

THE VIETNAMESE AGREE TO TALKS

After the previous article was written, Johnson announced his refusal to accept renomination and a partial "de-escalation". These were smart moves on his part. They put the loyal opposition led by Kennedy and McCarthy in a bizarre position. These forces have never argued for goals different from Johnson's. They stand for U.S. domination of Asia and therefore a strong U.S. "presence" in Vietnam. Kennedy and McCarthy differed from Johnson only on timing - and, of course, over the question of which particular imperialist, themselves or Johnson, would run the imperialist show. But now Johnson has (at least for now) removed the figure (himself) in opposition to whom the "doves" defined themselves; he has removed himself to an angelic sphere "above" politics where he no longer appears to threaten liberals. At the same time, he calls for "peace" talks through "de-escalation." This leaves the "doves" with no threat to oppose and no differences that they can pretend exist.

This supports our contention, discussed earlier, that the war is imperialist. One of the main arguments for the view that the war is not imperialist has been that Johnson's stupidity and egomania have kept the U.S. in Vietnam. Withdrawing from the presidential race is hardly the act of a man controlled by his ego; much less is it the act of a fool.

Here is RFK's reaction to Johnson's March 31 speech:

I fervently hope that your new efforts for peace in Vietnam will succeed. Your decision regarding the presidency subordinates self to country and is truly magnanimous. I respectfully and earnestly request an opportunity to visit you as soon as possible to discuss how we might work together in the interest of national unity during the coming months, the telegram said.
(Boston Globe, Tuesday, April 2, 1968)

McCarthy's reaction was similar. This supports our position that the "split" in the ruling class is over timing. With Johnson's "new" stand, even that appears to have vanished.

THE VIETNAMESE RESPOND

Previously, when the U.S. announced "de-escalation", aimed at achieving talks, there was a fairly sustained pause in the bombing. During one such pause, in Feb. 1967, the Vietnamese agreed to talk if the halt were made permanent. The U.S. then demanded "reciprocal action" by the DRV-NLF forces before a permanent bombing halt and talks could begin. The DRV refused and the bombing has continued ever since.

Now, instead of stopping the bombing, the U.S. is bombing "only" within the first 200 miles of the DRV! The quantity of bombing remains unchanged; only the locale has been shifted. That is, the bombing has been concentrated. For in fact, the U.S. aim in this bombing is to

prevent supplies from passing through the southern DRV to areas of intense fighting south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Even Sen. Fulbright commented that the bombing cutback "as of no consequence and certainly not an inducement for the North to come to the conference table." (Boston Globe, April 2, 1968)

This "de-escalation" has been accompanied by a large call-up of reserves - yet the DRV has announced it is ready to meet with U.S. representatives to discuss a total end to the bombing and the beginning of talks!

What has happened?

NEGOTIATIONS FOR WITHDRAWAL?

Having come to identify with the Vietnamese people's magnificent struggle, many in the anti-war movement will support this Vietnamese response. There are several arguments in favor of the Vietnamese stand.

Argument 1. The DRV and NLF stand for immediate U.S. withdrawal. They have agreed to talk because they realize the U.S. is ready to withdraw, and only refrains from admitting this to save face. Under cover of negotiations, which will save U.S. prestige, the Vietnamese can get the U.S. government to agree to immediate withdrawal.

If the U.S. were in fact ready to withdraw, this argument might appear valid. But as we showed earlier, the necessity of maintaining a strong U.S. "presence" in Vietnam is precisely what all imperialists - from Kennedy to Johnson - agree on. There is no evidence to the contrary in any of their statements. Moreover, the U.S. government's reasons for being in Vietnam are very good. Holding Vietnam is not a dream of a few crazed LBJ types, but a key strategic goal of imperialism as a whole.

