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No mindless militancy on march—Tariq Ali

By JOHN EZARD

The main committee planning next Sunday's Vietnam demonstration in London, yesterday came nearer than ever before—and probably as near as it politically dares—to committing itself to minimise violence.

Mr Tariq Ali, a leader of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, one of the chief groups on the committee, said: "We don't want any mindless militancy. We don't want any confrontations with the police.

"We are trying to encourage a kind of revolutionary self-discipline. We believe we could

have a very fraternal and frank discussion before the march starts and people would agree on self-discipline."

He also said: "We have always made it clear that the British police, compared with the French and German police, are mild."

With these words, the committee was close to offering an olive branch to the police.

It was no small gesture, at a time when some marchers—through a classified advertisement in this week's "Tribune"—are encouraging a comparison, in advance, between the conduct

of police in Mexico City, London, derry, and London.

But the hard line—that violence is a product of police provocation—prevailed at other moments in yesterday's news conference. Asked about Mr Callaghan's reference to "roving bands of political hooligans," Mr Ali retorted: "I reject the use of the word hooligan. It has been planted quite deliberately to discredit the march. Any hooliganism which takes place in this country is a direct result of Labour Government support for the Americans in Vietnam."

Mr Alan Harris, a Vietnam Solidarity Campaign organiser, said: "We are not going to police the march. We would like to see a massive demonstration, very loud, colourful and with lots of people chanting slogans, so that people standing by will know that large sections of the British people are very angered by the war."

Only the International Socialists planned to use stewards, Mr Ali said, "and if they need stewards to discipline their members, that is their own affair." The question of violence, he said, depended on the police—whether they tried to break the march up or to stop a peaceful attempt to demonstrate at the American Embassy.

Ruled out

Mr Ali ruled out any compromise with the rival Maoist contingent planning this breakaway march to the embassy. Although prepared to hold discussions with this committee, he believed that "militant feeling in the provinces is that we don't go anywhere near Grosvenor Square."

The rival committee, dominated by the British-Vietnam Solidarity Front, has said some very hard things about Mr Ali and his colleagues. Using words like "revisionist" and worse, they have threatened to outflank the official committee in militancy. But Mr Ali said these divisions had been emphasised by "certain sections of the press" to disrupt the march's unity.

The National Council for Civil Liberties said yesterday it would have 130 observers—some of them professional journalists—on the march. Its concern was "with the freedoms of speech and assembly and the preservation of public order."

Exploitation of the right to demonstrate could have serious consequences for the civil liberties of other groups who might genuinely wish to demonstrate peacefully, the council warned. It is offering legal advice to people who believe their civil liberties are infringed on the march.

C.I. Down



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