Review

Vietnam across the decades

Saturday 23 August 2008, by LE BLANC Paul (Date first published: 20 August 2008).

*** Joe Allen. *Vietnam: The (Last) War the U.S. Lost*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2008. 253 pages, including index. $14.00.**

*** Jonathan Neale. *A People's History of the Vietnam War*. New York: The New Press, 2004. 336 pages, including index. $ 15.95.**

Contents

These are important books. They need to be read by many people.

The U.S. war in Vietnam has been so central to my life that it is always jarring to find so many – a growing number, it seems – who were not even born before its conclusion in 1975. Unlike many of my contemporaries, I learned about the developing U.S. involvement in that small Asian country through the early 1960s when, as a high school student, I read such publications as the left-liberal *Progressive* and the more radical *National Guardian* in my home. But like many of my contemporaries, after the U.S. escalation of that war in early 1965 and into the 1970s, I became part of a massive anti-war movement – we threw so much of our lives into that movement – to help bring the war to an end. And there were many lessons that were learned.

Lived Experience

The lessons that some of us learned – so that we could share the information with others in our country, in order to build opposition to the war – included information on how and why the U.S. got involved in this Southeast Asian country, even as it was breaking free from French colonialism in the wake of World War II. The anti-colonial movement, led by Vietnamese Communists, launched the final push for independence just as the Cold War confrontation was unfolding between the U.S.-led "free world" coalition on the one side and the Communist Bloc led by the Soviet Union on the other. In order to fight against the spread of Communism, the U.S. government supported the French colonial regime (funding 80 percent of the French war effort), and when France was defeated, the U.S. government backed a series of brutal and hated dictatorships in the artificially-created country of South Vietnam, in order to prevent the popular Vietnamese Communists from taking control of the whole country.

The 1954 Geneva Peace Agreements had temporarily divided Vietnam into northern and southern zones, to be reunified by internationally-supervised elections in 1956. Because it was generally

understood that the Communists would have overwhelmingly won overwhelmingly, so the U.S.-created regime in the South blocked the elections. This flowed from a "bi-partisan" foreign policy crafted and supported by liberals, moderates and conservatives in both the Democratic and Republican parties. Whether the President was Truman or Eisenhower or Kennedy or Johnson or Nixon, the goal was U.S. "victory" in Vietnam.

We learned that the reason U.S. leaders were refusing to let the Vietnamese decide the fate of their own country was not because they wanted "freedom" for the Vietnamese people – that was an increasingly obvious lie. Rather, they wanted to protect "free enterprise" (that is, the access of U.S.-based multinational corporations to markets, raw materials, and investment opportunities) that seemed to be threatened by the spread of anti-capitalist revolutions in the 1950s and 1960s. The U.S. capitalist economy – driven by the dynamics of capital accumulation analyzed by Rosa Luxemburg and V. I. Lenin many years before (and by U.S. historian William Appleman Williams in his 1959 classic *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*) – could not survive without the economic expansionism that its enemies dubbed "imperialism." This is why Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara, in his 1966 call for global liberation, called for "two, three, many Vietnams!"

Vietnam itself was hardly essential to U.S. economic interests, but if indigenous revolutionaries could close the door to U.S. business exploitation in this little country, their bad example would inspire others to do the same throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This was the basis of the "domino theory" articulated by U.S. policy-makers.

With the U.S. escalation of the war in 1965, many of us became keenly aware of the murderous nature of the war. Torture and total war, technologically sophisticated anti-personnel devices, and weapons of mass destruction were unleashed on civilian populations (men, women, and so many, many children) not by "wicked Communists" but by our own forces. U.S. soldiers were sent into a living hell that destroyed over 58,000 of them outright, with terrible and often lethal damage done to many more – but the death toll for the Vietnamese mounted to one or even two million. Growing numbers of us were horrified, and we did all that we could to stop it.

For me there was a special poignancy.

Although a college student, I never asked for a "student deferment" from the military draft, because this was unavailable to working-class kids unable to go to college, and that seemed unfair to me. But I was a conscientious objector and, when drafted, ended up serving with a Quaker organization, the American Friends Service Committee. And I did lots of draft counseling, counseling probably hundreds of young men (women were not conscripted back then) about their rights and obligations under the Selective Service Act – doing all that I could to help as many as I could from going into the military and being sent to Vietnam.

