

The Week

A NEWS ANALYSIS FOR SOCIALISTS
Volume 9 No. 11 March 13th 1968

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STUDENTS UNDER ATTACK

vietnam

and

the left

an answer to some critics

8, TOYNBEE STREET LONDON E.1.

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STUDENTS UNDER ATTACK

The new wave of student radicalism - the sit-ins - the demonstrations and student strikes - the protests on Vietnam - including vigorous treatment given to Labour Cabinet members - should be welcomed by socialists for what it is: a bright ray of sunlight finding its way through the general apathy and acquiescence which the Labour Government has been reigning over since it was elected.

The programme of the students is legitimate and the activities and tactics they are using to have it implemented are entirely justified. They are correct in relying on their own strength to win their reforms. If they can win some concessions - relatively small ones - this alone can serve to show the working class generally that with just a little application of its power, it is possible to show this Government up for what it is - a bunch of politically discredited individuals working in the interest of capitalism - something of a paper tiger.

That is why we must look with more than a little apprehension upon the talk in the press and in Government circles about "controlling" the students, and especially ominous is the calculating demagoguery of Patrick Gordon Walker's playing up to the ignorance and prejudice of sections of the working class with his not so veiled threats. This talk of a taxpayer's revolt is arch-hypocrisy. In their plans for licking the working class into shape, the ruling class have no room for a rebellious student population, and would seek to turn one against the other. In this respect, a Patrick Gordon Walker is doing the employer's work.

The employers and the Government are nervous, the tactics and methods of the students have their own infectious qualities. Very quickly on the morrow they can become the tactics of the industrial class-struggle on a much wider front. That is why the left should welcome the new upsurge and do their best to understand it and to help to give it direction and a more general purpose.

Students must seek to explain their case to the organised working class - no trade union would agree to recent attacks which the students have suffered in relation to their grants. Likewise militant workers must resist the pressures, grounded in deep-down antagonisms which have a class basis, to take an anti-student stance.

We should counterpose student-worker unity against the Government in its foreign and home policies.

When dealing with the position of the Communist Party on Vietnam, Mrs. Reid draws attention to the resolutions passed on Vietnam by that party; especially those in "support of the Vietnamese people's right to self-determination. But, unfortunately, these fine words have not always coincided with the deeds of Communist Party leaders and members, who have concentrated their activities in the British Council for Peace in Vietnam which, as we have noted before, Mrs. Reid forgets about in her article. This organisation, which we must say does very good work in general propaganda, has consistently refused to adopt a principled line on Vietnam. Its founding statement of aims stated that the B.C.P.V. did not seek to take sides - how can this be reconciled with giving support to the right of the Vietnamese people to self-determination. It has consistently called for "negotiations" as an aim regardless of the position the Vietnamese themselves have taken. Of late, it has pushed the slogan: "Support U Thant" The North Vietnamese had occasion last year to criticise Fenner Brockway, the chairman of the B.C.P.V., in very strong terms (we have reproduced the text of the main criticism in this issue). The Vietnamese totally rejected U Thant's most recent proposals, yet Betty Reid takes the V.S.C. and The Week to task for attacking U Thant. In fact, the criticisms that V.S.C. had made of U Thant and his proposals were extremely mild in comparison with those made by both North Vietnam and the N.L.F., as any regular reader of Vietnam Courier will confirm.

Where does Betty Reid stand on this question? If the V.C.C. and The Week are guilty of "disruption" because of their mild criticisms, then surely, by the same logic, the Vietnamese are totally disrupting the peace movement in this country by their much more severe attacks. But this is obvious nonsense. Betty Reid is counting upon the readers of Comment being unfamiliar with the Vietnamese point of view, which is seldom to be seen in Communist Party publications.

Neither is Mrs. Reid particularly reliable in her use of quotations: consider how she uses part of Pat Jordan's speech in Trafalgar Square on October 22nd. She wishes to demonstrate that The Week believes that nothing of importance can be done in Britain to defend the Vietnamese people until we have a socialist government. But readers of The Week will know that we have consistently polemicalised against this sectarian view attributed to us. In fact, the very passage Betty Reid quotes was directed primarily against those who claim nothing can be done because the Labour Government cannot be forced to change its policy, or that we should suspend activity on Vietnam until after the social revolution. By missing out two sentences prior to her quotation and by missing the word "But" from the beginning of her extract she maliciously distorts our real position. Readers of this issue can compare her quotation with the original.

So much for Mrs. Reid's methods of arguing. What of her politics? Here we are familiar ground and the issues are straightforward: firstly, whether we should seek to build a movement on a principled programme or by diluting the programme to give it the widest appeal; and, secondly, on the nature of the "united front."

At this point we feel it helpful to quote Harold Wilson when speaking in the House of Commons on Tuesday, March 12, he said:
"Provided that those who demonstrate genuinely want peace and not military victory for one side or the other, if it makes them feel good, I have no objection."

