

DECEMBER 66

Vietnam Action Committee

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Telephone: 32-6875.

To organisations and individuals throughout Australia opposed to the Vietnam War and Conscription.

A proposal from the Sydney Vietnam Action Committee for an Australasia wide Conference early in 1967 of activists in the Anti-Vietnam War/ Anti- Conscription Movements.

Dear Friends,

All of us, who have been so deeply involved over the past couple of years in the campaign against the Vietnam War and Conscription, cannot but be dismayed at last Saturday's election results in Australia and New Zealand. A number of the reasons for the defeat we suffered are obvious, the most significant being the vicious and hysterical campaign in favour of the Vietnam War conducted, on Government behalf by every conceivable medium of propaganda, i.e., the Press, Radio, T.V., etc., While the forces opposed to the war made a determined and reasonably imaginative effort to explain the issue to the people, the resources in this sphere of the anti-war movement proved to be marginal compared to the enormous impact on popular thinking of the established media.

Some of the other reasons for the defeat last Saturday are not so obvious and we must examine all aspects of the recent election campaign with considerable care, with a view to making our campaign for public support more effective in the future.

There were some ways, however, in which the results of the elections were not entirely negative. For instance, there are a number of indications that the enormous venom of the Establishment's pro-war campaign, combined with the energetic expositions of the reasons for opposition to the Vietnam War, put forward by some Labor leaders, Parliamentarians, and by the Anti-Vietnam War movement, contributed to a clarification of the issues, and many factors indicate that those voting in this election polarised around foreign policy questions much more than voters in any previous elections. Some indications of this are: the relatively high vote for the Liberal Reform Group in a number of marginal, predominantly middle class electorates, and the high percentage of informal votes, particularly in a number of Labor strongholds, indicating, seemingly, the stampede away from Labor of a number of working class voters, who were affected by the hysterical pro-war press propaganda, but were reluctant to vote Liberal. Instructive in this regard were the answers to interviewers' questions given by people throughout Australia, interviewed in last Sunday night's "Four Corners" special election programme. Asked for whom they intended to vote, and why, a clear majority of those voting Labor linked their vote with opposition to the Vietnam War and Conscription.

Another fascinating feature of the election campaign period was the enthusiasm and militancy of those thousands of Australians and New Zealanders, particularly young people, who were demonstrating and campaigning against the Vietnam War and Conscription. The magnitude of this groundswell of active opposition to the war was first indicated by the extraordinary and entirely unprecedented demonstrations against the visit of Johnson, and it continued at a high level throughout the whole election campaign, culminating in the demonstrations at Holt's meetings, the character of which, spontaneous to say the least, gave some indication of the determined mood prevalent amongst many of those thousands prepared to demonstrate publicly their moral outrage at the Government's aggressive war.

Indeed, Holt himself, and numerous press, radio and TV pundits, all commented at length on the youth of many demonstrators (TV coverage of the demonstrations show this phenomenon very graphically.) This enthusiastic participation by thousands of young people in the campaign

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against the aggressive foreign policies of the Government is a new and extremely encouraging addition to the pattern of Australasian politics of the last few years.

The situation we now face seems roughly to follow the following pattern. A vicious pro-war campaign by the Establishment in Australia and New Zealand has snatched temporary electoral victory for Conservative Governments, committed to a bellicose policy in Asia, an enormous minority comprising some 42% of the electorate, a minority which includes the majority of the academic and literary intelligentsia, a majority of the industrial working class, and an important minority of young people and students, and of such groupings as clergymen, and which even includes significant groupings of successful businessmen.

Everything points to the likelihood of an almost immediate escalation of the Vietnam War, including most probably the military invasion of North Vietnam by America, and an enormous increase in Australasian participation in this monstrous war. Many of the misguided Australasians who were stampeded into voting for Holt and Holyoake last weekend, will inevitably find their enthusiasm for the policy of these leaders beginning to flag as Australian and New Zealand casualties increase and as the financial cost of the war bears down more and more severely on the living standards of the Australasian people.

In the most obvious preparation for this pattern of development and in obvious reaction also, to the striking power and determination shown during the election campaign period, by the anti-Vietnam war movement, the Holt Government in particular has launched a two pronged attack, firstly on the right to demonstrate, using the specious excuse of a certain amount of boisterousness displayed by demonstrators at a number of Holt's meetings. The second and more sinister aspect of this campaign is a tremendous propaganda barrage by Australia's venal newspapers, directed at timorous elements in the Australian Labor Party, in the hope of persuading the ALP to drop its forthright policy of withdrawal from Vietnam and opposition to conscription. In the light of these developments we can by no means be complacent about the present level of organisation, co-ordination, and propaganda characteristic of the Australian anti-war movement, a level of organisation which lags behind the explosive militancy of the movement.

