

Johnson Altered Vietnam Plank

By Drew Pearson and
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Looking back over the ebb and flow, the mistakes, the achievements of the recent Democratic Convention, the most disruptive debate was that over peace in Vietnam. It left wounds that probably will not heal, either before or after November.

The tragedy is that it didn't have to happen.

If LBJ, sitting at his ranch in Texas, had taken his hands off the reins of the convention it wouldn't have happened at all.

But he didn't. Instead he seemed more interested in vindication for his own Vietnam policy than in the election of Hubert Humphrey next November.

Here is the inside story of what happened:

It began when the President insisted that his man, Representative Hale Boggs of New Orleans, head the platform committee, instead of Senator Ed Muskie of Maine, whom Humphrey wanted. Boggs is highly competent, but HHH wanted Muskie in the spot in order to let the convention have a look at him as a vice presidential possibility. The President's man got the job.

Before the Convention actually started, Boggs got three phone calls from LBJ, the last one at 1:30 a.m., Saturday, asking him to come back to Washington to confer. Boggs complied, along with Senator Jen-

nings Randolph of West Virginia, chairman of the "riot" subcommittee of the platform committee. Officially they came back to confer on the Czech crisis, though actually they were given a special briefing by Gen. William Westmoreland, former commander in Vietnam, now Army Chief of Staff, on the danger of suspending the bombing of North Vietnam.

Westmoreland showed them, among other things, a message from General Creighton Abrams stating that, when bombing had ceased, North Vietnamese trucks moving South had increased from 150 a week to 1000 a week.

LBJ Hit Ceiling

Back in Chicago, a private task force was picked to work on the Vietnam plank, composed of Ted Sorensen, former counsel to President Kennedy, who in this case represented the McCarthy peace forces; and David Ginsberg represented the Humphrey forces.

Ginsberg is close to President Johnson and had served on the Kerner Commission on Racial Violence.

They came up with a plank on Vietnam which contained the President's view against any stopping of bombing which might endanger American life, but wrapped it up in language emphasizing the importance of peace.

To make sure the President approved the exact wording of the plank, Vice President

Humphrey had a copy flown to him at the Texas ranch, via Charles Murphy, former head of CAB, now a trusted White House adviser.

LBJ had had his Jet Star on the runway in Texas ready to take off for Chicago, but had been advised not to come, first by the Secret Service; second by Representative Boggs. Boggs cautioned him that his presence would inflame passions during the Vietnam debate. The Secret Service warned that his life might not be safe in Chicago.

When Charley Murphy delivered the text of the Vietnam plank at the ranch, the President is reported to have hit the ceiling. He junked the compromise wording worked out by Sorensen and Ginsberg and substituted a much briefer plank which endorsed the end of bombing if American lives were not endangered, but eliminated most of the phrases regarding hopes for peace.

It was this watered-down plank which caused such bitter debate and was adopted only by the narrow margin of 1567% to 1041%.

Communist Tactics

In fairness to President Johnson, it should be noted that he had intelligence reports that young Communists and Yuppies in Chicago planned to whip up the debate over Vietnam in order to influence the truce talks in Paris. This was the reason the

State Department spokesman issued a warning to North Vietnamese delegates in Paris to stay out of American politics and get on with the talks.

One intelligence report received in Washington and passed on to the President stated that American Communists were quarreling over tactics; that Donald Hamerquist, the Party's coordinator, argued that street violence would adversely affect Senator Eugene McCarthy's chances at Chicago.

But the New Left, according to the intelligence report, wanted to rampage in the streets and force a confrontation with the police. The repercussions around the world, they argued, would demonstrate the strength of peace forces and help North Vietnamese negotiations in Paris.

This was exactly what happened. The militants staged a peace rally which was never intended to be peaceful. They waved red flags, shouted obscenities, and deliberately provoked clashes in front of TV cameras.

The traditional Communists were right, in that violence in the streets did not help McCarthy. The sight of bearded, ragged youths waving red flags and hate-Humphrey flags probably helped Humphrey. What effect it had on Hanoi remains to be seen.

McCarthy, of course, had nothing to do with those who sought to exploit his candidacy.

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