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BACKGROUND

The French, for a variety of reasons, went into what the West knows as Indochina starting in the middle of the 19th century. Each of the states that we presently know as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam - generally lumped together during the period of French occupation under the title French Indochina - has in fact a long history of its own, particularly the state of Vietnam. With the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954, French Indochina was again broken up into its component parts of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam - with Vietnam temporarily divided into a Northern and Southern sector pending national elections (to be held not later than 1956), designed to unify them again into the historic state of Vietnam.

The United States involvement in Vietnamese affairs - and in the affairs of the Indochinese generally - began during the French period. The late John Foster Dulles with his at times quite irrational fear of Communism was afraid that a Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh would prove the first step in the extension of military, cultural and political control by the Chinese Communists over the South East Asian peninsula. Dulles was extremely eager that the war continue, and some billions of dollars of American military aid was supplied to the French up until the end of the war in 1954. (At one time Dulles flew to London to try to persuade Prime Minister Winston Churchill to join the United States in pledging troops to France if France would continue the war. It was also reliably reported that Dulles was considering the use of nuclear weapons in Indochina in a last ditch attempt to stop the forces of the Vietminh.)

But despite Dulles's misgivings, the Geneva Accords were signed in 1954 and the war came to an end. Then Dulles, with the collaboration of the Central Intelligence Agency and very possibly of the Pentagon, began a more direct intervention in Vietnamese affairs. The first step was the sending in of Diem, who it was felt could serve as a leader in making the southern part of Vietnam an independent anti-Communist state. A great deal of American advice and economic aid went into South Vietnam starting in 1954, and American influence became dominant when Diem threw out Bao Dai, the French puppet emperor.

It should be noted that Diem, while set up in business by the Americans, never was a truly cooperative 'puppet' - one reason for his eventual assassination. But with varying degrees of success, Diem managed to establish his control over the Southern part of Vietnam - until the year 1956, when his refusal to agree to the all-national elections specified in the Geneva Accords, and his refusal to agree to trade with North Vietnam (combined with the repressive measures of his regime toward the peasantry and toward former supporters of the Vietminh), led to a series of uprisings.

The assumption here in the United States is that these uprisings were called for by the Communist Party in North Vietnam. But the evidence would indicate that initially Hanoi was unhappy with the insurrection in the South and did not in fact give its blessing until sometime in the early 1960s. Some hard feeling exists to the present time between the rebel elements in South Vietnam and the official Communist leadership in Hanoi because there is some belief on the part of the South that in the '50s it was sold out by Hanoi. This belief dates back to the Geneva Accords, when many historians and apparently also the South Vietnamese rebels felt that the French would have given up a good deal more territory to Ho Chi Minh if Russia and China had

not jointly pressured Ho into settling the war, and doing so at the 17th parallel.

The rebellion was, of course, eventually supported by Communist elements in the North, and so far as we know, the National Liberation Front is now under the control of the Communists in Vietnam, though they are only a fairly small minority group within the National Liberation Front itself. But it is quite clear from a study of the facts that political support is about all that Hanoi gave the Vietcong until very recently, when the infiltration of men and supplies began on a significant scale, following the massive US intervention.

The rebellion in the South was basically just that - a rebellion in the South basing itself on the South Vietnamese people and on very genuine grievances they had with Diem. By 1961, the position of the Diem government, as opposed to that of the Vietcong, was so weak that President Kennedy made a decision to send in thousands of "military advisors." The military situation continued to deteriorate, even though Washington remained officially optimistic. By late 1964 it had become obvious to all observers except official spokesmen for the American government that the Vietcong controlled most of the territory of South Vietnam and that it was going to be impossible for any effective government to be formed in South Vietnam unless it included members of the National Liberation Front.