In the past, Mr. Wilson has made similar statements, adding that the people who demonstrate should go to the Chinese Embassy. Why does Harold Wilson not object to those who call for "peace"? Because he knows that if the call is confined in such a way the issues become blurred. He can claim, quite correctly, that he wants "peace in Vietnam". It can be argued that Johnson wants "peace in Vietnam", too. The point is, of course, what kind of peace? Supporters of the V.S.C. and The Week want a certain kind of peace, one which is more likely to be a lasting peace, moreover: a peace consistent with self-determination for the Vietnamese people. Johnson's "peace" would be that of his victory over the N.L.F. Therefore, a mere call for "peace" in Vietnam is totally inadequate and confusing. A movement based upon this slogan - as is the British Council for Peace in Vietnam - will be thrown into disarray by Wilson's and Johnson's phoney "peace" moves. The B.C.P.V. will, furthermore, appear in the position of putting equal pressure on the victims of aggression and the aggressors to "open negotiations". Little wonder that the representatives of the Vietnamese people have had to publicly criticise the Fenner Brockways.

Even from a historical point of view all the available evidence points to a solidarity position being more effective, as well as being more correct. In Britain, there have been two occasions when really mass movements arose on foreign policy issues: in support of the young Soviet republic in the twenties; and against the fascists in Spain. In both cases, there was mass mobilisation of very wide support and, more important, big sections of the working class were involved. In both cases it was precisely because the movement was committed to one side that it was so large, enthusiastic and effective. We ask Betty Reid: what kind of movement would have been built on the programme that called for "negotiations" between the young Soviet Republic and the intervening powers? Would there have been a mass movement built on the basis of "peace" between the fascists in Spain and the Republicans? To pose these questions is to answer them. Can anyone say that the Vietnamese are less justified in their cause than were the Soviets or the Spanish Republicans?

Mrs. Reid, for all her talk about broad support, from her criticism of other left-wing groups wants to make her "united front" in support of the Vietnamese people conditional on agreement on a whole series of other issues not necessarily relevant to Vietnam. That is why she finds it necessary to bring in the question of Trotskyism and the Fourth International's estimate of the Soviet Union. But her criterion for working with other leftist groups changes when it comes to forming a front with Christians, Liberals, etc., who are often anti-socialist and anti-communist. Betty Reid would, no doubt, be very enthusiastic about the fact that the British Peace Committee is so broad-based that at a conference organised by it in London last week end there were a large number of delegates who support N.A.T.O.. But to work with people who talk of the "agonised socialist conscience of the Western World" is dangerous. We will examine why Mrs. Reid thinks this is dangerous later, but let us look a bit more at this question of "breadth".

Is it true that the solidarity position "narrows down the movement for Vietnam"? Look at the messages of support that the October 22nd demonstration received. The March 17th demonstration is receiving even wider support from all sections of the movement and all walks of life. Mrs. Reid's last argument is thus disposed of.

In the same issue of Peace News which contained Alistair Bucknell's letter there was an editorial entitled "Sham Solidarity". This is a cleverer and more honest statement of the pacifist position. (see elsewhere in this issue.) Thus it states: "... Our position ideally is that the NLF should cease fire unilaterally and that the United States should withdraw unilaterally" However, Peace News recognises that "we have no right to call upon the NLF to cease fire." (emphasis in the original.) "We are too much responsible for what the Americans are doing in Vietnam to be entitled to condemn the NLF when they resist with violence." This handsome concession (it is a fine thing that leader writers from Caledonian Road are prepared to concede the right of Vietnamese peasants to defend themselves with violence) is in marked contrast to the treatment that Bob Overy dishes out to anti-Vietnam war demonstrators who take the solidarity position. They are described as "a shouting 'militant' mob," "a huge slogan-shouting, unruly march," and people who "show contempt, by ... lack of dignity and commitment"; in fact, the whole demonstration will be one of "frustration, ill-directed violence" (does the pacifist recognise well-directed violence?) "and anger" which is really "self-contempt" Comrade Overy's advice is that "we should get on with doing" things ... "to dissociate Britain from America and to help forward the pressures for American withdrawal." Bob Overy's anger is understandable from his point of view; not only has he had to concede the right of the Vietnamese people to defend themselves, he has also to recognise that there is going to be a huge demonstration in favour of the Vietnamese being successful in this struggle.

But to conclude this examination one has to ask the question: why have all these organisations chosen to attack the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign at this very time? We would venture the following answer: precisely because of its success in mobilising and because that success is attracting support from the rank and file of those organisations. The united front concepts of the V.S.C. and the Ad-hoc committees which V.S.C. has initiated frighten them. These small minded people put the sectarian interests of their organisations above that of forming an all-embracing non-exclusive mass movement in support of the people of Vietnam. That is why they ignored invitations to attend the founding meetings of the October 22nd and March 17th Ad-hoc committees. Had they attended these meetings they could have easily taken part in the formulation of slogans and the general policy of the demonstrations. The fact that this non-exclusive, democratic method was used by the Ad-hoc Committees has been completely hidden from the readers of these organisations' journals.

They will not be successful; this struggle also took place in the United States and the sectarians were defeated. As a result the most significant anti-war movement ever seen in the United States has been built against the most fantastic odds. The same process is happening in this country. ... Those organisations which refuse to participate in the united front of support for the Vietnamese people will themselves suffer. Those leaders or organisations who stand against the united front will only have themselves to blame if they lose members and if their organisations are beset by bitter wrangles. The united front will grow and important lessons will be learnt by thousands of militants which have relevance for all struggles. The Week is very proud of the modest part it has played in this process.

