

Carolina Forum Speech - May, 17, 1966

(Preceding speakers: government spokesman (Lodge), Professor Larson, Henry Kissinger; AKL follows Kissinger. Moderator is Jimmy Wallace.)

Wallace: Now, we'll call upon Mr. Allard K. Lowenstein.

AKL: Well ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ I'm delighted to be here and I'm quite used, as many of you will know to finding Jimmy Wallace on
(LAUGHTER)
my far left. [^] And I'm delighted as an alumnus to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ be able to begin the program this evening by expressing a feeling that is deep in my heart about the university, which is ^{THAT ITS A PITY} that tonight on this program in discussing the problems of Vietnam we are, by present regulations, unable to have with us on the panel an American who was in North Vietnam, Mr. Aptheker. I regret his absence for many reasons, not the least of which is that when you hear Mr. Aptheker, as some of us have, its the surest ~~was~~ way of discovering that its a mistake to think that the National Liberation Front is ^{the} a kind of socially-oriented sort of Asian ADA that some people like to make it out to be. You can't listen to Mr. Aptheker and come away with any illusions as to the nature of the enemy in Vietnam and I think its very constructive to have all that from people who are sympathetic to it, so ~~XXXX~~ one knows that its the truth rather than from those of us who have been very critical of it.

This discussion presents certain dilemmas, because there are wide areas of agreement among all of us on the panel. That perhaps is ~~an~~ one of the problems ^{is} of the American debate on Vietnam, is that there is a tendency on all sides except ~~perhaps~~ people who are very far removed from the

discussion's center to seek consensus, and perhaps we've absorbed that from the political success of the President - and all of us now see ourselves as formulating positions which represent the widest consensus of agreement possible.

I would like to start out by saying that I am in almost total agreement with Mr. Larson's proposals as far as they went. I would add to those two or three additional proposals which seem to me to be essential to carrying out the ones ~~which~~ ^{that} he has listed. The first of these is that if we really are serious about seeking a solution in Vietnam that will ~~stick~~ stick, we must simultaneously pursue a reappraisal of our attitudes toward China because it seems quite clear to me that unless we are able to seek a detente with China on the problem of Southeast Asia and the problem of ~~TAN~~ Taiwan and Chinese membership in the U.N. and other areas of exacerbated hostility between us that China is in a position to ~~keep~~ keep negotiations from ever succeeding in Vietnam and has very little reason not to do so, since China at the moment seems to profit a great deal from the fighting going on between ourselves and the Vietnamese.

Second, I think that if we're serious about seeking a way in which the sincerity of our desire to negotiate can be demonstrated, we must cease the bombing permanently, not as if it's an act of grace but because we are wrong in fact to be bombing North Vietnam legally, we're wrong ~~legally~~ militarily and a continuation of the bombing continues or indicates to the North Vietnamese at least that all the talk that we make of our desire to arrive at a negotiated settlement is insincere.

The original excuse for the bombing ~~was~~ was that it would persuade

the other side to come to the conference table. No one even uses that excuse any longer. Our military people concede that will not happen; they now say its to ~~XXX~~ interdict supplies coming ~~from~~ from the North to the South. Interdicting the supplies hasn't occurred in anything like the measure to which we were promised it would and we are now told that we have to continue the bombing apparently as a morale factor for the South Vietnamese which was the original reason given i nine or ten governments ago, or ~~xx~~ however many it is - someone once said that South Vietnam is probably the most democratic country in the world now since ~~expanding~~ practically everybody ends up being premier at least once. (laughter)

But its very difficult to know in the situation ^{that} we are in now what we now think we are achieving by the bombing except to risk the likelihood of pursuing other planes across the Chinese border, which we now seem to be heading toward, certainly to risk ultimately the bombing of the bases in Thailand from which we are now attacking North Vietnam and risk generally a lateral escalation across the whole of Southeast Asia that would make the entrapment that confronts us now even more difficult to escape from. So with these additions, my feeling is that Mr. Larson's proposals make very good sense.