After the war had ended, I worked as a caseworker for the American Red Cross, counseling Vietnam war veterans, back from hell, some of them heroes, all of them victims. They had gotten dishonorable, undesirable or bad conduct discharges, and were appealing for upgrades so that they – working-class guys facing difficult times – would be entitled to much-needed veterans benefits. As I helped them write up their cases, I heard many of the same kinds of things. Speaking of the Vietnamese, man after man after man told me: "They didn't want us over there." Sometimes it was impossible to tell friend from foe. Only one said something like: "I enjoyed killing those gooks." A number of them had done some killing – there was extremely fierce fighting that I heard about – but such information was shared without exultation or pride. Generally it was recounted as something required to save the lives of one's buddies and one's self. Some were angry over what they had been part of. Some were haunted.

A black veteran described the determination of himself and many others, brought back to the U.S. just before the urban riots generated by the killing of Martin Luther King, Jr., not to allow themselves to be used against African-American communities in the way that they had been used against Vietnamese communities. (Such insubordination had resulted in this decorated veteran's receipt of a dishonorable discharge.) Another, newly thrown into the conflict, with a friend killed a couple of days before, and frightened while on guard duty, had inadvertently blown away a number of small children hiding in the bushes. He threw down his weapon and refused to enter into any more combat situations, was sent to the rear to recover but refused to "recover" (instead he got hooked on heroin), and was dishonorably discharged. There were many different stories with common elements.

Comparing Books

Joe Allen's just-published *Vietnam* and Jonathan Neale's somewhat earlier *A People's History of the Vietnam War* capture much of what I remember from those years. They gather much information in coherent and relatively succinct accounts. They stirred not only memories but also emotions – especially the sense of indignation and outrage that I felt so often from 1965 to 1975 when confronting the immense atrocity of the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

It is clear and well-documented in each account that the majority of the Vietnamese people were opposed to the artificial division of a Communist North Vietnam and an anti-Communist South Vietnam imposed by U.S. policy-makers, and that a majority were far, far more inclined to support Communist-led liberation forces than the corrupt tyrants backed by the United States. Without increasingly massive U.S. intervention, the South Vietnamese regime would have been swept aside by popular insurgencies, and U.S. counter-insurgency policies – Operation Phoenix, strategic hamlets, free-fire zones, etc. – reflected an understanding of these realities. The thoroughgoing violation of Vietnamese self-determination could only be accomplished, Neale and Allen show us (with ample documentation), through the degradation, injury, maiming, and slaughter of innocents on an immense scale.

Both volumes have a very definite point of view, as most books do, though few authors are as honest about this as are Allen and Neale. Actually, the authors' fundamental standpoint is the same – revolutionary socialist (Neale even offers a nicely-done one-page summary of Marxism) and against Stalinism, the bureaucratic dictatorship that defeated workers' democracy in the Communist movement. They both adhere to the particular theory of "state-capitalism," the notion that Stalin's orientation created not socialism (rule by the people over the economy) but simply a state-run version of capitalism. Neale makes more of this than Allen. Consider his description of venerable Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh: "Almost everyone who ever met Ho agreed that he was a nice man – humble, gentle, and kind." Neale continues:

His project was to build a state capitalist regime in Vietnam like Stalin's Russia. Ho wanted a proud and independent state with modern industry. The Communists would rule, and the workers and peasants would work, and be arrested if they talked back. Ho wanted, in short, what the Vietnamese now have.

While it is not likely that Ho and his comrades would have described their goals in this way, Neale's description does capture the authoritarian element that was surely present in even this seemingly most benevolent of Stalin-oriented Communists. In later pages, he further harps on (and on) "state-capitalist" analysis, although not always persuasively (characterizing the Communist Bloc nations as threatening to the U.S. because they were "competing capitalist powers"). Neale keeps a much

sharper focus on the role of the Vietnamese Communist Party in the liberation struggle than does Allen – sometimes to score an ideological point. He posits a three-sided struggle in Vietnam: the "state capitalist" Communist leaders, the Vietnam liberation fighters (including rank-and-file Communists), and the forces of U.S. imperialism. Allen seems more inclined to allow the facts to speak with less ideological encumbrance.

