

VIETNAM

And The Republicans

The War In Vietnam. The Text of the Controversial Republican White Paper Prepared by the Staff of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, Washington, D. C., Public Affairs Press, 1967, 62 pp., \$1.00.

By Leonard P. Liggio

Early in this staff study it is stated:

America, no matter how pure its motives, cannot overcome the weight of history insofar as the Vietnamese look at it. In short, their memory of history is what we must learn to deal with, not our concept of it.

And in its conclusions, it declares:

In short, we Americans cannot simply go to Asia, wipe the slate clean, and say to them, "This is how it shall be." The Vietnamese have their own view of nationalism, quite different from ours, the Vietnamese Communists identify with it, and it renders our involvement immeasurably difficult.

The advantage of the Republicans' study is that it seeks to understand the realities both of the recent history of the Vietnamese people and of the present political situation. Against these facts the Republicans re-examine the U. S. intervention in Vietnam.

The background indicates to the Republicans that the "most crucial moments" came at the end of the Second World War. Ho Chi Minh's leadership brought independence to Vietnam on September 2, 1945, but, based on the decision of the Anglo-Soviet-American Potsdam conference, allied forces under a British general restored the colonial rule of the De Gaulle government in southern Vietnam. "The consequences of this decision are with us today."

While completely condemning the U. S. - supported French aggression, the Republican study merely touches on the original U. S. official involvement in Vietnam - its recognition of the puppet Saigon government in February 1950. It refuses to face the fact that this recognition was intimately involved in U. S. hostility to the newly established Peoples's Republic of China. Throughout the study the relationship of Vietnam to overall U. S. policy, especially to China policy, is neglected as though the Vietnam involvement were an isolated mistake rather than the most obvious aspect of a single foreign policy. Thus, when in mid-January 1950, the Soviet Union objected to the presence of the Chiang delegate in the Security Council, the U.S., supported by France, vetoed the seating of the delegation of the People's Republic of China; China recognized Ho Chi Minh's government, the U. S., to compensate France, recognized the Saigon regime, and the Soviet Union boycotted the Security Council until after the beginning of the Korean war six months later. Again, regarding Truman's intervention in Korea, the Republicans fail to indicate an overall policy in the simultaneous introduction of American forces at the three traditional invasion routes against China: Korea, the Seventh Fleet in the Strait of Taiwan, and the dispatch of American 'advisers' to Vietnam. Nor do they recall the strong Republican opposition to this policy led by Senator Robert Taft. Taft declared:

I have never felt that we should send American soldiers to the Continent of Asia, which, of course, included China proper and Indo-China, simply because we are so outnumbered in fighting a land war on the Continent of Asia that it would bring about complete exhaustion even if we were able to win.

If the President can intervene in Korea without congressional approval, we can go to war in Malaya or Indonesia or Iran or South America.

Understandably, the Republicans are proud of the Eisenhower administration's responsible reaction to the Vietnam crisis of 1954.

President Eisenhower was willing to cash in his chips in 1954, no matter how humiliating it might be to admit we had backed a loser, rather than throw good blood after bad money. In other words, he realized the application of military power could not resolve a hopeless political situation in Vietnam.

Eisenhower's American-centered decision for non-intervention in Vietnam contributed to the famous accusation from

careless observers that he was a "conscious agent of communism."

The White Paper's analysis of the Geneva conference of 1954 suggests that US imperialism's defining of all opposition to it as Communist may rest less in ignorance than in conscious policy. By narrowing the alternatives for national liberation struggles in this way, US imperialism insures receiving the benefit of the accomodating influence of the major Communist powers in gaining a negotiated approach to end the struggle and in regaining at the conference table what imperialism lost on the battlefield.

The Soviet Union . . . pressured Ho Chi Minh to make concessions to France which Ho did not feel were justified. Since the Vietminh controlled three-quarters of all Vietnam, Ho was confident he could quickly capture the rest. . . Communist China, at the time, was trying to present a more moderate image to the world and was willing to cooperate with the Soviet Union in forcing Ho Chi Minh to ease his demands. . . . France emerged from the Conference having salvaged at the negotiating table much of which she had lost on the battlefield. Ho Chi Minh agreed to pull Vietminh forces out of South Vietnam, which they largely controlled, back above the 17th parallel.

This policy of US imperialism further limits the effectiveness of successful liberation movements by narrowing the alternatives for development in the future as well as by reducing the meaningful responses to US imperialism's policies.

