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# The Dirty War in Mr. Wilson

Or How He Stopped Worrying About Vietnam  
and Learned to Love the Dollar

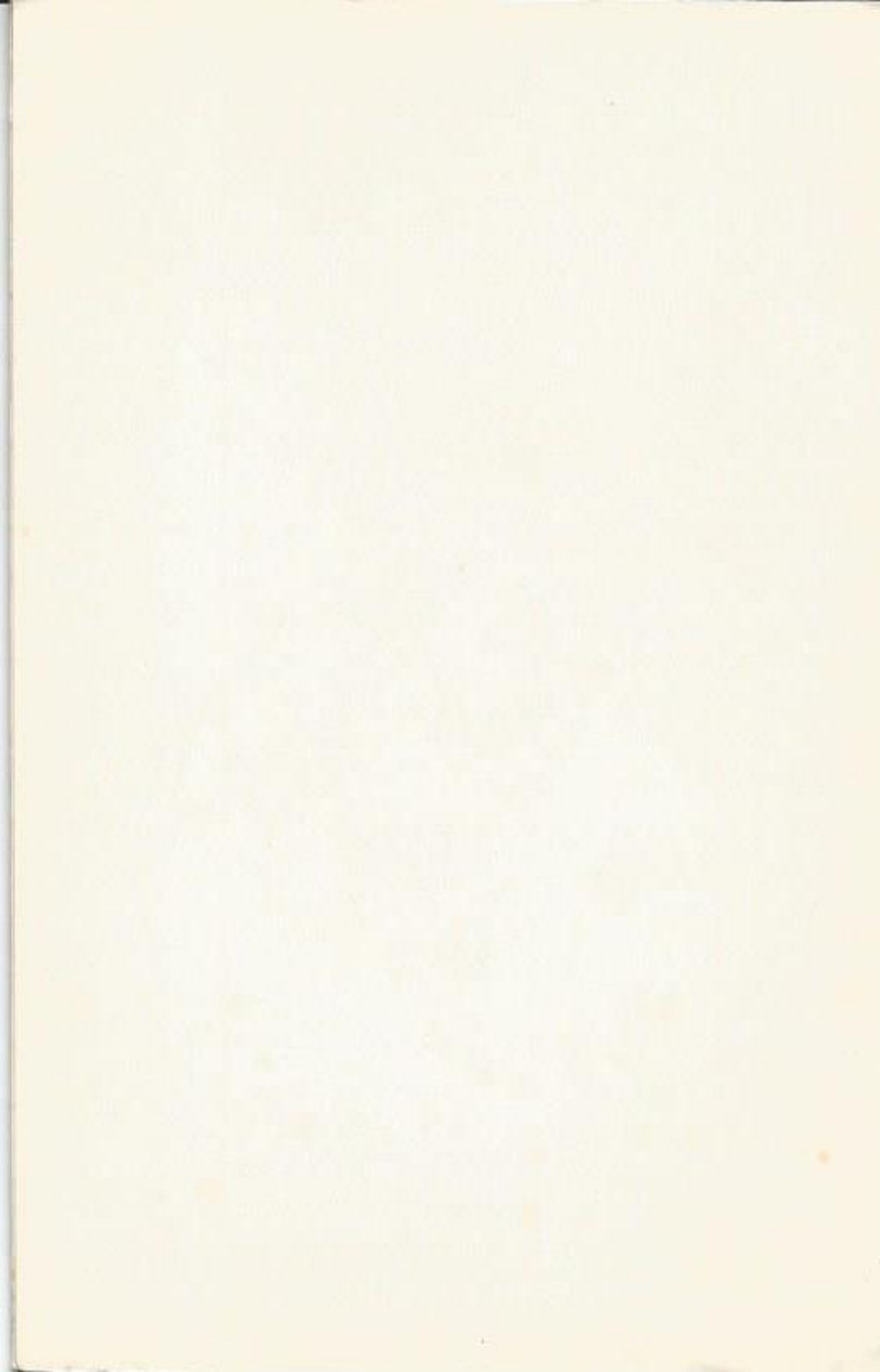
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by Ken Coates

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Vietnam Solidarity Campaign 1/-



Vietnam is a poor country. If you live in the predominantly rural south, you can expect to live for 35 years, provided you are not killed by a lazy dog or 'non-toxic chemicals'. Before the Americans invaded, before the French had been driven out, even before the Japanese had been defeated, the Vietnamese peasants knew Death very intimately. They lived in hunger. They knew their powerful enemies: the absentee landlords who switched their backers with the fluctuations of the international balance of power, but who never for one moment bridled their appetites or let up on their carnivorous extortion; the usurers who swallowed well over half the harvest either as rent or interest; the imperial entrepreneurs who laid down millions of rubber trees across vast plantations and across the bodies and the sweated labour of thousands of conscribed coolies; these they knew well, but even better they knew their police and their soldiers, who had all the mangling arsenal of civilised disciplinary force at their disposal.<sup>1</sup>

