

VIETNAM



SVERIGE

HISTORY OF THE
LIVING FUTURE PROJECT

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History of the Living Future Project

Swedish public education initiative on the Vietnam War and other crimes against humanity by the United States and its allies

Given the widely admired conduct of Sweden during the years when Olof Palme dominated its politics, it has been widely expected to continue providing the international community with a clear and consistent voice of opposition to war and imperial ambition.¹ But that voice has remained largely silent since Palme was assassinated twenty years ago. Instead, his current successor as prime minister and head of the Social Democratic Party, Göran Persson, has turned Sweden into something of a vassal state within the U.S. empire.²

Thus far, Persson's main contribution to international understanding has been *Levande Historia* ("Living History"),³ a campaign of public education on the Nazi Holocaust and other crimes against humanity which has received much praise, including that of U.S. President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

But it was evident from the start that crimes against humanity committed by the United States and England were not to be included on the campaign agenda. It therefore occurred to me that an effort should be made to fill the knowledge gap with a similar campaign on the crimes of the current superpower and its allies, especially since they were still active and likely (as we have now seen) to commit more of the same.

For that purpose, I formed a non-profit organization to which five distinguished citizens of Sweden and Norway agreed to lend the weight of their names as members of the steering committee. One of them, Lena Klevenås, conceived the project title of *Levande Framtid* (which sounds better in the original Swedish than in English translation, "Living Future"). An advisory board of four experts and one veterans' organization from the United States was formed, as well.

Levande Framtid/Living Future received a brief flurry of attention in Sweden when it was launched on 28 February 1999, the thirteenth anniversary of Olof Palme's death. But it soon disappeared from public view, and efforts to recruit members were largely futile. It was evidently an idea whose time had not yet come, most likely for the reasons suggested in the following pages.⁴

Accordingly, it was necessary to change tactics and one result was an international conference on the long-term consequences of the Vietnam War, which had a more successful outcome.⁵ For that purpose, Living Future provided a suitable legal and administrative framework. Also, to judge from the frequency of visits to the project's website and related correspondence, the information it provides has been and continues to be useful to students and other interested parties around the world.

It would thus appear that the initiative was not a complete waste of time and effort. By the summer of 2006, however, it had ceased to serve any useful function and was formally terminated.

Meanwhile, events of recent years have sadly demonstrated that the need for a public education campaign of the sort originally envisioned remains as great as ever— probably more so.

— Al Burke
May 2008

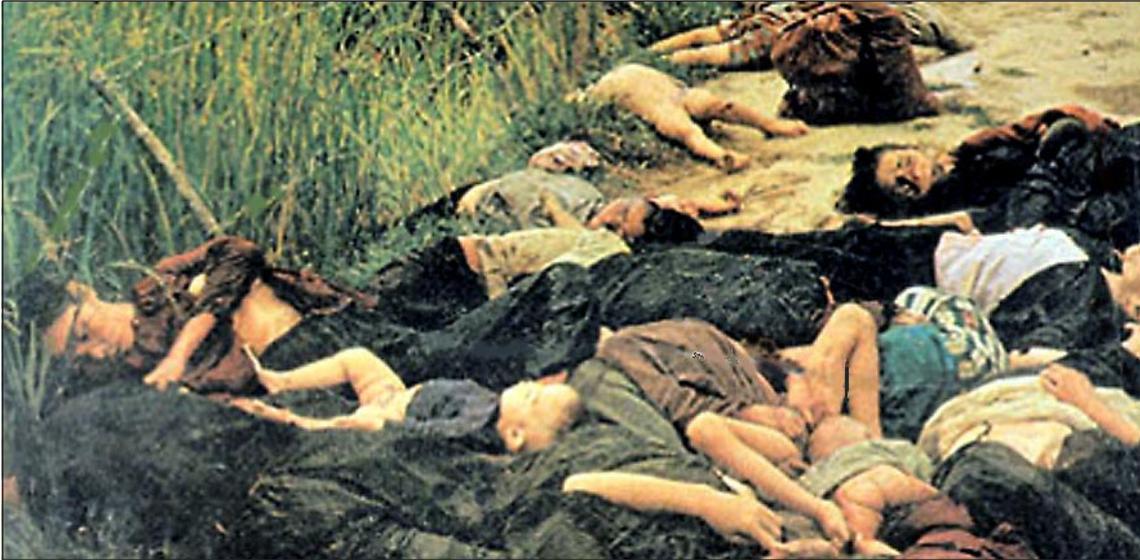


Photo: Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University

A few of the unarmed civilians slaughtered at the village of My Lai— one of numerous massacres committed during the Vietnam War by U.S. troops and their allies. By a modest estimate, the number of Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians killed was equivalent to over 20 million U.S. citizens. The suffering of the survivors will continue long into the future.