Argument 2. Of course the U.S. won't withdraw. The Vietnamese leaders know this - but many other people do not. Once negotiations begin, the Vietnamese will put forward the demand for immediate withdrawal. They will refuse to back down or discuss anything else. Then the U.S. will break off talks, and U.S. unwillingness to withdraw will be exposed before the world.

This is also fallacious. Before January, 1967, the Vietnamese did indeed demand immediate withdrawal. Since then they have buried this proposal in favor of a call to "stop the bombing and negotiate." U Thant has pointed out that the Vietnamese tell him they are ready to "come to terms" to negotiate "in good faith" meaning to give and take on "all outstanding issues." The world has been prepared, therefore, for bargaining between the two sides, expecting the Vietnamese to make major concessions in the interests of world "peace." If the Vietnamese were in fact to revert to a "rigid" stand of unconditional and immediate withdrawal the U.S. could break off negotiations and self-righteously declare: "We have to escalate. These commies promise to talk turkey, and instead, when they get you to the table, they refuse to budge an inch." The Vietnamese, not the U.S. imperialists, would be "exposed" in this situation.

The only way to expose U.S. unwillingness to withdraw from Vietnam

is to advocate such withdrawal, and as the DRV did prior to 1967, to fight a protracted war to force the U.S. out. This would necessitate a sharp explanation of the nature of imperialism, the reasons for its war against the Vietnamese, and the impossibility of peace with those who kill through war and exploitation. Internally, such clarification would prepare the Vietnamese people for the necessity of protracted war, expanding to the rest of Asia and other parts of the world, before the U.S. could be driven out. Externally, this would help the world-wide anti-war movement understand the necessity of being thoroughly anti-imperialist. On the contrary, the Vietnamese have not prepared their own people. For example, in a documentary on the DRV by the pro-Vietnamese author Felix Greene, a peasant whose home had been destroyed asked: "Why are the Americans fighting us? Why won't they leave us in peace?" The knowledge of why the U.S. is in Vietnam should have been made the property of all Vietnamese. And similarly, outside the country, the Vietnamese have never put forward this knowledge.

If the U.S. were ready to withdraw, it would, in keeping with the pre-1967 stand of the Vietnamese, be entirely proper for U.S. and Vietnamese representatives to meet. They would not bargain, but discuss how U.S. forces could be removed in the fastest and safest way.

NEGOTIATIONS: FOR THE PEACE THAT KILLS!

There is overwhelming evidence that the Vietnamese will not demand immediate withdrawal during talks. Rather they will negotiate U.S. presence in Vietnam.

First of all, there is the negative evidence discussed above. If the Vietnamese are really demanding immediate withdrawal, their actions are very foolish and very misinformed. In fact, the Vietnamese leaders are very smart, and very, very well informed. They are famous for their keen understanding of their enemies.

There is also much positive evidence. Their past actions, since 1967, indicate Vietnamese willingness to bargain U.S. presence in their country. This evidence was presented earlier. Without rehashing these points let us consider recent statements and actions of the Vietnamese.

The declaration in which the DRV announced its willingness to meet with U.S. representatives is very revealing. The statement began with a largely rhetorical account of the Vietnamese struggle against imperialism. The first reference to recent events is as follows:

The generalized offensive and uprising of the South Vietnam armed forces and people early this year have inflicted on the U.S. aggressors and their lackeys a fatal blow. Nothing can save from collapse the puppet administration and army, props of U.S. neo-colonialism in South Vietnam. Nothing can save the U.S. aggressors from a total defeat." (Boston Globe, April 3, 1968, our emphasis.)

And a little later:

The Vietnamese people's fight for independence and freedom has entered a new period. The United States defeat is already evident. (ibid.)

Thus the DRV statement maintains that its all over except the talking. Given that the U.S. has not been driven out of Vietnam and won't withdraw, the real meaning of the "new phase" is: a period during which talks will restore "peace" to South Vietnam at the expense of maintaining the U.S. in that area.

