US still involved in Asia, state Fonda and Hayden

By Barb Moore

The Indochina Peace Campaign is conducting its fall tour, appearing in the Boston area twice last week. Led by Jane Fonda and her husband Tom Hayden, the group is hoping to draw attention to the continuing situation in Southeast Asia.

Fonda stated in a press conference last Monday that “although Americans have been told the war is over, there has not been a day of peace in South Vietnam.” This national campaign is aimed at informing the American public of the present role of the US in Indochina.

Traveling with the group are Jean-Pierre Debris, a French school teacher held prisoner in Saigon for over two years, and Robert Chenowith, an American POW for more than five years.

The basis of the new campaign is the fact that, as Fonda stated, “South Vietnam is now the largest police state in the world. The US government is paying much of the salary of these police, and until the US stops this financial interference, the people of South Vietnam will not have their freedom.”

She cited the fact that the January Peace agreement calls for stopped support from a foreign country (including the US) to the Thieu regime or any other governmental faction. The support of the US to Thieu directly violates this agreement, stated Fonda.

Debris described his capture as a political prisoner in Saigon in 1970. He was then a school teacher, and was arrested for passing out leaflets advocating peace. He spent two years in Chua Hoa prison, along with several hundred Vietnamese political prisoners.

Chenowith was captured in South Vietnam in 1966, and spent nearly six years as a POW. After his release last March, he was charged with “collaboration with the enemy,” along with seven other former POWs. The charge against them was dropped when Larry Kavanagh, one of those charged, killed himself last June.

“The whole reason that we were in Vietnam was immoral and wrong…” said Chenowith, however he had enlisted six months prior to his capture, and was not drafted. When questioned about this point, he stated that his ideas had changed once he saw the war, and that he had become disillusioned. He then realized the real motives for the US involvement.

The building of tiger cages by US labor force used to imprison South Vietnamese is a major objection of the Indochina Peace Campaign. Debris described the cages, and said that they are built at a prison camp near Saigon. These cages are made of concrete, and are too short for a man to stand upright. Debris protected the continued building of such devices.

Fonda described the plight of the estimated 200,000 political prisoners still held by the Thieu regime in South Vietnam. There have been documented reports of continuing torture and murder of Vietnamese villagers, stated Hayden, which are sustained by the US involvement.