

Documents described as representing "the views of a substantial non aligned minority in the VSC" by Conrad Dixon were placed on Special Branch files in January 1969

SOLIDARITY WITH THE N.L.F.

Unfortunately the prediction that without a sustained campaign, a demonstration, however large and militant will fail to build V.S.C. adequately, has proved true. Although the level of activity is much greater than after March 17th with many branches thinking seriously about organisation, the level is uneven, the work inco-ordinated, and the potential for integrating large numbers of people into V.S.C. which October 27th provided has not yet been acted upon.

It is not too late to retrieve this situation if the National Council Decision on November 10th to initiate a campaigning in preparation for a conference at the end of January is taken seriously. The Working Committee carried a resolution to this effect on December 5th as follows:

"That V.S.C. initiate a campaign nationally through the local organisation of the movement on British Complicity in the war. In this campaign the exclusion of N.L.F. and D.R.V. representatives is to be the focal point. We see the culmination of this campaign as a mass action, to include demands on the Government to accord full diplomatic status by a date to be specified later, and mass demonstrations at airports to welcome representatives, or any other action, when this is felt to be the appropriate time.

The building of local V.S.C. branches is an integral part of the campaign and hence V.S.C. must itself take responsibility without the politically inhibiting ad-hoc form of organisation "

The reason for choosing a campaign over the status of the N.L.F. is twofold. Internally, it enables us to expose British complicity by showing that refusal of visas to N.L.F. representatives, whilst allowing a Saigon embassy here is in fact to take sides. It allows us to explain to the public who the N.L.F. are, what their programme is, and why they have successfully forced the U.S. to give them de facto recognition. Externally, it gives diplomatic aid to the N.L.F. which is very relevant at this stage of the war, when negotiations in Paris have become a focus of the struggle. This can be clearly seen from the importance the U.S. attaches to improving the image of the Thieu- Ky regime. They were allowed to delay agreement to enter the talks and to make a fuss about the formula "2 side or 4 side talks". The U.S. has said that only the military aspects are a matter for Hanoi and Washington, the political aspects are for Saigon to decide, although a U.S. spokesman is quoted (New York Times Nov. 17th) "It was always our money and our support that kept these guys in power"---- "But we always insisted on treating them as statesmen of a sovereign nation. If we had insisted from the beginning on having a voice in their decisions, we would be able to handle them now. We have nobody to blame but ourselves" This is mere pretence, since the U.S. obviously has the whip hand, but it relates to their strategy.

The state of the war is that the U.S. has been militarily defeated in its attempt to subjugate Vietnam, and has been obliged to stop the bombing of the D.R.V. unconditionally. The war is too expensive (as emphasised by a recent Congressional Report) the nation is against it (Nixon was elected on a minority vote of 25% of the electorate) and the international monetary system is rocking from crisis to crisis, partly as a consequence of the weakness of the dollar.

Therefore the U.S. would like to withdraw (the only alternative being a massive escalation with invasion of the D.V.R.) But only if it can secure bases in the South. The negotiations will centre round a compromise effort which will leave the U.S. in some big action-- perhaps an enclave round Saigon, plus bases, with demilitarisation of the rest of the South and permanent partition. It is highly problematic if the U.S. can achieve this. The Saigon regime would certainly be unable to accept it, since it would be the end of their claim to be a legitimate Government, and there is no reason for the N.L.F. to accept it- they are after all the victors.

Meanwhile the war continues. The U.S. has intensified the bombing of the South and continues to send reconnaissance planes to the North and bomb the demilitarised zone. The draft has increased since the election from 10,000 a month to 25,000 a month. The N.L.F. continue to attack the cities, render them insecure, and remove puppet administration and police centres. They have held extensive elections in liberated areas in preparation for a coalition Government, marking the end of the U.S. reconstruction programme. The lull in the fighting is entirely due to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country side to strengthen the towns.

It is therefore significant that both in New York and London public meetings to promote Nguuyen Van Thieu's Saigon Government have been held recently, and the full diplomatic fanfare accorded to Ky on arrival in Paris. In New York, the S.D.S. made effective interventions. The London meeting, held by an offshoot of the fascist anti-communist league, the Friends of South Vietnam, with some dozen members of the South Vietnamese Embassy present, was completely taken over by 250 V.S.C. people in an exemplary demonstration. We turned it into our own meeting and announced it as the initiation of a campaign to get N.L.F. representatives here.

