

Viet Protest News

VIETNAM CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

BOX 59, POST OFFICE, PARKVILLE 3052, VIC.

NUMBER 19

DECEMBER 1968

SECRETARY'S REPORT

DEMONSTRATIONS: The VCC, since the October 25 demonstration, has been concerned with the role and organisation of demonstrations. In this issue of VPN, a special symposium of articles on demonstrations is published as a contribution to discussion on this question. The VCC welcomes comments and constructive criticisms of these viewpoints. The Conference Report (still available at 30c.) also contains relevant discussion.

EXECUTIVE: At the annual general meeting, the following Executive positions were filled:

President:	Roger Holdsworth
Vice-Presidents:	David Pope, Keith Stodden
Secretary-Treasurer:	John Layfield
Editor:	David Hudson
Assistant Secretary:	Len Cooper
Student Representatives:	Harry van Moorst, David Nadel

FINANCE: The VCC has incurred a debt for about \$150 from the October 25 demonstration. As well as this, general running costs and previous debts leave us nearly \$300 in debt. The appeal in the last issue of VPN failed even to return the cost of half the postage - leaving a large deficit for printing envelopes and the remaining cost of postage.

Unless we can cover the cost of each issue of VPN, we may have to cease production.

The Executive has tried to cut the cost of production of this issue by duplicating it rather than having it printed. If you feel that we perform a worthwhile function - PLEASE SEND US A DONATION!

Otherwise this may be the last issue of VPN.

DISSENTERS' DEFENCE FUND: The urgency of the present situation - at least twenty cases arising from conscientious objection and demonstrations before the courts - is putting great strain on the Fund. \$100 is being donated from the DDF to the John Zaeb Appeal. To maintain and enlarge the Fund, we again urge you to send your donations to the VCC. We would welcome also any efforts - through personal representation, functions, meetings, etc. - to raise money.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

VIGIL: The vigil for peace in Vietnam continues to take place every Wednesday, 12.30 - 1.30 p.m. outside the State Library in Swanston St.

DRAFT RESISTERS' CONFERENCE: An interstate conference for all draft resisters and potential draft resisters will be held on

December 28-29. Draft resisters from Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and possibly Hobart will be attending. This conference will be of direct relevance to next year's anti-conscription campaign and will initiate a number of activities for next year. Those wishing to attend should send their name and address to the CDA, 57 Palmerston St., Carlton. 3053.

C.O. DISCUSSION GROUP: A Conscientious Objectors' Discussion Group has been convened by Dick Cherry and Tony Dalton. It will meet regularly during 1969, and can be contacted C/o 70 Dorritt St., Carlton.

WILFRED BURCHETT: A protest meeting for Wilfred Burchett will be held at Assembly Hall on Thursday 19 December, with Gordon Bryant as the main speaker. On Friday 20 December, there will be a demonstration at 4.30 p.m. outside the Immigration Department, at the corner of Latrobe and Spring Sts.

FILMS: The Centre for Democratic Action at 57 Palmerston St., Carlton screens feature films with political themes every Sunday evening at 8 p.m. - 40c. admission. For program details ring 34 5734.

JOHN ZARB APPEAL: Donations to help with John Zarb's legal expenses can be sent to Conscientious Objectors (Non-Pacifist), Box 2120T, GPO, Melbourne. 3001.

BOOKS, POSTERS, BADGES: You can get (almost) anything you want at - Alice's Restaurant Bookshop, 116 Greville St., Prahran.

DEMONSTRATIONS

The following statement was issued by the VCC executive on October 26:- "The October 25th demonstration has been described as 'one of the most violent demonstrations that Melbourne has ever seen'. The police have accused the organizers, the Vietnam Co-ordinating Committee, of 'going back on their word'. The VCC, as organizers of the demonstration wish to present their version of the situation. Unlike the Government and the police we do not have ready access to the news media, so we have published the truth of the situation in this broadsheet.

OCT. 25

Firstly, what has been called 'violence' was actually no more than a few very minor incidents accompanied by a lot of noise. No policemen were hurt in any way and only a few demonstrators were hurt - by the police; no damage to property was done whatsoever by the demonstrators and only a few flags and placards were destroyed and amplifiers damaged - by the police.

Secondly, it was the police, not the organizers of the demonstration, who went back on their word. The executive of the VCC spent a full week talking to the police; the day before the demonstration two executive members went to see the Assistant Commissioner of Traffic Police, Mr. Braybrook, and finalized arrangements for the demonstration. He was given detailed information about our plans and assurances of our cooperation.