Both fact-filled volumes merit second editions – in part to clear up relatively minor errors. At one point, for example, Allen calls the U.S. Secretary of Defense William – not Robert – McNamara. Those who were members of a U.S. group of that period, the Young Socialist Alliance, may be annoyed by Allen's reference to "the Young Socialists of America." Neale describes Students for a Democratic Society, the organizer of the first U.S. major anti-war march, in 1965, as having 100,000 members – but its actual size in that year was probably 5000 or less. More seriously, and oddly, he insists that Vietnam was "not a Buddhist country," pointing to a million Catholics and "many more Marxist atheists" – although it is commonly acknowledged that the population was, in fact, more than 70 percent Buddhist. The errors don't get in the way of a basically accurate account – although Neale's myopia may have caused him to explain the 1963 overthrow of South Vietnamese dictator Ngo Dinh Diem (by his U.S.-backed generals, with CIA connivance) as being due to his desire to negotiate with the North Vietnamese. Allen more convincingly attributes the coup to a perceived need by U.S. policy-makers and South Vietnamese generals to dispense with an inflexibly Catholic Diem, who was repressing and antagonizing the Buddhist majority.

The heroism of Vietnamese liberation fighters comes through in both accounts. Allen cites what some of them told a U.S. teacher in Vietnam: "We must fight the Americans who have taken away our sovereignty. We must fight them because their presence is destroying our native land, physically and culturally and morally. To fight now is the only way to prove our love for our country, for our Vietnamese people." It is estimated that 75 percent of the South Vietnamese villagers supported such liberation fighters, while 20 percent sought to remain neutral, and 5 percent supported the U.S.-backed Saigon regime. Neale quotes U.S. soldiers who saw their enemies as "steadfast" and "amazing." A U.S. platoon leader marveled that these Vietnamese fighters "were taking on the best army in the world. They received their training from local cadre. We respected them from day one. … They did an awful lot with awful little." They were female as well as male, many were teenagers, some were younger.

A striking difference in interpretation, comes through in the way each author deals with the Tet Offensive of 1968. U.S. policy-makers had been assuring all who would listen that U.S. policies were effective, that the North Vietnamese Communists and their partisans in the South – the Communist-led National Liberation Front (NLF, dubbed "Viet Cong" by the U.S. forces) – were losing, that it was possible to see "the light at the end of the tunnel." But during the Vietnamese New Year (Tet), January 31, there was a well-coordinated and ferocious assault on 34 out of 44 provincial capitals in South Vietnam, on 64 district capitals, and on numerous military installations. It was obvious that massive popular support was enjoyed by the NLF and North Vietnamese forces, which captured Hue and other cities, almost taking the capital city of Saigon as well. Only U.S. firepower ("the most hysterical use of American firepower ever seen," according to one reporter) and massive air strikes – inflicting huge casualties especially on the NLF and its civilian supporters in more than one case "destroying the city in order to save the city" – prevented a total U.S. defeat.

According to Neale, "Tet was a terrible defeat for the Viet Cong," but it seems to me that Allen is far more on-target. While noting that Tet was "extremely costly for the nationalist forces, especially for the NLF," Allen writes: "Tet was the turning point in the American war in Vietnam. It had a dramatic effect on domestic U.S. politics. From Tet on, the question was no longer when would the United States win the war, but how quickly could the United States get out of Vietnam." Tet Offensive took a terrible toll on the liberation forces – but it was a blow from which U.S. war-makers could not

recover.

Each book has a distinctive style. Allen's volume provides a chronological account written with journalistic clarity. Neale, a novelist and playwright, makes ample use of simple (but cumulatively eloquent) declarative sentences reminiscent of Hemingway. His first six chapters, by far the best, are organized topically: 1) The Vietnamese; 2) Why America Intervened; 3) Firepower; 4) Guerrillas; 5) Protestors; 6) The GIs' Revolt. His last two chapters look at what happened afterwards, first (depressingly) in Vietnam and Cambodia, followed by the long and overly ambitious "America and the World After the War," which sets the stage for a future socialist revolution. By contrast, Allen's six-page conclusion, "The Legacy of Vietnam," is quite modest – and accomplishes more by suggesting three "lessons of the Vietnam war":

1. U.S. imperialism can be defeated.

2. Millions of Americans previously paralyzed by anticommunism and supportive of U.S. foreign policy could quickly be radicalized and mobilized against that foreign policy.