Clearly the war is not over, but more, the political necessity for revolutionaries in Britain to develop an understanding of the war and a sustained movement which can oppose the system which produced the war, is obvious to far more people. Since the war stems from the nature of imperialism, and will unquestionably be succeeded by other similar interventions by the U.S., it is ludicrous to see a solidarity movement as a thing in itself and wait passively for the next crisis to get excited and start all over again. A campaign should teach us how to organise, how to relate to the mass of the population, and how to use direct action including demonstrations not as a protest or to let off steam, but as a weapon, which develops power, with clear objectives, readily understood.

The main obstacle to a campaign is the inadequacy of our thinking. We have to distinguish between a campaign and a publicity drive or propaganda. In the past, work on getting N.L.F. representatives here has consisted of meetings and petitions, and applications for visas for particular individuals, followed by protest at refusals. Such a campaign is based on the political concept of "free speech", democracy, putting pressure on the Government to do something. The public remain passive, to be educated or instructed. We give them the alternative - join V.S.C., or take a leaflet and go home. As regards the activity, since the Government makes the decision (grant or refuse a visa) then win or lose, V.S.C. is no better off. For if a visa is refused - we can only try again i.e. there is no development. And if a visa is granted, it will be for a specific occasion, the Government imperialist role will remain and we will have nothing to complain of - we will be co-opted by the system. Unless we have succeeded in changing and developing those whom we come into contact with during the campaign, that campaign becomes specific and transitory.

A real campaign therefore has to change the relation of forces between us and the Government, by getting the public to take sides. By asking for diplomatic status for the N.L.F. in the eyes of the British people, we are then saying the people are sovereign, not the Government, that they should feel solidarity with the N.L.F., and that they will support our actions to challenge the Government, to confront them. In this case, when a particular request is made, such as for visas it will be seen against the background of this struggle over ideas, and not as a thing in itself. If successful, it will enable us to go on to challenge other aspects of complicity.

In this respect, the prevention of war materials, defence contracts, research etc. for the U.S., which require more power than we have at present, is a complementary campaign, to be developed in parallel. Again, we do not propagandise the workers in a factory like Rolls Royce to black work - for them to make the sacrifice. We begin by getting the facts known, go on to intervene ourselves, we have to find the actions.

take the risks and ask for support from the workers concerned on the basis of their changed political understanding.

The most important point about a campaign if we are to get people to make the step of supporting us is to get them to act. We have to ask them to do something, perhaps only minimal at first. We should not feel disheartened because at this stage we cannot lay down all the actions needed in an impressive list- it would not be a real campaign (which resulted in change) unless it was based on the expectation of creative initiative by V.S.C. branches and by the new people who are organised.

What are the elements of a campaign into which we try and get people involved?

- 1) A basic leaflet announcing the need to express support for the N.L.F. because they are fighting our common enemy - the U.S. and British ruling class. In recognition of this, we want full recognition of the status of the N.L.F. as the representatives of the Vietnamese. D.R.V. and N.L.F. spokesmen should be allowed in to speak to us. The Government is guilty of complicity in the war, and previous attempts have indicated this. We should contact other local groups and individuals and try and interest them in this.
- 2) Wall posters with the face of Madame Binh deputy leader of the delegation in Paris.
- 3) Production of N.L.F. flags, posters and car stickers for display in their homes places of work etc.
- 4) Further basic leaflets on the history of the N.L.F. , on the courses of the war, and the programme of the N.L.F.
- 5) Programmes to rename streets, street signs, public buildings etc. in solidarity with the Vietnamese.
- 6) Demands to have the true history of Vietnam taught in schools, colleges, and Universities (as the black power in U.S.A. ask for Afro- American history)
- 7) Public campaigning for local libraries to carry the Vietnam Courier and other relevant literature.
- 8) Develop blood donor sessions as specific aid to N.L.F. Use them politically. In Kilburn, Brent Council have refused the use of a Clinic and a public hall for a session, on political grounds. This is a direct example of local complicity, exposing the power structure, and showing undemocratic decision making. It gives opportunity for local actions eg. in the Council , meetings, or directed at local councillors.
- 9) Regular market stalls and or street meetings to engage in political discussion with the public. The aim should be to have a public face which people will see as a political centre. It will only succeed if it is recognised as serious by being there over a period of months.
- 10) Wall newspapers and guerilla theatre have been discussed previously. The aim is to develop imaginative ways of creating a real dialogue. For this reason, one or two people are inadequate - as soon as a conversation is started the pitch is virtually "immobilised". The more people, the more discussion should be aimed at. Even leafletting can be more than a passive exchange.
- 11) The use of a local Bulletin which records activities- preferably of other left groups too, pursuing the policy of uniting the left. It should pick out local events and personalities and relate them to the overall struggle against imperialism. It should involve as much of the V.S.C. group as possible. This is useful for a number of reasons. It is a creative on-going activity to involve people in and it builds up its own regular audience, if held regularly at the same place. It

is from such people that recruits to the movement are most usefully made.