MARCH 17

a letter from Alistair Bucknell, chairman of the Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which appeared in the March 9th issue of Peace News.

I find it amazing that so many people in the peace movement are supporting the proposed demonstration for March 17. The slogan "solidarity with the Vietnamese people against American aggression" is all very nice, frightfully daring and means absolutely nothing. This demonstration will let Wilson and co. off the hook completely. Violent themes and violent actions are exactly what the British and American press would like to hear. They also undo years of hard work by CND, the Committee of 100, and others in breaking down barriers of fear, hatred and prejudice.

We are for peace in Vietnam. That means that we must support freedom for the Vietnamese people, but exactly how this is brought about in Vietnam is beyond our power to control from Britain.

It is our job to help force the American aggressors to withdraw. This means:

1. Get Britain to dissociate from American policy in Vietnam.
2. Subvert United States' troops in Britain. Encourage desertion and demonstrations against the war by Americans in Britain.
3. Stop playing at being brave and gaily taking sides with the liberation forces when we could have some real influence in weakening the aggressor.

All that gas about solidarity is exactly what the United States Government and the Central Intelligence Agency would like us to say.

Forget March 17. It is irrelevant and dangerous. British dissociation must be our priority, and Y.C.N.D.'s demonstration on March 24 is the time to make a major step in forcing a real British initiative for peace and freedom in Vietnam.

Alistair Bucknell,
Chairman, Y.C.N.D.,
5, Caledonian Rd.,
London N.1.

READ INTERNATIONAL - READ INTERNATIONAL - READ INTERNATIONAL - READ INTER

On March 27, The Week will cease publication and will be replaced by International. This will be a printed political review of British and foreign affairs. It will analyse the vital political questions which face the left on the home and foreign fronts. It will continue the work which The Week has done in building a united front movement against the Wilson Government's Tory policies and for support to national liberation front struggles.

International will appear monthly and cost 1/- (3d extra for postage)
Send for a copy to: International, 8, Toynbee St., London E.1.

BROCKWAY DISTORTS THE TRUTH

from Vietnam Courier July 24, 1967

At the International Congress to discuss the Vietnam problem in Stockholm in early July, the delegates of both North and South Vietnam energetically denounced the U.S. aggression in Vietnam and exposed the correct stand of the Vietnamese people on the settlement of the Vietnam issue. This was warmly hailed by the Congress. But according to Western reports a British politician, Brockway, who attended the Congress made the assertion that the Vietnamese people have "lowered their demands". He said that he would inform Johnson and discuss the matter with British foreign Minister Brown, the propagandist of U.S. "peace negotiations".

This allegation is a mere distortion of the stand of the Vietnamese people; it runs counter to the appeal of the Congress demanding that the U.S. definitively and unconditionally put an end to the bombing, shelling and other war acts against the D.R.V.N., stop aggression, definitively and unconditionally withdraw all U.S. and satellite troops and war materials, dismantle all U.S. bases in South Vietnam and let the Vietnamese people settle themselves their internal affairs without interference from outside, conformity with the platform of the South Vietnam N.L.F., the sole authentic representative of the fundamental aspirations of the South Vietnamese people.

The allegation that the Vietnamese people have "lowered the demand" in their stand on the Vietnam problem is only profitable to the U.S. imperialists who are trying to bring pressure to bear on the Vietnamese people, fool world opinion which has been staunchly supporting the Vietnamese people in their struggle against the U.S. aggression. The leaders of the D.R.V.N. have also clearly pointed out that if the U.S. government sincerely desires to talk with the D.R.V.N. government, it must first of all definitively and unconditionally stop the bombing, shelling and other acts of war against the D.R.V.N.

VIETNAMESE DENOUNCE U THANT'S PROPOSALS from The Week (6/4/67) shortened

...In an article in the official newspaper Nhan Dan, U Thant's recent Vietnam truce proposals were described as "supporting and encouraging U.S. imperialism." The paper went on to say that U Thant's suggestion for a general stand-still truce, followed by preliminary talks and the reconvening of the Geneva conference, put the "victim of aggression on the same footing as the aggressor. The truce proposals would, it said, "amount in fact to demanding that the Vietnamese people lay down their arms and give up the fight against U.S. aggressors while nearly 500,000 U.S. troops still tread Vietnamese soil. "Such an approach constitutes in itself an encouragement to the U.S. aggressors in Vietnam," the paper concluded.

Le Monde of April 3rd had this to say about U Thant's latest proposals: "The publication by Mr. Thant of his new 'peace plan' for Vietnam undoubtedly constitutes a success for the United States. The United Nations secretary-general unquestionably strengthened the American position that any cessation of the bombing should co-incide with a reciprocity move from Hanoi....Mr. Thant's attempt, whose failure was foreseeable, is all the more to be regretted since it is already interpreted in Peking as further evidence of the secretary-general's alignment with 'American imperialism'.....
(Our emphasis)

MESSAGES OF SUPPORT FOR OCTOBER 22

ERNIE ROBERTS* (Assistant General Secretary AEU)

'The war in Vietnam is reaching a most critical stage and is pregnant with danger to world peace. Either the war must be brought to an end quickly by the Americans ceasing their war of aggression and leaving the Vietnamese to settle their own affairs or we shall find ourselves involved in a World Wide Nuclear War. The TUC and the Labour Party have made clear their opposition to this worst of all wars and I urge all Trade Unionists to continue their opposition until peace and justice has been established in Vietnam.'

