

A Great Day for the Doves?

(Meagher 3/14/68)

On a single day in March 1968, LBJ's ferocious war against the Vietnamese people and nation received a devastating rebuff, both from the voters in New Hampshire and from the majority of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Contrary to the invidious propaganda by the hawks, this double repudiation of Johnson's war did not make General Giap gleeful. Giap, like any careful student of LBJ's war policy, must have realized that to the Johnson Administration any manifestation of protest against the carnage in this dirtiest of wars is a signal for ~~immediate~~ a new escalation. That was the case after the April 15 peace march in 1967; and, in the wake of the double blow of March 12-13, 1968, there were ^{immediate} reports of recruitment of South Vietnamese "volunteers" to launch an invasion of North Vietnam, and nuclear-warrior Herman Kahn was despatched to Saigon "to advise on pacification"!

To be exhilarated by the spectacle of LBJ slapped on one cheek by voters and on the other by senators, that is only human. To be misled by it, however, would be naive.

The open rebellion in the Foreign Relations Committee--by Senators Fulbright, Mansfield, Clark, Pell, Church, Gore, Case, Aiken, even Mundt --did not erupt because the war against a tiny Asian country was one of the most savage, inhuman, disgusting, and rotten spectacles since Hitler's gas chambers were exposed to the horrified eyes of mankind. The rebellion erupted because the almighty United States had suffered a humiliating military debacle, and now seemed poised at the edge of a new Dienbienphu and total rout by a smaller but indomitable force. The accomplice-senators were scared. What next? Another 200,000 men despatched to the slaughter, nuclear weapons, the touching off of the third global war?

Something had to be done, if only the public wringing of palsied hands, for the benefit of constituents, and ~~the~~^{for} ~~the~~ ~~benefit~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~historians~~ absolution by historians. When the senators, how many resolutions and how many votes ago, had stripped off their iron glove, they had left themselves only the flabby velvet fist. Dean Rusk knew that. During his ten-hour "interrogation," his nearest approach to personal emotion was a barely-concealed contempt for and indifference to the anger and prostrations of his powerless accomplice-adversaries.

The untenable position of the members of the Foreign Relations Committee was revealed in the scathing statement by Senator Wayne Morse: "...I have no vote for the Tonkin Bay resolution that I have to alibi or rationalize and the facts speak for themselves in support of my vote (against it)...all the snow jobs that the Administration or my colleagues on this committee try...to cover up the provocation of the United States in Tonkin Bay will simply melt under the facts."

Snow Jobs

The latter day doves on the Committee do have to answer for their complicity in the Tonkin Bay resolution, ~~especially~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~very~~ ~~same~~ ~~facts~~ The very same facts which they now claim in injured voices were then misrepresented, were in reality no less clear for their inspection in 1964 than they were to Wayne Morse. Snow jobs were, indeed, the order of the day, in one or another degree. Mainly it was Dean Rusk who perpetrated them; but his accessory-critics failed to challenge his basic and persistent fictions, even in their late-dawned anguish and desperation to stop--or to "win"--the lost and shameful war.

Rusk was permitted (except by Morse, who called him a liar to his face) to claim as ~~proven~~ ^{proven} the legal propriety and moral purity of the U.S. intervention. A few senators beat their own breasts lightly, for having trusted the LBJ administration too easily, for having helped push through the fatal Tonkin Bay resolution, unthinkingly. But they had voted for it (except Wayne Morse) in full knowledge that it would be used as it was used. They had consented then to the unprovoked, unjustifiable, and ruthless bombing of Hanoi. If they were angry and frightened now, it was not because the bombing was a crime against an innocent people. It was because the bombing, like all the other escalation~~s~~ authorized by them, had failed to bring the North Vietnamese to their knees.

Dean Rusk was imperturbable. (It is hard for a man essentially lifeless to be perturbed, even by the agony of napalmed children; and, to be fair to the Secretary of State, why should he be perturbed merely because his partners conceal their panic under sudden "morality"?) He was prepared with an inexhaustible and familiar supply of platitudes and self-righteous fictions. These he used, and with considerable success in silencing his interrogators, to counter all assaults. One might have thought that even such a robot would be shaken by the humiliations heaped on American forces ^{the total failure of} and American policy during the Tet offensive. Not at all.

There had been "problems" but things were returning to normal; the "allies" would soon resume the initiative; he "regretted" the suffering of the civilian population but civilians suffered in every war; true, there was some corruption in the South Vietnamese "government" but it was being rooted out, and the "government" was winning the loyalty of the people; after all, there was some corruption in every war; true, there had been a summary execution of a suspect by the Saigon chief of security, another unfortunate incident. But these were all incidentals to the paramount issue--the United States must be faithful to its commitments, for its own survival

and to protect the "freedom" of South Vietnam from the rapacious aggressors of the North.

