

## SOME RESULTS AND TASKS OF THE VIETNAM MORATORIUM

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This is merely a personal assessment of the results of the Vietnam Moratorium of May 8,9 and 10, 1970, and suggestions of its tasks in September and later.

The results of the May Moratorium can be arrived at to the extent that it achieved its aims. Its aims were to bring about the immediate withdrawal of Australian forces from Vietnam and the immediate repeal of conscription and to operate in a peaceful and non-violent manner.

Australian troops are still in Vietnam. None of the National Service Act has been repealed. The campaign was carried out in a peaceful and non-violent manner. Hence the success of the campaign is largely confined to the way it was conducted and to the effects of that.

At this point it is necessary to discuss how the aims of the Moratorium (and for that matter the broader aims of showing why Australian and American troops are in Vietnam, and of establishing a better society) can be achieved.

These aims depend upon changing the state of mind of Australian people.

Their achievement does not depend upon winning over more than 50 per cent of the people, which would result in a change of government and then probably immediate withdrawal of troops and repeal of conscription, but they may be achieved if the existing government is influenced by the view that enough people's minds are being changed towards withdrawal and repeal to make it politically wise to act in accordance with the change.

Our aims can be achieved therefore when we can persuade or move sufficient people into agreement with them.

They will move our way if they approve of what we do and/or if they come to see things as we do. Certainly one My Lai and one 'tiger cage' prison probably do more to influence minds against Australian (and American) government policy than would several Moratorium Campaigns but our main purpose must be to act in a way that does not repel the people we must influence and to tell them vividly what has happened in Vietnam, what is happening and why it happened.

We cannot do this if the people we need to influence disagree with what we do, or the way we do it, and we cannot do this unless we educate, explain, illustrate - the message must get through, the story must be told.

It will not get through, it will not be told if we induce resistance or dislike by what we do and it will not get through even to receptive people unless we have the means to tell the story and use them fully enough.

The May Moratorium Campaign was successful in that people we can influence were most impressed by its size and in the way that 70,000 to 100,000 people actually behaved. Most people were very impressed by it. A few were envious, some realised its potential for winning more support and will oppose and distort it all the more because of this.



Indeed I believe there has been a change in many parts of the mass media and in other places simply because of the support and potential the Moratorium revealed.

Many parts of the mass media I am told, have decided to black-list the September Moratorium.

Many parts of the mass media showed up a kind of euphoria, a genuine appreciation of May 8, but that was at the journalist level, but now the directors may have been at work and the screws maybe on. Not only this, but parts of the authority structure are panicking a little because the Moratorium has been taken as something that shows radicalism to be far stronger than they thought at least a little more repression is certain to follow.

Another successful aspect of the May Moratorium was that it has strengthened the radical forces in Australia. It was good for us. It did give us a feeling that we amounted to more, and that we are capable of more, than we thought. For a long time many of us have felt somewhat isolated, and because our views conflicted, some of us were worried by doubt and reassessment. But when 70,000 or 100,000 people did what they did in Melbourne on May 8 it was an experience to most of us that confirmed our stand and gave us well based confidence. This feeling of rational and well based confidence is good for the future, because some of us have been pushed into somewhat desperate and irrational actions because we felt we would never get anywhere by "normal" methods.

But we did not educate, explain or illustrate very much in the May Moratorium.

We did not really tell people much about the war and conscription and, above all we did not tell them much about why it was happening and how it might be changed. We did not talk, write, act and demonstrate sufficiently.

The mass media, this time, helped a little, very often when it thought it was damaging us; but it will help less in September. Sooner or later it finds out that when it has no case, and when most of the case is on our side, the best way to damage us is to refuse to report us at all. Editorials, radio gossip spreaders, Prime Ministers and Archbishops will be more silent next time.

In addition to mass action and "winning the support of the masses" there are other lines of action which have been taken.