U.S. hostility to Communism has led to the persistent American feeling that 1) the Vietcong is simply an extension of the Communist Party centered in Hanoi and 2) that the Communist Party leadership in Hanoi is simply an extension of the Chinese Communists. Both assumptions, as I have noted, are in error. The latter assumption, namely that Hanoi is very directly under the control of Peking, is particularly dangerous. For the entire history of Vietnam, dating back some 2000 years, is one of great tension and conflict with the Chinese - and there is little reason to think such tension and conflict would in any way be changed simply by the fact that Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse Tung are both Communists. We are dealing here not with an act of Chinese aggression carried on indirectly through Ho, and indirectly by him through the Vietcong. We are dealing with very real problems in the South of Vietnam, and must come to terms with the force of Vietnamese nationalism.

US Escalation

In late 1964 when it became clear that the United States was being beaten on the ground, President Johnson began escalation of the war by a series of air raids on North Vietnamese coastal ports, allegedly in retaliation for an attack on a U.S. destroyer in the Tonkin gulf. The nature of the alleged attack in the Tonkin gulf remains very hazy; and even if it in fact occurred as the Pentagon claims it did (and there are very serious questions about the relevant Pentagon press releases), the American retaliation was far in excess of any reasonable military counterstrike, and most obviously was an attempt to indicate to Hanoi that it ought to bring pressure on the rebels in the South to end the war. The Americans did not strike again in the North until February of this year when the airstrikes began, when the war was officially and unilaterally escalated by the American government.

Up until that time, the quantity of military supplies captured in South Vietnam which had originated in North Vietnam or in China was minimal. It was clear in February that the overwhelming bulk of Vietcong military supplies were in fact captured from the forces of the Saigon government - that is, they were American weapons, weapons which we had supplied to Saigon. (It should be noted that the Vietcong relied so much on captured American weapons that they even sent agents into the various training centres of the Vietnamese national army in order to learn how to use them.) It should also be noted that while America's escalation of the war did not officially begin until February 1965, it is an established fact that for at least two years prior to this the U.S. had been involved in sending "counter-insurgency" units into North Vietnam in an attempt to damage the regime there. In fact, therefore, the Americans had begun escalating the war - albeit secretly and informally - at least as early as 1962 or 1963. The documentation for this is overwhelming.

Following the drastic escalation of the war by the February air raids on the North, the military picture in the South did not improve but on the contrary it got a good deal worse. The situation has continued to deteriorate, so that by now the common talk is that the Americans may be forced back to the coast, and that all it is reasonable to expect them to hold are the key cities of Saigon and Hue, as well as the port of Danang. It is now perfectly obvious even to spokesmen for the U.S. government that the Vietcong control almost all of the land territory of South Vietnam. The present escalation by the United States government -- not only in terms of the air attacks in the North but also in terms of the sharp increases in U.S. armed forces in the South -- and the new orders that these forces are no longer merely to advise the South Vietnamese army but are to engage in direct military actions are further evidence of how serious the situation has become.

This crisis did not arise overnight. Some months ago now a leading military analyst -- Hanson Baldwin -- writing in the New York Times magazine section suggested that between 250,000 and one million American troops might need to be sent to hold South Vietnam. Baldwin was not writing off the top of his head, but was writing as an informal voice of the Pentagon, a role which he has played for some time. The numerous increases in U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam should therefore come as no surprise -- and one must expect that there may be heavy increases yet (in addition to those men just sent over). An eventual figure of 250,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam is, if anything, a conservative estimate. The construction now going on at the various ports and bases in South Vietnam would indicate that we are rapidly preparing to send in at least that number.

Where Now?

The problem for the United States is that it has managed to get itself trapped since 1954 in a situation from which there simply is no easy way out. If Johnson were to pull out American troops entirely, which is certainly what he ought to do, there is reason to believe that he would be impeached in this country for having "sold out to Communism." If, on the other hand, Johnson simply wants to stand still in Vietnam, that by itself will require an increasing number of U.S. troops. The Vietcong are now better organized, they are better armed than they were in 1963. Their morale is high. If we want merely to hold the area we have, we will have to invest a good deal more men and machines than we have yet invested. Therefore, even to "stand still" means in fact to escalate. But there is a political problem also in "standing still," in that pressures are building up in the United States to "win" the war -- which would mean advancing into North Vietnam and, if necessary, taking on China itself. These are now the three courses open to the U.S.: withdrawal, standing pat, or further escalation of the war into the North.