The "Enemy"

Rusk had the culprit firmly identified. Hanoi, the invader, the aggressor, had answered with a battery of "noes" the unending appeals of Washington for negotiations. White was black; black was white. On what other conceivable basis could U.S. policy be defended? And the senators let him get away with it, for the most part--even with the ~~high~~ low farce of ~~Rusk~~ invoking ~~of~~ a ~~self-made~~ fiction of Cambodia suffering aggression by North Vietnam. The senators did not laugh. And when Rusk denounced "the enemy" (the Viet Cong and North Vietnam), no one of them summoned the courage to tell him that he--and his principal--were the real enemy. Perhaps it was only imagination, but it seemed that the temptation to tell that to Rusk was naked, fleetingly, on a few senatorial faces.

With Such Friends...

Rusk endured impassively a tongue-lashing of his policy by Senator Joseph Clark, and equally devastating attacks by Claiborne Pell, Fulbright, Gore, and others. His worst moment was the lone statement of unconditional support and approval given to the LBJ/Rusk policy---not ~~by~~ Hickenlooper, who was quiet, nor ~~by~~ Mundt, disillusioned and angry, but ~~by~~ Senator Thomas Dodd, who still appears in public, wreathed in wretched scandal. His face in collapse, his tongue wandering endlessly in praise of holy war against the godless Communists, Dodd alone praised unreservedly the slaughter and destruction and the escalation which could be smelled in the air. He thrust his infected kiss on Rusk, who had only just tried to minimize and brush aside the corruption of our client government in Saigon. Here was a mortification which no one would have dared write into a script. And only minutes later, ^{Came} the anticlimax of Rusk's impatience with the "moral myopia" of the senator who asked him if the policy of "protecting"

the "freedom" of the South Vietnamese could be pushed to the point of making certain that they were all in graves on non-Communist soil.

"Moral myopia," was Rusk's irritated reply; he was tired of those who never thought to condemn the rapacious North Vietnamese for invading the South and trying to seize this "country" by force. ⁷ Clearly, this Secretary of State is ready to destroy Vietnam in order to "save" it.

To education the public...

When the charade was finally over, LBJ was quick to herald his surrogate and pay him lavish public tribute. He had every reason to be happy with Rusk. He had faced the senators for more than ten hours, without giving an inch or losing his cool. His self-righteousness was intact, his hauteur undiminished, his stony dogmatism unyielding to any truth, however undisputable, or to plain humanity. If he had not made converts, neither had he lost one loyalist hawk. The encounter was, as the press pronounced the next morning, a stand-off. The insistence of Fulbright and his colleagues on consultation with the Senate before more troops were sent into hell, ~~was~~ ^{dismissed} this was ~~done~~ ^{with} bland arrogance. ^{Take} it or leave it. The senators could ~~find~~ ^{find} comfort only ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ hope that their futile exercise in resistance ~~that was too late~~ ~~and toothless~~ would inform and educate the people.

Nondoubt the people who ~~had~~ monitored the hearings could find new insights, not alone about the cancer of this war but about the Senate. Here sat the men (always excepting Wayne Morse) who had been ready accomplices in the bullying and slaughter of a small Asian country, whose martyred people had been cheated three times now of hard-earned victory over foreign occupiers. Because the policy had failed, after the sacrifice of twenty thousand young American lives and many times that number of innocent Vietnamese, and the levelling of cities, and the waste of a hundred billion dollars, they were finally willing to speak up feebly. But they were and

accessories in the anguish of the human beings maimed and murdered, accomplices in the flow of napalm and blood, and even now they will not stop the war --by withholding the money for its prosecution, by impeachment of the war criminals and the architects of genocide, or by any true revolt against the system of which they remain an inherent part.

Here sat the senators and among them a robber baron ~~_____~~, who ~~_____~~ ^{is} ~~_____~~ the symbol of greed and venal sell-out, still a member in good standing of the club which reluctantly had censured him. From this, the people have a lesson to draw, and the lesson is ~~_____~~ that the new-born doves are ^{not} heroes. One must have measured appreciation for the courage and passion with which they have finally spoken out against the rotten war; but it is the people who will ^{still} have to put an end to it.

Eugene McCarthy, campaigning against LBJ ^{'s} ~~_____~~ massacre of ^{human beings and of} decency itself, earned for his quiet labors an immense 42 percent of the votes in the New Hampshire primary, as against Johnson's humiliating 49 percent. Shrewder politicians like RFK were unwilling to take the risk that McCarthy took, although RFK lost ^{even} not ^{before} an hour ~~_____~~ trying to cheat McCarthy of his triumph. But ~~_____~~ RFK endorses the Warren Report. His instant readiness to take on LBJ, now that McCarthy had shown that it could be done, should surprise no one.

It is not gratuitous to recall that the Vietnam crisis of today had its beginnings in Dallas. No wonder John Sherman Cooper, also a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, could barely eject his stumbling shaken words from his disintegrated face during the Rusk hearings. A man who has been an accomplice to the Warren Report and the annihilation of Vietnam should be, as Cooper seemed, a creature ^{mistakenly} sickened by his intimacy with evil. The nation lost what decency and justice it still harbored when it accepted complacently the murder of its President, the execution of the innocent "assassin," and the debasing official fiction with which these events were buried. We have been overwhelmed by dishonor, and the hatred of the world.