

COMMUNIST REGIMES BLOCKIN

By MICHAEL STEWART

I am very glad to be taking part in this meeting tonight. It is an excellent thing that students should have access to news and comment from all over the world, that they should be able in the light of that news and comment to form their opinions and to express them freely.

I rejoice, therefore, that meetings of this kind can be held and are held in this country and in the United States. I hope the day will come when students in China, in the Soviet Union, in North Vietnam and in all countries have the like freedom of access to information and the freedom to express their views. For when that day comes it will be easier to establish a peaceful and civilized world.

My object tonight is to describe the steps which the British government has taken, the reasons for those steps and the way in which the British government believes this problem should be solved. To do that I must briefly refer to past history. But I want to move from that to an account of the most recent events and to a discussion of our views and how events could move if there is any measure of good will.

At Geneva in 1954 no full or firm settlement was made. There was a proposal for free elections throughout the whole of Vietnam, but neither in the Communist north nor the disturbed south was it possible for these to be held. What emerged was a de facto division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel, and it is noticeable that one million people moved from the Communist north into the south.

I mention this because it demonstrates that there are many people in Vietnam who do not wish to live under Communist rule. And indeed one of the difficulties now facing South Vietnam is the flood of refugees who hurry away from areas dominated by the Vietcong into the towns.

Excerpts from talk by Foreign Secretary of British Labor Government at recent "speech-in" at Oxford University.

From 1954 to 1959 north and south lived uneasily, though both parts were able to make some progress.

This comparative peace was ended by a deliberate act of the government of North Vietnam when it called for an all-out onslaught by the Vietcong and proceeded to give them aid, with men, with weapons, and military direction. This we know from the 1962 report of the International Control Commission and this action was taken when the number of American personnel in the south did not exceed 700. It was in fact an assault by the Communist North Vietnam upon its neighbor.

The United States, by virtue of its agreement with South Vietnam, gave them aid and, against an increasingly determined Communist effort to gain control by force, the American assistance grew to 12,000 personnel by the end of 1962. Yet, it was not until 1964, after five years of conflict, that any attempt was made by the United States to move against the territory of North Vietnam, and this was only after an unprovoked attack on United States warships in international waters. The American forces only assumed an operational role in the air in 1964 and on the ground in recent days.

We have now received information of a new and rather disturbing situation. There is at least one regular battalion of the North Vietnamese army and probably other units operating 200 miles within the frontier of South Vietnam. Thus we now know that the North Vietnamese, not content with supplying the Vietcong with weapons and men, have now regular formations inside the territory of South Vietnam.

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I mention these facts because they show that the matter cannot be dealt with merely by condemnation of the United States. Nor can it be dealt with by simply yielding to the demand of the Communist powers that all American troops should be withdrawn forthwith and the future of the whole of Vietnam determined by the Communists alone. An abandonment of this kind would be a plain indication that Communist aggression had succeeded and it would be profoundly unwelcome to every non-Communist country in Asia.

In these circumstances, the British government's view has always been and still is that we must seek every way of getting a conference so that the fighting could be stopped and the people of Vietnam given a genuine chance to determine their own future.

We have made this view at all times clear to the government of the United States. And in April of this year President Johnson declared his country's willingness to enter a conference without preconditions.

Let me mention the efforts we have made to this end. When Mr. Gromyko was here in March, I urged him that he and I as co-chairmen should recall the Geneva Conference. He was not prepared to agree. When I put the same proposal to him on a later occasion there was the same refusal.

Failing this we have proposed that the two co-chairmen should at least invite all the powers concerned to state their views on how a settlement can be reached. To even this limited proposal there was still a refusal, though the British government has itself taken this step.

Again, I proposed that we could at least take joint action concerning the kindred problem of Laos in the hope that this might bring some better understanding of the problems of all Southeast Asia. I have still received no reply to this suggestion.

When the 17 non-aligned countries issued their call for a conference without preconditions we welcomed this and, as I said recently

in the House of Commons, we are now seeking to make use of this initiative.

Now is there any reason in commonsense or humanity why the following sequence of events should not occur? First, a conference under whatever auspices can be agreed; a cease-fire could either precede such a conference or be achieved at the conference. Next, a settlement which would assure North and South Vietnam against any form of aggression.

Once so assured, South Vietnam would be a country in which there were no foreign troops or bases and which was tied to no military alliance; her citizens would then have the chance to repair the ravages of war and to determine freely and in peace their form of government.

The future relationship between North and South Vietnam could be a matter for free decisions by the people of both these countries. There would be opportunity for a program of economic reconstruction under United Nations administration. The British government would gladly contribute to such a program, the United States government has promised a generous contribution and I trust many other countries would do the same.

This is the policy for which we have been and are working. Opposition to a development of this kind does not come from Britain or from the United States. The barrier at present is the refusal of the governments of North Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union to negotiate at all.

Despite that refusal, the British government will continue to work for a conference by any method which offers a chance of success. It is my profound conviction that sooner or later a settlement broadly on these lines must be achieved and will be achieved. Why not now before more lives are lost?