This analysis is unfortunately strengthened by statements by the Russians in London:

Hanoi had already assured the United States privately that it would open no major offensive if all American bombing attacks were halted.

The Soviet sources were further quoted as having said that North Vietnam had begun to lift its siege of the Marine garrison at Khe Sanh, in the northwest corner of South Vietnam, as a sign of Hanoi's goodwill. American officials said that they had no independent confirmation of the report.

Officials here were encouraged that North Vietnamese troops had thinned out around Khe Sanh and that an American column was encountering little resistance in approaching the garrison. But they asserted that this was not part of a deliberate prearranged pattern of mutual battlefield de-escalations by Washington and Hanoi.

There was some speculation that President Johnson might have regarded the easing of the seige at Khe Sanh as a signal from Hanoi that justified the reduction of bombing. But officials insisted this was not the case. (NY Times, April 5, 1968)

The U.S. denials sound very feeble. In any event, U.S. officials are only denying that the events were prearranged, not that the Vietnamese have eased their siege. The fact that the Vietnamese are letting up their Dienbienphu-type encirclement of Khe Sanh solidly supports the view that the Tet offensive and the siege itself, were bargaining points to encourage Johnson to ease his position on the timing of talks. These actions do not appear to be a stage in a protracted war to get the U.S. out. They look like chess moves by the Vietnamese leaders, escalations from which they can now back down to achieve a total bombing halt and start bargaining with the imperialists.

On April 5, the Globe printed a story including the following Russian statement:

The Soviet Government believes that in its statement, the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam indicates a realistic way to ending the war in Vietnam, to a political settlement in the interests of the

Vietnamese people, in the interests of a normal situation in Southeast Asia," the Kremlin announcement said.

And the DRV statement agreed that their goal was:

...the defense of peace in Indochina, Southeast Asia and the world." (Globe, April 3, 1968)

But the war in Vietnam is not a matter of pure violence. It is a political war (like all wars) "the extension of politics by other means" as the military theorists put it. The U.S. government's aim is to secure control of Asia for imperialist exploitation and to suppress revolutionary forces which threaten that exploitation, as discussed earlier. But the Vietnamese need to throw the U.S. out to develop their country freed from imperialist oppression. Thus the Vietnamese aim cannot be to establish "peace", i.e., to end the war even though the U.S. will remain in Vietnam and expand its fighting in other Asian areas.

It is very clear from Soviet statements and actions over the past few years that they have been pushing very hard for peace with U.S. presence, a peace that kills. To see them rejoice now in Vietnamese acceptance of such terms is horrifying.

But how can the Vietnamese lose? Many people argue that the military situation in Vietnam is so far gone that it is impossible for the U.S. to maintain its "presence" there.

This is a fundamental misestimate of people's war. The basis for victory in people's war is the political awareness of the people. Such wars always begin, for example, with the imperialists possessing overwhelming military superiority, fighting with modern arms and vast armies against small groups of ill-armed peasants and working people. These small groups can only reverse that military superiority by relying on the tremendous strength of the masses of people who are hurt by imperialism. Revolutionaries lead those people, through struggle, to understand the character of the enemy and the need to drive him out. Thus they unleash tremendous forces, capable of completely smashing the imperialists. Precisely because the people's victory depends on politics, politics can defeat the people no matter what the "purely military" situation. Thus the U.S. was completely encircled at Khe Sanh. But by a political decision that siege has been eased. Whereas U.S. forces previously were completely boxed in at Khe Sanh, with relief virtually impossible, now:

A battalion of U.S. marines surged 1.5 miles out of Khe Sanh yesterday and seized a Communist-vacated hill ...They met no resistance...The allied infantry-tank juggernaut pushing up Highway 9 was reported only two miles from the base Thursday in Operation Pegasus, code name for the relief operation. (UPI release, Record American, April 5, 1968)