The following points of agreement were reached by the two executive members and the Assistant Commissioner:

1. We would hold the demonstration in front of the Dow Chemical Offices - when the time came we were forced to go to the other side of the road.
2. We would be allowed to police the 'napalming' of the dummy with our own 'police' force - but when the dummy was about to be burned the police formed a cordon around it (it had been agreed on that our own 'police force' would be allowed to do this and that the police would stay out of it) and tried to prevent the

dummy being lit. When it was lit the police had arranged for the fire brigade to come in and put it out. We had agreed with the police that we would bring a fire extinguisher along in case of trouble, hence the fire brigade was brought in only as a petty attempt by the police to embarrass and disrupt our demonstration.

3. We would be allowed to carry placards, flags and banners (so long as they were not offensive) - when the march got under way the police destroyed a number of placards and flags without any reason whatsoever.
4. We would be allowed to march to the city in the St. Kilda Rd., service lane - yet when we did this police vans and policemen continually pushed people into the gutter and harassed them all the way along the march. Demonstrators were forced to move aside on a number of occasions to avoid being run over by a police van.
5. We would be allowed to use our public address system to direct the demonstration - yet on four occasions the police ripped the cords from the loudspeakers - this was done well before any other trouble had started.
6. We would be allowed to march up the centre of St. Kilda Road on the way to the U.S. Consulate - yet the police, by using their vans and 'courtesy' cars as battering rams, forced the demonstrators to walk on the footpath.
7. We would be allowed to present the remains of the 'napalmed' Vietnamese to the U.S. Consulate - yet this was not allowed when we arrived there, instead the coffin and the 'remains' were taken from us and thrown to the ground by the police.

Then after all this the police were dishonest enough to utilise the mass media to justify their actions by saying that WE broke our word. All that we did was to attempt to speak for a few minutes to the people who had gathered on the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets. We hoped that we might give them some of the facts and figures about Vietnam that were not readily available.

The police had broken their word long before this.

We have tried cooperation with the police - it doesn't work! Information given to the police in good faith, and in a sincere attempt to cooperate with them, was used to intimidate demonstrators at every conceivable opportunity. The police say one thing and do another - they obviously prefer to push us around rather than cooperate with us.

We are not going to be pushed around any more.

The VCC does not want violent demonstrations, but neither does it want demonstrations victimised by a Police force that treats demonstrations as a social evil that must be stamped out at all costs rather than as the democratic right of all Australians.

To prevent violence and disorder in future demonstrations the VCC will provide its own police force and will request the regular police to keep clear of the demonstrators."

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At the VCC meeting on the 21 November, there was further discussion of the October 25 demonstration, future demonstrations and the function of the VCC. It was felt that the VCC, being a coordinating body, could not

5 POINTS

formulate any policy on the nature of demonstrations - but that the nature of each proposed demonstration should be decided according to the circumstances surrounding it. The following five points were adopted.

1. That no precise form of demonstration be excluded, but that each proposed demonstration should be considered on its merits.

2. Before a demonstration the plans and objects of the event should be set out for the consideration of component bodies of the VCC and the resulting consensus should then become the programme.
3. That the appointed leaders and marshals are then answerable to the accepted plans and objects of the demonstration.
4. That the precise plans of the demonstration should be notified by leaflet or announcement to all participants and publicised at the event.
5. That leaders of the programme should be known to participants so that they will know where directions are to come from.

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Mr. Webster says that a demonstration is "a public manifestation of feeling". But that definition should not be interpreted too narrowly. The people who demonstrate against Australia's involvement in Vietnam should not consider their actions as a simple release of frustrations. Demonstrations, if they are to serve any useful purpose, must be recognized as a political tool.

LLOYD

Our demonstrations should have a three fold political purpose:

1. To cause a creative tension in the minds of the people who witness the demonstrations. My earliest memory of a demonstration was to see films of people walking the streets with signs reading "Ban the Bomb". That seemed to me to be an odd thing for people to be doing - there must be some reason for such behaviour - they must take their cause very seriously to be prepared to be labelled cranks. That tension helped to shape my attitudes to nuclear warfare.
2. A demonstration must set people talking to one another. It is designed to produce public debate. It has to be widely publicised, not with the aim of converting people directly, but with the aim of promoting discussion that will lead to a change in public opinion. The demonstration technique is based on the belief that if people discuss the subject, they will cease to support the Vietnam War. Such a belief, although hopelessly optimistic, is being vindicated by the current development of public feeling.
3. A demonstration needs to have the capacity of putting the Government on the defensive. It should never leave the government with the initiative. Demonstrations can harass and annoy even a Prime Minister if they contain an imaginative punch at his own weakest points. When the government is trying to defend its cause, it is very likely to reveal its own weaknesses.