From a political standpoint none of these courses of action are tempting to Johnson. But obviously he must choose one of them. Up till the present time, Johnson seems to have settled for course number two -- a willingness to try to hold the area that we have and to bring the Vietnamese Communists to the negotiating table by increased bombing of North Vietnam. But the North Vietnamese, very understandably, do not feel like negotiating while they are being bombed. Nor do the Vietcong feel the need for negotiations while they are winning. And there is the further question, as I have indicated above, as to whether the North Vietnamese can in any event -- even if they so desired -- negotiate in the name of the National Liberation Front.

The problem for anyone trying to make an analysis of the situation is that it is very hard to tell from Johnson's policy whether he is really trying to keep the conflict to a minimum or whether he long ago decided that he would like to get us involved in a war with China and is doing so through a process of slow and steady escalation. American policy in Vietnam could be seen as fitting either of these two alternatives. Certainly the United States has not yet taken any step which could be considered a genuine effort to

end the conflict by negotiations, Johnson's halting of the bombing of North Vietnam was for so brief a period (six days) and came so late in the game, that it could only serve to infuriate any politically reasonable person. It was clearly and flatly a sham. In the same way, Johnson's offer to "negotiate with anyone at any time" is also a sham as long as Johnson holds to his present position, that we will under no circumstances negotiate with the National Liberation Front -- the group with which we are immediately involved in fighting. It is hard in all of this to know to what extent the Administration is still acting politically and to what extent it is simply caught up in its own anti-Communist pathology.

It may be that Johnson and his advisors really think that Hanoi could stop the struggle in South Vietnam tomorrow if they wanted to. It may be that our key men in the State Department really do not understand that the South Vietnamese rebels have a very high measure of independence of action. Such contacts as that some of us have had with various government officials at various levels, and a reading of statements coming from the government, would indicate either a profound dishonesty on the part of virtually the entire official structure of this government, or -- equally disturbing -- a terrible naivete regarding the true situation in South Vietnam. The latter may well be the case -- for certainly it took the British a very long time to understand the realities in Indochina; and in general, major powers in their arrogance often make mistakes which are based primarily on their own ignorance. We always run the risk of overestimating the degree of competence which governments have. My own feeling is that the U.S. position in South Vietnam is by and large not in the hands of men very familiar with the Vietnamese situation.

The greatest problem we presently face in Vietnam is the danger of Chinese intervention. The American war in Vietnam is in itself a criminal enterprise, probably the most criminal single war in which the Americans have ever gotten themselves involved. But so long as the principles in this conflict are confined to North and South Vietnam and the United States, this war primarily raises moral questions, and is not so much a threat to world peace. Thus far China has indicated that while she is prepared to talk about dealing violently with the imperialists, she is in fact a paper tiger, and has been very reluctant to give the United States government any excuse to attack her own territory. There is reason to feel the Chinese are delighted to have Americans involved in a war they cannot win, a war which is destroying American prestige throughout all of Asia to an extent the American State Department and the American public seem not even to begin to understand. But the Chinese attitude toward American involvement in Vietnam would surely change if we escalated the the war into North Vietnam by sending in a land army. In Korea in 1950, China demonstrated that she was prepared to see an American military base in Asia provided that it was not directly contiguous to her own boundaries. China did not intervene in the Korean conflict until after the American forces had driven north of the 38th parallel and were approaching the Yalu River. But at that time China did fulfil her threat - that if the Americans continued to advance toward the Chinese border, she would enter the war. It is certainly reasonable to feel that if in 1950 - only one year after she had consolidated her revolution - China was ready to take on the United States in a major war, that she would do so again in 1965, at a time when she was stronger. I see no reason to believe that the Chinese would be so docile as to permit the Americans to take North Vietnam.

