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15 CENTS

Time To Tell The Truth For A Change

"We are ready now, as we always have been, to move from the battlefield to the conference table. I have stated publicly, and many times, again and again, America's willingness to begin unconditional discussions with any government at any place at any time. Fifteen efforts have been made to start these discussions with the help of 40 nations throughout the world, but there has been no answer."

—LBJ announcing troop buildup in Vietnam July 28.

As in the U-2 incident, our government has again been caught in falsehood. It owes the country an honest explanation before more of our sons die in Vietnam. The State Department's admissions in the wake of Eric Sevareid's revelations in *Look* explain a cryptic remark made by UN Secretary General U Thant last February and a mysterious leak at UN headquarters in New York last August. "I have been conducting private discussions on the question of Vietnam for a long time," U Thant told a press conference Feb 24, "I am sure that the great American people, if only they knew the true facts and the background to the developments in South Vietnam, will agree with me that further bloodshed is unnecessary." Then he added sadly, "As you know in times of war and of hostilities the first casualty is truth." He was slapped down the same day in a curt White House statement.

A Whopper Sets Off A Leak

This brings us to the leak, which now falls into perspective. "In 20 months," Mr. Johnson said in a White House speech Aug. 3, "we have agreed to 15 different approaches to try to bring peace, and each of them has been turned down by the other side." This was too much for someone at UN headquarters. Someone called in two UN correspondents, Hella Pick of the *Manchester Guardian* and Darius S. Jhabvala of the *New York Herald-Tribune* and leaked the story which the State Department has now confirmed, that only 11 months earlier in Sept. 1964 we turned down a chance for secret peace talks U Thant had arranged with the North Vietnamese.* It appeared in the *Herald-Tribune* Aug. 8 and in the *Manchester Guardian* Aug. 9. The account in the latter suggests that the source of the story was someone close to Adlai Stevenson and that he told it in such a way as to put the blame on the State Department and avoid direct criticism of Kennedy and Johnson.

The *Manchester Guardian* story said Washington had "cold shouldered at least two opportunities for contacts with North Vietnam in the last two years. The first was after the fall of Diem in the fall of 1963, when Hanoi "was willing to discuss the establishment of a coalition neutralist government

* An earlier hint of this had appeared the previous April 18 in a dispatch to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch from its UN correspondent, Donald Grant.

Historic Victory

Only those who lived, and fought through, the post-war witch hunt of the late 40s will be able fully to savor the Supreme Court's unanimous opinion last Monday striking down the registration provisions of the Internal Security Act as unconstitutional. The Act originated in the Mundt-Nixon bill in 1948, a product of the atmosphere created by the Hiss-Chambers case. It came out of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and it was the pride and joy of that up-and-coming young Congressman Richard Nixon. Some of the country's most conservative lawyers, led by John W. Davis, opposed the bill. Mr. Justice Tom Clark was then Attorney General and proudly recalled in his concurring opinion Monday that he, too, opposed it. The Court's decision is a triumph for Harry Truman. Just 15 years ago as President he vetoed the Act in an eloquent defense of civil liberties only to have it passed over his veto. He said its provision for a Subversive Activities Control Board would put the government into "the thought control business." The decision was also a triumph for Warren, Black, Douglas and Brennan. Four years ago they dissented when the Court upheld the registration provisions but declined to pass on the question of whether they were enforceable under the Fifth amendment. Black's dissent will live as one of the finest defenses of First Amendment rights ever handed down from our highest bench. Mr. Justice Brennan's decision Monday limited itself to holding the registration provisions contrary to the privilege against self-incrimination. Never was an historic issue decided in a drabber opinion. But it does finally bury the idea that the government can police ideas as it does pure food and drugs, forcing suspected Communist organizations or fronts to register and to label their publications and radio-TV broadcasts as communistic. Since the judgments of the Subversive Activities Control Board rested on parallels between positions taken by Moscow and those taken by domestic organizations, and since Communists also espouse many progressive ideas, the way was open to proscribe radical and liberal organizations of many kinds as communistic. The Southern atmosphere, where the whole civil rights movement is regarded as a Communist plot, enables one to understand the use that could be made of such a statute. So do the current attacks on the peace movement. From time to time we are accused of optimism and of undue faith in free American institutions. Such splendid victories may help explain these failings. To John Abt and Joseph Forer, the Communist party's lawyers in the long fight against this Act, our congratulations.

in Saigon." Note that the reference was to a coalition neutralist government and not to a National Liberation Front government. This throws light on another cryptic remark by U Thant at his press conference last February. "In my view,"

(Continued on Page Two)

