

VIETNAM AND THE C.P.G.B.

Report from the British Comrades in Peking

JOHN GOLLAN, John Mahon and Bill Alexander arrived in Peking on their way to Hanoi on June 9. That evening nine British comrades who live and work in Peking (with the approval of the E.C.) went to their hotel to discuss the Party's policy on Vietnam. (The nine comrades were: Rose Smith, Michael Shapiro, Elsie Chalmely, David Crook, Isabel Crook, Patricia Davies, Joshua Horn, Miriam Horn, Margaret Turner.)

The custom had grown up over the years that whenever British Party leaders came to Peking they arranged to meet the comrades working there. Not this time. In fact as they stepped out of the lift and saw us their faces were a study of surprise and discomfort and one of them gasped: "Good god!" Gollan did not even invite us into his room but headed off down the corridor away from us. We followed him and ourselves went for extra chairs. The meeting that followed lasted only 25 minutes, after which Gollan summarily ended it.

ON "SETTLING" THE VIETNAM QUESTION THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS

When we said that we gathered from the Party press that the leadership was for a negotiated "settlement" in Vietnam (which the Vietnamese oppose as a dodge to rob the people of the south of their hard-won victories) Gollan replied: "How would you gather that from the Party press?"

We cited the February 20 issue of Comment with its main slogan: "Britain Should Act Now to Get Peace Talks Going." Gollan dodged the issue. He tried to throw the question back at us and did not answer in a comradely way. In fact he did not deny that the Party is for negotiations. He just gave an opinion that Britain won't initiate peace talks. He said the Lobby organised by Fenner Brockway's Council for Peace in Vietnam was the main action to be taken in Britain. He said: "We've criticised the Lobby, but we support it." He did not explain why the Party had so often come out in favour of demands contrary to those of the Vietnamese people. He said nothing about supporting the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation or the Four Points of Premier Pham Van Dong of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (see below) which sum-up the position of our Vietnamese comrades.

Here we have to add our own opinion on the crucial question of negotiations. The U.S. want negotiations. Why? Because they are being beaten. They want to win at the conference table what they can't win on the battlefield. They want a breathing spell. They want the N.F.L. to let down its guard and lay down its arms. Then they will attack again. They insist that their Saigon puppets represent South Vietnam—i.e. that U.S. domination must be preserved. Look at South Korea. The Americans are still there after 11 years. They will never leave Vietnam till they are kicked out.

London, New Delhi, Paris, Moscow and Washington have been calling for negotiations—while the bombing of Vietnam is stepped up. What is the Vietnamese people's attitude to negotiations? They know they cannot be defeated; that negotiations now means throwing away victory. They beat the French, who had 400,000 men (several times as many as the Americans), who knew the country and the people, were acclimatized and had far better morale than the jittery American troops, whom the Vietnamese have already licked in hand-to-hand combat.

The Vietnamese demand is not for negotiations but for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops, weapons and war material from South Vietnam, the dismantling of all military bases there and the stopping of all acts of war against the territory of North Vietnam. The Americans are trying to force the Vietnamese to negotiate by bombing them. Should any Communist Party support such pressure by suggesting that it too favours negotiations? No, it should openly oppose them.

This has not been explained in the British Party press. *Marxism Today*, the Party's theoretical journal, has not carried a single article analysing the issues in Vietnam since the beginning of 1963. *The Daily Worker* of March 25 did carry extracts from the N.F.L. March 22 Declaration; but it presented the Front's warning to U.S.: "We may call for fighters from other lands," as if it were a desperate appeal instead of an expression of their determination to fight until final victory. It did not include extracts showing the Vietnamese people's contribution to the worldwide struggle against U.S. imperialism and what we owe them; their confidence in victory and the U.S. imperialists' desperate plight and weakness in Vietnam. On April 22 the *Daily Worker* reported Yugoslavia's view that "an initiative was needed on Vietnam and suggested unconditional talks"—without a word of comment to show that this was precisely Johnson's line. On May 2 the *Daily Worker* quoted Gollan as saying: "The real voice of Labour and the progressive movement was the decision of the USDAW conference and