As a report of an interview with DRV and NLF officials in Prague, published in "War/Peace Report", March, 1968, points out, the Vietnamese

are aiming at a coalition government with U.S. and U.N. forces holding various cities and bases for a long period. This would allow the U.S. to break down the unity of the south vietnamese, using bribes to buy off rightist elements in the very broad NLF, and systematically attacking strongholds of the more radical elements. Over a long period the U.S. could forge an anti-revolutionary coalition to run south Vietnam in the interests of imperialism. Meanwhile, with huge quantities of troops released from active war duty, the U.S. could turn its attention to Laos, Thailand, Burma, the Phillipines, India, and other areas in the early or advanced stages of People's War. What the U.S. could not win in outright war would be won in this "peaceful" situation.

The U.S. cannot reverse the military situation. Bad politics among the Vietnamese can.

REVISIONISM: LEANING THE HARD WAY

But why would the Vietnamese sell-out?

The answer to this question is difficult to give in a short space. It lies in the nature of what Communists call "revisionism" and the meaning of opposing it.

What is revisionism?

Some strikes are broken by the boss because he can hold out longer than the workers. Some are broken by the government, when the boss can't do the job. But most strikes are in fact never mainly defeated from without. They are basically sold out from within, by the trade union "leaders" themselves.

These are often men who got power in their unions by appearing or actually being quite militant. Sometimes they were phonies from the start. But a trade union leader can make a lot of money. If he never learns the necessity of sharp class struggle leading, in the long run, to the total destruction of the government which runs things for the boss, if he gives in to the constant enticement of bribes from the boss, even a militant can become a sell-out. This can only be prevented if revolutionaries lead workers to grasp the political realities of imperialism so those workers become themselves the guarantee against sell-outs by leaders who have gone over to the enemy.

Revisionism is the theory and practice of selling-out the people covered over with communist phraseology. As such, it represents the interests of exploiters against the oppressed. The history of the revolutionary movement demonstrates that, as long as there are exploited and exploiting classes, the revolutionary leaders of the oppressed can become revisionists, can betray the interests of the working people, can take the side of imperialists. Thus in the early 20th century, many leaders of the once-revolutionary European socialist parties became pro-imperialist. In European parliaments, most representatives of the old socialist parties voted for the First World War. It had long been agreed among revolutionaries that the coming war was a war among imperialists, a war for the division of the world's working people and resources among themselves. The socialist parties had

agreed that the workers had to use the situation of Imperialist war to launch revolutions against their "own" capitalist class. And after World War I, when workers began to take sharp revolutionary action in Germany, it was these revisionists who sided with the most reactionary forces in Germany to completely smash the working people.

Revisionism is presented by the American press as a swear word used by rigid Marxist-Leninists to smear their more "creative" brothers. Thus to oppose revisionism is to be an ideological fanatic. In fact, revisionism is not marxist creativity. It opposes, in the particular context of a given struggle, the fundamental notions of marxism which make it revolutionary. Against class struggle, revisionism upholds peace between oppressors and oppressed. Despite the constantly repeated historical lesson that no class gives up power without revolution, the revisionists hold that reform can bring the working people to power. Against the Marxist-Leninist notion that people, people oppressed by imperialism and not technique or weaponry, can defeat imperialism, the revisionists uphold the notion that weapons are the main thing and the political awareness of the people is of minor significance. (In practice, this means that revisionism wants to keep the people politically "innocent" so they can be misled.) When such people "lead" the revolutionary movement, they can hurt it more than imperialism. When the imperialists attack the people, the latter can learn lessons from such attacks and fight back harder. But when revisionists establish a strong following among the people, they can use their position to prevent key lessons from being learned, to get the people to follow their wrong ideas, and thereby demoralize and sell out the revolution. Misprepared and demoralized by revisionist leadership, the people can be smashed by imperialists' tactics of violence and bribery. Thus, during World War II revisionist forces in the American Communist Party (CP), arguing that since the war was a just war against fascism (which was true), no class struggle in the U.S. was acceptable (false), dissolved sharecroppers' groups all over the south. The sharecroppers, left in the lurch, unprepared for a sharp fight, were literally slaughtered by police and vigilante forces.