But the peasants of Indo-China were not the only people to live in privation: and even today they are by no means the most hungry, or the most nakedly oppressed, peoples of the world. Throughout South-East Asia, over half the peasants' income goes to buy his food, and even then he consumes an average of 2,000 calories a day against our 3,500. While we are eating 40 or 50 grams of animal protein a day, the Asian peasant gets 5 to 10. While we burn 10,000 pounds of fuels each, every year, he burns two or three hundred, much of which is animal dung that could be vitally useful to him in fertilising his land. Fifteen per cent of Indian babies die before they are one year old. In England, two die. In Burma, Pakistan, Indonesia, and India, the income per head of the population, in 1958, was sixty dollars or less. Formosa and Thailand had a per capita income of between sixty and one hundred dollars.<sup>2</sup> Yet in the West, every educated adolescent knows that Vietnam is a desperately poor country, and that its social problems demand solution. The American President and the British Prime Minister find it expedient to talk of extensive programmes of economic aid to Vietnam, after the war. Much less is heard of the affairs of even poorer countries in the same region. Why should this be so?

The answer is a dismal one. Western statesmen are not interested in hungry people, except when Christmas brings the season for free publicity on famine relief advertisements. Hunger,



in the rich countries, has a claim for attention only when it presents a political problem.

This is not entirely a strange condition to British political experience. Aneurin Bevan, in his most interesting tract "In Place of Fear" recounts a strong parallel case:

"One experience remains vividly in my memory. While the miners were striking in 1926 a great many people were moved to listen to their case. Certain high ecclesiastical dignitaries even went so far as to offer to mediate between the mine-owners and the miners. They were convinced that the terms the coal-owners were attempting to impose on the miners were unreasonable, and would entail much suffering and poverty for hundreds of thousands of miners' homes. Their efforts failed. The miners were beaten and driven back to work under disgraceful conditions.

For years these conditions continued. But were those high Church dignitaries moved to intervene then? Not at all. For them the problem was solved. It had never consisted in the suffering of the miners, but in the fact that the miners were still able to struggle and therefore to create a problem for the rest of the community. The problem was not their suffering but their struggle. Silent pain evokes no response."<sup>3</sup>

In South East Asia, now, as in South Wales before the second world war, silent pain evokes no response. The suffering of the poor, in Bevan's compelling words, is ignored "while they lack the power and status to insist on alleviation."<sup>4</sup>

The electric fact about Vietnam is that the people of that country have found power and status, in the organs which they have created in a most ferocious and desperate struggle. The National Liberation Front, like the South Wales Miners' Federation, has taught a whole generation of brutally oppressed people to stand up, to demand and begin to create a society in which they can begin to become persons, and cease to be chattels. The Front takes among the people ideas of direct democracy and economic reform. In the words of an American reporter, who asked a Mekong delta peasant why so many people support the "vietcong":

"They seize the rice fields from the absent owners and divide the land among the working farmers."<sup>5</sup>

It is understandable that the American Government, which has vast imperial interests in every continent, which defends the ownership by American corporations of approximately 60% of the world's economic resources, and which depends for its influence upon the most abject and corrupt politicians drawn from the most capricious and backward-looking social milieux of the countries over which it holds sway, should react with fierce apprehension against movements of land reform and national independence. It is far less understandable that the British Labour Movement, which has a long history of opposition

to imperialism, based upon the clear realisation that British Imperial exploitation centred on the same elite corps of financiers and businessmen which has inflicted such pain on British trade unions, should find itself today hoist with a leadership prepared to endorse almost every action of President Johnson.

Up to October 1965, 170,000 Vietnamese civilians had been slaughtered in the President's war. 800,000 had been tortured; 5,000 had been burnt alive; 100,000 had suffered poisoning by chemical weapons; while unknown numbers had been disembowelled, castrated, raped, eviscerated.<sup>6</sup> Ears, strung in a grisly necklace, swung across the walls of an installation of the Southern puppet Government which was visited by the New York Herald Tribune correspondent last year.<sup>7</sup> The troops which are responsible for these intrepid and valorous assaults on Vietnamese peasants are paid out of U.S. military appropriations.<sup>8</sup> If the peasants kill back, when they can, this is hardly surprising; but when the tally of carnage in this unholy American crusade is carefully elaborated, on the one side will be found discriminate casualties, victims of a war of resistance: on the other will be piled, in an abysmal hecatomb, the legions of those genocidally exterminated by the most advanced and civilised techniques available to a race which is totally, devilishly skilled in mechanical killing.<sup>9</sup> In order not to see this, anyone even slightly acquainted with the news from Vietnam would need to be steeped in the vulgar, philistine bigotry of a Michael Stewart, or morally null, a dollar-neuter like the capricious, ego-centred moral eunuch upon whom he fawns.<sup>10</sup>

For those who are interested in understanding the astonishing abdication of the British Labour Government from the most elementary pretension to a humane polity, it is important to distinguish between the four-square stupidity of the Foreign Secretary, which is a characteristically honest response shared by a fairly numerous body of the more narrow-minded functionaries of the Labour Party, and which could not be less cunning and guileful than it is; and the truly gargantuan duplicity of the Prime Minister, for whom a straight line is the shortest breach between two promises. Mr Stewart is as incapable of telling a lie as he is of seeing the plain truth before his nose. Mr. Wilson, on the contrary, does not *tell* lies: he lives them, he balances one against another, he juxtaposes, juggles and transfigures them, he banks them and transcends them with more perfect lies. Lies are meat and drink to him: or any moment they maybe also raiment, and all that England will await is that childish voice from the crowd to whisper that the emperor is naked.