the Easter March . . . we should win every trade union and public body to do as USDAW has done." But USDAW passed several resolutions, one urging "negotiations that will leave the people of Vietnam free to decide their own future," another supporting the 17 nation (Tito) appeal for "realistic negotiations" and it also demanded that "the Government use its influence to stop the fighting." And neither Gollan nor the *Daily Worker* said a word to the effect that calling for "cease-fire" and negotiations amounts to telling the Vietnamese people to lay down their arms in the face of aggression.

On April 8 in a front page box on the May Day March the slogan was: "Voice your demand for peace and no war in Vietnam!" How would it have sounded if the Party had called for "peace and no war" in Spain in the '30s instead of recruiting International Brigadiers? Or in Russia in 1919 instead of calling for "Hands Off Russia" and striking the "Jolly George"? Obviously the Party and the *Daily Worker*, while appearing to support the people of South Vietnam, is creating confusion on the most crucial question. It is not spearheading the campaign directly against U.S. imperialism and for the demands of the people of South Vietnam.

Gollan said he was going to Vietnam "to develop the solidarity campaign." What did he mean? The South Vietnamese have made clear what they mean by solidarity: offers of aid including arms and volunteers. It is necessary to be precise on this point because the revisionists try to twist on it. The official committee of the W.F.T.U. nearly split the recent International Trade Union Conference on it (held in Hanoi June 2-6) by opposing even a mention of arms, volunteers and boycott of U.S. shipments. One West European delegate to the conference put the revisionists' attitude very clearly when he said: "You" (i.e. the South Vietnam N.F.L.) "by calling for volunteers are trying to enlarge the war. Our unions are against all wars of any kind anywhere. We support you to restore peace and carry out the Geneva agreements; not to make war." Is this the sort of solidarity Gollan offers?

The *Daily Worker* of April 26 announced a coming conference of Communist Parties of capitalist countries in Europe to discuss "solidarity with the people of Vietnam and the struggle against American aggression there. . . ." It went on: "Because of the worsening situation in Vietnam, and because of the dangers which this means for world peace, it was proposed to call this conference as soon as possible." What is meant by "the worsening of the situation"—when the Vietnamese people are winning? What are "the dangers which this means" for world peace—when the

imperialists are being defeated? This is pure pacifism without any class approach, which can lead to no real "solidarity with the people of Vietnam." It plays into the hands of Johnson who tries by every means to drive a wedge between the North and South to weaken the unity of the Vietnamese people. Vietnam's slogan is: "Defend the North, Liberate the South, Unify the Country." It is solidarity for this that is needed.

ON THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S LEADING A MASS CAMPAIGN IN BRITAIN

In reply to our doubts as to whether the Party was leading a mass campaign to aid Vietnam, Gollan replied: "We're putting the whole strength of the Party behind this Vietnam thing. We have to handle other issues too. We must act in an overall fashion. We're doing more on Vietnam than on any other single issue." Here he cited the Lobby, saying "it is the biggest mass movement we have engaged in for a long time;" and the Aldermaston March, saying "there would have been no Aldermaston March except for us." He then noted that "104 Labour M.P.s are critical to one degree or another of the government position on Vietnam;" and that 10 trade unions are taking various actions, with the N.U.R. taking a full-page advertisement in the Sun.

Is this a mass campaign initiated by the Party, or is it tailing behind the Labour movement and the C.N.D.?

If the Party is putting its whole strength into support of Vietnam, why was no publicity given to the Vietnamese May Day Trade Union Appeal to transport workers all over the world not to handle U.S. war material for South Vietnam? Why did not the Party press publicise the Japanese dockers' refusal to load ships for Vietnam? These should have been top headlines to arouse similar action in Britain. Why has there been no call for action in Britain like that in New Zealand, where the Federation of Labour Conference took a stand against sending troops to South Vietnam and the seamen came out against transporting either troops or military equipment?