* in his personal capacity.

ALAN SILLITOE - writer

'I am very glad that this demonstration is being held, and regret that I am not able to speak at it.

The American troops in Vietnam are continuing the age of barbarism. They have no moral right whatsoever to oppose the Vietnamese peoples' struggle to take control of their own country and their own destiny. The presence of the Americans perpetuates appalling suffering and ruin, and they should be immediately withdrawn. The American attempt to occupy Vietnam is the most vicious form of imperialism the world has yet seen, and every person must condemn it, and do what they can to end it.'

NEW ZEALAND

'Auckland Council on Vietnam, representing growing disquiet at New Zealand involvement in this shameful war, sends warm greetings to London demonstrators, and our thanks for your part in helping to save our country's honour'.

JAPAN

'We are grateful to send our greeting of solidarity of international anti-war movement.

We are going to stage a nation-wide unified campaign against the Vietnam war on Oct 21 as our participation in the international campaign against the American imperialist invasion into Vietnam. Two million workers of Sohyo (the Japan General Council of Trade Unions) are going to have their rallies throughout the country. Another significant feature of the present situation is that anti-war youth organisations are taking the initiative of activities through the campaign under the influence of the struggles for the victorious people of Vietnam. We hope our solidarity and contact with you will be strengthened and consolidated through the struggle against our common enemy.

With the greeting of solidarity, Osaka Antiwar Youth Committee

Messages of support for October 22 Cont'd

NATIONAL MOBILISATION COMMITTEE

'The American Peace Movement has set October 21-22 as the date for our next national demonstration. On these days we plan to confront the war-makers at the Pentagon in Washington DC to demonstrate and communicate our opposition to the United States government's policy of aggression in Vietnam.

Beginning on Saturday, October 21, we will gather in Washington and march to the Pentagon grounds. Here we plan to hold a rally, where many distinguished people, representing the spectrum of American society's opposition to the war, will speak. Towards the end of the rally those many thousands who are prepared to take more direct action against the war machine will attempt to enter the Pentagon in order to sit-in, blocking hallways and entrances in a dramatic, non-violent action. The direct action and a supportive picket line will continue on Sunday October 22.

Your support has been a source of encouragement and enthusiasm to us. We are excited to hear about the many demonstrations planned throughout the world. Let's continue to work together to bring an end to the War and to build a world where peace and freedom can and will exist.'

NALSO - from their recruiting leaflet

'NALSO supports the demonstrations of 21st/22nd October which are being organised throughout the world against the continued aggression of the United States in Vietnam. In the United States a massive 'March on Washington' is being organised with the slogan - 'US Get Out of Vietnam Now'. In Britain the Ad Hoc Committee supported by NALSO will hold a mass rally in Trafalgar Square at 2.30 p.m. with international speakers. The march will then set out for the US Embassy via the Australian and New Zealand High Commissions'.

FRANK ALLAUN MP - Member Labour Party NEC

'There is growing war weariness in America. So President Johnson knows he must get the war over soon - and well before the Presidential elections in November 1968. Whilst he is being pressed very strongly by the US peace movement - a magnificent one - to end the bombing of North Vietnam, without which there is no possibility of peace talks, he is also being pressed by the hawks to get the war over by wiping out the whole population of North Vietnam. The hawks are prepared to risk a war with China and with Soviet Russia. So the decision could go either way. At this moment of decision it is most urgent that the British Government be pressed to bring its influence to bear against the terrible war in Vietnam.'

NATIONAL MOBILISATION COMMITTEE thanks VSC

The following letter was received early in September 1967 by the VSC (which initiated the October 22 Vietnam ad hoc Committee) from Rev James Bevel, National Director, National Mobilisation Committee to End the War in Vietnam.

'In the name of the National Mobilisation, I should like to express my appreciation of your prompt response to our appeal for international support of our October 21st Washington Mobilisation. The program you have arranged toward this end is inspiring and we are indebted to you for the hard work and enthusiasm that must have gone into the organisation of these proposed activities. We are further pleased by the long list of Peace groups that you have united for your demonstration and to hear that you have invited speakers from other countries including the United States.

In reply to your request for further information concerning the aims and ideas behind our Washington Mobilisation, let me stress that our plans are not finalised but that we shall keep you up to date as our program develops.

However, as you state in your letter that some of the Vietnam protest groups in Great Britian may not realise the importance of a week-end of international demonstrations, let me list some of the major considerations that contributed to our decision for an international appeal.

As a result of the April 15th marches and the various Vietnam summer programs, more and more people throughout the United States are realising the urgency involved in putting a stop to the war in South-east Asia as well as preventing the occurence of any similar situation in the future.

Consequently, we feel that action designed to focus international attention on the war-capital of the western world must be participated in by peace loving people of all countries.

Our slogan 'Confront the War Makers October 21st' is designed to appeal to all nations.