A demonstration can be considered a failure if it leaves the government with the initiative. When a government can direct the public attention from the object of the demonstration (the Australian involvement in Vietnam) to the demonstrators' methods (throwing mud-pies etc.) the initiative has been stolen from the demonstrators.

Or if the demonstrations can be easily dismissed ("those long-haired students again"), the cause is seriously impeded. This calls for the kind of demonstrations that are imaginative, varied in style and are not open to the same old criticisms.

The evolution in the styles of demonstrations we have seen in Melbourne deserve a couple of comments.

Firstly, the method of the demonstration must be consistent with the object. If we are advocating peace in Vietnam, we serve the cause best by demonstrating peacefully. Otherwise our "bonafides" is certainly suspect.

Secondly, we have to make the object and method of the demonstration perfectly clear before the event. On a few occasions, people have found themselves involved in an action which has

embarrassed them because the demonstration took an unintended direction. Civil disobedience may certainly be warranted on some occasions, but the plans need to be announced before the event in order to prevent placing people who are not prepared for such action in an unfortunate situation.

The numerous demonstrations which have swept across the USA, Australia, etc., since the commencement of the Vietnam war have undoubtedly played a tremendous role in stirring the popular conscience. Such a valuable political tool needs constant attention. I believe that demonstrations must be handled carefully to prevent inflicting wounds upon those demonstrating.

-- JOHN LLOYD (Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament).

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Bombing restrictions and quickening Paris peace talks have lifted no responsibility from opponents of the Vietnam intervention. Negotiator Harriman warns against expectations of an early conclusion to the war, while Gorton refers cynically to "these things they call peace talks". Meanwhile the napalm and gas canisters are still falling in what is still total war for the people of South Vietnam.

QUINN

That protest marches and demonstrations are an effective means of concentrating public attention on the war is beyond question. The deliberate intimidation and final disruption of the Dow Chemical demonstration is evidence of official determination to avoid the local and even international embarrassment of another "July 4" type display of militancy.

Obviously future demonstrations must be organized in the face of increasing police recalcitrance. The peaceful vigil, poster parade and promenade of large numbers provide few problems. The police don't mind 20 people standing outside an office holding hands and posters; they also don't mind 2,000 people marching down Bourke Street on a Sunday afternoon; but when protestors begin effectively to reach masses of people through the exploitation of news media by employment of better tactics, the state machine rolls into action. It would be naive to underestimate our opposition by involving ourselves in the sort of spontaneity evident on July 4 and October 25. We should aim at reducing arrests but also at completing effectively the demonstration we begin how?

Firstly, without inhibiting demonstrators, we should observe basic principles of responsibility -- avoidance of personal verbal attacks on police -- many of them are not beyond ideological change; open defiance of police should only be supported where suitable preparations are made.

The more or less spontaneous deviations from plan at the last two major marches can never be accomplished with the same degree of success again. The police have contingency plans now and we must adjust our organization accordingly. Some consideration could be given to the establishment of an action group of militants prepared to exploit police immobility and other favorable opportunities at short notice. "Favorable opportunities" could consist of surprise welcomes for visiting VIPs, unheralded calls on relevant embassies, and gatherings of moment, liable to be well covered by press and television. Certain organizational tasks such as provision of some protection from provocateurs and illegal arrest could concern a group. It could control and protect vehicles, loudspeakers, banners, etc. Sudden changes

of plan would be taken up and transmitted to other demonstrators. The group as outlined above, of course, must operate completely under the guidance of the VCC - itself a representative and democratic body.

In adopting more flexible tactics we are not challenging the police; we are challenging a government which is determined to outlaw public expressions of contempt for its bloody military jaunt in Vietnam.

No amount of clever demonstrating, however, can replace painstaking explanatory work among the mass of non-committed people. Demonstrations are but one of the myriad ways we can expose Australian acquiescence in a war of aggression.

— ROD QUINN (Vietnam Withdrawal Campaign).

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There is a definite division in the anti-Vietnam war movement between what might be called the "moderates" and the "militants". This is a serious and deep division which covers the whole field of strategy and tactics and stems from differing views as to the nature of the movement and the nature of the war itself. There is also overlap between people with militant strategy and moderate tactics and vice versa.

LANGER

The moderates tend to view the war as a mistake, either for strategic reasons or because of its "inhumane" character. They point out that the official explanations for the war are lies and base their anti-war propaganda on this and on the "atrocities". They try to seek a political solution to the war through compromise and negotiations, and regard support for a victory to the NLF and north Vietnam as "one-sided".

