the university on a regular schedule; there was nothing extraordinary about it. This one event expresses Michigan State University's Vietnam Project in a nutshell.

Nor, for that matter, is the episode an isolated instance in American intellectual history. Certainly the majority of university projects overseas do not involve such collaboration with the secret police -- American or foreign -- and they do follow a stricter definition of what is "technical" assistance. But the needs which the Michigan State project was designed to serve exist now, or are growing into existence, in many parts of the world. The conditions that made it possible to use American professors as they were used in Vietnam persist. The Michigan State University Group (MSUG) was not an unrepeatable event. More and more it appears as the prototype, the pilot model of a growing family of overseas "research projects" of which the controversial Project Camelot in Latin America was the latest member, but not the last. The MSU project reflects not only a few individual professors, not just one particular university, not merely an especially dark period of American history -- although these things were at work too; its roots go back further and deeper into the "normal," the established and enduring life of American professors, universities, and American foreign policy in general.

## A STRANGE BEGINNING

Credit for being the first to piece together and publish the outlines of the MSUG story belongs to *Ramparts* magazine's staff writer and sometime foreign correspondent Robert Scheer. Since the publication of Scheer's booklet, *How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam*,<sup>2</sup> in which Scheer made several allegations that disturbed Michigan State University, new evidence has come to light<sup>3</sup> which makes it possible for the first time to substantiate some of these charges with a solid network of proof. This is how the Vietnam project began:

In Tokyo in July 1950, Ngo Dinh Diem, then one of many exiled Vietnamese politicians, met Wesley Fishel, who had just accepted a position as assistant professor of political science at Michigan State University (then called Michigan State College).<sup>4</sup> The circumstances surrounding the meeting are obscure, but it was hardly accidental. Diem had been a frequent guest at American consulates-general in Asia since 1946, and it was rumored that certain elements of the American government -- the CIA most frequently mentioned in this regard -- were in fact grooming him for the job of eventually replacing Bao Dai, the playboy emperor of Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> Nor is it likely that Wesley Fishel was simply another young Ph.D. off on a lark in Japan, and just happened to run into Diem in a tearoom. In any case, this meeting proved to be an extraordinarily fortunate coincidence for both men. The two exchanged letters when Fishel returned to the United States, and a bare seven months later their friendship had blossomed to the point where Fishel had Diem made a "consultant" to Michigan State's "Governmental Research Bureau."<sup>6</sup> How a mere assistant professor in his first year at MSU was able to pull such strings for his friend is one of the several little mysteries that surround the MSU project and the person of Wesley Fishel. Only one and a half years after their initial meeting in Tokyo, Diem and Fishel -- both without any overt official standing -- were engaging in international diplomacy on behalf of the U.S. government. In 1952, Diem "asked the French to permit Michigan State College to furnish technical aid to the Vietnamese government, the costs of which would be borne by the United States government, but the French refused."<sup>7</sup> After that, Diem moved his base of operations from MSU's East Lansing campus eastward into Cardinal Spellman's territory, and began the series of publicity triumphs (recounted in Scheer's booklet) which catapulted him into power in Saigon in mid-1954. Less than two months later, his friend Wesley Fishel hurried to Saigon as Diem's special advisor and as a member of U.S. Special Ambassador Lawton

Collin's personal staff.<sup>8</sup> "Not surprisingly," in the words of Professors Scigliano and Fox, both of whom were high-ranking members of the MSU project, Fishel's discussions with Diem led to a request that Michigan State "undertake to help Vietnam in its current difficulties."<sup>9</sup> A team of four officials from the East Lansing campus, headed by Arthur Brandstatter, chief of MSU's School of Police Administration, made a whirlwind, two-week tour of Vietnam and returned in early October 1954 with a recommendation that MSU undertake a huge project of technical assistance to the Diem government.<sup>10</sup> During subsequent negotiations between Diem, Fishel, MSU, and the U.S. Foreign Operations Administration (now called, less candidly, Agency for International Development), the size of the project was somewhat reduced, but its scope remained broad. Its purpose was to give the Diem government assistance in strengthening nearly all aspects of its functioning, with particular emphasis on the economy, the civil service, and the police.<sup>11</sup>