It may seem that these are fairly strong words. By analysing the record of the premier, however, it can quickly be seen that they are valid. And nowhere does this become more starkly apparent than on the record in respect of Vietnam.

Mr. Wilson first became apparent as a man of the left when



he resigned from the Attlee administration, in 1951, together with Nye Bevan and John Freeman. In a pamphlet entitled "One Way Only" which was published by Tribune, the three introduced a five-point programme for the Labour Party. This demanded a 'supreme effort to negotiate a settlement with Russia in the next two years'; asserted the right of the "underprivileged colonial people" to complete "their social revolutions" and the duty of British socialists to assist these; insisted that the rearmament of the Atlantic powers should "be subordinate to a World Plan for Mutual Aid"; urged the financing of rearmament in Britain not by inflation "but under a system of socialist controls"; and stood firm on the principle that it was "not only possible, but desirable and necessary, to embark upon a series of measures designed to carry us forward towards the establishment of a Socialist society in Britain." Although this programme was conceived in the heart of the cold war, when Stalin's rule in Russia struck not only loathing, but also fear and irrational suspicion into the calculations of western liberals and socialists, so that it was predicated on the assumption of a possible Russian attack,<sup>11</sup> which retrospectively can be easily seen to have been absurd: nonetheless it maintained one very clear commitment which today seems entirely subversive, honest and commendable. The colonial revolution, for the co-authors of this pamphlet, required unstinting support and solidarity.

"Is the aim", they asked the western politicians, "to fight poverty, or a plan to purchase mercenaries in another kind of war? Is the aim to destroy malaria and provide tractors or to protect the landlords and prop up feudal regimes? Chiang Kai Shek on Formosa, saved by American guns and subsidies, is a symbol of all Asia. His mere presence there could destroy the effectiveness of America's aid plans even if they were ten times larger."<sup>12</sup>

"Against the background of world poverty" Mr. Wilson and his co-thinkers continued, "and the surging discontent which it is now producing among more than half the peoples of the world, the Western nations have so far produced no policy to match the magnitude of events. That discontent, and the revolt or revolution which it brings in its train, are as natural as the revolt of Englishmen in the seventeenth century against the claims of Charles I, or the revolt of Frenchmen in the eighteenth century against the luxury of King Louis' court, or the revolt of the American colonists against the blind tyranny of George III. It is born of the same spirit which inspired the Chartists and the early Socialist Movement in Britain. It will not be put down."<sup>13</sup>

"The only reputable policy for socialists", they concluded, "is to ally ourselves with the forces of social revolution, and to prove by our deeds that our aim is not dominion but honourable partnership."<sup>14</sup>

It is not difficult for socialists to endorse these words. They

are both realistic and morally sound. They represent, in the Prime Minister's words, "the spirit of the imperishable philosophy of Nye Bevan."<sup>15</sup> Alas, they also represent the letter of the rather more transient philosophy of Harold Wilson.

What was Bevan's philosophy, to which the British Premier finds it expedient to defer? It was above all a **socialist** philosophy. Bevan was not a utopian, and he could compromise in order to make what he considered to be worthwhile gains for his viewpoint. Some of his compromises caused apprehension on the left: but his basic commitment can easily be shown to have separated him by a gulf of lightyears from the totally unscrupulous opportunism of his epigone in Downing Street. Here, for instance, is his assessment of the overall background to the cold war, spoken at the Labour Party Conference immediately after his resignation:

"I am now 53 years of age. I was coming to adult life at the end of the 1914-18 war. I remember so well what happened when the Russian Revolution occurred. I remember the miners, when they read that the Czarist tyranny had been overthrown, rushing to meet each other with tears streaming down their cheeks, shaking hands and saying: "At last it has happened." Let us remember in 1951 that the revolution of 1917 came to the working class of Great Britain, not as a social disaster, but as one of the most emancipating events in the history of mankind. Let us also remember that the Soviet revolution would not have been so distorted, would not have ended in a tyranny, would not have resulted in a dictatorship, would not now be threatening the peace of mankind, had it not been for the behaviour of Churchill and the Tories of that time. Do not forget that in the early days when that great mass of backward people were trying to find their way to the light, were trying to lift themselves from age-long penury and oppression, they were diverted from their objectives and thrown back into the darkness, not by the malignancy of Stalin at first, but the action and the malignancy of Churchill, the City of London, New York and all the rest of the capitalist world.

The reasons for fear in the world at the moment have never come from the poor people, whenever they are trying to improve their lot. They have always come from those who are trying to hold them down... That is why, now that the Orient is in the same kind of ferment, we do not want China, we do not want Indonesia and we do not want the middle east to be driven into the same kind of totalitarian tyranny that the Tories drove the Soviet revolution into 1917."<sup>16</sup>

Bevan was mistaken about the predatory nature of Stalin's government,<sup>17</sup> but even this mistake did not blind him to the essential truth about the colonial upheaval which is the major social fact of our time: where hungry people found 'the power



and the status' to resist the anti-social groupings whose control of their resources engendered hunger. Bevan knew only one impulse, which was that of the South Wales Miners who rushed out on to the grey street in tears of joy at the news of the great Russian Revolution. In his morality, this was a primary response. For this reason, he embraced as his own the cause of the Chinese Revolution, in words which today sound as sharp as they were when he uttered them.