Therefore, if the war escalates in terms of American troops going into North Vietnam, I would anticipate that the Chinese will also escalate the war by sending in large numbers of Chinese volunteers. At that point, in fact, we will have a World War - even if it is simply an Asian World War. One must then expect that the Americans will attack nuclear power plants inside China. There has for some time now been talk in high circles in this country about the need to knock out Chinese nuclear power plants before China develops a serious potential for nuclear war. Many persons in the military here are

looking for a chance to go to war with China. I think China is fully aware of this, is eager to avoid a war, and that this accounts for her extreme moderation thus far in terms of what she is prepared to do physically - as opposed to what she is prepared to say. But in the event that China and the United States become involved in a war, it is a very risky proposition as to whether or not the Soviet Union could stay out. If Russia were to enter, the game of course would be up. We would have backed into World War III.

For all of these reasons, it would seem obvious to me that what is at stake in Vietnam is not simply the utterly contemptible actions of the American government in a war in which over 150,000 Vietnamese have now been killed, the bulk of them civilians, but it is also the shocking danger of a world war being unleashed by the military-political leadership of the United States. Therefore it is of primary importance for every section of the International to do everything in its power to bring the U.S. government to the light.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

If we are agreed that there is a clear and present danger of World War III breaking out over Vietnam, the question is how one gets the US to change its policy. One of the problems is that the American public still supports Johnson in this war and that the American anti-Communist pathology is such that Americans are prepared to do almost anything to Vietnam and even to China rather than to recognise that the United States is not an Asian power. Given this political reality, namely that no opposition within the United States is likely at this time to change the Johnson policy in Vietnam, one has to ask what will change that policy. Here I would submit that no American administration can afford indefinitely to ignore external pressure. One reason that we are in Vietnam at all is out of our fear of losing influence in Asia. If it becomes clear to Johnson that by remaining in Asia on the terms that we now remain there means that we are losing massive numbers of friends and allies elsewhere, the Administration may feel it necessary to cut its losses and get out of Vietnam. Rarely do I think we have seen a situation in which it is so necessary to mobilise world opinion in order to secure change of policy on the part of a given nation. I suggest the following steps be taken to compel the American government as well as the American people to re-examine their Vietnam policy:

1) I would urge that the pacifists in each of our various sections call together all of those peace organisations which are non-aligned, all those trade union movements with which we are on friendly terms, all those student groups which we can involve, and all of those religious bodies which are concerned, for the purpose of staging absolutely massive, silent and completely non-violent vigils at the various American embassies. If on a given day in early September, for example, there were to be some 15,000 - or preferably 50,000 - British citizens in front of the American embassy in London, some 5,000 to 10,000 French citizens in front of the American embassy in Paris, and so on across the continent (as well as in other countries, such as Japan), and if these masses of people were not engaged in rioting, and were led by spokesmen who could not be accused of being Communists but who represented what one might call the conscience of the country, I do not think that the American State Department or the American press or the American people could ignore action of that kind. I emphasize the need for such actions to be non-violent for the simple reason that Americans - like any people anywhere - tend to react against violent attacks on the embassies, consulates and missions of their own nation. I emphasize that the leadership should be of an impeccably democratic nature, because it ought not to be possible for the American government to dismiss the protests as being "Communist-inspired."

2) I would urge that in addition to such massive vigils that we make every attempt in every country to get church groups within that country to correspond with church groups in the United States, to get trade union organisations to correspond with trade union bodies in this country, to get student organisations to correspond with student groups here, and so forth. It would be of no great value if the trade union movement in Japan, for example, simply wrote to the official trade union

leadership in Washington - but it would be of great value if they could obtain a list of the various trade union locals and addressed their material to them directly. In the same way, I think that in addition to official communications to the National Council of Churches, religious bodies in Great Britain ought to be in touch with the lowest possible denominator of religious groups in this country that they can reach. That is to say, if the Episcopalians in England have addresses of local Episcopal churches, they ought to write to them directly as well as to write to the Episcopal Church headquarters. The point is to try to bring home as close to the American grass roots as possible the degree of opposition that much of the world feel toward our policies.