Shedding Light on a Dark Past

Public education campaign on Vietnam War and related issues

THE VIETNAM WAR and its persistent implications provide the point of departure for a public education campaign announced in Stockholm on 28 February 1999, the thirteenth anniversary of Olof Palme's assassination. Entitled *Levande Framtid*, which means "Living Future", a major objective of the campaign is to increase public awareness of war crimes and other forms of aggression by the United States and its allies.

"The problem of U.S. aggression is an increasingly urgent, now that it has— at least for the time being— achieved its ambition of becoming the sole superpower on earth," notes Al Burke, a former U.S. citizen and initiator of the project. "Given deeply rooted U.S. patterns of thought and behaviour, many of us are concerned about how that power will be used, or abused, in the years ahead."

One who shares that concern is Johan Galtung, often referred to as the founder of modern peace research: "There is an understandable reluctance in the West to confront the enormity of the crimes committed in the name of so-called western values such as freedom and democracy. But in terms of their scope and their devastating effects on human lives, those crimes are fully comparable with the worst excesses of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. If that insight does not become more widespread, the risk of repeating the grim history of the 20th century is very great."

Burke and Galtung, whose numerous book titles include *Hitlerism, Stalinism and Reaganism*, are joined on the steering committee of Living Future by two former members of the Swedish parliament and a professor of communication studies.

Impact on Third World

Birgitta Hambraeus, who recently retired after 27 years as a Member of Parliament for the Centre Party, feels that it is especially important to inform younger generations about the nature of the world they live in. "Like many Swedes, I do believe in the good intentions and noble ideals of the United States. One of the most satisfying experiences of my life was my time as a student at Vassar College in New York state. But I have also been aware that the impact of the U.S. foreign policy on the Third World is frequently destructive. We have to take a very close look at the implications of that policy, and the obvious way to start is to review its consequences in the recent past."

The problems of the Third World have long been the preoccupation of Lena Klevenås, former MP for the Social Democratic Party. "Vietnam is the most tragic example of U.S. aggression," she notes, "but the problem is clearly broader and more complex. The continuing arms build-up is very worrying, of course. But at present, the suffering caused by the dominant economic ideology may be as great as anything that might be inflicted by massive bombing. One of the questions we need to address is the nature of the relationship between that global economic policy and U.S. military power."

"The U.S. now accounts for some forty percent of the world's total weapon exports," adds Stig Arne Nohrstedt, Professor of Media and Communications at Örebro University. "It is extremely alarming that, at the same time, today's only superpower is playing the role of 'world police' and has succeeded in spreading the notion that conflicts can only be settled with displays of its military power, with or without the participation of its NATO allies.

"Thus far," continues Nohrstedt, "the leading news media in other countries, including Sweden, have demonstrated a near-total unawareness of what all this can easily lead to. It is therefore vitally important to remind ourselves and others of the historically devastating impact of U.S. aggression on the people of weaker nations."

Positive forces

Despite those kinds of concerns, the organizers of the Living Future project emphasize that it is not an exercise in anti-Americanism. "It has been my experience that Swedes in general prefer to think well of the United States," notes Al Burke, who immigrated to Sweden ten years ago and is currently editor of *Nordic News Network*, an Internet-based information service.

"The two countries have a lengthy mutual history," he points out. "Sweden was the first nation to formally acknowledge the newly-established United States of America. Proportionately, Sweden is the second or third largest source of immigration from Europe to the New World, and the 'dream of America' has not lost its mystical allure, especially among the young."

Birgitta Hambraeus adds, "We are all grateful for the many positive forces in the United States who work so hard, and often against such difficult odds, on behalf of international

peace and justice— individuals like Noam Chomsky and organizations like the American Friends Service Committee. Unfortunately, they seem always to be in the minority, and it is difficult to detect their imprint on U.S. foreign policy.”

Olof Palme was himself a warm admirer of the more positive aspects of U.S. life, and it is no accident that the Living Future project was announced on the anniversary of his assassination. Under his leadership, Sweden played a crucial role in the worldwide protest movement against the Vietnam War, resulting eventually in the United States’ unilateral severance of diplomatic relations for well over a year.

“The legacy of Olof Palme has been sadly neglected since his death,” says Lena Klevenås, a party colleague who notes that an ancillary purpose of Living Future is to revive interest in Palme’s analysis of international relations. “If anything, his ideas are even more relevant today than when he was alive. It is remarkable, for example, how clearly he anticipated the harmful consequences of global neo-liberalism.”