Ultimately we have to face the basic question of why we are in South Vietnam with a great deal more honesty and candor than we're doing it. You can argue that we're there in order to guarentee self-determination for the Vietnamese people or you can argue that we're there to defend America's vital interests and that we can't consider leaving until a non-Communist government is safely installed. Secretary Rusk has said both at times, other American officials have. I don't think ~~you~~ you can ~~do~~ argue both,

because it may very well turn out that these two things ~~possible~~ are not - possibly are not consistent. General Eisenhower some years ago said that 80% of the people of Vietnam would probably have voted for ~~HO~~ Ho if elections had been held in 1956. No one that I know of has seriously questioned the fact that in fact we didn't want elections in 1956 for reasons that were connected to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ our view that the side we didn't like would win. And that brings us to another point - you can argue ~~with~~ either that we were right in 1956 not to allow elections because the Communists would win and we couldn't have that happen or you can argue that we favored free ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ elections then and do now. But you can't argue both, which we try to do. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

You can argue that China is the enemy and is conducting a series of wars of national liberation and must be stopped in Vietnam or else we face a kind of accumulation of ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ of Munichs or you can ~~x~~ argue that China is irrelevant to the whole problem of the war ~~in Vietnam~~ of the war in Vietnam and that we ~~XXXX~~ must not confuse an overall review of our attitude toward China with the problem of Vietnam, but you can't argue both. You can argue that Marshall Ky is, if not an Asian Churchill, which Lyndon Johnson once announced President Diem was, is at least sort of an Asian Hubert Humphrey dedicated to social reform and free elections, whose word is his bond, who when he pledges something is going to carry it out - or that you can argue that Marshall Ky ~~is~~ is an impetuous, inexperienced fellow who sort of blurts out things intemperately which he thinks better of later - such as his admiration for Hitler, his promise not to use force at Danang, his announcement that he would not leave office for a year - ^{THAT} and therefore when he says something we shouldn't think he really means what he ^{is} ~~says~~ ^{SAID} until Secretary Rusk has translated it for us.

(laughter) - but you can't argue both. You can't say that his word is his bond and we know from Honolulu on that he really is pledged to basic social reform and therefore we shouldn't be critical of sort of temporary deviations from that and say at the same time that ~~we~~ when he does say things and act in ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ a peculiar fashion that we really mustn't blame him for it, that there will be a revision of his remarks extended in the Congressional Record by the Secretary of State. Unfortunately, his performance continues to fly in the face of what we'd like ~~it~~ to say ~~it~~ it was. And if ~~XXXX~~ Marshall Ky is to be the chosen instrument of American policy there it brings us to another contradiction in our concepts which we have to face. You could either argue that we are only there for the South Vietnamese people - for their self determination and that therefore we can't meddle in what's going on there - or you can argue that our ~~life-~~line is at stake and that we must stay there because its not clear what the ~~XXX~~ South Vietnamese people want, in which case I don't see how you can say that we can tolerate the present situation degenerating further because we can't meddle. We're there. We're there is such enormous numbers that our presence is one of the major factors in the situation and I don't think we can go on arguing simultaneously both sides of the coin of what our presence means to South Vietnam.

I can go on listing the kinds of contradictions in our general rhetoric and our ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ general attitude that I've been listing, but I cite these five or six only because I think that they illustrate what seems to me to be the saddest consequence of the war in Vietnam in the United States, which is that we have been crying wolf in a situation in which in fact its

very ~~diff~~ difficult to establish what wolves we think are at the door or why. That ~~does~~ doesn't mean I like the Viet Cong. It doesn't mean I like the idea of the Communists - or quasi-Communists winning control of an area. But it does mean that in any logical appraisal of the situation in ~~South~~ South Vietnam, in asserting that this is another war of national liberation of the Communists or trying to subvert the free world, we're using rhetoric in a way which can't help in my judgement to prejudice and poison the possibility that ~~we~~ when wolves really are at the door, when aggression has in fact occurred of a kind that is indisputable, that ~~the~~ the American people will not respond to it ~~in~~ the way they need to if we're to stop expansionism ~~if~~ ^{when} it occurs in other places where it ~~may~~ in fact may occur.