12) Blocking the diplomats and personalities e.g. Saigon spokesmen, U.S. diplomats, from entering the country, perhaps leading to the take over of the South Vietnamese Embassy. The Commonwealth Conference with the presence of Australian and New Zealand Premiers, who are very tied up with the war, is a good opportunity.

13) Attacks on firms producing war material for the U.S.- perhaps beginning with symbols such as painting the buildings "condemned by the K.L.F." and again exposure of directors and management.

14) Specific visits to Paris to meet and discuss with the N.L.F. delegation.

15) Support for demonstrations arising when the campaign indicates them and carefully planned to do a specific thing, e.g. at airports to block "enemies" or welcome friends; at the Home Office to cause disruption, at the B.B.D. or Press Offices to demand that the true case be put (again based on the power to disrupt) Such actions can be regional and must definitely rise above the stage of mere massing in a central place in London. The Japanese blocking of trains and stations to prevent war material being dispatched to Vietnam are model types of demonstration. These demonstrations should be planned based on known forces and people solely- though they may attract and should welcome "penumra" they must only assume a known strength.

16) This is a national campaign, organised locally (not a series of local campaigns) It requires a national framework from V.S.C. which encourages local initiative, can be co-ordinated and can respond to demands from the "rank and file" i.e. the active campaigners. Therefore V.S.C. would best be served by an individual membership basis, with branch representatives elected and subject to immediate recall (i.e. essentially elected for each specific meeting of national council) Affiliated bodies which wish to be active can best do so by engaging as individual members. Representatives of affiliates speak for abstract structures and not for real people. However the constitutional aspect of individual membership may best be left to the development of a campaign, when it becomes a positive demand and need, rather than preceding it, when it may appear to be exclusive and rejecting co-operation (which we don't want)

17) Similarly ad-hockery. An ad-hoc committee represents a situation in which the movement is a tentative alliance between existing forces. When the movement is predominantly (in terms of ideas and enthusiasm, even if not yet in numbers) of individuals committed to it, rather than to a faction, the ad-hoc form becomes a barrier to developing a sense of identity with the movement, and of a collective work style. Ad-hoc committees dissolve V.S.C. into a loose form where its specific identity is lost, where decisions tend to be the lowest common denominator losing their spontaneity and initiative. They inhibit creative work at the base because bureaucracies and not rank and file members are the ones who meet and discuss, they are time wasting and debilitating because the representatives vary from one meeting to the next and decision making often "referred back", and they provide no incentive for people to enter V.S.C., if co-operation can be secured outside it.

However again, it is not that we wish to be exclusive and reject co-operation, but it must be sought by making clear and open what our problems are before admitting to a compromise. It is fundamentally for each group to assess the best way of co-operating within its own locality. What experience has taught us to reject is ad-hockery as a permanent principle.

18) The internal life of a campaign. It is not easy truly to

identify with the Vietnamese revolution, yet unless our consciousness really rises to this level, we shall be unable to do anything very effective to assist the N.L.F. The Vietnam movement must come to represent our deepest aspirations and fuse the political and personal, not be one task among many. A movement is not a party--it has no exclusive line between members and non-members, yet it attempts to pervade society through its level of commitment, at the same time developing itself as a counter-society. Its superiority and difference from ordinary life depends on its ability to sustain the collective feelings of a large demonstration and the political solidarity with the Vietnam revolution--that is, every member is needed and only collective action can achieve results. This has to be obvious in the attitudes towards people in meetings and activity.

Thus new members must not be made to feel there is an inner core or clique which runs everything. The work must not be done by committees or a few activists--all must be involved. Meetings must not be run by people with dominant personalities insensitive to the needs of others, impatient to get on with what they themselves understand, without recognising that discussion is vital for this understanding to be effective in collective activity.

One possible way of encouraging the less self-confident to speak is by a dramatisation of the problems of discussing Vietnam with the public, with role playing by members of the branch. A collective discussion of the "performance" could help both strong and weak members, and reveal unsuspected lack of clarity in our thinking --what exactly are we trying to get over in our talking, what do we aim to learn from people?