According to the organizers, Palme’s teachings will provide the analytical framework of the information campaign. “For one thing,” notes Johan Galtung, “he has been proven right on virtually every foreign policy issue he addressed, including Vietnam, nuclear disarmament, apartheid, Latin America and much more.

“Secondly, entire generations of young Swedes are growing up without a clear understanding of the valuable contributions their country was able to make under Palme’s leadership, and how widely those contributions were and still are appreciated. Thirdly, a broad-based information campaign like the one we propose requires a coherent framework in order to avoid confusion and sectarian disputes. For that purpose, the proven wisdom of Olof Palme is ideal.”



Olof Palme (right) converses with Nguyen Tho Chanh, Vietnam’s ambassador to the Soviet Union (centre), during an anti-war demonstration in Stockholm in 1968— an image that aroused worldwide attention and the displeasure of the United States.

Anticipated reactions

“Needless to say, we expect *Levande Framtid* to be controversial,” notes Al Burke, “particularly among the United States’ powerful allies in this country. But all such reactions may be quite useful in illustrating the means by which a superpower exerts its influence within a small country like Sweden. The same applies to the responses of various news media: It will be interesting to observe how they choose to cover or ignore this project.”

In response to anticipated criticisms, the organizers of *Levande Framtid* point out that it is partly inspired by a public education campaign on the Nazi Holocaust initiated last year by Sweden’s prime minister, Göran Persson. That initiative has been widely applauded, and has given rise to an international effort along the same lines.

Among its strongest supporters are U.S. State Department officials responsible for Holocaust-related issues, including Bennett Freeman, a senior advisor who has said the following of *Levande Historia*: “It is the most inspiring, the most encouraging recent example of a reckoning with the truth— of a country’s willingness to confront [its past].... The United States looks forward to working with Sweden, to make history live and justice come alive as this century comes to a close.”

“Needless to say,” observes Johan Galtung, “the United States government is very welcome to work with us ‘to make history live and justice come alive’ for the countless victims of its policies in Vietnam and throughout the Third World.”

— *Adapted from Levande Framtid’s press release, 28 February 1999*

Questions & Answers

Concerning the origins and logic of The Living Future/Levande Framtid project

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You have noted that this project is partly inspired by the Swedish government's public education campaign on the Holocaust, Levande Historia. Would it not be more appropriate for the government to take on this task, as well?

Indeed, it would be very appropriate—but not very likely. It is one thing to focus attention on the evil deeds of an almost universally detested regime that was stamped out a half-century ago. It is quite another to challenge the current global superpower whose influence is spread throughout Swedish society by the country's political, economic and journalistic elites. Those forces could be relied upon to attack and obstruct any attempt by the government to scrutinize the criminal behaviour of the United States. Even if such an initiative were, by some political miracle, to be officially sanctioned, it would almost certainly be watered down and rendered harmless. In our judgment, therefore, the only feasible alternative is a citizens' initiative.

Granted that a citizens' initiative is necessary in this case, why these particular citizens? On what broader "authority" do the organizers base their initiative.

We have no greater authority than any other collection of citizens. But it seemed obvious that such an initiative should be taken by someone, and that it might as well be us. Most of us enjoy a measure of relative independence, and are not without experience in such matters. Three are former members of the Swedish parliament, from both major segments of the political spectrum. One has been awarded the so-called alternative Nobel Prize as "the father of peace research". Another is a former U.S. citizen who has written at some length on such issues. Yet another is a professor of communications studies with a special interest in media coverage of foreign policy issues. In addition, the project is supported by a distinguished advisory board.

You have said that any government initiative on this subject would almost certainly be met with strong resistance. Don't you expect the same?

Of course. But the first response is likely to be an attempt to kill the thing with silence, which in Sweden is the preferred method of dispensing with disagreeable issues. If that frequently successful strategy does not succeed, then we can expect the heavy artillery to be rolled out. In either case, a careful observer will probably be able to learn a good deal about the issues and the forces behind them by observing the reactions of various interests. One useful piece of wisdom to keep in mind is that of the 18th-century Irishman, William Hazlitt: "If your enemies cannot find a flaw in your reasoning, they will find it in your reputation."

Why drag up the Vietnam War again— isn't it "old news" at this point?

When is it ever inappropriate to focus attention on crimes against humanity? The mere fact that such a question can be raised suggests the existence of a double standard where the United States is concerned. There is no apparent reluctance to discuss the crimes of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, two defunct regimes that are no longer capable of additional harm. Obviously, it is even more urgent to study the behaviour patterns of a global superpower, which is in a better position than ever to destroy the lives of innocent millions who happen to get in the way of its perceived interests, and has often done so in the past.