But the facts in South Vietnam have not borne out our use of the rhetoric - we've cheapened it. It is true that we did not allow elections in 1956, whatever the reason was. It is true that at that time the Viet Cong ~~or~~ or the National Liberation Front, ~~which~~ controlled ~~the~~, by, I think, ~~undisputed~~ undisputed consent, an enormous part of the territory of South Vietnam and was ~~unhappy~~ unhappy about agreeing to go north to the 17th parallel, and agreed to that on a pledge of elections which were then not carried out. It's certainly true that the government of Vietnam, the French government, was unpopular at the end of the Second World War - in fact it was a government under the Vichy French ~~which~~ ^{that} supported the Japanese in large measure during the war, and had we followed President Roosevelt's policy and the American policy in the rest of Asia in Vietnam we would not have supported the restoration of French colonial rule in Vietnam - we ~~would~~ would have supported the installation of the Ho Chi Minh government in 1946. Now these historical

facts are not worth fighting over - I ~~quite~~ quite agree that on a panel of this that brevity its almost pointless to try to rehearse all of them. What I'm saying is that unpleasant though it may be that my 1966 - after twenty years of fighting - the enemy has taken on unattractive appearances which were not fully ~~present~~ present twenty years ago and might not have been present had the history been different - unattractive as that fact is, that is the fact, And what we have to ~~weigh~~ weigh now is what course do we follow in view of that fact. ~~And~~ And what I would suggest to you tonight is that if we think we're there defending democracy - if that part of our rhetoric means anything - then the way to defend democracy begins immediately with the bringing in of vast numbers of observers through the United Nations and other parts of the international agencies - a sort of combination, maybe, of the Mississippi Summer Project with the Honest Ballot Association done on a world scale, where we hold free elections open to everybody to participate in South Vietnam. If we do that, we have to rescind decree number 004-65 of May, 1965, under which its illegal in South Vietnam, ^{for} and I quote the ~~XXXX~~ decree, ~~XX~~ "any move which would weaken the national anti-Communist effort and which would be harmful to the anti-communist struggle. All plots to do this under the false name of peace and neutrality are punishable by jail." Well, you can't have an election if people who believe there ~~was~~ should be neutrality and there should be negotiations can't campaign because they've violated a decree which subjects ~~them~~ them without measures of law to be put in jail.

But if we're there not to defend democracy - if that line is now out, as Dr. Kissinger suggests we're in part fighting for ourselves now, then, of course, one has to weigh that also ~~is~~ very coldly. Are we helping ourselves in what we are doing in South Vietnam right now? ~~XXX~~ And my contention is that we are immeasurably hurting ourselves with each step in the direction of an escalated

war. We're hurting ourselves at home, because we're confusing a dialogue on what our domestic programs are about with a situation that corrodes the psychology of the country, that makes dissent difficult, that makes the economic progress we need at ~~home~~ home difficult, that encourages inflation needlessly. But much worse ~~than~~ than that, we're hurting ourselves enormously ^{all} around the world, because its almost impossible to find any place in the world - and I don't think we ~~need~~ have to kid ourselves about this - where our position in South Vietnam is either understood or approved. You could find exceptions, but the exceptions are so few that even listing them makes the position even more forceful when you recite it. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

What is it that we think we are achieving ~~when~~ in stopping Communism in South Vietnam in the face of the price we are paying in esteem, of respect, of the kinds of investment in capital of people's respect and support for us in other situations which are going to arrive where we're really going to be attempting to stop aggression. What conceivable gain do we have to make up for the incredible loss that we're ~~suffering~~ suffering in terms of people's respect for our pretenses of believing in ~~it~~ self determination and in believing in peace? So I would suggest that we're not stopping Communism, we're helping Communism. ~~XXXXXXXX~~

I think a case can be made that we've in fact driven South Vietnam ~~very~~ ~~close~~ much closer to a choice between militarism and Communism which ~~strengthens~~ strengthens Communism than ever needed to be the case. But even skipping that local question, the world impact is so clear by now that at the United Nations we were for a long time afraid to bring the subject up and that even today when we try to bring it up we discover that the hostility ^{toward} ~~in~~ our position is so wide that its very difficult to expect anyone to speak out on our behalf,

to the positions we hold, stop aggressive military ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ action, insist that we're prepared to negotiate with everybody that's involved in the conflict and hope that over a period of a year or so the other side will realize that their interests also require some sort of settlement. If not we just have to cling on, because we're in a mess that we can't unilaterally pull out of tomorrow, for reasons that have been stated by the other speakers.

~~SECRET~~