However, in early 1955, the Diem government was so near collapse that the MSU project almost died stillborn. The majority of Diem's cabinet deserted him, the army was in near revolt, and the city was under virtual siege by one of the armed sects, the Binh Xuyen. Even Special Ambassador Collins sent a pessimistic report to Eisenhower, suggesting that a new man be found to replace Diem. However, firm support for Diem came from the CIA's ubiquitous Colonel Lansdale, and (via CIA chief Allen Dulles to his brother, John Foster, to Eisenhower). Collins was overruled, and Diem's future was assured.<sup>12</sup> The persons in Saigon who did the most to keep Diem in power during this crisis, according to the French journalist Georges Chaffard, were certain American military counselors and unnamed "activists" from Michigan State University.<sup>13</sup> Their efforts were successful; Diem rode out the crisis, and in the spring of 1955 the U.S. National Security Council formally endorsed Diem. According to Scheer, who says he got it from Fishel, at this time "no less a personage than Vice-President Nixon called John Hannah, the president of Michigan State, to elicit his support."<sup>14</sup> Hannah, an important figure in the GOP and a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, was told (according to Scheer quoting Fishel) that it was "In the national interest for his university to become involved."<sup>15</sup> According to Hannah, however, there was no request from Nixon. Hannah claims that the request came from "authority even higher than Nixon's."<sup>16</sup> However that may be, Michigan State's interests, Diem's interests, and the national interest were already thoroughly intertwined before this phone call to Hannah took place.

According to Scheer, the MSU project filled a special need for American foreign policy at this time. "The Geneva Accords had prohibited increases in the strength of either side through the introduction of 'all types of arms' or buildups in troop strength. The presence of the International Control Commission ... offered the prospect of unfavorable publicity to the United States if its Military Assistance and Advisory Group, United States Operations Mission, or CIA agents operated openly. The Michigan group would serve as 'cover'."<sup>17</sup> It is true that the Geneva Accords (Article 17a) forbade arms increases, and it is a fact that the International Control Commission could have created heavily damaging publicity. But whether or not the Michigan group served as "cover" is a question that should be suspended for the moment, waiting until more of the evidence is in.

In May 1955, the Michigan State University Group was officially born with the signing of two contracts, one between MSU and the Diem government, the other between MSU and the U.S. government. The contracts were for two years, and were renewed with modifications in 1957 and 1959.<sup>18</sup> The first MSUG advisors under the contract arrived at the end of May, 1955.<sup>19</sup> For a project of its size, it was prepared in a remarkably short time. Actually "the team of MSU professors," as one is tempted to call the group, were neither predominantly from MSU nor were most of them professors. It was an academic program neither in numbers nor in purpose, only in publicity. From 1955 to 1962, the term of the project, MSUG had 104 American staff members altogether, who served various lengths of time. Of these 104, 32 were clerical or administrative personnel. Only 72 were full-fledged MSUG advisors. Of these 72 advisors, 33 were in the police division, 34 in the Public Administration Division, and 5 were short-term consultants. Of the 33 police advisors, only 4 came from the MSU campus, the remainder being recruited from law enforcement and other agencies. Of the 34 non-police advisors, only 11 were from the MSU campus. Only 25 of all 72 advisors were actually professors, and almost all of these were in the non-police division. The only reason to call the group the "MSU professors" is that all five of the Chief Advisors were political science professors at Michigan State, and Michigan State faculty held all other controlling positions the project. But professors from Yale, Pittsburgh, UCLA<sup>20</sup> and other universities also took part. While Michigan State lent its name and its respectability to the project and acted as coordinating agency, the real direction of the program came from the U.S. government and from the Saigon government. In doing its utmost to cooperate with these powers, MSU did no more than many other American universities would have done, and are doing.

Compared to the cost of a jet fighter-bomber, MSUG was a trivial operation, but compared to the cost of most "research" projects even in the physical sciences, MSUG was a behemoth. The cost of salaries, transportation, and overhead for the American staff alone was \$5.3 million, and the equivalent of an additional \$5.1 million in Vietnamese piastres was spent on the staff of about 200 Vietnamese scholars, translators, typists, chauffeurs, and security guards. To this tidy subtotal of \$10.4 million must be added another \$15 million more, according to the estimate of Scigliano and Fox. This amount approximately represents equipment and material aid funds controlled and disbursed by MSUG.<sup>21</sup> Nearly all of this amount was spent by the Police Division, but there is no way of knowing by how much the estimate is too low, since certain activities of the Police Division were never formally reported to MSUG's Chief Advisors.<sup>22</sup> But if the estimate is anywhere near accuracy, it means that MSUG spent the neat sum of about \$25 million, or about two dollars for every man, woman and child in the country. The entire cost, of course, was borne by the U.S. government.

Wesley Fishel became MSUG Chief Advisor in early 1956. Scheer quotes Fishel as having said "... I surfaced -- to use a CIA term -- to become head of the MSUG program,"<sup>23</sup> but Fishel denies that he ever used such language.<sup>24</sup> In any case, it was not a bad job for a man who had begun academic life as an assistant professor only six years before.

