

## Answers to questions re the anti-Vietnam War Movement

1. I always felt deeply the injustices of the world and the more I looked at the horrors etc of the world, the more I wanted to change the whole damn thing. It didn't seem to make any sense (the older I got) to simply try and stop this and that. I figured that there must be a root cause for all this shit happening; I also came across a lot of people who felt the same way I did at Uni (in USA where I lived for two years and at Monash Uni). Some of the people I spoke to were Maoists. I was impressed by their devotion and unselfish lives. At the time I was a pacifist but the Viet War changed the way I felt about that philosophy (something I have returned to - in some ways). If you were a pacifist in Vietnam and you turned the other cheek, it was very likely you'd get your head blown off. I thought, 'easy for me to be a pacifist in Australia' - thus I slowly but surely became a revolutionary.

Now the idea of being a revolutionary in Australia these days is seen as being slightly crazy (maybe we were) but when I looked at the Parliamentary system in Australia, all I could see was a thin veneer of democracy. The reality was that we lived in a capitalist system where it didn't seem to matter who you voted for, the inequalities, poverty and the rule of rich people still operated. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more our 'democracy' (and of course, when you look at countries like Indonesia you realise even what we have is a whole lot better than it could be) seemed to cover up what was actually going on.

Maoism seemed to be the only fair dinkum option. Organise against the Viet War and the system that caused it (and many other atrocities)
2. Opposed the war because it was in actual fact an invasion of Vietnam by the USA. I presume you all know about the Geneva Accords and the failure of USA and its corrupt allies in south Vietnam to honour an agreement to hold an election in 1956. The US etc stated that if the election was held then the most of the population of Vietnam would vote for Ho Chi Minh and the communists. (And why wouldn't they - the communist led forces had fought the Japanese in WW2, the French Colonialists (who had controlled Vietnam for years-pillaging their country, taking the natural resources, used the Viet people as cannon fodder in French wars etc. etc) and now all they wanted was to be the masters of their own country, and here was America supporting

a tiny minority in the south not because they had any great notions of decency but partly because they wanted to confront world communism (whatever that was supposed to mean!) and have direct control through puppet govts of countries surrounding China. The war was also excellent business for the US capitalist economy. Zillions were made by Westinghouse, IBM, Dow Chemicals, General Motors (household words, even today).

Conscription for this kind of war? You must be joking. And in any case, the main reason we sent troops was to curry favour with our 'friend' the USA. The US poured heaps of money into Australia - but not because they wanted to help us. We provided a place for profit and military bases for them that not even our PM could go onto without the permission of the US Govt (some of these - Pine Gap - still exist today.)

3. The Monash Labor Club was the most active, dynamic political organisation in Australian student movement. We sent money to the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) for medical supplies and to generally help with their efforts fighting the US. The organisation was led by democrats, trade unionists, lawyers, communists, monks etc and was specifically an organisation based in southern Vietnam. We organised demos on July 4<sup>th</sup> attacking the US Consulate, helped to organise and lead the Moratoriums, sent speakers into the community, handed out leaflets in shopping centres, helped smuggle draft resisters out of the country, kept them in safe houses, occupied campus offices of multinational corporations making billions out of the war, got arrested, got bashed by coppers, had our lives threatened, guns pointed at us and told to run etc etc. Of course, there were many others that did this stuff too, but we were in the thick of it. We did the big and the little things. For many of us it consumed our lives for at least a decade.
4. Liberals wre a pack of lying bastards. Labor wasn't much better. In fact, many ALP pollies took years to realise the unjust nature of the war and did very little to stop the thing. Some, like Jim Cairns were brave and wonderful. Whitlam (as much as I might like some of the things he did) basically only came out against the war completely when he knew the tide against the war had turned.

The public had been lied to. They weren't stupid. They had to be slowly won over through our militant actions, speaking at meetings, leafletting, door-knocking etc etc etc.

We (maoists, MULC etc) never saw the conscripts as the enemy. Most of them came from unskilled jobs and rural areas (check the lists if you don't believe me) and had no excuse to evade the draft. Some conscripts actually agitated against the war whilst in the army. So too with regular Army, although they were slightly different case. Nevertheless, it is a constant of armies that the people who do the fighting always come from the classes at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. (bloody decent people who life has dealt a crappy hand).

I know some Vets and it's interesting to note that very rarely do they blame people like me for their horror they might be living through now. WE didn't send them there and it also people like us who have often supported these people (agent orange, psych disorders). We should also remember that not one cent of reparation has been paid to Vietnam by USA. Also. Remember that all the stuff that the Vets suffer these days is suffered by the Viet people to this day (agent orange still produces thousands of miscarriages and deformed babies in Vietnam. )

5. At the time many hated us. Our phones were tapped; we were picked up and followed by cops and others; people saw us as disloyal, unpatriotic etc. But like the foolish old man who removed the mountain, by keeping at it and working out lots of creative ways to beat the bastards, we went from small demos of 50 - 100 people in 1967 to 110,000 (Melbourne) in 1970. Proof that we should never be overawed by the opposition we face (look at Fretilin in East Timor today)
6. Far too difficult a question for short answers. But, yes. I am proud of what we did. Sure we made heaps of mistakes and sometimes were too zealous and self-righteous. But most of the tactics and actions we employed turned out to be right. My views have changed in that I suspect that often when one tyrant is overthrown, another bastard pops up in his/hers place. But, that's easy for me to say - in some countries (E Timor) there doesn't seem to be any other option but to take up the gun.  
Many of the people I know from that era don't feel ashamed or pathetic. It taught us lots about the world we live in and how things

can be changed. It affected some of our lives dramatically: difficult to find a job for years; nervous breakdowns; marriage bust-ups; inability to settle down; some of us couldn't find work; prison terms; etc etc.

But I wouldn't have missed it for anything! In the midst of the mayhem there were wonderful times of camaraderie, silliness, creativity, hard work, arguments, bravery, fear, enlightenment, sex, romance and rock 'n roll.

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