3. An anti-war movement in the U.S. proved capable of transforming U.S. politics, inspiring people in other countries to oppose U.S. imperialism, and helping to create opposition within the U.S. military itself.

These points are consistent with Neale's analysis, who tells us: "Three movements had defeated the American ruling class – the American peace movement, the GI's revolt, and the peasant guerrillas." Allen's formulation, less simply put, may capture the reality better. "In the end it was these three elements that combined to defeat the United States in Vietnam: a strong national resistance movement in Vietnam; the development of a mass antiwar movement at home; and the almost complete breakdown of the fighting capacity of the American soldier as a result of the experience of combat combined with GI rebellion."

It seems to me, however, that while these three elements were decisive components in the equation, there were other factors as well – which might be summarized as "the dynamics of global politics." This includes the complex and inconsistent but not insignificant roles of the Soviet Union and China, but also pressures from certain U.S. "free world" allies as well as from neutralist nations. And – consistent with Che Guevara's revolutionary battle-cry – it includes actual and potential insurgencies in other parts of the globe.

The Class Dimension

A great strength of both Neale and Allen is that they give serious attention to the class dimension of the war – particularly to the question of how the working class fits into the equation. Of the two, Neale strikes me as being more thorough and consistent on this – Howard Zinn lauds the "bold class-conscious approach" in *A People's History of the Vietnam War*, and Jerry Lembcke rightly notes that it book "locates both the logic of the war and the resistance to it in the dynamics of class relations internal to the United States and Vietnam." Some of the book's most insightful and eloquent passages dramatically trace class differences and tensions – within the South Vietnam but also within Vietnamese liberation forces, and especially within the United States and among U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Joe Allen is also concerned, in his examination of U.S. realities and of dynamics within the U.S. military, to explore class forces. In fact, he has an entire chapter devoted to "The Working Class and the War," in which he takes on the myth that the working-class was more reactionary and more pro-

war than other sectors of the U.S. population. It can be demonstrated – and both authors demonstrate and document – that the opposite was the case. Blue-collar occupations, lower incomes, lower educational levels correlate in opinion surveys with higher rejection of the war and support for a "bring the troops home" orientation. This ultimately translated into the development of resistance to the war effort within the U.S. military among the overwhelmingly working-class troops. Both books cite the 1971 study by a Marine Corps historian, Col. Robert Heinl:

The morale, discipline and battle-worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.

By every conceivable indicator, our Army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden and dispirited where not near mutinous. …

All the foregoing facts – and many more indicators of the worst kind of military trouble – point to widespread conditions among American forces in Vietnam that have only been exceeded in this century by the French Army's Nivelle Mutinies and the collapse of the Tsarist armies in 1916 and 1917.

Both Neale and Allen highlight the class dynamics in this reality, and also emphasize the point that the mass anti-war movement helped to create the context and the consciousness in which this development could take place. Involvement of GIs in explicit anti-war protests, and the persistent organizing efforts of many civilian anti-war activists to reach out to, involve, and support those in the military is well-documented in each book. Significant attention is given the substantial Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the powerful Winter Solider Investigations organized by anti-war GIs. Allen and especially Neale sharply challenge the widely-propagated imagery (fostered by conservative and pro-war elements) of anti-war protestors attacking and spitting on returning soldiers. More typical of the attitudes of those in the anti-war movement were slogans on huge banners at anti-war marches: "Support Our Troops – Bring Them Home Now!"

In a search for class differences among anti-war forces, however, Allen badly slips by contrasting the working-class GI protestors with what he terms "middle-class" anti-war protestors. The term "middle class" is notoriously vague and slippery – in some contexts it is seen as the non-aristocratic "bourgeoisie" (that is, the capitalist class), while working-class people in the U.S., equating it as being a middle-income category, neither rich nor poor, often self-identify as middle-class. Allen clarifies his own meaning in this unfortunate passage about the alleged lack of working-class support for the anti-war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s: "After all, the bulk of antiwar activists and demonstrators were still primarily drawn from the middle class and still evaded military service even after the abolition of college deferments. They were the children of the bosses and supervisors, and of the lawyers and politicians, whom most workers hated or, at best, treated with great cynicism."