3) Here I have a suggestion to throw out that may be of value, but may on the other hand be impractical - something which the (WRI) Council will have to consider for itself. There has been emphasis in one place and another on sending delegations to Saigon or Hanoi. I certainly do not oppose such delegations. They are an excellent thing. But the basic problem is not in Saigon nor in Hanoi but in Washington D.C. Even if we were to grant that the National Liberation Front could enter negotiations if it were to make such an open offer through some third party, even if we were to grant that Hanoi should act more reasonably than it has acted, even if we were to grant that Peking has shown no great interest in a settlement in Vietnam, the fact would still remain that the prime aggressor on Vietnam is not the NLF, nor Hanoi, nor Peking, but the American government. There-fore in addition to the delegations that have or may be going to Vietnam, I would like to suggest the possible sending of a delegation to Washington D.C. to talk to Johnson.

Such a delegation would make sense only if it were of the very highest level and was formed in co-operation with the IFOR, the ICDP and groups like the World Council of Churches. If the leadership of the Japanese trade union movement, if key figures in the British Labour Party, if outstanding European intellectuals who have been known for playing a role independent of the Communist world, could be assembled in a single delegation for the purpose of going to Washington and demanding that the war be closed down, demanding that Johnson negotiate directly with the NLF, demanding that the Americans end the mass terror of napalm bombing and so forth, I think that delegation might carry the kind of moral authority which the American public could not so quickly dismiss. What precisely that delegation would do in this country I am not clear. It would of course attempt to see Johnson, but it might also engage in something such as a direct picketing of the White House. It might engage in a silent vigil in front of the UN headquarters in New York City; it might attempt to address some mass rally in New York City. This particular idea would have merit only if we were dealing with people at the very top, so to speak. Otherwise they could too easily be dismissed and the delegation could be overlooked by the press. One of the things which any such delegation could do would be to confer directly with their counterparts in this country. Church leadership could talk with the various church leaders here, trade union leadership could talk with the various union leaders here, student leaders could address student groups in this country, and so on.

I want to make very clear a point that I have touched on at least twice in my notes above. It is very important, whatever may be the attitude of our various national sections toward a degree of cooperation with the Communist movement, to realize that if we are going to expect the American public to listen to what we have to say on this issue, that the leadership in Europe and in Asia of the opposition to the Vietnamese war must not be seen simply as led by Communists and pro-Communists. Nor as being a coalition in which Communists and non-Communists fully co-operate. It is very important that those who have been traditionally and correctly considered "friends of the West", those who have been critical of Soviet policy or of Chinese policy, those - in short - who cannot be considered as pro-Communist in any sense, speak out and take the lead in speaking out in an effort to break through the almost psychotic American concern with "stopping Communism."

This is the reason that I have stressed the need for securing persons of this stature on any delegation that would come to this country, and the need for keeping the leadership of mass demonstrations in our own hands. By "our own hands" I do not mean the hands of the W.R.I. We do not begin to have the strength - nor does the entire pacifist movement put together - to mobilise the kind of protest which is needed at this time. I am talking about seeking out those trade union leaders who may even be pro-NATO but who are absolutely appalled by US policy in Vietnam and are prepared to speak out against it. I am talking about those Japanese trade union leaders, those Indian trade union leaders etc., who may be much more conservative on many points than we ourselves, but who on the issue of Vietnam are prepared to make clear statements to the American government and to the American people. There is a chance that they will be heard. It is hard to dismiss such voices. The question of forming united fronts with various local sections of the World Peace Council ought not even to arise until after we have attempted to secure united fronts with those elements that the American government and the American people will have to listen to.

I do not mean here to try to impose an American problem on the pacifist movement in other countries. I know how terribly impatient others are - as we ourselves are - with the American obsession with Communism, but our primary concern just now is not, I take it, to deal with that American problem but to deal with the more immediate one of ending the tragic, criminal and yerrribly dangerous situation in Vietnam. For that reason I ask that we speak with the voice that can be heard, that can be understood and cannot be dismissed by those in this country.