GOLLAN'S ATTITUDE TO THE BRITISH COMRADES IN PEKING

From the outset Gollan showed contempt for our questions—which were such as any Party member is entitled to ask. He told Rose Smith—a foundation member of the Party—that he was not going to discuss her questions seriously because they were "hostile" and she had criticised him. (She had criticised him when he defended the beating up of Vietnamese and Chinese student demonstrators in Moscow.) In fact it was Gollan who was hostile and arrogant. He neither sought our opinions as comrades, nor deigned to put his own case. He acted as a boss with underlings. We knew he was tired from travelling, but it was obviously not just tiredness that led him to announce that he would give us only 20 minutes. And when faced with a very awkward question he stood up and replied: "I'm not going to allow you to rob me of my sleep." Then he began to undress. It was nine o'clock.

CONCLUSION

We went to discuss things with Gollan because we have long noted that the line of the British Party leadership is to play down the victorious fight of the Vietnamese people and by stressing the war's horrors and the campaign for a negotiated settlement, to advocate compromise and capitulation. This is aid and comfort to Johnson, not to our Vietnamese comrades.

Of course this line is not advocated openly. Instead confusion and illusions are created. We know from first-hand experience how Gollan and Mathews used their visit to Peking in February 1963 to tone down opposition at the April 1963 Party Congress with a show of impartiality. Now they are preparing for the November 1965 Party Congress by arming themselves against a challenge to their revisionist line by a show of

"solidarity with Vietnam"—which in reality does not support the Vietnamese people's fight for victory. We believe they aim to use their Hanoi visit to this end.

Despite the present Party policy we still hope and look for a militant mass campaign in Britain for solidarity with and support for the people of Vietnam, based on:

FIVE POINTS FROM SOUTH VIETNAM N.F.L. CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S STATEMENT OF MARCH 22, 1965

1. The U.S. imperialists are the saboteurs of the Geneva Agreements, the most brazen warmongers and aggressors and the sworn enemy of the Vietnamese people.
2. The heroic South Vietnamese people are resolved to drive out the U.S. imperialists in order to liberate South Vietnam, achieve an independent, democratic, peaceful and neutral South Vietnam and eventual national reunification.
3. The valiant South Vietnamese people and the South Vietnam liberation army are resolved to fully accomplish their sacred duty to drive out the U.S. imperialists so as to liberate South Vietnam and defend North Vietnam.
4. The South Vietnamese people express their profound gratitude for the wholehearted support of the peace- and justice-loving people all over the world and declare their readiness to receive all assistance including weapons and all other war materials from their friends in the five continents.
5. The whole people to unite, the whole people to take up arms, to continue to march forward heroically and to resolve to fight and to defeat the U.S. aggressors and Vietnamese traitors.

Quoted from *Vietnam Courier*, Hanoi, April 3, 1965.

HANOI'S FOUR POINTS

1. Recognition of the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people: peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. According to the Geneva Agreements, the U.S. government must withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. troops, military personnel and weapons of all kinds, destroy all U.S. military bases there, cancel its "military alliance" with South Vietnam. It must end its policy of intervention and aggression in South Vietnam. According to the Geneva Agreements, the U.S. government must stop its acts of war against North Vietnam, completely cease all encroachments on the territory and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
2. Pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, while Vietnam is still temporarily divided into two zones, the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam must be strictly respected: the two zones must refrain from joining any military alliance with foreign countries, there must be no foreign military bases, troops, and military personnel in their respective territory.
3. The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the programme of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, without any foreign interference.
4. The peaceful reunification of Vietnam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declares that any approach contrary to the above stand is inappropriate: any approach tending to secure a U.N. intervention in the Vietnam situation is also inappropriate because such approaches are basically at variance with the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam.

From *Government Report*, submitted by Premier Pham Van Dong (National Assembly, 3rd Legislature, 2nd Session) Hanoi, April 1965.