

ATROCITY CHARGE STIRRING BRITISH

Debate Sought in Commons
or at Labor M.P. Meeting

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LONDON, Nov. 21 — The allegations of atrocities by American soldiers in South Vietnam will almost certainly be debated in the British House of Commons or before a meeting of the Parliamentary Labor party.

Pressure for a formal debate on the reports of mass murder — and the whole question of British policy toward the American involvement in Vietnam — grew markedly today. Public interest in the charges of a massacre in a Vietnamese village in March, 1968, is running extremely high in Britain.

The object of the pressure, which comes from back-bench members of the Labor party, is to have a debate before Parliament takes its Christmas recess. That way, members could make their feelings known before Prime Minister Wilson goes to Washington to meet President Nixon in January.

Reports Dominate Press

The reports about the alleged massacre in the village of Songmy, near Danang, dominated much of the press today. A number of commentators remarked that the concern about the charges seemed more intense here than in the United States, and were puzzled at the relative coolness with which the charges were being reported and discussed in America.

The main British Broadcasting Corporation television news tonight showed some film of an American Army sergeant who said he had been present at the incident and described it. Then the B.B.C.'s Washington correspondent, Charles Wheeler, remarked on what he called the relatively calm reaction in the United States and said:

"Seen from here, it seems that the conscience of America rests in the House of Commons and Fleet Street."

In a dispatch from Washington for tomorrow's editions, The Times of London says: "There seems to be more concern abroad than in America. One must assume a collective embarrassment, if not disbelief."

Newspapers from right to left expressed unease or worse at the atrocity charges.

For example, the conservative Daily Telegraph said: "It is natural that public opin-

ion should be shocked at such detailed allegations. Even if they are substantiated to the extent of only 1 per cent, they would leave forever a blot on American military honor. It must be assumed that the investigation will proceed with the utmost speed and thoroughness, taking no account, in any wider ramifications, either of rank or of any supposed overriding national interest. In such cases the highest national interest is that the truth should convincingly be laid bare."

In The Daily Mirror, a tabloid that sells 5 million copies a day and leans toward the Labor party, the reports covered all of the front page this morning. An editorial on page 2 said:

Called 'A Brutal Affair'

"If the ghoulish allegations are true, how have they been hushed up for 20 months? American Army law will have to take its course. And clearly there will have to be a ruthless inquiry into just how ugly the ugly war has now become."

The Evening Standard, the sister paper of the right-wing Daily Express, said in an edi-

torial headed "A Brutal Affair" that "military and civil authorities will have to set up a full and open investigation if American and world opinion is to be satisfied that such incidents are not only exceptional and punishable but that adequate steps are being taken to prevent their ever happening again."

There was a major flurry today when George Brown, the former Foreign Secretary, called on his Labor party colleagues to stop being so critical of the United States.

"I suspect," Mr. Brown said on a radio program, "there are an awful lot of specters in our cupboard, too." He said he wished the Americans would "stop weeping" and "just get on with the job."

This brought a sharp reaction from left wing members of the party, some of whom spoke about trying to have him dismissed as deputy leader.

It was considered possible that enough members of the center and the right of the party would support Mr. Brown to save his position. But the feeling of distaste for the war and disaffection from American policy has spread through the party.

Thus a junior minister regarded as on the party's right was highly critical in private today of a further comment by Mr. Brown that there had been atrocities by the Communist side.

"I thought the Americans were in this war," the minister said, "to show that they had a different standard of morality from the Communists."