NATIONAL ANTI-VIETNAM WAR CONFERENCE PROPOSALS:

For all of the above reasons, the Sydney Vietnam Action Committee considers that an urgent need exists for a National Conference early in the New Year, comprising organisations and individuals active in the anti-Vietnam War and anti-Conscription movements throughout Australasia, and VAC has decided to take the initiative in calling such a conference. The Sydney VAC, therefore, makes the following proposals which are however, to be understood as tentative, and are presented for your urgent examination comment, amendment, or alternative proposals, bearing in mind, however, the extreme urgency of the situation confronting us and the need for action. The conference perhaps to take the extremely pertinent title, "A Conference of Unrepresented People", to be held over the three days of the long weekend in January, in Sydney. (Sydney seems to be a suitable venue for such a gathering in terms of its equidistance from other major centres of population i.e., Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra/Newcastle, Perth/Auckland. The highly organised character of the anti war movement in Sydney would also assist in such questions as the billeting of delegates at minimum expense the hire of a hall, etc, and the pre-conference organisation, etc.) The conference should be conceived as exploring the possibility for agreement and common action between the diverse elements represented. The agenda should include a discussion of such topics as:

The basis issues involved in the conflict in Vietnam.
Proposals for ending the conflict, including such issues as negotiations or unconditional withdrawal from Vietnam.
Conscription and the struggle against it, embracing such aspects as Conscientious Objection, Refusal to Register, Refusal to inducted into the Army, The William White Case, organised defence of conscripts who refuse to be inducted, and soldiers who refuse to fight, etc.
Demonstration techniques. The role of civil disobedience, and its limitations.
Variety and form of demonstrations.
The mechanics of organising demonstrations, and other public activities.

Techniques of organising among students and young people.
Techniques of organising amongst industrial workers and trade unionists.
Techniques of organising in communities and localities.
The development in Australia of activities in support of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation's International War Crimes Tribunal.
The feasibility of the establishment in Australia, of a viable national anti-war journal along the lines of Peace News, the National Guardian, or even perhaps the "Bring The Boys Home Newsletter", such a journal to act as an organising medium against the Vietnam War for the whole anti-war movement.
Political pressure against the Vietnam war, embracing such questions as: the situation in the Australian and New Zealand Labor Parties.
The emergence of formations like the Liberal Reform Group, and other Party political aspects of the anti-war struggle.
Australasia wide co-ordination of anti-Vietnam war activities, including the discussion of the feasibility of the setting up in Australasia of some such body as the National Co-ordinating Committee Against the Vietnam War in the USA.
Finally, the planning of our next co-ordinated activity Australasia wide anti-war protest, to be perhaps another "Australasian Days of Protest." at Easter. Once again, the above proposals are presented to organisations and individuals tentatively. Sydney VAC does not regard any of them as the last word, but as a basis for a speedy discussion, so that by New Year's Day it may be possible to have some concretely formulated proposals for a significant and effective conference over the long weekend in January. We appeal to recipients of this communication to regard it as extremely urgent, to raise it for immediate discussion in their organisations, and, to send us comments, amendments, and/or counter proposals as soon as is humanly possible, with a view to the formulation by New Year's Day, of precise proposals acceptable to a significant cross section of the Anti-Vietnam War/ Anti Conscription movements in Australasia.

With the warmest fraternal greetings,

Bob Gould,

Convenor,

Sydney Vietnam Action Committee.

On behalf of the Sydney Vietnam Action Committee.

WAR FOES IN THE U.S.A. SET TO PROTEST ANY NEW ESCALATIONS.
(DEMONSTRATIONS PLANNED THE DAY AFTER)

The following extract from the U.S. progressive weekly Newspaper (Nov 19) "The National Guardian" describes the preparations being made by the Anti-War movement in the U.S.A., for the inevitable escalation of the Vietnam War. We need urgently to commence similar preparations in Australasia.

Acting in Anticipation of a major escalation of the war in Vietnam New York peace activists have announced plans to conduct a civil disobedience demonstration the day after the U.S. enlarges the war in any one of eight ways. The group, known as the Anti-Escalation Committee and composed of representatives from several areas anti-war organisations will issue a call to peace groups around the country to plan similar protests.

Responding to rumors that the war would be intensified after the elections, the committee said the demonstrations would take place in the event of either an invasion of North Vietnam or Cambodia, an attack on China, resumption of hostilities after a "cease-fire" agreement, bombings of Hanoi or Haiphong proper, mining of Haiphong harbour or the use of nuclear weapons.

The action in New York would begin at noon on the first weekday after announcement of any escalation. "We ask everyone to drop what he is doing and join us in assembling on the Broadway side of City Hall," the committee said. "From there we will march to the Army Induction Center at 39 Whitehall Street. Our intention will be to enter the building to speak with Army personnel, to insist that they immediately stop inducting men into the Army and to engage in non-violent acts of intervention. For those who cannot engage in civil disobedience, we ask you to take part in a supporting demonstration across the street."

The Anti-Escalation Committee is located at the peace-movement complex of offices at 5 Beekman Street. The phone is 227-5535. Members of the emergency group include A.J. Muste, chairman of the Peace Parade Committee; Norma Becker of Teachers Committee to end the War in Vietnam; Myron Shapiro, Veterans and Reservists to End the War in Vietnam; Eric Weinberger, Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA); Fred Halstead, Socialist Workers Party; Ivanhoe Donaldson, Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC); Jose Ristomacci, Du Bois Clubs; and Ruth Gage Colby, Women Strike for Peace (WSP), among others.