"Everyone here knows" he told the House of Commons — "at least every miner, railwayman and agricultural worker knows very well that if he were in China he would be a communist peasant. He would not be a Chiang Kai Shek, he would be a communist. Anyone who had lived under the regime of Chiang Kai Shek would become a communist. He would not be forced to be a communist, because everybody knows that when the People's Armies marched, they occupied a country where people received them willingly."<sup>18</sup>

It is probably fair to say that as a result of his clear and completely unequivocal response to the Chinese revolution, the whole Labour Movement in Britain was pulled back from its evolution into more and more aggravated cold war positions. The pressure generated by Bevan helped to persuade Attlee and the rest of the leadership that it was expedient, in 1954, to dispatch a delegation to China to discuss with the Chinese leaders. With these words Bevan broke the news to his constituents:

"If you South Wales Miners were in China, you would be communists, of course you would, I know you would. The Labour Party delegation is going to China, because they have been bottom dogs for a long time. We are going because we believe that the only people who can talk the language of the peasants and workers of China are the representatives of the peasants and workers of Great Britain."<sup>19</sup>

It was in the debate which arose during the events leading up to this delegation that the problem of Indo-China began to find students in British Leftwing politics. By the time he returned from Peking, Mr Attlee had been converted to at least a part of the Bevanite case. He reported to the Labour Party:

"The Chinese Revolution is essentially part of that rising of the Asiatic people that has been going on intensely for more than fifty years... you can see that same spirit in Indo-China. You can see it throughout the East, but I think it came through particularly strongly in China."<sup>20</sup>

In spite of his conviction that the Chinese "have for the first time got an honest government" Mr. Attlee still found it expedient to support the creation of SEATO, the Pacific version of the Atlantic alliance. A great row on the matter took place at the Party Conference, after Bevan had resigned from the Shadow Cabinet in protest. The Bevanites took every opportunity to



oppose this policy. In a motion by Harold Davies against SEATO<sup>21</sup> Jennie Lee, seconding, uttered a torrential indictment:

"I say a vote for SEATO is a vote to exclude China; a vote to exclude China is a vote that cuts us off from our own best comrades in India, in Indonesia, in Burma and elsewhere... I hope this great conference will be true to our own international socialist principles, that we will not play small politics, that we are not going to fight ideologies on the battlefield, we are going to make a stand against aggression..."<sup>22</sup>

James Callaghan joined in the condemnation:

"no-one can effectively offer a guarantee to anyone in South-East Asia unless you have both India and China concurring in an agreement. I must say if it is a question of who is frightened of whom, I think on the whole the Chinese have most to be frightened of at the present time. There are, as far as I know, not any Chinese attacking Los Angeles or even an island off the border there..."<sup>23</sup>

Among other red faces which might be provoked by a re-reading, today, of that Conference Report, would be that of Anthony Greenwood, who sturdily paraphrased the sentiments of 'one Way Only',

"In the Labour Movement we rose to power because we were on the side of the 'have-nots' of this country. We must never lose our community of interest and our identity with the 'have-nots' of the world.. we have got to convince the masses of Asia that we are on their side in their struggle, and that their struggle against exploitation and foreign domination is exactly the same struggle that we have carried on in this country."<sup>24</sup>

These speeches all reflect, directly, Bevan's influence. It is, as Mr. Wilson rightly indicates, 'imperishable'. However, this spirit can be detached from the earthly clay through which, from time to time, it speaks. If one wishes to discover it again in 1965 or 1966, one may find many echoes of Bevan's words in the British socialist press. One cannot find even the slightest memory of them among the ministerial team which includes the Right Honorable Anthony Greenwood. After grafting minority rule on British Guiana, this spokesman of the masses of Asia convinced them of his unlimited goodwill by gassing their children in the colony of Bahrain.<sup>25</sup> He is still, of course, on the side of the have-nots. Formerly, he embraced those who have-not wealth; today, less immoderately, he aligns with those who have-not conscience.

On the broad issues of foreign policy and opposition to Imperialism, the philosophy of Nye Bevan can obviously not in any degree suffer reconciliation with the actions of the Wilson administration. But even on the immediate issue of Vietnam the

Prime Minister has no more right to the mantle he is so concerned to flaunt.