All these factors are worth keeping in mind when asking the question whether MSUG acted as "cover" for the CIA.

### **AN URGENT REQUEST**

The first MSUG advisors to arrive in Saigon were police experts, and the first task undertaken by MSUG was a police project, so it seems fair to begin to describe the behemoth here. MSUG was divided into two Divisions: Police and Public Administration, with the Chief Advisor responsible for both. As the project became organized the two Divisions worked quite separately from one another and the Chief Advisor acted as the only channel of information between them, at least formally; but in the first few months the two groups worked together. Throughout 1955 much of Saigon was in ruins from the pitched street battles; frequent plastic bomb explosions rocked the residential districts, and some MSUG members happened to be living in a hotel that was raided during a riot, and suffered considerable property

damage.<sup>25</sup> In the midst of this atmosphere of crisis and chaos came an "urgent request" from the American Embassy in Saigon that MSUG devote all its energies to strengthening the police and security organizations, particularly the *Suret * and the Civil Guard, and to reorganizing the refugee commissariat.<sup>26</sup> Since the first advisors on the scene happened to be a secret police specialist and a civil guard specialist, MSUG readily acceded to the request. The first real professors who arrived were assigned to the refugees.

The Vietnamese secret police was nothing more nor less than a branch of the French *Suret *, a name that means to Vietnamese approximately what *Okhrana* meant to the Bolsheviks and *Gestapo* meant to German Jews. When the French abandoned Vietnam in 1954-1955, the Saigon government inherited the organization lock, stock and barrel, and set about patching its war wounds. The first step was to abolish the dreaded name *Suret * and replace it with something more suited to a brave new nation. The MSUG advisors had the answer: the secret police was henceforth called the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation, or VBI.<sup>27</sup> They then devoted a great part of their energies to increasing the organization's efficiency. Its scattered facilities and records were consolidated and expanded in a former French army camp which was renovated for the purpose. Here, under MSUG guidance and with MSUG-supplied funds, the VBI built an interrogation center, detention center, laboratory, records and identification center, and communications headquarters.<sup>28</sup> They undertook to modernize the *Suret *'s fingerprint files by reclassifying them from the French to the American system. After a year of work, they had reclassified 600,000 files in the "criminal and subversive" section, and expected the job to take another two years, which gives an idea of how many people the *Suret * had its eyes on -- perhaps from ten to twenty per cent of the population; not bad for an antiquated outfit, but not good enough by American standards.<sup>29</sup>

In order to improve on this percentage, the University Group in 1959 took charge of the national identity card program, designed to furnish every South Vietnamese over 21, for a small fee, with an obligatory, nearly indestructible plastic-laminated ID card bearing his photograph and thumbprint. MSUG imported specially- designed laminating machines and portable photography studios, and it trained, equipped, and advised the heavily-armed identification teams which sought, unsuccessfully, to dog-tag every peasant in the country. After a number of identification teams were ambushed, the program was abandoned.<sup>30</sup>

MSUG established a special training school under the jurisdiction of the VBI high command, in which the Americans gave instruction in subjects ranging from jeep driving to the use of different types of tear gas. They wrote or had translated manuals on weapons maintenance, riot control, and related subjects.<sup>31</sup> They gave advice on all aspects of the VOI's operations, including the location of training camps and the so-called detention centers.<sup>32</sup> However, despite the advisors' best efforts, when the project ended in 1962, the VBI (in the words of MSUG's Final Report) "still fell far short of the revised set-up which had been recommended."<sup>33</sup>

The U.S. Embassy's urgent request for help with the Civil Guard was a matter of special importance, but MSUG was less helpful here. The Civil Guard, an ill-equipped body of about 50,000 men staffed with military officers, quartered in army encampments and under control of the province chiefs, played a key role in Diem's strategy for seizing power in a largely hostile countryside. Regular units of the Civil Guard would sweep through an area to soften it up and to overcome whatever resistance was encountered and then remain, using the old French forts to keep the area pacified. The MSUG advisors wanted to reduce the organization in size and to convert it into a rural police force, to take it out of military control and base it in the villages, somewhat on the model of Franco's *Guardia Civil*. USOM and MAAG, on the other hand, wanted the Guard to be "organized into company, battalion, and regimental groups, and armed with rifles, automatic rifles, and machine guns."<sup>34</sup> As a result of this conflict, which was won by USOM and MAAG in 1959, MSUG's role in the Civil Guard was confined to some training and some supply activities.<sup>35</sup>

MSUG advisors also trained and supplied the municipal police; reorganized traffic patterns in Saigon; gave training in pistol marksmanship to the palace guard and to other "special groups"; and advised the government on counter-insurgency.<sup>36</sup>