In this connection, it is well to note that the present situation resembles that following World War II, when the United States was widely regarded as the unchallenged "leader of the free world". Even then, it was laying the groundwork for what would soon become the Vietnam War, and for all the other destruction it has wreaked on peoples of the Third World.

In any event, the war is certainly not "old news" for the one-eighth of Vietnam's population— a number roughly equivalent to the entire population of Sweden— who have been permanently disabled from the lingering effects of the war. Neither is it a thing of the past for the tens of thousands of children with birth defects attributed to the poisons left behind in the soil and water, or to the even greater numbers of children and adults killed or maimed by residual munitions. These are just a few of the very real and present consequences of the Vietnam War. One of the tasks of the *Levande Framtid* project is to increase public awareness of their nature and extent.

One of the most eloquent explanations of the need for such an initiative has been provided by Bennett Freeman, a U.S. State Department official responsible for Holocaust issues. Referring to the Swedish government's *Levande Historia* project, he has observed:

The Living History Project is a testament to Sweden's character.... It is also an opportunity for the world to act, to teach, and to learn.... It is the most inspiring, the most encouraging recent example of a reckoning with the truth— of a country's willingness to confront this most tragic and traumatic chapter. . . .

The national discussion that has been underway, on Sweden's role during the Second World War, has been remarkable for its lack of rancour and defensiveness, just as the Living History Project is also remarkable for its comprehensiveness and for its emphasis on individual and national responsibility. Sweden is making the right links— the links between searing history and enduring memory, between a bitter past and a better future. . . .

As my colleague, Under-Secretary of State Stuart Eisenstadt, has said: "A nation should be judged by its willingness to face the past honestly, to help right wrongs, and deal with injustices." . . . The United States looks forward to working with Sweden, to make history live and justice come alive as this century draws to a close.

In that case, why not leave it to the United States to “make history live and justice come alive” with regard to the Vietnam War?

As Gandhi replied, when asked his opinion of western civilization: “That would be a good idea.” Sad to say, there is nothing to indicate the slightest inclination on the part of the dominant forces in the U.S. to confront the country’s criminal past. The kinds of people and interests that were responsible for the Vietnam War remain very much in charge of foreign policy; if anything, their position is now even stronger.

To the extent that the Vietnam War is discussed at all, it is usually in terms of its terrible effects on the United States; the consequences for Vietnam are not an issue. This is hardly a novel syndrome: Referring to the evils of slavery, for example, Thomas Jefferson once observed that, “I tremble for my country when I consider that God is just.” Two centuries later, the United States has still not come to terms with the terrible legacy of slavery. There is even less reason to expect a proper moral accounting of the Vietnam War, at a time when many of its perpetrators are still alive and in possession of considerable power. Given the nature of U.S. society, it can be quite dangerous— physically, economically and socially— to publicly challenge the self-pity and self-righteousness that characterize the generally accepted view of the Vietnam War.

Whatever the capacity and willingness of the United States to confront its own dark past, it is a matter of the utmost importance to the people of Sweden, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most important is the question of Sweden’s relationship to the United States and NATO, the latter being essentially an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. At this moment in history, Sweden and its largely unsuspecting population are being inexorably drawn into NATO— and thereby into the operational framework of U.S. foreign policy— by various powerful and/or uncomprehending forces which have chosen to ignore or trivialize the potential implications of such an alliance. In this connection, it is crucial to recall that Norway— whose society and cultural values in so many ways resemble those of Sweden— actually participated in the Vietnam War as a consequence of its NATO membership.

A broader issue is the Pax Americana that has replaced the terror balance of the Cold War and, among other things, has made it increasingly difficult for the United Nations to assume the global responsibilities for which it was established. This is an issue of crucial significance for people everywhere, not just in Sweden. As Olof Palme so often pointed out with regard to the threat of nuclear war, no superpower possesses an inalienable right to determine the fate of the world. It is especially important to emphasize that principle at a moment in history, however brief and transient, dominated by only one superpower.

Isn’t this yet another exercise in the sort of “anti-American Third-World romanticism” of which Olof Palme and the Swedish left were so often accused in the past?

The standard joke on that subject is that Sweden is the most Americanized country in the world— with the United States as a close second. That may be a slight exaggeration, but it is undoubtedly true that Swedes in general have a positive attitude toward the United States, even if many of them find it difficult to accept certain aspects of its international behaviour and social policy.

This was certainly the case with Palme, who is still being depicted by right-wing forces in both Sweden and the U.S. as a fire-breathing anti-American. In fact, he was a great admirer of the positive ideals and accomplishments of the United States— whose population includes so many citizens of Swedish descent— but was deeply troubled by the glaring discrepancy between the promise of those ideals and the grim realities of U.S. policies both at home and abroad.