In recent years, revisionism has become the dominant force in most old communist parties - including most of those in power. The result has been tremendous setbacks for the movement. Thus the willingness of the European and Soviet revisionists to ease up the struggle in Europe meant that the U.S. could move huge numbers of Europe-based troops to Vietnam. Thus Russia gave large-scale aid to the Indonesian fascists, after they had slaughtered half a million reds and their followers, discussed earlier. Thus the deals between southern American communist parties and the military dictatorships in their countries. Thus the support of the revisionist American CP for Kennedy and McCarthy, and its attempt to swing the anti-war movement behind these imperialists. Thus the tremendous pressure the Soviets applied to get the Vietnamese to back down from their original four point stand for immediate withdrawal, to their present one-point, sell-out position.

Revisionism, therefore, is not an abstraction, an ideological heresy from which purists draw back in horror. It is the organized, systematic attempt by those who have sold-out to imperialism to betray the revolution from within. It can be seen, by observation, that revisionism develops in all revolutionary movements. To let it take the

lead is to let the theory and practice of counter-revolution, of imperialism, lead the anti-imperialist movement.

In this stage in the development of the communist movement, more than at any time, to fight revisionism is crucial. Unless one defeats its ideological influence in and practical leadership of the movement, the movement must be reversed, must be turned from anti- to pro-imperialist.

It is clear, more and more, that revisionism is very strong in Vietnam. There are a number of ways we can see this.

First, the fact that the North Vietnamese leaders do not struggle against revisionism. There is no way of conducting this struggle secretly. The intensity of the fight in the world communist movement between the revolutionary and the opportunist, the revisionist position, is tremendous. Therefore, the thing that most clearly marks the revolutionary forces within that movement today is that they wage a sharp struggle, both theoretically and in day to day practice, against revisionism. This means criticizing a revisionist approach as it develops out of the mistakes of basically solid revolutionaries, as well as sharply opposing the theory and practice of the world-wide revisionist movement. But the Vietnamese have been notable for their abstention from that struggle. Their stand has been (somewhat favorably) presented in the Western press as a "third" socialist path. There can be no such third path. In America, for example, Progressive Labor opposes the class privilege of 2S as unjust and a thing which divides students and workers. The revisionist Communist Party supports 2S. What is the third path here? Similarly, revolutionary forces call for the total elimination of U.S. influence in Vietnam. The revisionists argue that this is too extreme, that it is unreasonable, that a deal maintaining U.S. presence is the only way. Where is the third path here?

Secondly, the Vietnamese go further. Not only don't they attack revisionism internationally - they support it, although this support is somewhat veiled. Thus Ho Chi Minh sent a telegram wishing success to the recent Soviet sponsored congress of revisionist parties, called to attack the revolutionary part of the communist movement, especially China. Again, the DRV consistently invites the worst sell-outs, revisionists from all over the world, to visit Vietnam. Then they can return, their influence greatly enhanced by the prestige of the Vietnamese struggle.

Thirdly, the Vietnamese don't fight revisionism in their own country. There are two ways we can tell this. One way is by reading their literature. A struggle against revisionism cannot be waged in private. Its absence from Vietnamese publications means its absence from the efforts of the Vietnamese leaders. A second way is by considering what it means to accept Soviet aid. Nobody gives aid without strings. Even if the Soviet aid were without explicit strings (and Burchett's statement, quoted earlier by Theodore Draper), indicates this is hardly the case), there is the unspoken "string": do something against me or what I represent, and I'll remove aid. You can't expect a man to lend you money if you spit in his face. The Soviets would never give aid to those who fight revisionism - that was precisely

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why they cut off aid to China in 1960.