But all these training and advisory activities paled in importance compared to what Scigliano and Fox call "the core of the police program," the provision of "material aid."<sup>37</sup> From 1955 to 1959, according to Scigliano and Fox, the University Group was for all practical purposes the sole supplier of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and equipment to the entire South Vietnamese secret police, municipal police, Civil Guard, and palace guard.<sup>38</sup> Scigliano and Fox state that "the major items, some of which came from local stocks or American material that had been given to the French Expeditionary Corps,

were revolvers, riot guns, ammunition, tear gas, jeeps and other vehicles, handcuffs, office equipment, traffic lights, and communications equipment."<sup>39</sup> Even MSUG's Final Report, available on request from MSU, admits these facts: "The Division arranged to supply, wherever possible, motor vehicles, small arms weapons and tear gas ... Schedules of distribution of weapons to patrolmen and maintenance of training was also established."<sup>40</sup> But "patrolmen" is a characteristic euphemism. The most substantial portion of these supplies and funds went to the secret police directly; and even more, indirectly, in the name of Michigan State University.<sup>41</sup>

The weapons supply program was the biggest and most successful part of the entire MSU project. It received the lion's share of the project's costs, and the greatest number of man-hours were devoted to it. Most or all of the Police Division's training programs centered around the weapons and equipment supplied by MSUG: Scigliano and Fox note that the Vietnamese were eager to be instructed in the handling of riot guns but turned a deaf ear to attempts to instruct them in the rules of evidence or the rights of prisoners. Americans refrained from trying to impose their cultural values in these matters on the Vietnamese, although some instructors were "guilty" of the attempt.<sup>42</sup> Even when the training programs had been largely completed in 1958, the Police Division still found it necessary to maintain a staff of more than 20 advisors to handle the distribution schedules.<sup>43</sup> During the peak period of MSUG's operations, mid-1957 to mid-1959, the Police Division staff outnumbered the Public Administration staff – despite the latter's much wider range of tasks -- by a ratio of about 5 to 3, and the Public Administration Division never had as many as 20 advisors in it at any time.<sup>44</sup> If one did not know that the program was sponsored by a respectable American university, one could easily come to the conclusion that MSUG was primarily a paramilitary aid program with a research bureau thinly spread over it, like icing on the cake.

Finally, the accusation that MSUG acted as a cover for the CIA can now be regarded as definitively proven. Although both MSU and Wesley Fishel have denied Robert Scheer's allegations to this effect,<sup>45</sup> -- Scheer lacked decisive evidence, after all -- recent testimony by three top-ranking MSUG members makes these denials extremely dubious. Ralph Smuckler, MSUG Chief Advisor from April 1958 to December 1959 (immediately after Fishel's tenure) stated in a newspaper interview that "a few" of the Police Division's "borrowed helpers were from the CIA." But, he continued, "These were cloak and dagger operations, and the use of CIA agents was a drop in the bucket compared to

the overall project."<sup>46</sup> Smuckler is presently Acting Dean of International Programs at MSU. MSU political science professors Robert Scigliano (Assistant to Chief Advisor, July 1957 to September 1959 -- covering most of Fishel's term) and Guy Fox (Chief Advisor, May 1961 to June 1962), both colleagues of Fishel, have this to say in their recently-published book: "The non-professorial advisors in the police program were overwhelmingly from state and municipal law enforcement agencies, although there was also a group of CIA agents."<sup>47</sup> Further: "Lack of adequate information makes it impossible to assess the work that several persons conducted with a special internal security unit of the *Sûreté* between 1955 and 1959. Although attached to MSUG, these persons were members of the CIA and reported and were responsible only to the American Embassy in Saigon."<sup>48</sup> Scigliano and Fox also complain that MSUG's intimate involvement with police work "blurred for too many people, including its own staff, its primary mission as an educational institution. The last point applies with even greater force to MSUG's somewhat forced hospitality as an organizational cover for certain intelligence functions of the American government until mid-1959. Not only was the cover quite transparent, but what it did not conceal tended to bring the whole MSU endeavor under suspicion."<sup>49</sup> What the rather vague phrase "somewhat forced hospitality" refers to is not clear; but what is clear is that MSUG's function as a cover for the CIA unit was written into MSUG's original contract. In mid-1959, after reviewing its progress, the group "refused to provide cover for this unit in the new contract period."<sup>50</sup> At that time the CIA unit moved from MSUG to under the wings of USOM, which also absorbed the weapons distribution program.<sup>51</sup> As soon as these transfers had been accomplished, the Police Division staff dwindled rapidly to the vanishing point; its mission had been successfully accomplished.<sup>52</sup> In the light of these circumstances, MSU's protestations of innocence and ignorance are simply not credible.