Therefore, the National Mobilisation hopes that as many co-ordinated demonstrations throughout the world will stand with us behind this slogan and that our united demands will strengthen the note of impatience we feel toward the continued policy of destruction.

I hope that this brief outline will help you in gathering support for this program and that you will keep us informed about your activities.

We shall be in touch with you throughout the following months and shall keep you up to date with the essential structuring of the Washington confrontation.'

I do not intend to repeat the excellent arguments that have already been made on this platform about Vietnam. I want to address myself to one topic only: "What can we do best to assist the people of Vietnam to defeat American imperialism". First, and most obvious, we must build up the movement in this country which takes the line of American withdrawal because this is the most principled and most effective way of opposing the war. As other speakers have explained, to limit oneself to call for ending the bombing and negotiations, leads one into a trap. It is impossible to build a protest movement on these lines because it will be immediately confused by the so-called peace initiatives of Johnson, backed up by his faithful follower, Wilson. This much is obvious.

But there are wider issues: how can we really bring about a change in Government policy? Or to put it another way, CAN we bring about a change in Government policy? I want to say most emphatically that I believe we can and must force a change. But we can only force a change in the sense that the Government manoeuvres. This Government is totally committed to the defence of capitalism and imperialist domination of the third world, whether it be open domination or disguised in the form of neo-colonialism. That is the whole meaning of its foreign policy. Therefore the only lasting thing that we can do to help the people of Vietnam, and other countries, in their fight against imperialism, is to replace the present Government with one which is anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. How do we do this?

Comrades, this week that man Gunter talked of an unholy alliance of Communists and Trotskyists who are trying to wreck the British economy. That is dangerously like the talk of Hitler and Mussolini when justified their destruction of the German and Italian labour movements. But I want to pose an alliance in another form of words: a united front of all left wingers in this country on the issues of a struggle against imperialism and a struggle for the social transformation of Britain.

Comrades, all over Britain workers are going into action to defend their living standards: the dockers, printers, busmen, building site workers, postmen, electricians and others. Tomorrow, they will be followed by huge new sections of the working class. I propose that we fuse and integrate the struggles against the wage freeze with that of the struggle against American aggression in Vietnam. The anti-Vietnam movement and the militant trade unionists have much to learn from each other: those in the anti-Vietnam movement can learn from workers' struggles that only the might of the workers can, in the last analysis, bring about basic changes in Britain. Militant trade unionists can learn from the anti-Vietnam war movement that opposition to Government policy must be total.

One cannot isolate the wage freeze from the Government's support of the Americans in Vietnam: it is an integral part of an overall policy.

Comrades, the thousands of people on this demonstration must solidarise themselves with the dockers, building site workers, electricians, and all other workers engaged in struggle. Just as you have turned up here today to show your support for the Vietnamese people, you must also show your support for the

Speech to London Vietnam Rally

(Continued)

dockers, electricians, and building site workers. You must join their demonstrations, collect money for them, get your organisations to support them, argue their case. But we need also to win the militant trade unionists to opposition to the war in Vietnam. Out of the fusing of these two great protest movements we can build a united front, a united front with no bans or proscriptions. We are tired of being told that we can't work with certain people because they are communists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Anarchists. Lets get rid of this macarthyism once and for all.

There is only one yardstick by which we can judge people: whose side are they on in the living struggles of today? We judge people by what they do today, not what they say about history. Comrades, all of you here can help to form this united front. Let this united front embrace all those who are willing to fight imperialism and British capitalism and its representatives. Let us bring into the united front the communists, the trotskyists, the maoists, the left-wing labour, the left catholics, young liberals, young socialists and non-party people. Let us once and for all end the witch hunts of the past.

Comrades, we owe a great debt to the Vietnamese people. Their heroic example, their determination to fight to the end against American imperialism, their noble courage has inspired us all. All over the world young people have been won for anti-imperialism, for socialism by the strength of this example. Our debt is deep, let us repay it. Let us go forward from this meeting to make one of the most militant anti-imperialist demonstrations Britain has ever seen. Let us go forward from this demonstration to build the united front. Let us build through the united front a mighty movement against imperialism and against British capitalism's attempts to cut workers living standards. Let us take this united front on to the offensive, with the aim of building a movement and the necessary organisations to destroy capitalism in Britain. Let us pledge ourselves to build a new society in Britain through this struggle. A new society which will help to build up the terrible damage done by the imperialist wars of aggression, a new society which will pay its debts to the people of Vietnam.

Comrades, let us pledge ourselves to do all we can to help the world-wide struggle for national liberation, social advance and social justice. Comrades, let us show by our actions that we are the conscience of the west. Comrades, let us today and tomorrow show the same fighting spirit as the Vietnamese. Comrades, let us start doing all these things today.

EXTRACTS FROM DIVERSIONS IN THE FIGHT FOR PEACE

..... At a large demonstration in Trafalgar Square in October, initiated by an organisation called the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, Pat Jordan of The Week, in one of the main speeches of the afternoon, appealed for a united front.

'We are tired of being told that we can't work with certain people because they are Communists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Anarchists. Let's get rid of this Macarthyism once and for all.'