And this acceptance of Soviet aid, in turn, gives the revisionists a tremendous boost around the world. "Don't tell me the USSR's leadership is counter-revolutionary! Don't they help the Vietnamese?" This involves, of course, a fundamental misestimate of why the Russians give that aid. As the U.S. knows, that Russian aid enables the Vietnamese to shoot down a few planes is secondary. For it also allows Russian (revisionist) influence to become much stronger in Vietnam; it builds the prestige of sell-outs all over the world; it confuses people about revisionism, so they see it as less militant communism instead of as disguised counter-revolution; it prevents the Vietnamese from fighting revisionism within their own country, for if they fight, they lose the aid. The more aid accepted, the stronger it shows that revisionism has become, the harder it is for wavering forces to accept the hardships of rejecting the aid, the greater the influence of revisionism in Vietnam can become. The circle is vicious: the end result is the defeat of the Vietnamese.

"But why not unite with revisionism?" some people argue. "After all, does someone have to agree completely for you Maoists to unite with him?"

Of course not. Revolutions develop in stages. To make revolutions, communists must unite groups of people whose needs may dictate very different long-term goals, but who, within that stage, can unite in a common struggle against a common enemy. Thus, in Vietnam, workers and peasants unite with various elements like small shop keepers and anti-U.S. businessmen against imperialism. That's one thing. But uniting with revisionism is another. Revisionism means selling out the struggle on whatever level. Revisionism isn't a class; rather, its leadership rests on the opportunism present in all classes. It acts to get various groups to function in the least revolutionary way. To unite with revisionism is as bad as uniting with imperialism.

If the Vietnamese leaders opposed revisionism, denounced it, fought it internally and externally, and refused aid from it, the absence of that aid would probably mean a slightly more difficult situation in the "purely military" sense. (Of course, the weakness of the U.S. is not "purely military" anyway; the few planes that the SAM's shoot down can easily be replaced.) But the struggle against revisionism would greatly strengthen the Vietnamese politically. It would strengthen people all over the world politically. And that, after all, is how you win a people's war in the first place.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN? WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

The situation that will emerge in Vietnam as a result of negotiations for a U.S. presence will undoubtedly be very complex. Although the revisionists have the upper hand in the Vietnamese communist party (north and south), and therefore tremendous influence, most Vietnamese are committed to fighting imperialism, and many Vietnamese communists are against revisionism. The revisionists will be able to set the struggle back. But we have no doubt that - in the long run - the struggle will fully reassert itself, as the Vietnamese learn to see through revisionists among their leaders. However, there is no question

that between now and "the long run" many Vietnamese people will suffer unnecessarily as a result of a sell-out.

What does all this mean for the situation in the U.S.? It means serious problems for an anti-imperialist movement. Negotiations may begin immediately, they may temporarily break off and be resumed under a Kennedy or McCarthy or Nixon, (Nixon, incidentally, has nothing but praise for the Soviet role in Vietnam.) In any case, they will tend to bury the demand for immediate withdrawal. Large scale movement will be launched by the Loyal Opposition urging Johnson or Kennedy or whoever to negotiate more "liberally". Many people who had begun to see the state as their enemy, as the servant of the ruling class of owners of basic industry, many will be fooled back into viewing the system as okay, able to adjust, able to solve their problems. There is no point in anti-imperialists and revolutionaries pretending otherwise.

For precisely that reason, it would be wrong for the movement to turn away from Vietnam, to forget the issue as some are now urging. It is crucial that we provide the American people with a clear explanation of these events - difficult though it is to get these ideas across - so that some people will come out of the present situation clearer than before. And we must intensify our efforts, in practice, to build an anti-imperialist movement among black and white working people, students, and others who are hurt by the imperialist system. In that way, as Imperialism intensifies its attempts to exploit and oppress people here and abroad - including sharper wars in Vietnam and elsewhere - we will be able to serve the people by opposing those attempts.

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