It is a fact that article 17(a) of the Geneva Agreements prohibits the introduction into Vietnam of all types of arms and munitions, and it is another fact that from 1954 to 1957 the United States maintained an official posture of strict respect for the Agreements, even while supporting the Diem government's refusal to honor them by holding the 1956 national reunification elections. During Eisenhower's second term the official line changed to open disregard for the Agreements, and about a year later the International Control Commission began growing increasingly ineffectual because of an irreconcilable split between the Canadian and the Polish delegations, so that the Commission no longer represented a publicity threat.

Could these facts be related to the fact that the CIA and USOM-MAAG shed their professorial cloaks and began to distribute daggers openly at about the same time? Then, too, by 1957, the manacled peasant had begun his flight from Diem's repression into the *maquis*<sup>53</sup>; for the peasant, his urban sympathizers, together with the sects and certain ethnic minorities, and for the Diem regime, the gloves were off.

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**Viet-Report March-April 1966**

## **PART TWO**

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**Viet-Report June-July 1966**

## **PART THREE**

### **A Postscript & Some Proposals**

*"The intellectual today is very much an inside man ... In almost every field of governmental concern from economics to national security, the academic community has become a central instrument of public policy in these United States."* - Lyndon Johnson, in *The New York Times*, May 12, 1966

"What the hell is a university doing buying guns?" is a good question that demands a straight answer from the academic community. Congress -- and the American Association of University Professors -- most certainly ought to be investigating the academic arms racket and the use of universities by the CIA. The sordid nature of Michigan State University's Vietnam project may yet serve as the catalyst for a long-overdue review of the role of professors in foreign policy. The very least that should come out of the private and public debates occasioned by the MSU scandal is a forthright declaration by the responsible officials that in the future such things will not happen again. MSU President Hannah's statement to that effect before the recent Michigan

Legislature's investigating committee, is a step in the right direction. Caps and gowns must be kept in different drawers from cloaks and daggers.

Unfortunately the very notoriety of the affair, as it has been handled in the glossy media, tends to distract attention from a scandal that runs much deeper and is much more persistent than the dazzling story of guns and the CIA. The MSU story has been given so much James Bond 007 treatment that there is a real danger of forgetting that what Michigan State did in Vietnam was only a more melodramatic version of the entirely normal, everyday operations of most American universities abroad as well as at home. Michigan State deserves its present notoriety, but it does not deserve to be made into a scapegoat for sins that are very much nationwide.

### **MANY PROFESSORS, MANY UNIVERSITIES**

Only a small minority of the professors who participated in MSU's Vietnam project were on the Michigan State faculty. The majority belonged to universities that can not so easily be accused of being "on the make": Pittsburgh, California, Yale, and others equally well established. Except for the circumstance that MSU faculty held the responsible posts in the project, there is no good reason to call it an MSU project at all. When one reads the still unpublished research reports of the project, one is struck by the fact that the Michigan State faculty members were neither more nor less critical of the Diem regime than the professors from other institutions. While MSU may have had a corner on the market of intellectual servility in Vietnam, it by no means held a monopoly.

And one should keep in mind that the Vietnam project continued to function for three years after the arms traffic had stopped and the CIA had found a different cover, both in 1959. From then until the end of the project in 1962, most of the professors did most of their significant research in a strictly academic setting in Saigon, divorced from the sordid melodrama that has captured recent headlines. During these same three years, the brutality of the Diem tyranny revealed itself with unmistakable clarity. During this period began Diem's massive witch-hunts against all opposition; the *agroville* and strategic hamlet plans were put into operation, large-scale guerrilla warfare broke out, the National Liberation Front was founded, Diem's army tried to overthrow him, the most eminent non-communist figures in Saigon protested against the regime and were imprisoned, and the first battalions of U.S. "advisors" arrived. Yet until May 1961 there was no squeak of protest