In this, he was hardly alone. Another Swede with a similar perspective on U.S. society was Gunnar Myrdal, whose collaborative study of race relations was published following World War II under the title of *An American Dilemma*, and was subsequently to play an important role in the civil rights movement.

In short, there is little evidence of any widespread tendency to anti-Americanism among the Swedish population, not even among the sharpest critics of U.S. domestic and foreign policies. In fact, there is a much more evident tendency to excuse or ignore the shortcomings of U.S. society and foreign policy, in order to preserve a mental image that is generally favourable. Most Swedes like to like the U.S.A. For that and other reasons, they may be well-suited to analyze its deficiencies.

In Sweden, “anti-American Third World romanticism” is a term tossed about mainly by those who have consistently supported or ignored the worst excesses of U.S. foreign policy, in a fairly obvious attempt to divert attention from their own complicity in crimes against humanity. The very phrase betrays something of their general outlook: What could possibly be “romantic” about the destruction of tens of millions of innocent lives, in the Third World or anywhere else?

Our own view is that there are many positive forces in the United States, including all those who have protested against the Vietnam War and similar expressions of U.S. foreign policy. But for a variety of reasons, they have never exerted a decisive influence on that policy. For all the efforts of the U.S. anti-war movement, for example, Congress continued to finance the Vietnam War right up to the bitter end. We feel that this is something about which the Swedish people need to become more aware. If, at the same time, we can offer a gesture of support to all the positive forces in the U.S., so much the better.

By drawing a parallel between this initiative and the Levande Historia project, do you not in effect diminish the enormity of the Holocaust?

We do not draw an exact parallel between the Holocaust and the Vietnam War. The former was undeniably unique in its intent to completely eliminate Jews, gypsies and other allegedly “inferior racial stocks”. For that reason, it has been condemned as a singularly monstrous crime against humanity, and rightly so.

Every such crime has its own historical and ideological context. The Vietnam War was the most horrific concentrated abuse to which the ideology of anti-communism has been put, but it is far from an isolated instance. Although it was never the stated intention of the U.S. government to eliminate every Vietnamese on earth, it is an open question as to how many lives it would have ultimately destroyed if it had not encountered the stubborn resistance of the Vietnamese people and a worldwide protest movement, in which Olof Palme and a great many ordinary Swedes played a prominent role.

For those directly affected, the distinction between the Holocaust and the Vietnam War was probably of little relevance. In terms of human waste and suffering, what is the

difference between being suffocated in a gas chamber and being burned to a crisp in a sea of napalm? In terms of numbers, it should be noted that Vietnam's population at the time of the war was about one-fifth that of the United States. It is not difficult to imagine the reaction in the western world if a technologically overwhelming force were to invade the U.S. and slaughter some 20 million of its citizens, while disabling 35 million more.

Compare that scenario with the way that Vietnam has been treated since it finally succeeded in repelling the most recent in a series of invaders.

You have indicated that you may revive the issue of war crimes in relation to the Vietnam War and related events, in which case a figure like Henry Kissinger would become a prime target for prosecution. How can you possibly raise that issue in connection with someone who has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and whose own relatives died in Nazi death camps?

It strikes us as highly implausible that anyone who suffered persecution at the hands of Nazi Germany would allow anyone else, not even a relative, to misuse their suffering to justify the persecution of others. We prefer to believe that Kissinger's relatives would be among the first to condemn his role in the Vietnam War, which has been likened to that of the Nazis' von Ribbentrop during World War II.

The award to Kissinger is widely regarded as the most embarrassing fiasco in the history of the Nobel Peace Prize—which is to say much, given some of the competition (e.g. Teddy Roosevelt, Menachem Begin and F.W. de Clerk). Kissinger, himself, is reported to have laughed in disbelief when he was informed of the award. The choice of Kissinger provoked massive protests around the world and a furious debate in Norway, where the Peace Prize is situated. The co-recipient, Vietnam's Le Duc Tho, refused to accept his share of the prize. Once again, Norway's involvement in NATO probably had something to do with this particular disgrace.

The issue of war crimes has become all the more urgent, now that the U.S. has acquired such a dominant military position and refuses to submit to rules of conduct that it seems to expect of other nations—for example, by rejecting international treaties on nuclear disarmament and the prosecution of war criminals. To many in the West, this may seem like a vaguely academic issue at a time when the U.S. contents itself with dropping bombs on countries of the Muslim world. But in addition to the rights of those countries under international law, there is the question of what happens when the United States runs into serious difficulties at home or abroad.