Many of us who lived through that time and helped to organized the protests will know that this is – to be sure – the common imagery promulgated by the mass media, and also that it had little to do with the realities of our lives. There is no question that masses of anti-war protestors were students, and students were typically characterized (and saw themselves) as "middle class." But I know that in Pittsburgh these were largely the children of office workers, postal workers, steelworkers, garment workers, truck drivers, teachers, government employees, and others who had to sell their labor-power to an employer in order to make a living. As students many certainly saw themselves as "moving up" the social ladder and didn't connect their anti-war protests with class issues or class-consciousness. But Jonathan Neale nonetheless captures the reality better when he writes:

The movements of the 1960s and 1970s were massive. Most of the millions of people involved were blue-collar workers or lower-level white-collar workers. These were the majority of the marchers in the civil rights movement, the rioters in the northern cities, and the soldiers in revolt in Vietnam. Many of the students in the anti-war movement came from these backgrounds, and opposition to the war was strongest in the working class.

To his credit, Allen is not inclined to repeat, and in fact seems to drift away from, the "middle class" mischaracterization of the anti-war movement. One hopes that in a future edition of the book he will correct this faulty passage.

Helping to End the War

As we have observed, both Neale and Allen take the U.S. anti-war movement very seriously because they believe that this was one of the decisive factors in defeating the U.S. policy-makers who sought an imperial "victory in Vietnam." There is not room in either account for an actual history of the anti-war movement. (Such accounts are cited by both authors – with Fred Halstead's massive *Out Now! A Participant's Account of the Movement in the United States Against the Vietnam War* being cited as one of the two or three most important works – but it is obvious that a clear and succinct summary of that movement's history is just waiting to be written.)

Both authors genuinely hope to make points about the anti-war movement of the past that can help to orient revolutionary socialists who might help to build anti-war movements of the present and the future. This is admirable, but it seems to me that they seriously fall short. But perhaps an opportunity emerges from this to have a comradely discussion of what was done yesterday and what might be done tomorrow.

Unlike Allen, Neale reminisces about demonstrating against the war back in the day, but it is clear that he had nothing to do with the development of anti-war strategy. Looking back, however, it seems to him that the various protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s were deficient. Despite a working-class base, "these movements were led by middle-class professionals," he tells us (with no documentation, unfortunately). He goes on to make what might seem – from a socialist point of view – a cogent criticism:

More important, they saw themselves as sectional movements, fighting for blacks or women or peace. Most of the people involved did not see the possibility of a united movement of all the oppressed, trying to unite all workers and concentrate their struggle against the corporations at work.

From this starting-point, Joe Allen advances a serious critique of the most substantial revolutionary socialist, self-described Trotskyist, force in the U.S. anti-war movement, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its energetic youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). It is worth laying out the argument in full:

The SWP had the virtue of being staunchly for immediate withdrawal, unlike, for example, the Communist Party, which tailed the Democratic Party and supported "negotiations now." But the SWP singe-mindedly insisted that the movement must focus on the demand "Out Now!" to the practical exclusion of all other issues.

The SWP argued that the key to the antiwar movement was mobilizing ever-larger antiwar protests. To be able to mobilize those demonstrations, nothing should be done to antagonize liberal public opinion by engaging in either more militant tactics or associating with any other movements like

Black liberation or labor or the women's movement.

For many antiwar activists who were politicized and inspired by the militant tactics of the civil rights movement, as well as by the struggle of the Vietnamese, this emphasis on strictly legal protest was a turnoff. Perhaps more important, the SWP failed to orient its youth group on SDS (considering it too "multi-issue"), effectively turning its back on tens of thousands of radicalizing students.

From February 1965 to September 1969 I was a member of SDS. I very much identified with the "multi-issue" wing of the anti-war movement (for reasons well-articulated by Neale and Allen). The self-described followers of the revolutionary Leon Trotsky in the SWP/YSA, I imagined, were making poor Trotsky roll over in his grave with their cozying up to the liberals. I was disgusted by their efforts to make the anti-war movement politically "respectable" and narrow and non-revolutionary.