The whole British left approached the struggle of the Vietnamese against French rule with a sharply critical eye for French colonialism. In 1953 there was a debate on Foreign Affairs in the Commons, in which this attitude was not only clearly expressed, but in which the impact of the growing sympathy with the Chinese Revolution became very plain. The Labour team led off with a statement by Mr. Attlee, in a similar vein to the later one already quoted:

"It would be quite contrary to the whole history of that part of the world to assume that the Indo-Chinese want to be satellites of the Chinese. I cannot help thinking that there was a possibility at one time, that this business might have been settled and that Ho Chi Minh might have been Prime Minister in a part of Indo-China, Vietnam, just as some other people with whom we have disagreed in the past are now Prime Ministers in the British Commonwealth. It is essential that the French understand the logic of events... Colonialism belongs to a past age. It undoubtedly does in Asia."<sup>26</sup>

Through this breach fanned out other attackers. Mr Crossman, in strong form, echoed:

"I was delighted to hear Mr. Attlee say what we all know is true, that Ho Chi Minh leads the real national movement in Indo-China. Do not let us be hypocritical about it. It is time to tell the French and the Americans that they are fighting an unjust war in Indo-China. If the French had done the right thing, IndoChina today would stand alongside Indonesia and Burma. Ho Chi Minh and his rebels are not communists by nature but by compulsion. They are driven to be communists in order to get national liberation. If we accept the Chinese Revolution we must accept the Indo-Chinese Revolution, and tell our friends not to waste millions of dollars on preserving a few square miles round Saigon."<sup>27</sup>

The dollars do not seem quite so important in 1966 as the lives which have been added to this grotesque bonfire: but Mr. Crossman has been too busy researching into the economic limitations which may not permit the rehousing of the British people to find time in which to continue to urge these very desirable economies upon the Americans. However, back in 1953 there were other voices from Mr Wilson's present administration which other voices from Mr. Wilson's present administration which were not afraid to offer even stronger advice and criticism to the Americans. Mrs. Castle, for instance:

"The foreign policy of the United States of America is to destroy communism... That is a policy which does two things. First it says that the nationalist movements in Asia are all Moscow-inspired, Kremlin-financed, part of a great



Russian plot. It fails completely to understand what is happening in Asia, the revolution which is taking place over large parts of the earth's surface — which, as hon members on this side of the House have shown quite clearly, springs from the natural needs and indigenous demands of the peoples themselves.

Responsible organs of opinion in this country, discussing the problem of Indo-China, are complaining that the trouble is that we cannot get the people of Indo-China to resist the Communist Movement, because the desire to resist is not there. That is because the resistance movement reflects needs which are local and national."<sup>28</sup>

Possibly today, in the light of the intelligence which Mr Wilson has been able to offer about the origins and motivation of the English Seamans' strike, Mrs Castle has revised her opinion about the effect of natural needs and indigenous demands. In 1953, Labour MPs were not prone to such speculations as those of the later Mr Wilson on the effects of subversion. A certain scepticism infected them, arising possibly from a fairly healthy appreciation of the physical difficulties involved in subverting the restored conservative administration, against which all their bitter and justified reproaches seemed to bend like rubber knives or buckle like cardboard swords. For this reason, strong attacks were made upon the Government, which stubbornly refused to accept the logic of Messrs Attlee, Crossman and Castle. Among these was that of Jennie Lee, whose eloquence today seems stunningly appropriate:

"There are liberal Americans who are anxious to see Indo-China liberated from what they call old-fashioned colonialism.

We cannot talk to those Americans, when at the same time, we approach Washington with a begging-bowl held out, because money talks louder than words. I am grieved and shamed when I hear that the contribution which our country can make to international affairs is lost because of the clatter of the dollars falling into the begging bowl."<sup>29</sup>

Miss Lee is only partly right about this. Money does not necessarily talk louder than words: it depends who is listening. Her own past testifies to the truth of this cavil. For those in authority today, though, there can be little doubt that money talks very loudly indeed. It is not known for certain whether this still grieves Miss Lee. It does, without any doubt whatever, most surely still shame us all.

Where was Mr Wilson during all this time? He did not take part in this particular debate. But this does not mean that he did not share the opinions of his future ministerial colleagues: even a man of his agility cannot be everywhere at once. He did not break the line, though. In May, 1954, he did two Mayday

meetings, one in Liverpool and the other in Manchester. First, the Liverpool one:

"not a man, not a gun, must be sent from this country to defend French colonisation in Indo-China... we must not join or in any way encourage an anti-communist crusade in Asia under the leadership of the Americans or anyone else..."<sup>30</sup>

In case this might be thought ambiguous, the next day, in Manchester, was added this:

"It was right to issue a warning to the Government not to go any further in the subordination of British policies to the United States... I believe at the moment the danger to a negotiated settlement in Asia is provided by a lunatic fringe in the American Senate... Asia, like other parts of the world, is in revolution, and what we have to learn today in this country is to march on the side of the peoples in that revolution and not on the side of their oppressors."<sup>31</sup>

Mr Wilson had always a good eye for the winning side. By the beginning of 1954 it had become clear that the French were being routed by the forces of the Viet Minh. Even while he was speaking at Manchester and Liverpool, the final heroic 55-day battle of Dien Bien Phu was in progress. The French had had enough. For a race of empiricists, the British have been much slower than the schematising French to understand the facts of imperial collapse; and by May 1954 the French knew that their day in Indo-China was over. But four-fifths of their military bills were at that time already being met by the Americans; and the pragmatic empire-builders of Washington were ready at any time to make this five fifths of a very much larger total. President Eisenhower pondered on the feasibility of a 500-bomber strike against the Vietnamese forces at Dien Bien Phu. Indeed, the use of atomic weapons was carefully discussed. Less than a week before the Wilson declarations, the Americans were to have made their decisive intervention. We have it on the authority of Pierre Mendes France:

"The United States intervention was to have taken place on the request of France, April 28th. The warships carrying atomic aviation material were loaded and on route. President Eisenhower was to have asked Congress April 26th for authorisation. Luckily the project of the US intervention was set aside by Britain and public opinion in the US."<sup>32</sup>

Britain, in this context, was the Britain of the conservative restoration. Fortunately for the people of Vietnam and the peace of the world, the conservative leadership were less deafened by the clatter of dollars into the begging bowl in 1954 than Mr Wilson's own team in 1964. To be fair, it must be admitted that the clatter of the dollars has taken on a neurotic significance for Mr Wilson, during the months since his October victory.

It remains true that before the American bombers were unleashed, the British Government of 1954 had intervened. Mr



Wilson did not then instruct his supporters to "carry the banner then, but you do not need to carry it here: the right place to take that banner is to the Chinese Embassy."<sup>33</sup> In those days he marched "on the side of the peoples" in the Vietnamese Revolution, and "not on the side of their oppressors."

What accounts, then, for this singular change of front? The most obvious single answer is precisely, of course, the clatter of dollars, or, to be still more precise, the fear of the failure of that clatter. This was made perfectly plain at the famous speech in September 1964 to the Trades Union Congress.

"You can get into pawn, but don't then talk of an independent foreign policy, or an independent defence policy... if you borrow from some of the worlds' bankers, you will quickly find that you lose another kind of independence because of the deflationary policies and the cuts in social services that will be imposed on a Government that has got itself into that position."<sup>34</sup>

If not a handful, then at any rate for several plane-loads of silver he left us.

This explanation is, of course, rather strongly contested by the Prime Minister himself. At the 1965 Labour Party Conference, the South Nottingham delegate, Peter Price, put the matter in a nutshell:

"I know the pound is important; I know the American loan is important; but so are the lives of Vietnamese people."<sup>35</sup>

This stung Mr Wilson. He exploded into a John Bull rebuttal:

"I am surprised that this question can even have been put. At no time—and I say this categorically—has there been any attempt to link economic co-operation with any aspect of foreign policy. Patrick Gordon Walker, Michael Stewart and I can confirm that there have never been, whether in White House talks, in telegrams, in ambassadorial approaches, or even on the hot line, any attempts to link Vietnam with any aspect of economic or monetary co-operation, and to suggest that there have been is a libel first on the President of the United States; second, on Britain and the British Government. If I may quote Nye again, we are not gigolos."<sup>36</sup>

A number of questions arise out of this denial. First, are we in pawn, or not? If we are not, then why all the hesitation about implementing Labour's domestic policy, why the transformation of the incomes policy into a machinery for wage restraint, why the retreat from taming property, why the assaults on trade unionism? If we are, was the warning to the TUC merely a rhetorical flourish? Which Wilson are we to believe; the solidarist with social revolution in Asia who excoriates pawnbrokers, or the statesman who never mixes business with foreign policy? Second, as cynics were already whispering before the premier

had sat down, assuming that his claims about the virginal innocence of every syllable on the hot line were completely true, did that not make the whole matter worse? If we had moved from "the side of the peoples" to that of their oppressors for **nothing** was that in some sinister sense not worse than to have at any rate saved the pound at their expense? Of course, no one in his right mind could accuse her majesty's first minister of being a gigolo: he has hardly the appearance which is required for the job. Although he cuts a snazzy figure, it is fairly difficult to imagine even such a battered dowager as LBJ actually expending money for his embraces. To be utterly frank, none of those of us who had been listening to Mr Wilson during this speech had even the faintest reason to suspect his sexual conformity: it was his policies which we were concerned about. The premier was aware of this, and it was presumably for this reason that he felt the need for a warm quotation from Nye<sup>37</sup> in which to wrap himself from the frigid blasts of disquiet which had been gusting up through the Labour Movement, as the killing accelerated and the Government's indifference solidified into open contempt.

If there ever were any doubt as to which Mr Wilson spoke the truth on this matter, it was finally settled when Mr Frank Cousins resigned from the cabinet on the issue of the legislation which was designed to buttress the entirely inequitable and retrogressive incomes policy. In his letter of resignation, Mr Cousins, with a characteristic openness which makes a sharp and fitting contrast to the utterances of the prime minister, squarely states the plain fact:

"We have slipped back to the usual position of Treasury control of our approach to to questions of investment, spending and planning.

That attitude cannot help us in a drive towards expansion of demand and has obviously driven us to the position where our international monetary transactions have been based on assurances of our intention to restrict internal demand. This is a wrong attitude and a contradiction of the philosophy upon which our party is based and so it must be opposed.