from any of the professors, and even when protest began, it was confined to a minority of project members. Most of the professors were ready and willing to continue working for the Diem regime, and there is no reason to suppose that many of them would not have been willing to stay on even after Buddhist monks began to incinerate themselves alive in the streets of Saigon. [As we go to press and as Buddhist monks again incinerate themselves alive in the streets of Saigon, we learn that Professor Wesley Fishel of Michigan State University and former head of MSUG has returned to Vietnam, that John P. Roche, Professor of History and Politics at Brandeis University and former Chairman of ADA has gone to Saigon to assist in writing a new constitution, that Professor .... There are too many to list; the spirit of vigilant liberalism and international reform still burns bright in the academic breast. Ed.] In the light of these facts, the question "what the hell is a university doing buying guns" is a trivial one. The real question has little to do with weapons and the CIA: Why the hell were American professors willing to work for the Diem regime at all? That question has not become ancient history with the termination of the MSU project. There are other Diems in the world, other U.S. government agencies supporting them, and other professors willing to help. An example is Project Camelot, in which no known CIA agents were involved, where no arms traffic was contemplated, and where the melodramatic trappings of the MSU affair were completely absent. Project Camelot began in 1964 when the U.S. Army decided to invest 1.5 million dollars annually in social science research designed to facilitate the Army's world-wide counter-insurgency program. A shadowy group called the Special Operations Research Office, theoretically a subsidiary of the equally shadowy American University, was in charge of the research. Notwithstanding the unorthodox nature of the sponsors, despite the distinctly dubious status of the university involved, Project Camelot successfully recruited not only some of the most eminent and respected American scholars, but also a number of professors with long-established reputations as liberals, including one sociologist identified in a recent *N. Y. Times Magazine* article as a member of the New York "Intellectual Establishment." As Irving Louis Horowitz noted in the magazine *Trans-Action* (Washington University, St. Louis, Nov/ Dec. 1965), the men in Camelot spoke of themselves without irony as "reformers." Reform is exactly what the professors in Vietnam thought they were doing. In both cases, the professors accomplished the phenomena I intellectual leap from reform to counter-insurgency with the greatest of ease. They believed that the U. S. Army could and would, if properly enlightened, become a force for progressive social change in the underdeveloped world; and they saw no contradiction between their ethos of scientific objectivity and their activity in helping the

U.S. Army to interfere more effectively in the affairs of other nations. And this was *after* the Dominican intervention had been launched!

Camelot was officially cancelled in 1965 when its purpose leaked out in Chile and caused a storm of protest throughout Latin America. However, similar projects under similar sponsorship have since been discovered in Peru, Colombia, and even in Quebec, Canada; and it would be naive to think that the Pentagon has given up on social science research or that professors have abandoned the Pentagon. Apart from a few prudent souls, the reaction or most academics (according to Horowitz' article) was one of distinct regret that so worthwhile an opportunity had been spoiled. Nothing supports the expectation that American professors have slowed down in their effort to sell their services to the men of power who police the restless peasants throughout the world.

### **MANY POLICEMEN**

As the experience of these projects demonstrates, the United States government is very much interested in forging alliances between professors and policemen. The intent may be either to use the former as a respectable cover for the unpublicized and unpublicizable activities of the latter, as in the case of MSUG; or the intent may be (as in Camelot) to use professors as social scouts to identify the trouble spots where pressure need be applied, somewhat like Forward Air Controllers signal artillery crews where to lay their barrages. This working alliance between intellectuals and American foreign policy is always presented as a respectable package; the positions carry high financial rewards, opportunities for publication and advancement, and the prestige of working for the government. As the government gets to know the academic community better, the research designs it proposes will be more scientific, more intellectually challenging; consequently more of the top men in the field will be attracted to such projects. This is what has happened to a great extent already. A working alliance between a portion of the academic community and counterrevolutionary foreign policy is one of the entrenched features of the American ideological landscape.

The most fortunate aspect of this alliance is that in the form of projects like MSUG and Camelot, it does not work for very long. Once they are publicized, once it becomes known that behind the professor lurks the policeman, the projects lose the respectability essential to their operation. Once their sacred "objectivity" is put into question, the projects become worthless. It did not

take Vietnamese peasants very long to figure out that the MSUG researchers were too friendly with the local officials to be trusted, and as a result MSUG's understanding of the peasants has all the scientific merit of a white Southerner's understanding of Negroes, based on conversations with the colored maid. Project Camelot was even less fortunate. Once the news leaked out who was sponsoring the research, Latin American radicals and nationalists drove the researchers northward in a hail of verbal sticks and stones. Even the chances of getting information useful to the U.S. government under these conditions, much less of getting information of scientific value, becomes nil. For all practical purposes this amounts to the same thing, because the value of such research to the government is precisely in its "scientific" prestige. Once that prestige becomes publicly and widely tainted, the government might as well, and more cheaply, train members of the Special Forces to become social scientists in uniform. The training program is probably already underway.