They seek to achieve political change within the present social system - either through a strong anti-war movement putting pressure on the federal government, or through the election of an ALP government committed to their policies, or both. The method of achieving the required political changes is through "education" to win widespread support. For this reason the movement must be as "broad" as possible. Demonstrations are seen as a means of educating the public and appealing to their consciences. They seek to show that opponents of the war are a group of serious and responsible people

Allied with the moderates is a tendency which regards the anti-war movement not as having a definite political goal and working to achieve it, but primarily as a means of clearing their consciences. These people favor "non-violent sit-ins", "civil disobedience" and so on, and are prepared to "go to gaol for their beliefs". While younger, scruffier and more dynamic than the average moderate, this group still does not seek a revolutionary solution to the "Vietnam problem".

The difference between moderates and militants is not one of age or temperament, but of political outlook. The militants believe that the war is a natural consequence of the imperialist nature of US capitalism, and that its atrocities are a natural consequence of the war. Australian participation is seen as a consequence of US domination of Australia, and can only be ended by ending that domination. They say that the war can end in only one way - with the defeat and withdrawal of the Americans. Any advocacy of a compromise settlement is seen as

a betrayal of the Vietnamese people. The anti-war movement in Australia is a component part of the general struggle to end American domination. Its objectives can be achieved by:

1. Making the war as unpleasant as possible for the government by disruptive demonstrations, resistance to conscription, etc.
2. Mobilising a widespread mass movement against the war by linking it with issues of direct concern to ordinary Australians, e.g. increased exploitation of Australian workers due to war expenditure, use of young Australians as cannon fodder for American interests.

Instead of long-winded explanations of the Geneva Convention and the history of Vietnam there should be simple accounts of how the war is against the interests of the Australian people. We should also emphasise that it is in fact a war of America against Vietnam. We should therefore give clear-cut support to the Vietnamese people's struggle on the grounds that they are right. In particular we should point out that the NLF and North Vietnam are winning the war, and that it is therefore pointless to go on fighting.

It is still true that moderates dominate the established peace organisations, but the rank and file has left the leaders far behind. This is because a whole series of experiences has shown the militants to be right, e.g. Whitlam's victory in the ALP and the withdrawal of that party from its Vietnam policy, and the NLF victories at the Tet offensive. Lately the sponsors of the "Stop the Bombing - Negotiate" slogan have been shown up completely - Johnson HAS stopped the bombing and IS negotiating, and so what? As a result of police brutality at demonstrations and such "legal" actions as the "Defence Forces Protection Act", many people have come to accept the militant view on state power.

Today it is clear that the militant line is completely dominant (in a quite coherent form) in the student movement, and also prevails amongst most younger activists. A good example of what happens when there is a straight-out clash between the two lines is provided by the July 4 demonstration, when all the moderate leaders tried unsuccessfully to persuade the demonstrators to march away from the consulate to the Assembly Hall for one of the usual fascinating "public meetings" at which we could all

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TO: V.C.C., P.O. BOX 59, PARKVILLE, 3052.

Enclosed is as donation to the V.C.C. and subscription to Viet Protest News.

Enclosed is as donation to the Dissenters' Defence Fund.

Enclosed is for copies of the V.C.C. Anti-War Conference Report (30 cents each).

NAME PHONE

ADDRESS

. POSTCODE

tell each other about how bad the war is.

We must reject the long-standing principle that "A demonstration is more successful the less it is noticed." While never stated in such blunt terms, this patently absurd principle is what lies behind moderate thinking on demonstrations. The idea is that since the papers will always give us bad publicity, the less publicity we get the better. From this we can conclude that we would be still better off if no demonstrations were held at all.

Demonstrations themselves are not very important. The real mass work of the peace movement consists of patient day-to-day agitation among friends, neighbours and workmates. The role which demonstrations do play in winning mass support is by gaining publicity. Apart from building cohesiveness and a sense of solidarity within the movement, our aim in demonstrating is to make people think about the war so that they will be more receptive to our arguments. To attract the attention of the mass media, any large mass demonstration should be as militant as possible and cause as much chaos as possible. Original and unusual small-scale demos should also be organised, as well as local rallies.

It is clear that the police intend to apply as much violence and intimidation as possible at mass demos. We should therefore be prepared to organise our own resistance when necessary.

-- ALBERT LANGER (Monash Labor Club).

(NOTE: This is a condensed version of Mr. Langer's article, which was too long for publication in full.)

S T O P P R E S S

Secondary Students for Democratic Action have published a leaflet setting out the background to the war in Vietnam. Copies are available from Kim Dalton (Secretary, SSDA), 2 Dudley Ave., Moorabbin, 3189.

PUBLISHED BY the Vietnam Co-ordinating Committee.

PRESIDENT: Roger Holdsworth. SECRETARY: John Layfield.