Any appeal for unity in the present situation necessarily evokes an immediate response. Is there not an overwhelming need for the concentration of all possible forces? Must we not welcome all who declare support for the Vietnamese people? Communists can work with Christians, liberals, pacifists. Should they not also be ready to work with all those who claim to be committed socialists? Surely it could only be the most doctrinaire, the sectarian, those who do not see the need for unity, those who want to continue into the sixties old and forgotten controversies and divisions, who could hold back from such an appeal?

Calls for unity, however, must be accompanied by principled discussion and agreement on policies and forms of action which can be mutually agreed, whatever the frankly expressed differences on long-term policies and solutions, because of the urgent need to avert immediate disaster.

We need therefore to progress from general calls for unity to an examination of various policies which are being put forward in the peace movement, in order to see precisely what it is on which we are being asked to unite.

In pamphlets, articles, leaflets, posters, meetings, in the visit of our delegation of three Political Committee members, including our General Secretary, to North Vietnam in 1965, and in our policy resolution at the 30th National Congress in November 1967, the Communist Party has made its policy absolutely clear. Our Congress resolution states that we believe the only just basis for a solution is summarised in the four point proposal of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and in the programme of the broad alliance of progressive forces embodied in the National Front of Liberation of South Vietnam.

This has been our position throughout the whole period and remains our position today. It is our objective, by continuous explanation of this policy, to win more and more people to understand and agree with it. Furthermore, Communists have supported and participated in the work of the British Vietnam Committee which was set up as long ago as 1952 and which has consistently campaigned over all these years to bring information to organisations and individuals in Britain about the struggles of the Vietnamese people and to win understanding and support for these. There is no doubt that their work has contributed to no small measure to the decisions of the Labour Party and Trade Union Conferences on Vietnam.

Our Party also declares in its resolution that it will respond to all requests made by the Vietnamese people. What requests have been made? Medical aid and supplies are desperately needed, and we have worked for the fullest support for such a campaign. But above all they ask us for political action,

for the mobilisation of British people in such numbers that the policy of support by Britain for American aggression can be ended. This would further isolate the US and put greater pressure on it to withdraw its forces from Vietnam, as provided for in the 1954 Geneva agreements.

How to bring this about? Only on the basis of genuine unity between hundreds of thousands of people, who may differ widely in their views on the causes of war, on religion, on communism and socialism, on the basic role of American imperialism, on the character of the Governments of North and South Vietnam, but who nevertheless can unite in their demands for the cessation of the bombing, for the withdrawal of American troops, and for the right of the Vietnamese people to decide their own future.

Such are the divisions within the imperialist camp, and even within the ruling classes in Britain and America, that not even all of these are united in pursuing present American Government policies in Vietnam. And amongst ordinary people awareness of the pressing danger of nuclear war, of a future clouded with permanent menace, horror at the actions of a world power turning the might of its military machine upon a small undeveloped country, admiration at the heroism, tenacity and skill of a people fighting against aggression, disgust at the corruption of the Saigon puppet Government and its fascist-loving ruling class, are all powerful and varied motives driving many who are not aware of all the fundamental issues involved, or who hold firmly to different views, to become nevertheless, the allies of those who already have a totally committed position based on a socialist world view.

It is this kind of unity which is the task before the peace movement, if it is to mobilise forces powerful enough to change the situation, and not simply to make a declaration of its horror at what is happening. How to bring into the struggle hundreds of thousands more who can unite on the kind of immediate demands we have outlined, and which if fought for and realised could change the shape of future events both in Britain and on a world-scale,

This organisation (The VSC), a very late arrival on the scene, having been set up only 1966, claims to be the only organisation in Britain which seeks to build a united front of organisations and individuals pledged to full support for the National Liberation Front and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. 'Victory for the NLF' is its slogan, and this it declares must be the basis of united action. Our party, as we have already shown, has made its own analysis and policy perfectly clear. It is not then on the question of the call for support for the Vietnamese people that we are critical of this organisation, but over what needs to be done now to end US aggression. We believe that what is required is a movement of hundreds of thousands that will make a real political impact in Britain. It is here that the attitude and activities of the VSC are obstacles to the building of such a movement, since they express continuous hostility to all whom they consider have not passed their test of full commitment, and constantly endeavour to narrow down, and indeed attack, genuine efforts for the broadest unity around realisable immediate demands such as we have already outlined.

Thus U Thant, for example, became a figure for major attack and hostility, and his proposals were posed against the 'full solidarity' this organisation demands.

Are we doing it an injustice? Let us examine a frank declaration of its intentions as outlined in the current Labour Worker by the organiser, David Robinson. Hitherto, he states, the policy of the VSC has been to encourage its supporters to join local Peace in Vietnam Committees and there put forward the "full solidarity" position.

Following the successful Trafalgar Square demonstration, he continues, the VSC must use its new strength in these committees "to call for a slogan of full solidarity with the Vietnamese people" and "the situation is now favourable for transforming Peace in Vietnam groups into Solidarity Committees. This is, of course, not a call for unity but for disruption. It would exclude the vast majority of organisation from any participation in the committees, including great sections of the Labour movement.