Now obviously, if all else fails, if there are no leading Protestant and Catholic clergy in Europe who are prepared to take a stand on this, if there are no leading members of the British Labour Party who will join in a protest, then as far as I am concerned we shall have to take our allies where we can find them, in order to make whatever protest we can against this war. But the problem in Vietnam is far too serious for us not to treat it with the seriousness that it deserves, which is to say with some degree of political reality and some understanding of the need to secure the very largest names in the intellectual, trade union and religious fields. I say again that this is not something which the WRI can do on its own, but it is something which it could initiate in term of bringing about meetings and consultations among elements that are broader than ourselves.

CONCLUSION

My conclusion would be that the United States got itself involved in Vietnam in large part by the blundering diplomacy of John Foster Dulles who on the basis of his fear of Communist China involved the United States in a war which it could not possibly win. The tragedy, leaving for a moment the moral issue aside, is a political tragedy - for Ho Chi Minh could have played (and may still play) the role of a kind of Asian Tito. American policy thus far has not only killed over a hundred and fifty thousand Vietnamese but has come very close to guaranteeing that North Vietnam will be placed in the unnatural position (in the light of its entire history) of being a close ally and a subject state essentially of China. This is a tragedy of US policy. The future of US policy is even more ominous, for the tendency is to drift steadily toward: a confrontation with mainland China.

It would not be out of place in any conclusion to stress once more that those of us in this country in this country feel that the Vietnam crisis is the gravest single crisis in international politics since the Cuban confrontation of 1962. For this reason, I think that every member section of the International has no choice but to give the highest priority at the present time to the matter of Vietnam.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE MEMO

The question for us in Britain is how best to provide that "external pressure" on the American Government that David McR talks about. He limits his suggestions (for domestic activity) to massive vigils at the American Embassy.

But the American government, so far as external pressure from Britain is concerned, thinks mainly in terms of the British Government. It is that Government, therefore, that we need to be 'after'. We have, after all, some responsibility for the British Government and we can, in time, do something about it. There is very little we can do directly about the American Government - for that we look to our friends in the US.

It follows that the focal point of a peace in Vietnam demonstration needs to be at the seat of government here i.e. in the Downing Street, Whitehall area. If there can be some supporting action in Grosvenor Square (US Embassy) - good, but secondary.

Then why lean so heavily - or even at all - on the tired old empires of the Labour Party, the trade unions and the Churches? As organisations they may have something to commend them in the US but over here as organisations they drag their feet hopelessly over all matters of war and peace. It is a different story with some of their individual members but this is because they have been active in the independent non-party-political peace movement since the first 'Aldermaston' of 1958. It is from this movement and from the Teach-Ins that the future will take off.

Until this year, over Vietnam, there has been nothing on a comparable scale in the U.S. and it is presumably this that leads David McR. not to realise its significance and to leap from "the pacifists" to "the Labour Party" without even reference to CND; Committee of 100; YCND; CUCaND and Campaign Caravan Workshops.

Further there is no prospect of an appreciable number of people distinguished in public life acting as a group or mission to Johnson or anyone else unless and until the grass roots are really growing anew. The thing is, of course, reciprocal, the generation of a great movement also needs VIP initiative within itself. (Can we drop this unintelligible word "intellectuals"?)

About Vietnam itself, there seems to be one key point not covered in "Memo on Vietnam". Peace will only be made in Vietnam on the basis of an American military withdrawal. The NLF is trying to enforce this by force and on present showing is not likely to succeed. But the US/Saigon army is not 'succeeding' either. If the war is not to continue indefinitely the conditions of US military withdrawal have to be discussed and agreed by the US itself. This is the central ^{round which} issue/mediation for a cease-fire and a negotiated settlement has to take place. It thus needs to be the central constructive message of our demonstrations.

All the above points of criticism notwithstanding "Memo on Vietnam" is a most helpful and valuable document. Our thanks to David McReynolds and the WRI.

The Vietnam crisis is the first major test of the world-wide non-aligned peace movement in the new shape signified by the setting up of the ICDP in 1963. The Cuban crisis showed how unready we were in 1962. Today we are, I think, less unready - but this we now have to prove.

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