At the moment, everything is just peachy from the U.S. point of view. If one chooses to ignore the country's ever-widening social divisions, the economy is perking steadily along, and there is no evil empire in sight to challenge the hegemony of the "world's policeman". But what happens when problems begin to mount, as inevitably they must—for example, when the seething tensions of U.S. society once again burst into open conflict, or a competing superpower emerges on the horizon (China, perhaps)?

The world has seen what the United States is capable of when the interests that dominate its foreign policy choose to perceive that they are threatened. It will almost certainly witness such behaviour again. A central question for the *Levande Framtid* project is: Where will Sweden be when the next Vietnam War occurs?

— March 1999



*Opening of Vietnamese art exhibition.
From the left: Van Duong Thanh, Ambassador Nam, Sara Lidman, Al Burke*

In the Spirit of Olof Palme

*Public education campaign continues,
in the shadow of the Kosovo catastrophe and Pax Americana*

THE LEVANDE FRAMTID/LIVING FUTURE project began its second year with a tribute to Olof Palme in Stockholm on 28 February 2000, the fourteenth anniversary of his assassination. Among the participants was Ambassador Nguyen Van Nam, who spoke of Olof Palme's significance for Vietnam, where he is still remembered with great affection and respect.

The ambassador was followed by actor Torsten Wahlund, who read from Palme's many speeches on the Vietnam War. Joining him was Leif Gustafsson, who once served as Palme's press officer, and guitarist Christer Karlberg.

The evening in honour of Olof Palme concluded two days on the theme of "Palme, Sweden & Vietnam", including an exhibition of Vietnamese art and photography. The works of ten Vietnamese artists were displayed, among them the modern masters Bui Xuan Phai, Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Tran Luu Hau. Also: Van Duong Thanh, who organized the exhibition and who last year became a citizen of Sweden, Prof. Tran Khanh Chuong, Tham Duc Tu, Prof. Nguyen Thi Ninh, Nguyen Thu Hang, Nguyen Dinh Dung, Duc Son Van, plus photographer Nguyet Vy.

Present at the opening on February 27th were: Ambassador Nam, author Sara Lidman, who played a central role in forming public opinion against the United States' war in

Indochina; Assistant Under-Secretary Anders Bauer from the Swedish Foreign Ministry; William Waring, Curator of Milles Gården, a well-known art museum near Stockholm; Bengt Hidemark, Professor of Architecture and Member of the Swedish Academy of Fine Arts; and many others.

In the shadow of Pax Americana

An independent non-profit organization, Living Future was launched on the same date in 1999 for the express purpose of “increasing public awareness of war crimes and other forms of aggression by the United States and its allies”.

The initiative attracted some measure of attention at the start, but its development came to an abrupt halt just a few weeks later when the United States and its NATO instrument began dropping bombs on Yugoslavia. According to the project’s co-ordinator, Al Burke, this latest U.S. war of aggression had three significant consequences for Living Future:

“First, the attention of most Swedes was naturally diverted to the conflagration raging on Europe’s doorstep. Also, the United State’s enormous propaganda apparatus— including its high-pitched Swedish components— managed to whip up an ugly war hysteria that afflicted even Sweden.

“But probably the most significant development was that Sweden’s Social Democratic government openly supported the bombings, even to the point of endorsing the war propaganda which— surprise, surprise— turned out to consist primarily of lies and manipulations.”

The mental re-occupation of Sweden

The result was a misled populace, and a climate of opinion in which the U.S. once again is being allowed to play “the leader of the free world” with nothing but presumptively good intentions. Not too long ago, it was the crusade against communism which cloaked the United States’ brutal methods in comely rhetoric; the current mode in verbal beautification goes under the name of human rights.

This climate of opinion has been experienced in the western world before, of course, and its potential consequences are well known. The current situation is reminiscent of the 1950s, i.e. during the early stages of the American War in Vietnam, the genocide of



Painting by Van Duong Thanh

Guatemala's native population, and numerous other tragedies that now appear to be repressed or denied in Sweden and elsewhere. In the year 2000, Sweden has once again become a mentally occupied country. Needless to say, the mass media play a decisive role in this process.⁶

None of this has made it any easier for *Levande Framtid* to attract attention or support, but it does confirm the apprehensions expressed in the project's original declaration of intent: "Given deeply rooted U.S. patterns of thought and behaviour, many of us are concerned about how that power will be used, or abused, in the years ahead."

The Kosovo catastrophe has more than justified those concerns: A "peace agreement" imposed by the U.S. has revealed itself to be an unacceptable ultimatum that was used as a pretext for initiating a war of aggression. The attacks were justified after the fact by murderous propaganda concerning, among other things, a genocide for which the evidence

Swedish Indifference

... There was a near-total absence of support for the project in Sweden. Most surprising and dismaying was the lack of interest among NGOs that are directly involved in efforts to alleviate the long-term consequences of the war in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The lack of response from environmental and peace groups was also a disappointment, to say the least...