(Continued from Page One)

he then said, "there was a very good possibility in 1963 of arriving at a satisfactory political solution." The second lost opportunity mentioned in the *Manchester Guardian* account was the secret meeting to which Ho Chi Minh had agreed in September, 1964, but which we rejected. The *Guardian* went on to say:

Details of these peace moves have come from an unimpeachable source. The State Department, however, seems to be dismissing the report of Ho Chi Minh's willingness to talk last year as irrelevant. It says there was no indication that anything would come of it, and hints that President Johnson was not involved in the matter at all. Nor is it clear whether the State Department ever informed President Kennedy that Hanoi was willing to talk after the fall of Dien. MR. ADLAI STEVENSON CERTAINLY KNEW OF THESE MOVES, AND IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF HIS GREAT REGRETS THAT WASHINGTON DID NOT REACT POSITIVELY. (Emphasis added.) The intermediaries who were involved in the effort to bring about a meeting between Hanoi and Washington believe that the Communist position hardened as a result of Washington's negative attitude.

Two Other Peace Efforts

Sevareid's account of his talk with Stevenson shortly before the latter's death last July adds to the August leak. It reveals that U Thant made two more attempts at peace. The September meeting was rejected for fear that it might leak to the Goldwater forces during the election campaign. "When the election was over," Sevareid relates, "U Thant again pursued the matter; Hanoi was still willing to send its man. But Defense Secretary McNamara, Adlai went on, flatly opposed the attempt." The argument against peace talks was that "the South Vietnamese government would have to be informed and that this would have a demoralizing effect on them; that government was shaky enough as it was." McNamara denied this and the State Department's spokesman last Monday said the Secretary of Defense "did not participate in the U.S. government handling of this matter." But the spokesman did not deny that a second Rangoon meeting with the North Vietnamese was possible after the election. U Thant's next effort was a cease-fire offer on U.S. terms. On this, the spokesman was evasive. He said it was not true that U Thant "at any time said he would accept any formulation concerning a cease-fire that the U.S. might propose—although he did advance his own suggestions." When pressed for clarification, the spokes-

How State Dept. Fogs The Peace Issue

A. . . . On the basis of the total evidence available to us, we did not believe at any time that North Vietnam was prepared for serious peace talks. . . .

Q. Could you help us understand what were the issues that you could identify for us that would have given the U.S. government the feeling that North Vietnam was ready for serious peace talks? What were the ingredients that were missing?

A. The Secretary of State has told you repeatedly that this is something he would recognize when it comes along, and he has his antenna exposed and sensitive at all times. He has not yet detected any such signal. . . .

Q. Well, then, when Secretary Rusk says, as he is fond of saying, that he could be in Geneva or anywhere else tomorrow if somebody really wanted to talk peace with him, he does not mean that. He means if they wanted to talk peace with him on the basis of some unstipulated determination that he is to make as to whether this was really worthwhile.

A. Well again, I think that what we are talking about is—we have pointed out here—we hear all kinds of things through direct, sometimes indirect contacts in various parts of the world that the other side is interested. But we have not seen any evidence of that. . . .

Q. Bob, could you say what could be regarded as evidence of willingness to talk on the other side. . . . What would we consider evidence?

A. Well, I think that you must appreciate that it would not be well advised to get in our own way by laying down what we would consider to be specifically acceptable.

—State Dept. press conference Nov. 15.

man would only say, it would be "highly inappropriate to disclose the details." The Department always seems to consider candor inappropriate. Through this bureaucratic fog we can see that the Department dares not deny the second Rangoon meeting it turned down nor the offer of a cease-fire. "Stevenson," Sevareid's account continues, "told me that U Thant was furious over this failure of his patient efforts but said nothing publicly."

Apparently U Thant persevered in his efforts, however. For if one goes back and rereads the transcript of the Feb. 24 press conference one sees that he said he had "presented concrete ideas and proposals" to the principal parties concerned, including the U.S. but that the results "have not been conclusive." Next day UN headquarters reported a message

Another Sample of the Double-Talk With Which State Dept. Answers Peace Feeler Queries

"Dear Mr. Stone: I was curious about your statement on Page 4 of your October 25 publication wherein you pointed out that Hanoi had offered to negotiate for peace on the basis of 4 points which possibly did not include prior withdrawal of American troops from the battlefield. I am always curious about many things which you say. However, I thought this particular item I would investigate. The enclosed reply was received from the State Department which would infer that there is very little validity to your allegation. I am sure your readers would be interested in the State Department reply."

—Robert L. Leggett (D. California).

"Dear Congressman Leggett: Thank you for your letter of October 26 to Secretary Rusk enclosing an article from the October 25 issue of I. F. Stone's Weekly, charging that the United States rebuffed a recent offer from the North

Vietnamese to enter negotiations on the situation in Vietnam. The United States position on peace talks has been frequently made clear, most notably by the President on April 7 and reaffirmed again on July 28. As for various reports such as the reports referring to an attempt last fall, or ones stemming from the recent suspension in our bombing raids over North Vietnam between May 13 and May 17, 1965, the Department is not aware of any initiatives that could have been described as an honest bid for peace talks."

