

Lest we forget

Some things just can't be forgotten. Or ignored. There's one issue readers tired of reading about six or seven years ago. Editorial writers tired of writing about it. Students tired of demonstrating against it. In general, citizens tired of thinking about it. Nonetheless, it was a human, moral and political issue, and in spite of all the tiredness the issue always was alive as ever.

Now it's time the lack of concern, news coverage and protest end. The issue is Vietnam, and U.S. involvement has anything but ceased.

In a recent letter to ASUN Senate President Ann Henry (see Page 5), State Sen. Ernie Chambers wrote the following:

"Students pretended so much concern for the Vietnamese people who were dying from American bombs, bullets and napalm. Vietnamese people are still dying. But there is a conspicuous student silence. Why? Because they are no longer confronted by the draft; there is no longer any danger to their own hides. So they no longer have any moral indignation about the Vietnamese people who continue to die."

Chambers apparently is on the right track. Not even 150 persons showed up Thursday to hear what Don Luce, an internationally known expert, had to say about the United States' continuing involvement in Vietnam. Four years ago, the Nebraska Union Ballroom would have been packed.

Thursday's spotty showing is unfortunate. For a larger group, the picture of Vietnam, circa 1974, as drawn by Luce might have served as a springboard for a resurrection of nonviolent protest.

According to one publication, "Luce is to the South Vietnamese government what Ralph Nader is to General Motors." The agriculturalist-journalist outlined a number of reasons why American outrage at the U.S. government's role in South Vietnam should be renewed. Among them:

-Uncle Sam foots the bill for 25,042 barrels of oil a day for South Vietnamese military purposes. Each barrel holds 42 gallons, which amounts to 365 million gallons of oil a year.

-A portion of U.S. money still being tunneled into Vietnam helps to build such military devices as "tiger cages," 5 x 5 x 10 ft. iron bar-covered craters that house as many as five persons for years at a time. If the prisoners—most of whom are political—survive their tiger cage tenure, they often are crippled or paralyzed.

-Smith & Wesson of Springfield, Mass., manufactures the shackles used to chain political prisoners in South Vietnamese jails.

-The Paris Peace Agreement stipulated that the U.S. would not dispatch military observers to Vietnam. But several sources report that there are at least 6,000 "advisers" in Vietnam, many working directly for the Pentagon. "This sends us right back to 1954-55," Luce said.

-South Vietnamese law says a person can be arrested and incarcerated without a trial for as long as two years. The period without trial is renewable.

-The peace agreement called for the release of all prisoners. U.S. prisoners were released; an estimated 200,000 persons confined in South Vietnamese jails for political reasons were not. "A lack of concern and the continued flow of U.S. money is why the Thieu government can still keep them in jail," Luce said. About 1,200 of the political prisoners remain in tiger cages.

Americans seem sadly myopic when they talk or write about Vietnam. Too many focus on statistics and casualty counts rather than the impact the war had on the citizens. "What would Lincolinites do if the entire city was bombed by another country and only one building was left standing?" Luce asked.

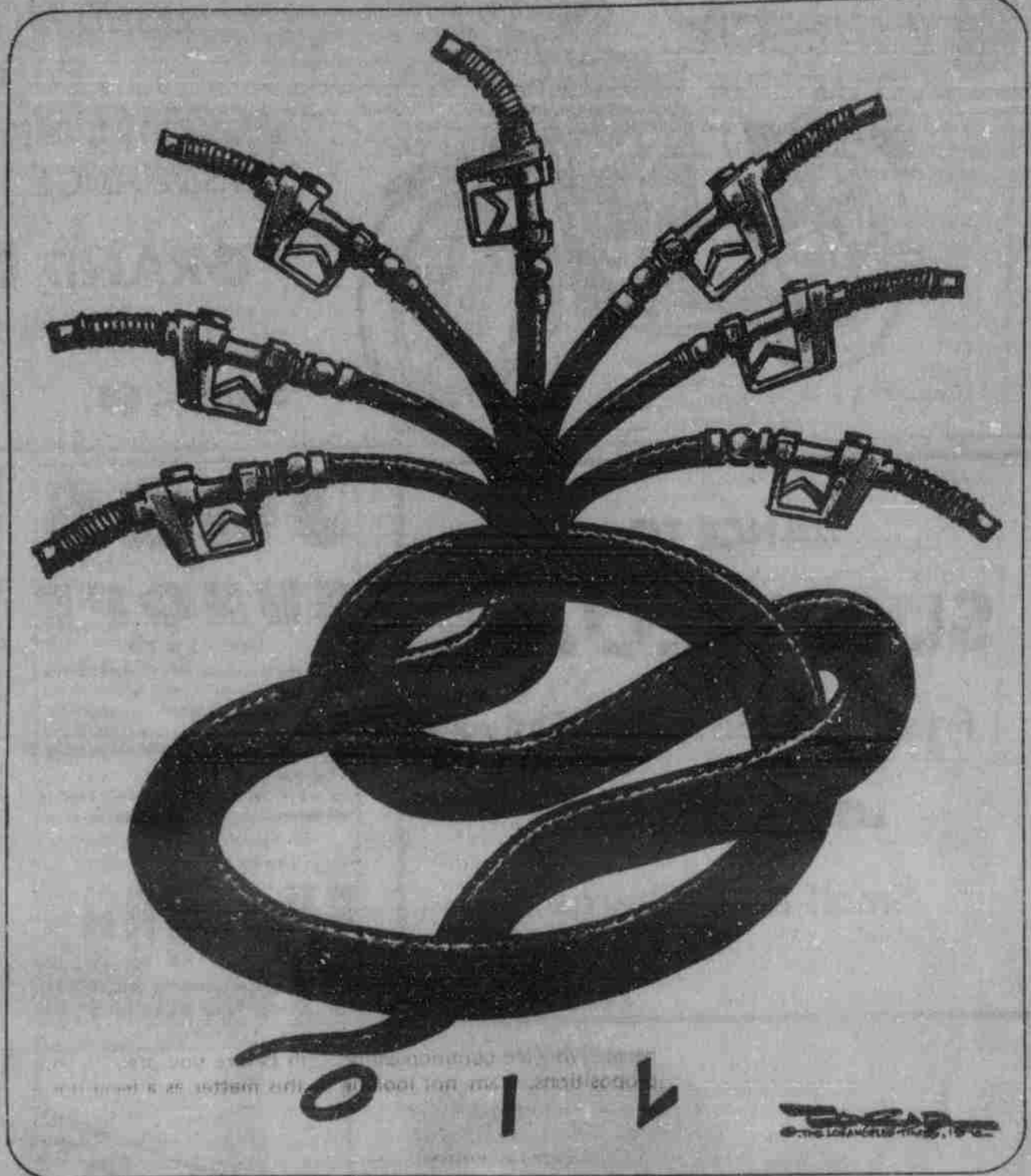
Part of the reason the war goes on is because newspapers have quit reporting on it and people have quit worrying about it, according to Luce. He urged the small crowd to take action, even if it only involved writing a congressman. "If we spoke out about these prisoners in South Vietnam we could get them released. International concern kept Solzhenitsyn out of jail."