With the usual reservations for exceptions and individual variations, my experience has tended to confirm the stereotype that Swedes have of themselves— i.e. as exceptionally slow to make up their minds and lurch into action. This is seldom noticeable among Swedes abroad, possibly due to the stimulation of travel and the statistical deviance of travellers. On their home ground, however, Swedes seem— to a relative newcomer like myself, at least— to be snugly wrapped in a cloak of inertia.

Another and perhaps related trait that is not very well-suited to volunteerism is a tendency to regard personal commitments as merely conditional. It has been my sad and repeated experience that a promise from a Swede to perform a voluntary task, no matter how small or simple, is very likely to be worthless. In connection with the environmental conference, it got to the point where,

if someone promised to help out, I found it safest to assume that it would never happen. With few exceptions, that expectation was sadly fulfilled....

One feels personally betrayed, of course. But far more dismaying is the harm done to the interests of the project's potential beneficiaries, and the evident disregard for the efforts of those who do keep their word....

Certainly, the current political climate is ill-suited to such a project. This will no doubt come as a surprise to anyone who has learned to regard Sweden as a world leader in matters of peace and solidarity. But to the extent that such concerns still influence Swedish foreign policy, that is largely a lingering effect of Olof Palme's enlightened leadership. His successor, Göran Persson, is almost the exact opposite of Palme, particularly with regard to foreign policy....

Fortunately, the outside world remains largely innocent of the malaise that has afflicted Sweden since the assassination of Olof Palme. Thanks to the legacy of good will that he left behind, Sweden is still widely regarded abroad with respect and admiration. This helps to explain why it was so much easier to enlist support for the conference in distant lands than on home ground. Thus, all the good that Palme did continues to live after him.

From Project Review of Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam

www.nnn.se/environ/review.pdf

remains to be presented. The bombing was also supposed to prevent an ethnic cleansing of Kosovo's Al-banians; instead, most of them were driven into exile. Currently in progress is an ethnic cleansing of Kosovo's Serbs, Gypsies and other non-Albanian minorities, while a large U.S./NATO military force looks on.⁷

It is difficult to imagine how it would be possible to achieve greater devastation or more bitter animosities in the Balkan powder keg—and all in the name of human rights, of course.

Even more urgent

Accordingly, it has become even more urgent for *Levande Framtid* to continue with its public education efforts in such matters. Although 1999 was in many respects a disappointing year, a certain amount of progress was made.

Among other things: A website was established and is expected to be expanded during the coming year to provide a readily accessible history of the war and its continuing aftermath. Eventually it is hoped that the entire range of U.S. crimes against humanity will receive similar treatment. It is considered especially urgent to provide Swedish youth with accurate and reliable information about that history, now, in this time of the U.S. super-power.

In order to ensure the accuracy of the information it publishes, *Levande Framtid* has formed an Advisory Board of recognized authorities with broad experience of the issues in question. Among them is Daniel Ellsberg, the former U.S. government official who disclosed its self-incriminating history of the Vietnam War.

To promote contacts between Sweden and Vietnam, and thereby increase awareness of the extent of the catastrophe inflicted on the Vietnamese people by the United States, *Levande Framtid* plans to encourage and co-ordinate the establishment of sister schools and sister cities. The foundations for those activities were laid during the past year. Also being explored is the possibility of arranging an international conference on the American War's long-term consequences for human health and the environment in Vietnam.

Redress for victims of U.S. aggression

A major objective of the *Levande Framtid* project is to encourage support for the countless innocent victims who have been caught in the crossfire of U.S. foreign policy. The United States has lately been very insistent in demanding redress for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and their families, and there is every reason to support such demands. The question is: Should not the same consideration be accorded the United States' tens of millions of victims around the globe?

Levande Framtid emphasizes that it draws no direct parallels between the Holocaust and other war crimes; every such crime has its own history and antecedents. But the recent Holocaust Conference in Stockholm concluded with a challenge to the entire world to shed light on all crimes against humanity, and Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson has heeded the call to make the conference an annual event.

"That is an important commitment," notes Al Burke. "But it will be empty and meaningless if it does not include the Vietnam War—the worst crime against humanity committed during the past half-century."

— March 2000

Advisory Board

In order to ensure the accuracy of the information it publishes, Levande Framtid/Living Future has formed an Advisory Board of recognized authorities with broad experience of the issues in question.

