

Why No Peace?

By DAVID LIVINGSTON

The press continues to report peace rumors. Every time Henry Kissinger travels, there is another flurry of hopeful speculation. Secret talks between Mr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho take place from time to time. But still there is no peace—the bombings, the fighting, the killing go on.

Over recent months, a delegation of American labor leaders, including this writer, visited North Vietnam, and on a number of subsequent occasions talked to Le Duc Tho, member of the politburo and chief negotiator for North Vietnam. In our discussions, we did not seek to negotiate or mediate. Rather we sought to understand why there was no peace. As long-time opponents of the war, we knew that public opinion has frequently been manipulated. If we could learn the truth and spread it, perhaps we could help bring peace at least a little closer.

On March 24, our delegation met with Le Duc Tho in Hanoi. In the course of that meeting, he stated that his Government favored a three-segment coalition in South Vietnam. One segment would consist of independents; one would be designated by the Provisional Revolutionary Government (somewhat inaccurately referred to in the United States as the Vietcong); and the third segment would be designated by the present Saigon administration, but not to include President Thieu. Only the one-third representation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government would include Communists, Le Duc Tho noted, and even among this segment, Communists would be a small minority.

In describing some of the persons who might participate in a coalition, he noted that they included merchants and landowners who were obviously opponents of Communism.

Our two and one-half hour talk covered a variety of subjects. The North Vietnamese leader denied that there had ever been a blood bath in North Vietnam or that one would take place in South Vietnam when the war was over. He urged that Paragraph

14C of the 1954 Geneva Agreement which outlawed reprisals be included in any settlement. He said North Vietnam wanted such safeguards as much as the United States.

Le Duc Tho urged that we inform Mr. Kissinger of everything he had told us. On March 31, our delegation met with Mr. Kissinger. Among other things, Mr. Kissinger said that there is no doubt that there must be a coalition government in South Vietnam to end the war.

"The Vietcong," Mr. Kissinger observed, "have been fighting for more than a dozen years, and they cannot be expected to just fade away and disappear."

But, he added, the trouble is that the Vietnamese speak "elliptically" so that it is impossible to tell what they really mean. Le Duc Tho says he is for a coalition, but when specific representatives are discussed, Mr. Kissinger said, not only is President Thieu unacceptable, but it also turns out that the North Vietnamese will tolerate nobody.

Mr. Kissinger stated he emphatically favored a negotiated settlement. He said that the United States has the power to achieve a military victory but if that power were to be used, it would create unbearable division among our people—it would in effect tear the United States apart.

In May, the United States did proceed to apply such power, resuming the bombing of North Vietnam and mining Haiphong harbor. President Nixon made two speeches declaring these measures to be necessary to prevent a Communist takeover in South Vietnam. Mr. Kissinger in an extended press conference described Le Duc Tho's proposals as merely a "thin veneer" for a Communist assumption of power.

On May 25, we met again with Le Duc Tho in Paris, in a five-hour conference. We placed on the table the two statements of President Nixon and the text of Mr. Kissinger's press conference. Did his government now have a changed position? Did it now demand

a Communist takeover as President Nixon charged? He answered that there could be no Communist takeover. South Vietnam has been so mercilessly bombed that it was nearly destroyed. There can only be rebuilding and healing the wounds. For this a unified, neutralist government which could mobilize all sections of the people is required. This, he said, remains the goal of his Government.

We referred to Mr. Kissinger's assertion that no agreement was obtainable from Le Duc Tho on a coalition that would include representatives of the current South Vietnamese Government. Le Duc Tho declared, "It is easy to solve this problem. Let each segment in the coalition pick its own representatives. Let the present Saigon Government and the United States which supports it, pick their own. Other than Thieu, any person that they name is acceptable."

Since we returned, we have spared no effort to report what we had learned. There is an obvious difference between what we were told by Le Duc Tho and the public reports which Mr. Kissinger has given on his meetings with the North Vietnamese. It seems to us that the Administration finds only as much opportunity for agreement with the North Vietnamese as it wants to find. Apparently peace is available, but the Nixon Administration still wants a military victory.

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