The Republican study emphasizes that the Geneva Agreement did not make the 17th parallel a permanent boundary and that elections were required in two years. However, the Republicans attempt to limit the responsibility of the Dulles policy for undermining the Geneva Agreement by placing the blame on Diem. Diem's actions in Vietnam were a phase of U. S. policy in Asia set by Dulles by creating SEATO in September 1954, less than two months after the Geneva conference, and by the U. S. letter to Diem of October 23, 1954 which had been dictated by a Thai representative. By concentrating upon Diem's actions, however, the Republicans come to present an accurate description of the development of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The study notes that the guerrilla activity began in 1957 as a result of Diem's refusal to hold the 1956

elections provided for at Geneva. This opposition was intensified when Diem replaced the local village chiefs with Saigon appointees who naturally became the objects of local "terrorism," i.e., popular justice.

The Republican statement, in its attempts to shift blame from bi-partisan US imperialism to the Democratic administration elected in November, 1960, fails to note the importance of that election for the Vietnamese. Diem was so closely identified with the Republican administration that its defeat by the Democrats led the anti-Diem opposition to revolt against Diem, on November 11, 1960. The Kennedy administration, however, was to support Diem as strongly as the Eisenhower administration. Meanwhile, as a result of the unsuccessful revolt of the Saigon military and political leaders supported by the paratroop forces, the only effective opposition to the US-puppet regime was now the guerrilla forces, and "in December 1960, the National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) was formed by militant South Vietnamese insurgents."

Challenging the State Department assumptions that the NLF is controlled by the Hanoi government, the Republicans raise a controversial issue for future events in Vietnam. Either there will be a complete national liberation struggle without compromises with American imperialism or, due to pressures within the socialist camp, there will be an opportunity for new manipulations by American imperialism. The Republicans say:

It should be noted that the NLF has been southern oriented. Forty of their senior leaders were native South Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese Communists have, in the past, found Hanoi quite willing to enter into agreements at the expense of the South Vietnamese whether Communist or not. Examples: . . . Three, the Geneva Agreements of July 1954, left the south under control of the Diem government for at least 2 more years - this when most of the south was already under Communist control. Four, thereafter, neither Hanoi nor Peking, nor Moscow made strong representations against dropping elections in 1956, in effect confirming Diem's control and leaving the South Vietnamese Communists out in the cold. All of which is a reminder to the South Vietnamese Communists that North Vietnam has separate in-

terests, and has not in the past been the most reliable of allies.

Besides this must be placed the Four Points of the North Vietnam government of April 13, 1965, quoted by the Republicans, including point three: "The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the program of the South Vietnam Front for Liberation, without any foreign interference."

To emphasize the qualitative change of the U. S. intervention under Kennedy the study notes that Kennedy announced a crisis in Southeast Asia in May 1961. "President Kennedy reverted to old fashioned gunboat diplomacy and sent an aircraft carrier to demonstrate off Haiphong." American troops were landed in Thailand, special forces units were sent to South Vietnam, and Vice President Lyndon Johnson went to Saigon to affirm the U. S. Vietnam policy. Beginning with China's request of February 24, 1962 and General De Gaulle's of August, 1963, both rejected by the Kennedy administration, and the initiatives of U Thant to the Johnson administration in 1963 and 1964, the Republicans detail the consistent refusal to seek peace by the U. S. government, and conclude that by December 1963 Johnson had made his choice: "The President now set the goal as military victory." Following the assumption of their posts in Saigon in July 1964 by Generals Westmoreland and Taylor, the President received full powers in the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, sponsored by Senator William Fulbright. The study states: "The series of events leading to the resolution began with a July 30th naval raid on North Vietnamese island radar and naval installations." By early August, the U. S. escalated the war by air attacks on North Vietnam. Ten thousand dead, fifty thousand wounded and several thousand lost aircraft later the Republicans noted: "Yet at the beginning of April 1967, the United States and South Vietnamese were able to claim control over fewer villages and hamlets than in 1962."

The single substantive proposal in the Republican study is that the United States should not be engaged in a land war on the Asian continent. While, if rigorously applied, the proposal would be a positive contribution, it does not deal with the most important, the most basic issue which underlies the Vietnam war: will the United States accept without any kind of intervention the revolutions which will be undertaken against foreign and domestic exploitation

by the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America? A political party which dodges that fundamental question lacks a future.