I should add that I did not fault the "Trots" for not coming into SDS to do missionary work among us. They had their own radical "multi-issue" organization, and we New Leftists had ours. If – like the then-Maoist Progressive Labor Party – they had started joining SDS chapters (and setting up chapters of their own) to push for a "worker-student alliance" or whatever, we would have fought against them too. In fact, in reaction against Progressive Labor – and without much theoretical or organizational coherence – there sprang up in SDS two, three, many forms of Maoism, generating a stridently factional morass in which I myself felt increasingly alienated. I doubt that the YSA could have made much headway within this chaotic swirl.

But it certainly seemed to me that the "Trots" were way off-target in regard to anti-war strategy. If we put the various issues together – peace, black liberation, anti-poverty, labor rights, feminism, campus reform, etc., etc. – we would surely draw together the constituencies gathered around all of those issues into demonstrations and other protest actions so huge that the war-makers and other oppressors would surely be pushed back. More than this, like Neale and Allen (and all Marxists), I understood that all of the issues were interrelated, and this made clear that the basic social-economic system (and the political apparatus that defended it) in the United States were to blame. The million-masses flocking to the multi-issue demonstrations would, increasingly, make those very same connections, and would become radicalized – and would then be only half a step from socialism. Through the multi-issue pathway the massive anti-war movement would become transformed into an even more massive multi-issue movement that would soon embrace a socialist goal.

I was glad when a late 1970 split in the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam put the "Trots" and their moderate allies into something called the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC), while the rest of us could build the National Coalition Against Racism, War, and Repression. (Our coalition soon took the less cumbersome name of People's Coalition for Peace and Justice – PCPJ.) And then I learned that my radical multi-issue strategy for the anti-war movement simply didn't work – and that the single-issue focus of the "Trots" was something other than what I imagined.

To a very large extent, the anti-poverty and welfare rights groups, the civil rights and black liberation organizations, the feminist organizations, and most certainly the unions stayed away from the polyglot multi-issue demonstrations – which had a fuzzy-radical agenda whose trajectory was not clear and might well do damage to any substantial organization that ventured to sign on. Such organizations obviously felt more comfortable participating in a united-front coalition where the demand was clear: "Bring the Troops Home Now! Immediate and Unconditional U.S. Withdrawal from Vietnam! Vietnam for the Vietnamese!" And many individuals – millions of individuals – who knew that they agreed with these demands (but were uncertain about one or several items on the PCPJ laundry-list) also flocked to the NPAC-organized actions. In 1971, on April 24, over a million

people massed in Washington, DC and San Francisco under the NPAC banner – in stark contrast to the 30,000 who came to the chaotic and confusing May Day Actions that PCPJ had put forward as the “more radical” alternative.

Like Joe Allen and Jonathan Neale, I very much wanted the anti-war movement to link with the black liberation movement, the women’s liberation movement, the labor movement, etc. And it was in the NPAC demonstrations that there were large black liberation contingents, women’s liberation contingents, trade union contingents, student and youth contingents, community group contingents, and contingents of socialists of various sorts. Literature of all kinds was passed out among the masses of demonstrators making the links between the various issues, and offering various analyses (from moderately liberal to uncompromisingly revolutionary to crazily ultra-left). From the speakers’ platform, one person after another give his or her reasons for opposing the war, relating that opposition to concerns around other issues, in some cases putting forth a clearly liberal line, in some cases offering clearly anti-imperialist and socialist perspectives. Participants were not expected to agree on all issues and perspectives – the single-issue focus only required that we all agree on the unifying demand: Bring the Troops Home Now!

No one stopped the “multi-issue” wing of the anti-war movement from organizing bigger and better actions. It was tried – and it failed. Such experience drew some activists, such as myself, to NPAC and to the SWP. NPAC’s singe-issue focus proved more effective in achieving the goals I believed in. The orientation advanced by the SWP proved better able to advance revolutionary socialist perspectives – and also to build and mobilize the kind of anti-war movement that both Allen and Neale tell us was a decisive factor in helping to end war.

Joe Allen and Jonathan Neale care deeply about what they write, and they write well. What they write may not be the last word about the Vietnam war and how it was ended – but these are not bad places to start. These books can help us as we wrestle to understand and change the realities of our own time.