—Douglas MacArthur II, Assistant Secretary of State.

The correspondence refers to an article by Sanford Gottlieb in our Oct 25 issue which reported that on the last day of the six-day lull in the bombing of the North last May, Hanoi offered to negotiate but the State Department said the offer was not the kind of message we were looking for.—IFS

from Hanoi that it was sympathetic to the proposals U Thant had outlined (*Facts on File* for 1965 p. 74E3). But the same day at a press conference Secretary Rusk made clear U.S. rejection. He said the U.S. would not enter negotiations to end the Vietnamese war until North Vietnam gave some "indication" that it was "prepared to stop what it is doing and what it knows it is doing to its neighbors." This embodied the view that the war was a simple case of aggression from the North and implied that we would not negotiate until the other side laid down its arms.

Hanoi's Terms for Settlement

What terms was Hanoi thinking of? In the *Weekly* last April 12, "Peace Feelers? Is The Truth About Them Being Withheld?" we reprinted a letter to *The Times* of London April 1 by William Warbey, a British Laborite M.P. back from talks in Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. Warbey outlined their terms for a settlement as told to him and previously "to others who passed their message on to Washington." This called for a neutralized North and South, with resumption of trade between them, but with autonomous regimes on both sides of the 17th parallel. "The people of the Southern zone" would have the right "to form and support a government which genuinely represents all the major sections of the Southern population" and each zone would have the right "to enjoy economic, cultural and 'fraternal' relations with countries of its choice", i.e. South Vietnam could be linked economically and culturally with the West if it so chose while North Vietnam presumably would remain linked with the Soviet bloc. Warbey wrote that the only precondition on which the North was insisting was the cessation of bombing attacks upon it. Note that these terms did not call for a government based on the National Liberation Front but on "all the major sections of the Southern population," and that it was broad enough to envisage free elections. It was also suggested that eventual reunification might be based on a bi-federal system. This would seem to offer a solution which would be democratic and honorable and a face-saver for the U.S. This may make

The Reality Behind Our Peace Talk

"The Johnson Administration has, of course, repeatedly professed its willingness to go to the conference table at any time and place for what are vaguely termed 'unconditional discussions.' With considerably less fanfare, however, it has made clear to Hanoi through neutral intermediaries and in the fine print of its public pronouncements that it will not countenance a Communist South Vietnam or the creation of any coalition regime in Saigon which might lead to a Communist seizure of power. What Washington thus seems to mean by negotiations is a conference at which Hanoi would agree to cease its activities in the South, abandon its attempt to unify the country under Communist rule and acquiesce in a permanent partition of Vietnam. As this would amount to abandonment of everything for which the Vietnamese Communists have fought for the last 20 years, no one here expects the North Vietnamese, as one senior diplomat put it, 'to ratify their own defeat' as long as they have some chance of success."

—Neil Sheehan from Saigon in the *New York Times* Oct. 23. The Washington correspondent of a leading metropolitan daily checked this with the White House and was told it was accurate.

it easier to understand what U Thant meant when he told a luncheon last Tuesday, the day after the State Department's admissions, "If only bold steps had been taken as late as 1964 I feel that much of today's tragic development could have been avoided."

The day the Warbey letter appeared in *The Times* of London, Mr. Johnson was asked at press conference whether he had "any evidence of a willingness on the part of the Communists to negotiate" in Vietnam. We called attention in that same issue of April 12 to the curious wording of his reply. He said he had "no evidence that they are ready and willing to negotiate *under conditions that would be productive.*" Our italics. Last Monday's press conference at the State Department suggested that what we would consider "productive" would be restoration of an independent South

(Continued on Page Four)

How Peking Polemics Lifted The Curtain on Soviet Peace Efforts in Vietnam

"In January 1965 the U.S. imperialists asked the Soviet government to use its influence to have the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam accept two conditions: 1) stop supporting South Vietnam, and stop supplying it with guns; and 2) stop the attacks on cities in South Vietnam. Faithfully obeying the orders of the U.S. imperialists the new leaders of the CPSU officially transmitted to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam these preposterous demands, which were aimed at forcing the Vietnamese people into unconditional surrender.