**Much of our domestic and external policy has been determined by the acceptance of that principle.**"<sup>38</sup>

We are in fact in pawn, in short: and for that reason, whether the American Government bombs, rapes, poisons or exterminates the people of Vietnam, the most that will ever come from the British Government by way of a gesture to humanity will be the type of 'dissociation' uttered up on the day after the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong. That this sanctimonious gesture is upheld in the House of Commons by a speech (from the Foreign Secretary) about a 'long list of merciless cruelties by the Vietcong'<sup>39</sup> is entirely to be expected. Mr Stewart has begun to gather a developed experience on how to dissociate himself while



moving closer all the time to his dissociated mentor. At the Blackpool Labour Party Conference, he even went to the length of appealing for a cessation of the bombing raids by US forces on the very eve of the rainy season, which made them operationally impossible.

The same pressures which bring about the need for such manoeuvres as these are of course felt here at home, as well as in the Mekong delta. The trade unions find themselves hoist with a severe system of wage control under the slogan of 'a planned growth of incomes'. Elementary trade union freedoms are placed in jeopardy. All the apparatus of the witch-hunt becomes involved in defence against the inevitable strikes which result from this.

Within this dreadful story there is one hopeful prospect. When people begin to feel the weight of these commitments, dragging at their own freedoms, unease will turn to anger. But how long will this inevitable reaction take? While Labour's authentic spokesmen, in the unions and in the party, are groping for some answer to the disturbing problems of which they are becoming increasingly aware, how many peasants must be incinerated?

Labour's past contains many vital lessons which may help to ensure that it has a future. Not least of these is the lesson spelt out in detail by the actions of the old Labour left, now the establishment, in the days in which principle still counted for something in the Labour Movement. The idea of solidarity with the colonial revolution, spelt out by the young Wilson and his one-time mentor, far from signifying only a romantic attachment, is at the very heart of the solution to Britain's present problems. Only when the day of empire, including American empire, is past, can there be either peace or planned social development. If Labour in Britain will not embrace the future, it will be smothered in the past. And primitive, fierce, and infinitely brave as they are, the people of Vietnam, from their warren'd dug-outs and earthen battle emplacements, embody in their desperate fight more of the undying liberal hope of mankind, more of the great and unexplored potential in humane culture, than has ever been forgotten by their most sophisticated tormentors.

**Ken Coates**

## Notes

- 1 of Ellen Hammer : "The Struggle for Indo China," Stanford UP, 1954
- 2 of Michael Barratt Brown : "After Imperialism." Heinemann, 1963. Mr. Barratt Brown, besides documenting the legacy of imperialism, sets out proposals for a strategy to replace it by a world-wide system of planned economic relations. A Labour Government might, once, have been expected to be interested in his proposals.
- 3 "In Place of Fear," Heinemann, 1952, pp. 4-5.
- 4 Ibid, p4.
- 5 J. A. Rose in the New York Times Magazine Section, quoted in Russell D. Stetler Jr.: "War and Atrocity in Vietnam," BRPF 1964.
- 6 New York Times, October 3rd 1965.
- 7 July 21 1965. For a terrifying dossier on American atrocities, see Eric Norden : "American Atrocities in Vietnam," in Africa and the World, July, 1966.
- 8 Currently the Americans are spending £4,500,000,000 a year on the destruction of Vietnam. On 14 April 1966 the Sunday Times carried these figures : 235,000 US personnel cost £517m in pay. Support forces (50,000) cost £110m; B52s costing £425 an hour fly daily ten-hour sorties to the North; the consumption of air-delivered munitions last Feb. was 2½ times the average monthly rate in the Korean war, itself proportionately the bloodiest war in previous history; US ground forces use £35m worth of ammunition a month; their air forces use £38 m. In 1965 the Americans lost 475 major planes costing £640,000 each, 165 lesser craft costing £70,000 each, and 320 helicopters at £90,000 each; which totals £345,000,000. The Americans give £350,000,000 in military aid to their Saigon puppets, and spend the same amount again in South-East Asian bases "associated with their operations in South Vietnam." As Pat Jordan commented in the May edition of Vietnam Voice : "Think what this would mean in aid to the Third World for its development plans."
- 9 The dead are not the only sufferers. Also the grotesque moral effect of the occupation upon the hapless town-dwellers of South Vietnam needs to be understood. See "Vietnam—The Dirty War," Housmans, 1966.
- 10 In his speech to the Commons on July 8 1966, Mr. Stewart showed his arithmetical dullness as well as his moral blindness. "As far back as 1960 the number of people, apart from the operation of the battle (sic) being murdered or abducted by the Vietcong was running at 6,000 per year; in 1965 it was 9,000 and in the first half of this year it was 5,000" he said. Even if one assumed an even escalation between 1960 and the present day, this would yield a figure around 45,000, killed and abducted. In other words, the Foreign secretary accuses the NLF of killing and capturing a total of something over a quarter of the total killed alone by the puppet governments. But in his speech he continued, "These victims were not only civilians, but people who held any kind of governmental position or position of authority in the villages." By this he means that they were civilian functionaries : in fact, they were the usurers, landlords and oppressors of the villages. How many of them died, and how many were captured, and how many were reformed and integrated into the forces of the NLF, Mr. Stewart did not say. Nor did he say anything about the one million plus civilian casualties scored by the efforts of his allies. Nye Bevan once described Mr. Gaitskell as "a desiccated calculating machine." Desiccated, Mr. Stewart most certainly is. But in disrepair, into the bargain. Truly we have the worst of both worlds.
- 11 If anyone doubts this, they should read David Horowitz' graphic account of American Foreign Policy "The Free World Colossus" MacGibbon and Kee, 1965.
- 12 One Way Only : a Tribune Pamphlet, 1951, p6.
- 13 Ibid, p7.



- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Report of the Labour Party Conference, Blackpool 1965, p 155.
- 16 Report of the Labour Party Conference, Scarborough 1951, p121.
- 17 He was not mistaken about its tyranny: but it was a **defensive** tyranny, not an expansive one. The fact that Stalin advised both the Chinese and the Yugoslav Communists **against** revolutionary action (see Dedijer's biography: Tito Speaks) is only the best known instance of his general caution. All the cold war mythology of the aggressive Russian Empire has been effectively shattered by Fleming's work, and Horowitz, *op cit*.
- 18 Hansard CDXCVI (1952) col 989.
- 19 J. P. O'Connell "Can Britain's Restless Rebel Take Over?" Saturday Evening Post, December 18 1954, p 82, cited in Krug: "Aneurin Bevan—Cautious Rebel," Yoseloff 1961, p 207.
- 20 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, Scarborough 1954, p70.
- 21 This is the Same Harold Davies, MP, who was starred to appear at the 1965 Blackpool Conference as an apologist for Mr. Wilson's Vietnam policy. In the play "Waiting for Godot," which Samuel Beckett must have written for the Labour Party, there is a stout character, determined and powerful, called Pozzo, who has a porter-slave, mute and demoralised, who goes by the name of Lucky. Lucky is tethered, broken and frequently ill-used. He carries heavy bags for his master and remains quiet. But at the high point of the drama Lucky is licensed to burst into speech. All the lost hopes and devastated ideals of the poor creature come flooding out of him, but fragmented, in shattering cascade of gibberish. Everything is jumbled up. The sight of this slave, humiliated even in his one moment that might have been glory, brings one to tears. The sight of Pozzo-Wilson at Blackpool last September, beaming from his eminence while Lucky Davies was payed out along his rope to the rostrum and then set up to babble through his tormented lines, was one of the most tragic, heart-breaking moments of recent Labour politics. It should not be forgiven. Thus men are broken, and it is not tolerable.
- 22 Labour Party Conference Report, Scarborough 1954, p77.
- 23 Ibid, p84.
- 24 Ibid, p75.
- 25 On the 28 March 1965 the Observer reported:  
 "The angry young men of Muharrag have been on strike for nearly three weeks. Armed with stones and Pepsi Cola bottles, **they have braved riot guns and instant-vomit gas** to stage the first major disturbance in the Persian Gulf since Suez."  
 The report went on to describe British helicopters "looking for . . . the flying shapes of schoolboy demonstrators."
- 26 House of Commons, Hansard, Mal 11th 1953.
- 27 Ibid col 1122.
- 28 Ibid col 1000.
- 29 Ibid col 1090-1091.
- 30 Reported in the Daily Worker, May 5th 1954, reprinted in The Week 5th May 1966.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Speech in the National Assembly on June 10th 1954, quoted in Douglas Jenness: "War and Revolution in Vietnam," Young Socialist Pamphlet, New York, 1965 p12.
- 33 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, Blackpool 1965, p199. Mr. Wilson has repeated this endearing smear at every possible opportunity. It would be pleasant if someone would inform him (a) that the Chinese are not employed in this war; (b) that far from being a Chinese puppet, there is every evidence that Ho Chi Minh is much more independent of his allies than Mr. Wilson has ever been. (c) That in any case the National Liberation Front, unlike Wilson's Britain, runs under its own steam.
- 34 TUC Report, 1964, p383.

35 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, Blackpool 1965, p195.  
36 Ibid p197.

37 Perhaps the events of 1966 will have persuaded the premier that it is no longer judicious to continue calling upon the shade of Aneurin Bevan for this purpose. The discrepancies between utterance and performance are becoming more and more glaring. In case anyone still takes these genuflections of Doctor Jekyll to Mr. Hyde seriously, though, it may be proper to recall the memoirs of the late Hugh Dalton, "High Tide and After." Dalton acidly describes Bevan's 1954 resignation from the Shadow Cabinet, following a public clash with Attlee on the question of SEATO. (See above, page 8).

"Bevan's action, taken on the spur of the moment and without consultation with his friends, disconcerted many of them. The vacancy on the Shadow Cabinet, due to his resignation, was filled under the rules by Harold Wilson, the runner-up in the ballot . . . at the beginning of the session. Wilson was naturally anxious to accept this promotion. Otherwise he too would have been compelled to resign from the Shadow Cabinet, before he had even taken his seat in it. But he wished to be able to state publicly that he only accepted with Bevan's full approval. Crossman went to Bevan to seek his approval. But Bevan replied that he would regard it as an act of personal disloyalty to himself if Wilson accepted. 'So you regard Harold as expendable?' said Crossman. 'Yes, and you too,' Bevan replied." (Dalton, pp 408-9).

38 The Times, July 4th 1966. A red-letter day for freedom!

39 The Times, July 8th 1966.

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