About the Conference. If this is an abstract discussion on theories of how a Vietnam movement could be effective (single issue versus multi-issue, demonstrations versus local work, Party building versus movements, linking with the working class, etc) it will be disastrous. It can only succeed by relating our ideas to specific projects which can be tested out in practice to decide between differing theories, and exchanging experience which can make them more successful, talking to and not at each other. For this reason it is vital to break up the conference into working sessions or seminars. The aim of the document has not been to lay down the "rules" for a campaign, but to argue the context in which we believe a campaign of the sort adopted by National Council and Working Committee can be both creative and effective, and can mobilise a large number of people without the frustration often caused by an artificial climax such as a mass mobilisation. Many possible forms of local activity have been suggested, but they are only suggestions. What we need is not just a debate within each branch--this is essential--but also in V.S.C. as a whole. Therefore, all groups must be encouraged to let the National Office know of their experiences and methods, ideas, etc., so that the movement as a whole can learn from them. The Conference could be an excellent place for this to begin.

COMMENTS RECEIVED AFTER A LIMITED CIRCULATION.

A. 1) Nixon's 25% vote is of less significance than the large and increasing proportion of abstentions.

2) The basic leaflets should be locally produced and experimental in the sense of willingness to produce new versions in response to discovering precisely what information has to be conveyed.

3) Visits to Paris-- not 'official' delegations, but groups representative of the campaign work for a specific purpose (point 14)

4) p.3. top:- the key question remains getting people to act. We have to distinguish between actions for V.S.C. members, and those which we can hope for from other people, which will express the support they feel at present (perhaps U.S. should get out of Vietnam, but not yet solidarity with the A.L.F.) and at the same time carry them forward towards identifying with V.S.C. Signing petitions or even coming on a demonstration are such positive acts but insufficient for a campaign.

5) p.5. top:- "the fusion of personal and political" There is a risk of using "the needs of the Vietnamese revolution for our support" as a substitute for developing that kind of political understanding in Britain which alone can truly aid the A.L.F. We must not be parasitic on the Vietnamese struggle.

B. The major focus of the campaign is to organise people-- everything else depends on this.

"To organise" means to bring people to the point where they identify with a political movement to the extent that they help to build it. That is they see the movement as answering some of their needs and feel that they are needed by the movement. Organising can only be done locally. It can not be done through the media or just by remote contact, such as posters or leaflets.

Any action, whether simple leafletting or a mass demonstration is most likely to succeed when the tactical goals are set realistically. To do this it is necessary to know before the event is planned the number of people who will participate and what action they are willing to take part in. Therefore it is necessary to plan any mass demonstration after the campaign is under way. This way we can plan demonstrations based on our known strength rather than our political strength. If we reverse this procedure we will find ourselves trying to plan an action with our capabilities unknown. In this situation our activity will of necessity be based on the lowest common denominator (October 27th suffered from this fault)

Actions should be based on our known power

Action should increase our power.

The section on the national campaign and ad-hockery is not sufficiently clear. Each of the recent mobilisations has been successful in bringing people out into the streets for a single occasion. But we have been remarkably unsuccessful in bringing people into daily political activity. Part of the reason for this is that we have not understood the implication of two facts: most new people on the demonstration do not belong to any left group; Vietnam has been the one political issue that has consistently activated new people. This means that new people who want to be active need a V.S.C. They cannot be shunted off into the existing multi-issue organisations or parties. The only organisation which people feel a part of is one controlled by the active membership. Therefore we need active local V.S.C. groups. We need a V.S.C. controlled by its membership and we must avoid a central bureaucracy which does not rest on opinion at the base of V.S.C.

This last point is the key reason for opposing ad-hoc committees as a necessary structural form at all times. At the present moment we have to build V.S.C. and give it internal life. We cannot do this properly if we place all crucial decision in the hands of a central bureaucracy that is not concerned with building V.S.C.

J. Some of the worst obstacles may relate to national links, especially to the diffusion and cross-fertilisation of experiences in different places (your point 16) The only real lines of communication at present belong to the sectarian groups (this is indeed one reason why people join the groups); only fellow-members of such groups will trust each other. One thus get partial and filtered accounts of what is going on elsewhere, and people without sectarian affiliations become a kind of "perumbra", spasmodically inactive (for lack of meaningful activity) or led; organised, manipulated by the members of the sects. This is perhaps worse outside London (for example, in Edinburgh, we recently set up an R.S.S.F. here without any real idea about the probable character and perspectives of R.S.S.F. nationally, except that it calls itself revolutionary) There is then the further problem that any attempt to break down sectarianism is interpreted as "another faction", increasing distrust and the tendency of factions to have "internal" and " external" versions of what is happening, reducing still further the level of information and analysis available to the movement, etc.