Other consequences of the alliance between intellectuals and the policemen of the world are not so short-lived. For example, its effects on the international reputation of American social scientists are worth considering seriously. A time may come when an American professor, upon entering a gathering of intellectuals anywhere in the world, will find that conversation drops to a whisper. Invitations to congresses abroad, other than those organized by the State Department, may cease to arrive. Books may cease to be translated, other than those distributed by USIA. Contacts with the thinking of other minds may end altogether, intellectual cross-fertilization come to a halt. The alliance of professors with counter-revolution could well produce intellectual stagnation on a hitherto unprecedented scale, just as the alliance between professors and white supremacists has made an intellectual wasteland of the American South. Meanwhile, the world moves on; intellectuals in other countries make their peace with revolutions or work actively toward them, and the United States acquires the reputation of being a place so intellectually stale that no one would want to teach or study except for the money. If this prognosis seems premature or exaggerated, one should keep in mind Jean Paul Sartre's refusal to visit the U.S. last year.

To educate a generation of students in the spirit of this alliance is almost a criminal undertaking. But apart from the moral question involved, the result is a bad educational investment. The first to realize that their education has not prepared them to gain a realistic understanding of world events are the students. To paraphrase the poet, the best minds of a generation are howling

with confusion. More concretely, and more hopefully, the best minds of the generation will spend their time organizing teach-ins, Free Speech Movements, civil rights demonstrations, peace marches, and Free Universities. In defecting from the alliance between universities and the power that polices the world, and proclaiming their opposition to it, these students are incidentally doing their teachers an essential service. Every real protest movement on the campus lets fresh air into a stifling atmosphere, breaks down petrified stereotypes, and preserves the intellectual community from falling into the provincial idiocy where the interests of American foreign policy are leading it.

### **CAN SCIENCE BE SOCIAL?**

Meanwhile the possibility of a truly objective social science is in serious question. The "scientific method" itself is value-free, inert, but so is any other method, be it the method of driving a car or of typing. But if all the cars are driven on the same side of the street and all the typewritten words express the same thought, then the method is being used non-objectively. Social science, as a social system of practices and theories, is not now "objective." Even the very word "objective" has become so shadowy that a candid treatment of the topic compels one to enclose it in quotation marks, as if referring to hearsay evidence. When one hears a phrase like "value-neutral social science" one never knows whether the speaker is referring to an attempt to get at the truth of a matter regardless of whose feet are being stepped on, or whether he is defending the paltriness of his thoughts on the grounds that it is not his business to step on anyone's feet -- especially on the feet of those who pay for research. The coin of the realm has become so debased that one can no longer accept it at face value.

The kind of social science that allows a professor to pass over without comment an interview with a secret police chief whose latest victim lies brutalized in a corner (Part I, Feb. *Viet-Report*) -- this is not value-neutral social science. The most charitable thing that can be said about it is that it is value-neuter -- absolutely devoid of all social and human values, ready to adopt the values of whoever pays.

### **SOME RADICAL PROPOSALS**

In this situation it is senseless to raise the question of objectivity. Until a social basis has been found for the development of a body of research that does

not serve to perpetrate and strengthen exploitative relationships, all discussions of objectivity become ingenious tabulations. Probably an objective social science can never be achieved. In any case, it will only make sense to raise the question of objectivity *after* it has been demonstrated that social science substantially bases itself on the following three points:

*One: That social scientists do not participate in research sponsored by organizations that wield power over those who are being studied.* In a world where, for example, the government is in latent or actual conflict with so many people, both abroad and in the United States, the researcher's formal association with the government makes him subject to suspicion. Where that suspicion exists, the colored-maid syndrome arises, and the research easily turns into a confirmation of the researcher's prejudices. Despite the researcher's personal feelings of sympathy for the people he studies, despite his sincere intentions to treat their case fairly, the fact of his association with the power that controls his subjects biases the relationship. Whether the researcher works for the Saigon government or for the city welfare department, the fact that he is responsible to those powers means that the people he studies cannot reasonably or safely permit themselves to be objective. If the researcher wishes to be objective, he must first make it possible for the people he studies to be objective toward him. This means that he must dissociate himself from any individual or organization that wields power over the people he studies. A corollary of this point is that any attempt by the researcher to withhold or conceal the Identity of his sponsors amounts to dishonesty.

*Two: That social scientists regularly communicate their findings to those who are affected by them.* When those who are able to pay for research are individually and collectively the only ones to benefit from it, then social science is part of an exploitative arrangement. Research does not always yield knowledge, and knowledge does not always yield power, but research leads to power so often that powerful interests find the sponsorship of research a profitable investment. A social science which is truly neutral between conflicting values must go one step further than the present minimum obligation of publishing its results. It must publish its results in a language, in a medium, and at a price accessible to those who (individually or collectively) are affected by those results. For example, an article about poverty published in a scholarly journal will not reach the poor, nor will it do so if it is written in jargon, or if it appears in a book no poor person can afford to buy. In the attempt to establish communication, it may turn out that (for example) the poor find that most of

the research being done about them is wrong, wide of the mark, or meaningless. If this feeling arises, it is a sign that the research is not objective, and that it is not free of particular values. A body of research that is meaningful only to the rich is not objective. It may be technically sound, but it is not socially neutral.