It is necessary to examine the position even further. How did this organisation come into existence? It was set up in Britain with total disregard for all existing organisations, following the call of the "World Congress" of the Fourth International in 1965. By that time the British Council for Peace in Vietnam was already firmly established and embraced a wide range of peace, anti-colonial, labour movement, church and youth organisations, and individuals of all parties and all walks of life. What was the "World Congress of the Fourth International"? There have been many splits in the Fourth International since Trotsky founded it in 1938 and there are now at least four bodies claiming to be the true heirs of Trotsky. But for our purpose here it is sufficient to know that this Congress was held by the Paris-based section which publishes a journal in English called World Outlook. Supporters in Britain do not have a public organisation, but work within other organisations. The creation of the VSC must be seen in the context of policy put forward by this 1965 "World Congress".

....Following the Congress, supporters of the Fourth International in Britain, together with International Socialism supporters, and some who supported the position of the Communist Party of China, called a conference to set up the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign....

....Later the supporters of the Communist Party of China withdrew from the conference because of various differences with which this article is not concerned, and what finally emerged was a committee largely composed of members of these other two groupings....

....Whatever our views about the nature of the two organisations we have described this would not cause us to create divisions in any genuine united effort for Vietnam. The issue is too immediate, too important, too central for that. However, not all who shout the loudest match words with deeds. The VSC, as we have seen, explicitly campaigns against the concept of a broad united movement.....

..... When the journal 'The Week', which played a big part in the setting up of the VSC, states, for example, in an editorial that the demonstrations in Britain and America on Vietnam represented "the agonised socialist conscience of the Western world" (our emphasis) we must say that this is nonsense, and dangerous nonsense, since on the one hand it totally overestimates the stage reached in terms of a coherent socialist position, and on the other it underestimates what mobilisation on a broader scale could achieve.

And if we listen again to Mr. Jordan of The Week speaking at Trafalgar Sq. we may come to a further conclusion - that he is implying that nothing in

fact can be done for Vietnam of any real consequence until we get a genuine socialist government, with an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist mandate.

"We can only force a change in the sense that this Government manoeuvres. This Government is totally committed to the defence of capitalism and imperialist domination of the third world..... therefore the only lasting thing we can do to help the people of Vietnam and other countries in their fight against imperialism is to replace the present Government with one which is anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist."

As always, the ultimate objective is posed against immediate demands. Thus on the one hand we are offered as a solution to the Vietnamese war the revolutionary overthrow of the American Government, and in Britain where the majority of the population has not been won to an understanding of the nature of capitalism and to a committed socialist position it is proposed that we should narrow down the movement for Vietnam to those who understand the need to participate in the struggle for socialism.

The fight to explain the necessity for a socialist solution and to expose the role of right-wing democracy must go on, and the Communist Party devotes a major part of its energies precisely to this task. This, however, is not the task of the peace movement which brings together people on a clear platform of immediate demands.....

SHAM SOLIDARITY

From: "Peace News", 9th March, 1968

No doubt some of those who on March 17 will be demonstrating as militantly as possible for the complete and final victory of the N.L.F. in South Vietnam would be prepared to go and fight for the Vietnamese people if the call went out for an international brigade. But we wonder how many?

There is a ring of inauthenticity about a call for complete solidarity with the Vietnamese people that asks the mass of supporters simply to shout raucous slogans from the safety of the horde, to interfere with passing motor traffic no doubt, and to break through a few police cordons. Moreover, it is deceptive and verging even on contempt to suggest that a shouting "militant" mob in Grosvenor Square is in any way equivalent in courage or moral stature to the guerrilla movement that is fighting for liberation in Vietnam.

A true assessment of the predicament and courage of those Vietnamese who are resisting the American occupation of Vietnam demands of the Englishman an appraisal of his own responsibility for the war and a willingness to consider and take equivalent risks to those of the guerrilla fighter. Any one of us who can say that he is willing to sacrifice his liberty and even his life to do the maximum possible in this country to make the Americans withdraw from Vietnam does have the right to claim that he is in solidarity with the Vietnamese guerrillas. But Peace News does not recommend that individuals in Britain should adopt over here the tactics

of the NLF; nor do we recommend that people in Vietnam itself should join the Front. Our position ideally is that the NLF should cease fire unilaterally and that the United States should withdraw unilaterally. (To call for a cease-fire by America is to recognise her right to be in Vietnam.) + (Our emphasis)

However, as pacifists like A.J. Muste and the crew of the Phoenix have discovered when they visited Vietnam, we have no right to call on the NLF to cease fire. We are too much responsible for what the Americans are doing in Vietnam to be entitled to condemn the NLF when they resist with violence. Therefore we call for American withdrawal from Vietnam and must do all in our power to make that withdrawal possible. Does a huge, slogan-shouting unruly march to Grosvenor Square make American withdrawal more likely? We don't think so. What we look to are attempts to dramatise British involvement in Vietnam - our hovercraft, nerve gases, electrical instruments, training facilities in Johore, rest and recreation centres in Hong Kong, troops in Thailand, military-sponsored research in universities, diplomatic support, historical responsibility - and to spell out that British dissociation involves the abandonment of and atonement for these functions.

Moreover, we can best dissociate ourselves from British involvement by working for the withdrawal of American troops from this country and by encouraging American troops over here to desert and US draft resisters to stand firm. The proof that these efforts are not insignificant was the demonstration against the war by soldiers in the US army that we reported only two weeks ago.

