

... to be seen by the belligerents on the ground with no chance of their doing so peaceably.

The unreality of those agreements, without modern parallel in their cruel cynicism, is illustrated by, for example, Article 11 which said:

"Immediately after the ceasefire, the two South Vietnamese parties will: achieve national reconciliation and concord, end hatred and enmity, prohibit all acts of reprisal and discrimination against individuals or organisations that have collaborated with one side or the other; ensure the democratic liberties of the people; personal freedom, freedom of speech

... American troops without setting the political future of South Vietnam, no longer persisting with its demand that Thieu must go.

From this all else flowed. Kissinger planned to fly secretly to Hanoi and appear theatrically there to initial the "peace" on October 31, a few days before the US Presidential election. When that fell through, for reasons we shall come to, Kissinger still felt able to make his famous "peace is at hand" announcement from the White House on October 26. The American concession in Moscow on April 20 and the North Vietnamese concession in Paris on October 8 remained the essential elements of

... October 1972 proposals on which he was never adequately, if at all, consulted. Failure to consult allies seems to be a Kissinger hallmark. Had Kissinger been more open and forceful with Thieu in August 1972, much grief and tragedy might have been avoided."

Since Szul wrote those words last May still far greater grief and tragedy has resulted from Henry Kissinger's deceptions until now we are witnessing its final agonies and horrors each night on our television screens. For it is barely to be doubted that part of the price for Thieu's acquiescence in the American "peace with honour" were secret assurances given to

... to be deluged. But he did not deserve to be duped. Nor did the American people. Nor did thousands upon thousands Vietnamese deserve to lose their lives to save the American face. There would have been more honour, and more credibility too, in the admission that 50,000 Americans had died bravely in vain.

We cannot say whether President Nixon and Dr Kissinger intended to carry out whatever secret promises were made or whether they were designed simply

... to be duped. Nor did the American people. Nor did thousands upon thousands Vietnamese deserve to lose their lives to save the American face. There would have been more honour, and more credibility too, in the admission that 50,000 Americans had died bravely in vain.

What we are now witnessing is the fore-ordained outcome of Nixon's fraudulent "peace with honour." The meaning of that "peace with honour," now revealed, strips Henry Kissinger of his own honour. The interval has been indecent. Let him take home his Nobel Prize. Let him depart.

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Martin Woollacott in Saigon on the men who will run the Communist-ruled areas of South Vietnam

When I last saw Pham Van Luong he was a major in the South Vietnamese army medical corps and the chief surgeon at Da Nang military hospital. Now he is the mayor of Da Nang.

His appointment was announced on the PRG radio a few days after that city fell to Communist troops and his story illustrates that fact that, far from installing a rigid structure of control, the Communists are governing their newly acquired territories with the help of men who are certainly not party members and whose view may diverge very much from their own.

Of course Pham Van Luong may have been what is called a "sleeper," a party member planted long ago for just such an occasion. But his friends in Saigon do not think so. One, another doctor, said that Luong had been "an idealist from his student days, but never a Communist."

As a student, Luong demonstrated against Diem, then went into the army, joining the elite airborne division. Later he went to medical school and returned to the army as a military doctor. But his great claim to fame was that in December, 1970, he appeared on the steps of the National Assembly in Saigon carrying two primed grenades, and threatening to blow himself up as a protest against Government corruption. He was dissuaded, arrested, and imprisoned briefly.

He might well have stayed in jail longer had he not been a doctor, the scarcest profession of all in Vietnam, and an army surgeon as well

Light hand on the reins of power

He was returned to duty and became chief surgeon at Da Nang.

Luong, a youthful-looking 40-year-old with his hair clipped in the regulation army crewcut, told us the story of his protest against corruption in his office at the hospital during a visit in August last year.

He had been driven to it, he explained, not just by the spectacle of corruption all around, but by a very personal matter, the death of a friend and colleague. The friend had been on the staff of the Government Hospital in Nha Trang and had discovered corruption there to do with the diversion of hospital funds and the illegal sale of drugs. Trying to pursue the matter, Luong believed, his friend offended some corrupt local administrator who thereupon had him murdered.

But Luong answered our questions on the affair reluctantly. He talked mainly about the casualties at this hospital, the number of which were swelling then because of fierce fighting south-west of Da Nang. As he looked around the wards he expressed no opinion about the war but he did say: "As for us we are short of everything, except wounded."

When Radio Da Nang came briefly on the air after the fall of the city and before the Government started jamming it, the announcer was describing what sounded like a

coalition Administration. Public buildings, he said, were flying three flags. The centre flag, the largest, was that of the National Force of Reconciliation and Concord, a movement set up last year by the An Quang militant Buddhist sect. An Quang's home area is central Vietnam and the cities of Hue and Da Nang. The An Quang flag was flanked by a small PRG flag on one side and by a small South Vietnamese flag on the other. It is sketchy enough evidence to go on, but it seems that what is being aimed at is a tripartite Administration - with empty seats for Saigon, perhaps - in line with the Paris peace agreement as the Communists see it.

The Communists, with their taste for repetitive slogans, have already made a new one famous - the "three samies" - the "three samies" are directed at Saigon-appointed officials in the newly occupied areas, and they advise them to stay in the same place, in the same job, and at the same salary. Sometimes, it is reported, the PRG broadcasts rather oddly add that there can be no question of a rise at the present moment.

Where officials have had to be replaced on the coastal lowlands the Communists have put in men like Luong, and it is said that quite a few of the names of new administrators are of men who were members of

the Vietnamese Kuomintang, the VNQDD, once the Communist Party's most bitter rival for power in Vietnam.

In the Central Highlands the story is different. There, most new officials appear to be members of the Communist splinter of FULRO. This movement began in the early sixties when American-trained Montagnard soldiers rebelled in the town of Ban Me Thuot. The acronym means "Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Minorities," and its aim is the end of Vietnamese exploitation and settlement of the Montagnard homelands in the central highlands.

FULRO was not a Communist movement, and was indeed supported for a while by Lon Nol of Cambodia, in the days before Sihanouk's downfall. But under the pressure of the war it split in various ways, one segment rallying to Saigon another coming under Communist control. But Westerners, mainly missionaries, who have lived in the Central Highlands say that the present FULRO is still not a Communist movement but primarily a minorities really do allow FULRO to run the Highlands, the missionaries say, then the Montagnese will get a better deal than they have had for a long time.

That, obviously, is a question, and

one has to ask, also, how much real power the non-Communists appointed by the PRG have now and how long they are likely to last. On the other hand if we take what has happened for the moment at face value, it is better than many people expected. There has been no sign of an immediate bloodbath like that in Hue in 1968, although there have been stories of atrocities and executions.

In Hue, the Communists are said to have shot some national policemen. In Ban Me Thuot an elderly priest died - some say he was shot, some claim he was executed. There can be no proof either way, but it is probably safe to say that if there has been large scale killing, the truth would now be out. That is no guarantee for the future.

The Communists have claimed in broadcasts that they intend to make no major economic changes. But one aspect of life in South Vietnam has certainly already changed - the ubiquitous Honda has gone, some say simply because of shortage of petrol, others that the Communists have sequestered the machines. One late refugee from Da Nang said that the city was quieter than he had ever known it when he managed to get out.

That is one change that everybody can agree and welcome. As to the rest, the evidence is so minimal that interpretation is a matter of choice. But one thing to be watched carefully is the fate of men like Luong, whom the Communists must in the end find as difficult to handle as did the South Vietnamese Government.