Three: *That social science devote an equitable portion of its energies to the solution of "problems" as defined by those who cannot pay for research.* When the "problem" which the research is supposed to help solve is defined by men of power, then the research does not begin on an objective basis. A problem is a problem for someone; it has a subjective, particular referent, and the same is true of solutions. When all the problems to be researched are the problems faced by men of power, then researchers provide only men of power with solutions, and therefore lend themselves to an exploitative relationship. In the present state of social science the powerful command an entire industry of computers, mathematicians, statisticians, data analysts, and publicists to help them solve their problems, while the poor have to rely on the maxims of Horatio Alger memorized by an over-burdened, underpaid welfare worker. A fundamental demonstration of the possibility of an objective social science is whether it can identify and solve what the poor see as problems. For example, social science should allow itself no more latitude in interpreting what its task is when solving the problems of the poor than it allows itself in solving the problems of the rich. If a corporation thinks its sales problem results from a bad public image (rather than from an inferior product), researchers find ways of improving the image. If some body of poor people thinks that the landlord is charging too much rent, social scientists likewise should be able to find effective ways of getting the landlord to charge less rent. When management complains that workers waste too much time while on the job, social scientists may devise a way of changing the workers' attitudes so that they will work harder. Social science itself is not objective unless it can devote equal energy to helping workers devise ways of spending more time on the job relaxing and of doing less work for more pay. When the government of Vietnam hires social scientists to find out how to get the peasants to like the government, social scientists do their best. But social science is not truly value-free unless it also does its best to devise ways of solving the same problem from the peasants' point of view by getting rid of the government. Revolution is the acid test of neutrality. When social scientists as a body have demonstrated that they can help make revolutions as well as they have helped to prevent them, then and only then can the question of objectivity be raised in a meaningful way.

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## NOTES TO PART ONE

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- <sup>1</sup> Joseph Zasloff, *A Study of Administration in Binh Minh District*, MSUG, Saigon, October 1961 (mimeo), p. 25
- <sup>2</sup> Available from the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California
- <sup>3</sup> Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam, The Michigan State University Experience*, Prager Special Studies, 1965.
- <sup>4</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 1
- <sup>5</sup> Georges Chaffard, *L'Indochine – dix ans d'indépendance*, Calmann-Levy, Paris 1974, pp. 24, 27, 53.
- <sup>6</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 1
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*; also Scheer.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Scigliano & Fox, pp. 2, 75.
- <sup>11</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> See, for example, Wise & Ross, *The Invisible Government*, Random House, 1964, pp. 157-158
- <sup>13</sup> Chaffard, pp. 75, 82.
- <sup>14</sup> Scheer, quoted in *Viet Nam*, ed. Marvin Gettleman, Fawcett, 1965, p. 249.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Quoted in "Deny MSU Fronted for CIA in Vietnam," *The Detroit News*, Sunday, Nov. 28, 1965.
- <sup>17</sup> Scheer, p. 249.
- <sup>18</sup> *Final Report*, MSUG, Saigon, June 1962 (mimeo), p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup> *Final Report*, pp. 61, 62.
- <sup>20</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 40-41.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21
- <sup>23</sup> Scheer, p. 249
- <sup>24</sup> *The Detroit News*, *loc.cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> *Final Report*, p. 2, Scigliano & Fox, p. 5
- <sup>26</sup> Scigliano & Fox, pp. 6, 66
- <sup>27</sup> Scheer, p. 251; also *Final Report*, p. 61
- <sup>28</sup> *Final Report*, p. 48
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, my projections.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45
- <sup>32</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p.6
- <sup>33</sup> *Final Report*, p. 47
- <sup>34</sup> Scigliano & Fox, pp. 17, 23.
- <sup>35</sup> Scigliano & Fox, pp. 17, 19; *Final Report*, p. 48

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- <sup>36</sup> *Final Report*, 45-51. On the palace guard, Scigliano & Fox, p. 18
- <sup>37</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 15
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16
- <sup>40</sup> *Final Report*, p. 47
- <sup>41</sup> Scigliano & Fox, pp. 16, 21; *Final Report*, p. 47
- <sup>42</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 19
- <sup>43</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 16; *Final Report*, p. 66
- <sup>44</sup> *Final Report*, pp. 65-67
- <sup>45</sup> *The Detroit News*, *ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> Scigliano & Fox, p. 41
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> *Final Report*, pp. 65-67
- <sup>53</sup> See Philippe Devillers, "The Struggle for Unification," *China Quarterly*, January-March 1962.