

# JOHNSON'S OFFENSIVE PEACE

by Robert Levin

President Monmouth College  
Young Democratic Club

As the Viet Nam war progresses to pinnacles ever more diabolical, President Johnson is consistently portrayed by most media as a man of peaceful intent, a man christened by reason and wisdom and whose actions are governed by the lessons of history. Even such renowned liberals as J.W. Fulbright and James Reston earnestly believe Johnson desires negotiations leading to peace.

The basis for such a claim is believed to be quite tenuous. Although the President has unremittingly stressed a longing for peace he has yet to translate such feelings into meaningful action.

The Administration has so far rejected the idea of a temporary lull in the bombing of the North a cessation Hanoi and the Viet Cong have set as one major requirement for negotiations. Although the U.S. says it will deal with the Viet Cong, it fails to make specific the weight and power it will accord that delegation, which implies the U.S. will attempt to minimize the authority of the major force opposing the American offensive. Our nation promises full evacuation from Viet Nam once a mutually satisfactory peace is established, but the existence of 55000 U.S. troops in South Korea and 30,000 in Thailand, along with steady buildups in Burma and the Philippines does not lend much weight to these promises, or to statements that the U.S. desires no military foothold in Asia. Along with these inconsistencies the Johnson Administration admits it will accept a democratically elected Communist regime to rule all of Viet Nam, yet at the same time justifies the entire war as a solemn commitment to the "free people" of South Viet Nam against the demagogic regime of the North. How can the North sincerely believe the U.S. will accept a Communist-Socialist Viet Nam after such a pervasive commitment?

The problem, to be sure, is one of credibility. The North simply will not retreat on empty statements and token changes in policy. If our government is truly interested in peace as a first and necessary step toward fair negotiations it must implement obvious action toward de-escalation of the war through the cessation of all bombing and through a noticeable de-escalation in offensive ground action. It must state that it will accept the Viet Cong on equal terms with all other parties. It must seek to reconvene the Geneva Conference or convene some other body of neutral nations to supervise a settlement. America should act toward the reduction of our military forces in surrounding Asian nations and emphasize a willingness to stay out of Asian military matters.

It is probable if not certain that General Ky and his followers will object to such action. The U.S., therefore, must insist that the above operations are the only feasible way to an effective cease-fire and a climate conducive for negotiations and that without such concessions peace would be impossible short of killing off millions of innocent North and South Vietnamese. If such arguments fail to win over General Ky then the U.S. must accept whatever political organization or otherwise competent

group chooses to deal with the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong as representing Southern interests. Such methods it is contended are tantamount to appeasing the North while giving undue recognition to the claims of the South. General Ky however has refused to deal with the Viet Cong on any terms short of s u r r e n d e r and meanwhile presses for a more brutal escalation of the war.

The Johnson Administration incessantly speaks of peace and flexibility, while more people die. We are killing six times as many civilians as Viet Cong, U Thant fears we will instigate a war with China, and the war is proving detrimental to our sense and perspective of economic and social priorities. Peace, indeed, is becoming too illusionary to even imagine.

If Johnson is really after peace and a chance for legitimate negotiations he must inaugurate action upon tenets liberal enough to encourage rational discussion. If not, thousands, perhaps millions more will die, and I'm sure it will give us no consolation in that hour when we can say, "I told you so."