There is non-compliance with the National Service Act. This involves a heavy task for the non-compliers but it has been effective. It has puzzled and embarrassed the government. They know that many convictions and long terms of imprisonment imposed upon sincere, intelligent and courageous young men will turn many people against the government and the system that is responsible. And so they have deferred action and desperately sought for alternatives. But sooner or later the pressures on them by those who hate young men who reject militarism and who, hating them, have an urge to punish them, will probably prevail. But I am convinced we should do everything within our power to aid those who are convinced on moral and rational grounds, and who form a conscientious objection to conscription, or who refuse to comply with it.



Other forms of non-compliance or obstruction have been proposed or adopted. Examples are filling in false National Service registration cards, or crowding in or "sitting in" government offices, or blocking traffic. Before any such action is adopted what is expected to be achieved by it and its effects must be worked out. Often people turn to these activities only because other types of activity have not brought about withdrawal of troops or some other objective. In other words these activities are not chosen because of what they can do but because other things appear to have failed. It can be said that the effects of these "resistance" methods are as follows:

- (1) To deter the government or some one else from activity or policy. For instance if "the works are gummed up enough" the government may give up the National Service call up; or "if enough letters are written" the government may withdraw troops. Sometimes physical attacks on property or other violence is explained in the same way. Sometimes "stopping business as usual", or strikes, are supported for this reason.

In my opinion it is extremely unlikely that resistance or obstruction will deter the government or cause it to change policy. Indeed it is more likely to have the opposite effect. This result is made more likely too, because the people whose minds we need to influence, if our aims are to be achieved, will not accept these methods and will turn against us because of them.

- (2) To attract attention, make people think without being repelled, begin to see things they did not see before and reassess their views. This is the primary justification for demonstration whether it be resistance or obstruction or not.

The success the Moratorium of May 8 did have was in the main because it did stop people, make them think and most have emerged with a good impression. The theme of the Moratorium is "to stop business as usual" but is this because we think we can stop business as usual enough to make the government change its policy because business has been stopped or do we have the theme because it is necessary for that degree of excitement ("constructive tension" Martin Luther King called it) to make people stop and think much more deeply?

I suggest that resistance or obstruction methods have to be very carefully weighed up. What must be avoided is turning to resistance or obstruction methods alone because other methods appear to have failed or are not for us interesting enough.



There has been a lot of experience of this dilemma. It does not occur now for the first time. Resistance and obstruction methods fail too and are more likely to leave behind opposition among people we could have won over to our side, and resentment and even viciousness elsewhere, which does not induce any gains for us.

There is a place for resistance and obstruction when it confronts people with an issue they have ignored and when it shows them, at the same time, a different vista. But often resistance and obstruction is related to nothing and does nothing but induce opposition or misunderstanding.

I think the main purpose of the Moratorium from now on is to confront the government and the people with the true nature of the war in Vietnam, and conscription for it, and with the causes of both. For this I suggest we need at least the following:

1. Orderly and powerful mass action similar to that of May 8.

Such things as street "sit downs" are incidental and are necessary only as a "constructive tension" element when that is needed.

2. Mass support should be used to show our opponents we have it but for use constructively. In particular;

- (a) voluntary work of many kinds
- (b) raising regular money income for such things as
  - (i) publications including a regular 'newsletter'
  - (ii) a 'school' for speakers, writers, artists and actors who having learnt a bit more about Vietnam and the cause of the war can work much more effectively against it.
  - (iii) pay for notices in the mass media particularly when we are blacklisted.

3. Acts of resistance and non-compliance when their results are reasonably likely to be beneficial.

In brief we have to change the minds of sufficient people whether the change is called revolutionary or not.

A leading revolutionary thinker has put it this way: "The revolutionary party must identify itself with the masses, and according to their present level, awaken them or raise their political consciousness and help them gradually to organise themselves voluntarily and to set going all essential struggles permitted by the internal and external circumstances of the given time and place." It is worth applying this statement to the future tasks of the Moratorium.