DANIEL ELLSBERG, an economist and political scientist who served as a government official and helped to formulate U.S. military strategy in Vietnam during the 1960s. Subsequently, he and 35 other researchers were assigned the task of compiling a history of the Vietnam War and its origins. As the work progressed, Ellsberg discovered that the official government justification of the war was based on lies.

He then leaked the study to the *New York Times*, which published the major components under the title of *The Pentagon Papers*. That unimpeachable source confirmed the principal contentions of the anti-war movement, and thereby helped to shorten the war.

Attempts by the Nixon administration to discredit Ellsberg backfired and played a significant role in the Watergate scandal that resulted in Nixon's forced departure from office. Among other things, the president's men devised plans to spike Ellsberg's drinks with hallucinatory drugs, and even hired a gang of exile Cubans to murder him. But for various reasons, none of these attempts succeeded in "neutralizing" Ellsberg.

During the past two decades, Ellsberg has devoted himself primarily to disarmament issues, in co-operation with organizations such as Physicians for Social Responsibility (recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986). At present, he is working on his memoirs, which are expected to be published sometime during 2001.⁸

Regarding Sweden's opposition to the Vietnam War, Ellsberg has observed: "I always thought that our allies and other countries were derelict with their silence. Sweden was the one honourable exception."

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR (VVAW) was founded in New York in 1967, and has since developed into a nation-wide organization which, among other things, seeks to spread knowledge of "the ugly truth about U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia". It also conducts projects of support and reconciliation in Vietnam. In addition, VVAW actively opposes other conflicts in which the United States is engaged, noting that, "Today our government is still financing and arming undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War."

Principal contact at VVAW is National Co-ordinator Joseph T. Miller, who says that, "In our judgment, Living Future is a very valuable project, and we feel obligated to assist in any way that we can."

EDWARD HERMAN is Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. He is the author of numerous books and articles within the fields of economics, political science, foreign policy and mass media. Among his best-known works

are *The Political Economy of Human Rights* and *Manufacturing Consent* (both with Noam Chomsky), *Triumph of the Market*, *The Myth of the Liberal Media* and *Corporate Control, Corporate Power*.

An early critic of the Vietnam War, Prof. Herman has written frequently on that and related subjects. His observations on the lessons of the Vietnam War are available at www.nnn.se/vietnam/lessons.pdf

WILLIAM BLUM left his position with the U.S. State Dept. in 1967, in protest over the Vietnam War. Since then he has been a political activist and writer whose book, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, has become a standard reference on the devastating impact of U.S. foreign policy on countries all over the globe. According to Noam Chomsky, "It is far and away the best book on the subject."

Blum writes frequently for *Covert Action Quarterly*, a magazine founded by former U.S. security and intelligence agents. His latest book, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, will be published in the spring of 2000 by Common Courage Press.

RICHARD DU BOFF is Professor Emeritus of Economics at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. He was very actively engaged in the anti-war movement and has published many articles on issues relating to the Vietnam War.

He writes: "I fully support the Levande Framtid/Living Future project and its efforts to spread knowledge about the greatest act of criminal aggression during the second half of the 20th century—the war waged by the United States against the nation of Vietnam and its people.

"That war remains the key to understanding U.S. foreign policy—including its unilateral, aggressive character, and its predictable resort to military intervention abroad which, as in Vietnam, transforms local and regional conflicts into major international confrontations."

— March 1999

NOTES

1. For an introduction to Olof Palme's life and work, see *The Legacy of Olof Palme*: www.nnn.se/nordic/palme.pdf
2. Prime Minister Persson's vassal-statesmanship is discussed in:
 - *Collateral Damage* at www.nnn.se/nordic/damage.pdf
 - *All Quieted on the Word Front* (p. 48) at www.www.nnn.se/disinfo/ordfront.pdf
3. The *Levande Historia* website includes an English summary; see www.levandehistoria.org
4. See also:
 - "Safe in the Arms of Uncle Sam Again" in *The Price of Everything* at www.nnn.se/nordic/price.pdf
 - "Swedish indifference" on p. 16 of *Project Review* at www.nnn.se/environ/review.pdf
5. A related and fairly successful initiative entitled "The Word from the White House" was conducted under the aegis of Nordic News Network; see www.nnn.se/disinfo/vithus.pdf
6. See also:
 - "The Mechanisms of Mental Occupation" at www.nnn.se/disinfo/mechanism.pdf
 - "The Word from the White House" at www.nnn.se/disinfo/vithus.pdf
7. See "Propaganda and 'Preventive' War" at www.nnn.se/disinfo/kosovo.pdf
8. For a review of Ellsberg's memoir, see www.nnn.se/vietnam/ellsberg.pdf
9. Prof. Herman's article is available at www.nnn.se/vietnam/lessons.pdf

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www.nnn.se/levande.htm