Luce said Americans can display a renewed concern by championing beleaguered Vietnamese individuals. One such person is Nguyen Long, a lawyer now imprisoned for his political statements. He is 65.

Luce suggested that one way Long's plight could be publicized is by awarding him an honorary degree. This is something UNL should look into. For once, this University could distinguish itself in something besides athletics.

The war in Vietnam has touched almost every American to some extent. It's deplorable that so many have forgotten so soon.

Mary Voboril



Ah, yes—The Good Old Days

The doddering members of The National Assoc. for the Perpetuation of Nostalgia held their annual meeting last week to fondly recall in quavering voices how lovely the world has been — "back in The Good Old Days."

"Remember how it was, friends?" President Horner T. Pettibone said gently in opening the meeting. "Everyone was at peace. No American boys were being sent to die in little Asian countries. Why, there wasn't even a war in the Middle East — back in The Good Old Days."

"And prosperity," said an aging banker, rising to his feet with the aid of a silver headed cane. "Unemployment was down, everybody had been making killings in the stock market and nobody was worried about a worldwide Depression — not in The Good Old Days."

"Why you didn't think nothing of getting in your big old car and going for a nice Sunday drive," said an old working man wistfully. "Heck, you could even drive clean across the country if you wanted. Those sure were The Good Old Days."

"Course, we used to complain about prices even then," said his wife, frowning. "Guess we always have. But you didn't have to lay out half a week's paycheck for a pound of hamburger back in The Good Old Days."

"And you could go to a restaurant without spending a fortune," said a former businessman. "A 6-course Italian dinner with a bottle of wine at some little place... Well, I forget what it cost. But we used to eat out once a week regularly in The Good Old Days."

"I think people were nicer then," said an elderly spinster sweetly. "You didn't see them people fighting in lines at service stations or over the last roll of paper towels in the supermarket. Maybe it's the chill and the dark. Everything was so much warmer and brighter — back in The Good Old Days."

"It's these shortages," said the working man's wife. "They make people testy. We didn't have shortages of anything in The Good Old Days."

"Perhaps it's fear, too," said the spinster, shuddering. "We didn't have these radical secret armies murdering and kidnaping innocent people in The Good Old Days."

"Oh, they were just happier times," said a retired schoolteacher nostalgically. "Remember the wonderful shows on Broadway then? Irene and No, No, Nanette? Ruby Keeler and Marlene Dietrich? Jack Benny and Duke Ellington? They were younger in The Good Old Days."

"And look at this Exorcist thing!" cried the banker, pounding the floor with his cane. "No wonder the country's going to hell in a handbasket. Remember Last Horizon? Why can't they make the same kind of good, wholesome movies they made in The Good Old Days?"

"I believe these drastic changes are due primarily to inflation and Watergate," said a Prof. Emeritus thoughtfully. "Most of us believed in our President then. We had faith in our government, faith in America, faith in the future. That is why they were, in the final analysis, The Good Old Days."

arthur hoppe innocent bystander

The meeting broke up with a rendition of that old favorite, "God Bless America." There wasn't a dry eye in the house.

On his way out, Pettibone was stopped by a young reporter, who asked, "Excuse me, sir, but just when were The Good Old Days?"

"Why, precisely 12 months ago today," said Pettibone. "You see we meet once each year to recall how much better things were the year before."

"Then in 1975," said the reporter, "you'll look back nostalgically on 1974 and..."

"Oh, yes, I can't wait for our next annual meeting," said Pettibone, rubbing his hands. "It should be a real pip-er-oo!"

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