Not only, we fear, will the March 17 demonstration show contempt by its lack of dignity and commitment, for the Vietnamese who are fighting for their independence. But also we expect that it will show by expressions of frustration, ill-directed violence, and anger, the self-contempt in which many of the demonstrators hold themselves. It just isn't serious to suggest that a punch-up with policemen in London can help us to stop the Vietnam war, yet because people care about Vietnam and because they can't think of anything better to do, many normally sensible people will find themselves carried by the crowd into scuffles with the police.

The frustration, this desperate irrational reaction to our inability to do anything very much to stop a horrible war, is a form of self-contempt. For there are things that we can do to dissociate Britain from America and to help forward the pressures for American withdrawal. And we should get on with doing them.

Bob Overy

ADVERTISER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

International Socialist Review

Contents of the March-April issue

1. The Cuban Revolution and Its Lessons by Hugo Gonzalez Moscoso. A leader of the Bolivian Trotskyist movement analyzes the victory of the Cuban revolution and its meaning for Bolivia. Written last year, when the first news of a guerrilla front in Bolivia appeared, this article explains why guerrilla warfare plays a crucial role in the Latin American revolution and why it must be supported by those who seriously intend to challenge imperialist domination.
2. Radical Intellectuals in the 1930s by George Novack. One aspect of the mass American radicalization of the thirties was that a number of prominent writers, artists and intellectuals - from Edmund Wilson to John Dos Passos - came over to the side of revolution. Today, the same are establishment intellectuals at best, if not outright conservatives. What happened to them? George Novack, the "sole survivor" in the ranks of revolutionary socialism answers the question.
3. Postwar Capitalist Development at a Turning Point by Dick Roberts. An examination of the main trends of capitalist expansion in the "epoch of prosperity." Roberts questions fashionable "New Economic" theories that it can go on forever and points to significant problems for international capitalism that have developed in the past two years.
4. The Centenary of Marx's "Capital" by Ernest Mandel. The noted Belgian economist and author of *Traite d'Economie Marxiste* subjects Marx's central tenets to the test of one hundred years of capitalist "success."
5. The Day of the People by Eugene V. Debs. Reprinted from the February 1919 issue of Debs' magazine, *The Class Struggle*.

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WORLD OUTLOOK

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GENOCIDE IN VIETNAM - HYPOCRISY IN CLAPHAM HIGH STREET

The success of V.S.C. in building a united front of support for the Vietnamese liberation struggle will be evident on March 17th, as it was in last October's mobilisation. Another achievement of V.S.C. has been to outrage the leaders of the C.P. and the S.L.L., just about the only issue on which they have achieved unanimity.

There has been a stream of articles in "The Newsletter" lately, attacking V.S.C. and "The Week" for everything from Pacifism to supporting "indirectly" the C.P. bureaucracy. The high point came in the issue of March 5th, when Cliff Slaughter, chief Guru of Clapham High Street, attempted to interpret the ramblings of Betty Reid's article in "Comment" (which has been dealt with in previous issues of "The Week"). Faced with the contradiction between the S.L.L.'s accusations of support by V.S.C. for Stalinism, and the C.P.'s attack in "Comment" he concludes that; "Her real aim is to lick them into shape, as part of bringing all the "Left" protest groups under the control of the Stalinists directly. (So this is what the unity of opposites means!) Such a claim may convince the more dedicated adherents of Slaughter's band of transcendental meditation, but its falseness will be exposed as V.S.C. builds support for the N.L.F. on a genuinely non-sectarian basis.

This is, of course, what the S.L.L. opposes, they are filled with horror at the sight of Maoists, L.P. members, Trotsyists, New Left, Trade Unionists, etc. working together and achieving a genuine unity on the most vital issue facing the International Working Class movement. This is why, last Spring, they denounced the first mass demonstration in the U.S. against the war, under the cynical headline, "Genocide in Vietnam, Euphoria in Sheep Meadow." But, of course, they have loudly and long proclaimed their solidarity with the N.L.F., and have lost no opportunity to boast of it. But alas! this solidarity does not extend to supporting the call by the Vietnamese for International demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the first Anti-American demonstration in Saigon on March 19th, 1950. They have also ignored the appeals of the Vietnamese for Medical Aid, and whilst V.S.C. supporters have worked hard to raise funds for the aid of the Vietnamese Revolution, their support has been confined to the printed page. We might well comment, "Genocide in Vietnam - Hypocrisy in Clapham High Street.

However, they do not intend to kick their heels, for the latest in the proliferating issues of the "News Letter", carried a statement from the "National Committee of the Young Socialists" (the body which was set up after the split of the S.L.L. supporters from the Y.S. in 1964, and which has been in residence in Clapham High Street ever since, despite somewhat extensive and frequent changes in personnel) in which they call for a week of demonstrations from March 24th to 31st, mainly on Vietnam.

It has been a consistent complaint of the S.L.L. that when they have called for a Lobby or Demonstration on a certain date, the C.P. have followed by calling for one shortly after, in order to divert support from their effort. Could it be that they are taking a leaf out of Gollan's book on this occasion? Of course, even so they have no chance of success.

Bob Purdie.