So I think the stress on "a national campaign organised locally" is important but difficult to implement. . . Immediately, detailed critical analysis of the more interesting experiences in the "Bulletin" would be valuable. At the moment, successes elsewhere often produce paralysis and feelings of helpless envy, the idea that "It's backward here" and so on.

D. At Paris it has become clear that the I.L.F. and D.R.V. have a keen eye for the formalities of the proceedings-- because of their political symbolism--and for the use of conventional tactics like airport receptions and press conferences. It may well be that the I.L.F. would not welcome in the U.K. a "mass demonstration" to greet them at the airport possibly leading to its disruption. For it could give an image of them not as a serious political force, but as rabble rousers. I believe they would not want to be associated in a personal sense with mass actions whilst welcoming a campaign with mass actions as part of it, to give them recognition by the British people, and that they would welcome a dignified entry to the country and well-ordered public meetings at which they would speak. V.S.C. should ascertain whether the "dignity line is one they wish to pursue, or whether they would be happy to see London Airport disrupted if they are not allowed to leave their plane.

2. It is said the U.S. would like to withdraw because of military defeat etc., this is naive rationality. All these problem could have been avoided by never invading Vietnam. Of course the fact that neither the North nor the South has been subdued, and that Nixon will be the next President and is not the architect of the war (so will find it easier to reverse) are important facts. Against this must be weighed the innumerable and powerful pressures from the military and industry, the inertia of policy, and the insane ideological fervour of the nation. The question of U.S. withdrawal is still open.

3. It is said that negotiations will centre around U.S. enclaves, demilitarisation and permanent partition. It should have been made clear that this may be the U.S. intention but they can never succeed. The D.R.V.&I.L.F.-- and for that matter Saigon-- could never accept these ideas as a basis of negotiation. They would render meaningless the whole of the struggle since 1943.

4. The present lull in the fighting is explained by U.S. withdrawal into the towns. Many members of V.S.C. may not have realised this. It would be an excellent idea to devote a page or two in the next bulletin to this point. I had seen it as an informal quid pro quo for a halt to the bombing.

5. Of course "it is ludicrous to see a solidarity movement as a thing in itself" for it is an imperialist war, and of course we must not wait passively for the next crisis. But this gives us no indication of what the authors see as the proper

political activity of members of V.S.C. when the Vietnamese are victorious. Perhaps to discuss that would be premature.

6. As part of the campaign on the N.L.F. issue, but also for the historical record, and in order to teach ourselves in V.S.C. the nature of contemporary British capitalism, we should produce a collection of essays on British complicity in this war--a war which in a hundred years from now will be recognised as one of the bloodiest and most heroic man has known, and the first people's war to defeat imperialism. A number of essays would describe and analyse particular facets of British complicity-- historical, intellectual, financial, political, material and propaganda. One essay would bring all these together and another would describe the brief history of V.S.C. and associated actions against the war.

7. Blood donorship could become a powerful weapon if used in a militant fashion. Vietnam is a battlefield: our blood to replace blood shed there. There is also a fruitful dialectic: if local councils refuse facilities, we attack them for complicity and collect the blood anyway. 100,000 pints of blood in 1969 (or any alternative high but realistic target)

8. All the frustrations and involutions of ad-hoc committees are well described. But no attempt is made to include within the campaign, either through its organisational form or through its activities, features consolidating Left unity on Vietnam in particular or on capitalism and socialism in general. This autonomy in the line I regard as its major weakness. I suggest two ways in which Left unity can be worked for. First, we should talk to each other in our local groups. The war, imperialism, complicity, and actions against the war comprehend an extensive range of political issues. Local V.S.C. groups should frequently invite speakers from other political groups to discuss some aspect of the war and its penumbra in terms of their political analysis. Similarly V.S.C. would send speakers to political cells. Joint meetings on a single issue related to Vietnam could be held. This is intellectual interpenetration. Interpenetration in activity could be carried out by town or regional V.S.C. inviting political groups to send delegates to work in actions they are preparing. Similarly actions on the war by other movements would bring an invitation to V.S.C. to take part. If the activities originate at the local or town level and if the initiative is begun and maintained explicitly within a single movement, plus delegate representation, the disadvantages of ad-hockery would disappear.

9. An important distinction, which is not used in this paper, can be drawn between two concepts: interdiction and harrassment. The former is the ending of complicity in specific areas of materials supply and research by the actions of workers, students and the Vietnam solidarity movement. Harrassment is a series of actions, each one in itself an irritant. This includes even demonstrations which in a direct sense are impotent. Harrassment must precede interdiction, small victories must precede large ones.

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