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Time to RETHINK on Vietnam

Statement by National Committee, Communist Party of Australia

EVENTS in Vietnam now show that, despite the massive military presence of the United States and all the terror it has sown, the Vietnamese liberation forces have shattered the whole political position of the American and Australian governments on the war.

These events have exposed the civil and military policy makers of both countries not only as aggressors but also as men who have deliberately misled their own people.

First they piled falsehood upon falsehood to justify aggression against Vietnam, in cynical disregard of the 1954 Geneva agreements. More recently they have resorted to new falsehood about alleged US political and military successes.

But the political and military situation in Vietnam now reveals the complete collapse of their whole case and the bankruptcy of the whole policy.

The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam has mounted a nation-wide offensive, combining and alternating positional and guerrilla warfare. All the most "secure" bases of the Americans are under attack, Saigon itself is a battlefield in which US planes have bombed residential areas and Buddhist temples. The puppet South Vietnamese forces are in disarray, blamed by the US Press for the debacle. This amounts to a new stage of the war of the Vietnamese people for their independence.

In fact the NLF holds not only the tactical initiative, as admitted by US and Australian spokesmen, but also the complete strategic initiative in the war. All friends of peace and the independence of nations owe a debt of gratitude to the unflagging spirit and heroism of the Vietnamese patriots, who will win their fight for freedom, whatever new and more frightful escalations the Americans may launch.

This US debacle proves beyond doubt the invincible strength of the Vietnamese people's war. Such a national offensive could only be mounted by an army that has the loyalty and devoted support of the South Vietnamese people, thousands of whom have been subjected to ruthless US bombing reprisals against whole residential areas of Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities. Even large elements of the Saigon army have evidently crossed to the NLF.

The situation makes nonsense of claims of US military and political "successes" in the war, made by spokesmen for the American and Australian governments.

The Communist Party long ago described the Vietnam war as unjust, immoral and aggressive. We also warned it was certain to be disastrous both to long term Australian national interests — which demand peace and friendship with Asia — and immediately to the young men conscripted for the war, to the national economy and the people's well being.

For Australians, the need to break with the aggressive US policy is clearer than ever.

We now call for a completely new and realistic policy, to avert still greater dangers and losses. Vital Australian interests are at stake, a new course is essential. The most urgent needs are:

- Australia must demand that the Americans unconditionally end bombing of the North and immediately begin peace talks as proposed by the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam.
- Recognition of the National Liberation Front as the representative of the people of South Vietnam. The aim of the talks must be peace, withdrawal of foreign troops and independence for Vietnam.
- Complete withdrawal of Australian troops. While this is being organised, the Australians should immediately be withdrawn from all battle operations.
- Dissociation of Australia from US policy in Asia and ending the illusion of seeking Australian security through the militarist "American Alliance", already depriving Australia of any independence in foreign policy. Far from providing security for Australia, this alliance has committed us to full-scale war and defeat in Vietnam, threatens involvement in Korea and possible full-scale war in Asia.

The present Government will not take these steps unless public opinion exerts great pressure. This should be mounted at once, by the labor movement and those who have opposed the war, by those who so far have only felt disgust, and those who now see they were misled by the Government's propaganda, now collapsing around its ears.

If the Government refuses to reverse its policy, the people should demand its resignation and replace it by a government pledged to take a new line.

The Labor Party policy for an end to the Vietnam war and withdrawal of Australian troops, clearly stated by the 1967 Federal Conference, has proved despite its weaknesses and inconsistencies, much closer to reality than the Government's policy.

The whole labor movement faces a crucial test. The Labor Party could play a major part in extricating Australia from danger, and defeat the Gorton Government by challenging its whole Vietnam policy.

To do this, the Labor Party would have to make its policy clear and unequivocal, uniting around a challenge to the Government on principles as well as methods.

However, Mr. Whitlam, the present ALP leader, is more and more diverging from that policy (which is also the policy of the ACTU national trade union Congress). Mr. Whitlam has declared for more efficient prosecution of the war of intervention in Vietnam and a continuing Australian military presence in South East Asia. This is aimed at taking the ALP policy to the right, towards that of the DLP and the Gorton Government.

The determination of its policies, important to its whole future, can only be made by the ALP itself. But the ALP is only a part of the labor movement.

The trade unions, the Communist Party and the uncommitted left, uniting with all others who want peace, should now campaign still more actively to rally the greatest possible movement to fight for a really new course for Australia.



G.I.'s drag the body of one of their dead to a personnel carrier after fierce fighting with the NLF near Saigon airport.

For facts on Vietnam and suggestions about activity that you may undertake to help change Australian Government policy, WRITE or CALL

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