

APRIL 8

**CANBERRA CITIZENS'  
STATEMENT ON  
WAR IN INDO-CHINA**

In a statement issued last night, a number of Canberra citizens, including Bishop Burgmann, Professor Davidson, Professor Fitzgerald and Professor Manning Clark, expressed concern over recent developments in Indo-China.

The statement said: "There is increasing evidence that the British Government, as well as the governments of the Asian members of the British Commonwealth, are becoming deeply concerned about recent developments in American policy towards Asia.

"It would be most unfortunate if, at this stage, the Australian Government gave unqualified support to American policy without the fullest consultation of members of the British Commonwealth and of its own Parliament. Before Australian policy is determined there should be full and public discussion of this issue between the governments of the British Commonwealth."

**"NATIONALIST MOVEMENT"**

"It is often forgotten that the Vietminh movement, led by Ho Chi Min, arose in Indo-China long before the Communist Government had come to power in China and was, in its original form, not a Communist but a nationalist movement aiming at the total independence of Vietnam from French rule.

"During the latter stages of the war, Japanese forces which already occupied Indo-China disarmed and interned the French garrison and put an end to French rule," the statement continued. "The Emperor of Annam, Bao Dai, thereupon declared the total independence of his country and ruled as an independent sovereign under Japanese protection until the Japanese surrender several months later. Bao Dai then abdicated and handed over his power to a government presided over by Ho Chi Min, which thereupon proclaimed the republic of Vietnam.

"By the terms of the Japanese surrender, Chinese Nationalist forces (the armies of Chiang Kai-shek) occupied northern Indo-China to disarm the Japanese troops, while South-East Asia Command troops (originally British) undertook this duty in the southern half of the country.

"The Chinese authorities protected and sustained the republic of Vietnam, that is to say, the (Communist) Vietminh movement. On the other hand, the returning French forces took charge of Saigon and put an end to Vietminh authority in that city.

"Subsequently, prolonged negotiation between the French Government and the republic of Vietnam, during which Ho Chi Min and his colleagues visited France for a conference, failed to produce more than a temporary agreement under which French troops were admitted to Hanoi at the time that the Chinese Nationalist garrisons were withdrawn.

"Open strife between these French forces and the Vietminh followed the failure of the French Government to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.

"It should, however, be remembered that the Government which Ho Chi Min still leads was recognised by the French Government in 1945-46 and came to power long before the Communist movement had triumphed in China and represented the main force of Indo-Chinese nationalism.

"In the light of these facts, it is therefore alarming to read recent official statements on the subject of policy towards Indo-China. The American Secretary of State, Mr. Dulles, has proposed that the signatories of the Anzus Pact—America, Australia and New Zealand—should, in collaboration with France and Britain, act together to oppose the Vietminh movement. The Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Casey, to-night said that he welcomed the intervention of America in opposing the spread of Communism in South-East Asia. Both he and the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Evatt, were content to describe the Vietminh movement as Communist. This is not in accordance with the facts."

APRIL 9

Sir.—In reply to a question by Dr. Cameron in the House of Representatives to-day, the Minister for External Affairs re-asserted his view that the Vietminh movement is dominated by "Moscow-trained Communists" and that it is to be regarded as an instrument of "Communist aggression" and not any longer a genuine Nationalist movement.

This answer, like the question which invited it, accentuates one's fears of the confusion holding sway in Government circles on this now critically important subject. The admitted history of the Vietminh movement makes it ludicrous to describe its leaders as "insurgents" or "rebels," as the Government now does. Their past recognition by France and their ability, over the years to maintain an effective government and at the same time carry on a war shows that they are far more than that. The terms "rebel" and "insurgent" are applied to them, apparently, not as a means of accurate description but in an endeavour to win support for the Government's present policy towards Indo-China.

The essentials of that policy are not in doubt. They are, by one means or another, to assist the French in overthrowing the Vietminh regime and replacing it by administrations more pleasing to the Western Powers. In their more liberal moments, official speakers are inclined to add a rider about "self-government within the French Union." All this leaves most of the important questions unanswered. Is such a policy militarily feasible? Would it not involve us in a situation similar to that which developed in Korea? And would a solution imposed by these means ensure the security which is its alleged object?

The idea that the political aspirations of Nationalist movements can be satisfied by conditional political concessions, while treating our own security as the primary objective of policy, has been advanced before; by the British with regard to India and by the Dutch in regard to Indonesia, for example. But, in every case, the possibility of effective co-operation has appeared only when complete freedom has been attained. Puppet regimes, supported by foreign arms and relying on demoralised officials, even if they can survive, are no strength to their self-styled friends and offer no real opportunity of political advancement to the people concerned.

Admittedly the situation in Indo-China is complicated. French intransigence has—as Mr. Casey says—led to an increasing penetration of the Vietminh movement by Communists. But this fact

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