"The new leaders of the CPSU have been busy running errands for the U.S. aggressors, who are anxious to find a way out of their predicament in Vietnam. When Kosygin, chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, passed through Peking on his visit to Vietnam in February 1965 and exchanged views with Chinese leaders, he stressed the need to help the United States 'find a way out of Vietnam.' This was firmly rebutted by the Chinese leaders. We expressed the hope that the new leaders of the CPSU would support the struggle of the Vietnamese people and not make a deal with the United States on the question of Vietnam. Kosygin expressed agreement with our views and stated that they would 'not bargain with others on this

issue.' However, the new leaders of the CPSU soon went back on their promise.

"Johnson wanted to play his fraudulent game of 'unconditional discussions.' So the new leaders of the CPSU put forward the idea of 'unconditional negotiations.' On February 16 this year, the day after Kosygin's return to Moscow, the Soviet Government officially put before Vietnam and China a proposal to convene a new international conference on Indochina without prior conditions, which in fact was advocacy of 'unconditional negotiations' on the Vietnam question. On 23 February, disregarding the stand which the Vietnamese government had taken against this proposal and without waiting for a reply from China, the new leaders of the CPSU discussed the question of calling the above-mentioned international conference with the President of France through the Soviet ambassador.

"Johnson's fraud of 'unconditional negotiations' met with a stern rebuff from the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The new leaders of the CPSU then publicly began to insinuate that negotiations could be held if only the United States stopped its bombing of North Vietnam."

—People's Daily-Red Flag, Peking, Nov. 10.

(Continued from Page Three)

Vietnam under our wing. The Department's spokesman insisted that the Johns Hopkins speech last April 7 did not mark any change in policy when it offered "unconditional discussions." To prove continuity of policy he read the reporters two previous Presidential statements. In one, at an AP lunch, April 20, 1964, Mr. Johnson said "Once war seems hopeless, then peace may be possible. The door is always open to any settlement which assures the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom to seek help for its protection." This implies (1) that peace can only come when the other side realizes war is hopeless and (2) that the settlement to which our door is open is one which assures an independent South Vietnam, which can call on the U.S. and SEATO for protection. The other quotation offered was from Johnson's message August 5, 1964, assuring Congress "that we shall continue readily to explore any avenues of political solution that will effectively guarantee the removal of Communist subversion."

Back to Unconditional Surrender

Any compromise which would give the National Liberation Front some role in a coalition government would seem to be ruled out by that formulation. It implies their surrender or extermination. The fact that the State Department put these two quotations forward as embodiments of our policy foreshadows war to the bitter end rather than negotiation. When a reporter said, "Well, all that does not say that he (Johnson) is willing to have unconditional discussions", the Department's spokesman replied, "Well I think then that we are hung up on semantics." This makes sense only if "unconditional discussions" means something very different from unconditional negotiations, that in negotiations we would still insist on winning at the bargaining table what we have yet to win either on the battlefield or in our dealings with the Vietnamese people. When reporters at the press conference tried to elicit what standards the government imposes in determining whether peace feelers are "serious" or "sincere", the spokesman retreated behind a smoke-screen of double-talk (see box at the top of p. 2). The truth I believe is that we wait for a signal that the other side is ready, not to negotiate, but to surrender.

As The Other Side Sees It

"We have been told here in this debate and elsewhere in various terms that the United States wishes for a negotiated settlement and that it has made proposals for negotiations. It has even been said that the U.S. has asked its allies, some of the non-aligned nations and, personally, the Secretary General to use their good services with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam [North] with a view to initiating talks on Vietnam. And it has been said also that all peace offers have been refused. The real picture is entirely different. With full knowledge of the opinion of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and that of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam regarding the war issues, I have to state that no real peace offer has been made so far on the part of the United States, either directly or through intermediaries. Until the aggression, the bombing raids and the threats of bombing are stopped, no proposal for talks has any value at all."

—Janos Peter (Hungary) in the UN Assembly Oct. 6.

I hope I am wrong because if this is the policy then it will take a good many years of fighting and a lot of American and Vietnamese lives. It will poison our relations with the Soviet Union and may end the hopes of preventing a new stepup in the arms race. The Soviets, as can be seen in the latest attack from Peking (see box bottom of p. 3), are under fire for serving U.S. interests in trying to bring about peace. Peking discloses that Kosygin went to Hanoi last February 6 in an attempt to bring about a negotiated settlement. This was also the report carried by the London *Sunday Observer* February 7 from Hong Kong in a dispatch by Stanley Karnow which reflected the judgment of the U.S. intelligence community there. That was the day Johnson, under the impact of the Viet Cong attack on our barracks at Pleiku, ordered the bombing of the North in accordance with contingency plans drawn up months earlier and long urged upon him by the military. To bomb the North while Kosygin was there virtually as our emissary trying to bring about peace, and to continue the bombing indefinitely instead of limiting it to a reprisal raid, may turn out to have been the Big Mistake of the war. It hardly made the search for peace easier. On this, too, the Administration has been deceptive.

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