

Alaskan Lifts the Curtain on Reassuring But Illusory Talk Last August With LBJ

Gruening in Dramatic Move Would Bar Use of Draftees in Southeast Asia

A focus for militant peace action was provided when Senator Gruening, Jan. 25, with the support of Senator Morse introduced amendments to three pending Vietnamese military and AID bills. These riders provide that no draftees may be sent to Southeast Asia without Congressional approval. Though slighted by most of the press including the *New York Times*, the amendments would force members of Congress to stand up and be counted on expansion of the war. In introducing these measures Senator Gruening disclosed in a speech for Senate delivery that last August 20 he had been about to offer a similar rider to the Defense Appropriation bill then pending in the Senate when he was called to the White House. The President urged him not to introduce the rider and "said that in any event no draftees would be sent to Vietnam before January" unless a "grave national emergency develops."

Serious Effort or Soft-Soap?

In releasing a letter he sent the President at that time, agreeing not to introduce the rider, Senator Gruening lifted the curtain on talks which encouraged pro-peace Senators to believe that Mr. Johnson was seriously seeking peace. The Alaskan said he was especially gratified by Mr. Johnson's press conference statement of July 28 "that there would be no particular problem in bringing the Vietcong and the National Liberation Front to the conference table." The Senator said he was also pleased by the President's readiness for reunification by elections in accordance with the Geneva agreement. "Of course, as I said," the letter continued, referring to their conversation at the White House, "it is difficult to convince those with whom we are seeking to arrange a cessation of hostilities of our bona fides while we continue the bombing of North Vietnam."

In introducing the riders, Senator Gruening injected a new

Non-Toxic But Deadly?

One Australian soldier has died and several others have been made ill from the effects of "non-toxic" gases in Vietnam. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Jan. 13), the Australians were searching a tunnel northwest of Saigon when they spotted two Viet Cong. The troops hurled grenades and then smoke and gas into the corridor. After two hours, assuming that the gas and smoke had dispersed, two engineers returned. The Viet Cong were gone, but the gas and smoke remained. "Smoke and gas stick to the side of the tunnels," explained one engineer later. Although wearing a gas mask, one of the Australians was overcome and fell unconscious. His companion ran for help. The rescue team, after dragging the man out, also was overcome, and had to be hospitalized. The Pentagon's report of the incident is vague. The death of the engineer is attributed to "lack of oxygen and smoke inhalation." Any suggestion that gas may have been a factor is flatly rejected with a stern reminder that "non-toxic" gas is harmless.—P.O.

question into debate over the Vietnamese war. He asked why draftees should be sent to Southeast Asia when "over 300,000 well-trained, experienced troops are stationed in Europe." He also put into the Record a Defense Department table which showed that more than \$5.5 billions had been spent in fiscal '63, '64 and '65 on Army Reserve and National Guard forces. The Senator asked why draftees should be sent when "hundreds of thousands" of these trained reservists "are going about their daily civilian jobs, sacrificing only one evening a week or one day a month for which they receive pay." This involves basic military and political questions which should be fully aired, particularly in respect to the large U.S. army in West Germany.

Two Dispatches from The Mekong Delta Portray the Feudalism We Support

In Long An, one of Vietnam's most fertile provinces more than 85 percent of the peasant population are tenants. This land-ownership pattern may help explain why, despite a tremendous cost in lives and material, the war in Long An is no closer to being won than it was several years ago. . . . [Yet] the rice-rich heartland of the Saigon region and the upper Mekong Delta, linked together by Long An, remains the prize for which the war is being fought. Here, in less than 14 provinces, live almost two-thirds of the 15 million South Vietnamese. . . . American military and civilian advisers agree there are many more Viet Cong than a year ago.

Most important in Long An, however, government and the mass of peasantry still seem to be on the opposing sides. . . . Land is of such paramount importance here that the Viet Cong allow only the landless or very poor farmers to command guerrilla units or qualify as party members. The provincial government's social order is the exact reverse. Most of the military officers, civil servants and community leaders come from the land-owning gentry. The same is true in Saigon where only one of the 10 generals now sharing power has any rapport with the masses. He is Central Vietnam's erratic Maj. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, who also is the only one of peasant origin. . . .

In the delta, out of 1.2 million farms, only 260,000 are

owner-operated. . . . Some 3,000 rich Saigon families still are the big landowners.

—Richard Critchfield in the *Washington Star*, Jan. 24

The village chief, a 36-year old former Army officer named Do Hun Minh . . . explained through an interpreter that only four village youngsters since the year 1950 have been in high school. No youngster in the village has ever attended college. "The Vietnamese government continues to support an exclusive educational system in a revolutionary war," says [Richard] Burnham [the U.S. aid mission province representative]. "All this is the preservation of privilege. It is madness and until it is changed into an American type egalitarian educational system, most of our efforts will be marginal." Those other efforts . . . are considerable. USOM pumps about half a million dollars a year into Kienhoa [province], arranging for medical teams and technical assistance, and building dams, school rooms, a potable water system, an orphanage, three fish markets, two electricity systems. But knowledgeable Americans here say that the Vietcong still offer the only outlet for a bright boy from the villages. The static nature of Sondong assures that there is no legitimate route out of the rice paddy. The rural children cannot be officers, administrators or district chiefs."

—Ward Just, in *Washington Post*, Jan. 23

Time to Recall How Past Peace Feelers Were Hidden In Disingenuous Palaver

Secretary Rusk Provides A Brilliant Lesson in How Not to Be Candid

We thought readers would like to see for themselves just how hard it is to get a straight answer from Secretary Rusk on peace responses from the other side. This is from the official press conference transcript of January 21:

Q. Mr. Secretary, you spoke of receiving no indication from Hanoi of being interested in peace. Can we assume that, therefore, any reports we may have received from the Russians were negative after the visit of the Soviet delegation to Hanoi, or that we have received no reports from the Russians?

A. I would not wish to embroider on what I said in terms of channels or communications. I am simply saying that we have not received the kind of response for which we were hoping during this period.

[Comment: The questioner's paraphrase was inaccurate: Rusk did not say we had received "no indication from Hanoi of being interested in peace." What Rusk said in his opening statement was that there had been "an overwhelming favorable response" to the peace offensive "except from those who could in fact sit down and make peace." All he says in reply is that the U.S. had not received "the kind of response for which we were hoping." No one asked him what kind of response that was but an attempt was made to get clarification:]

Q. Mr. Secretary, was there specifically no reply by the Hanoi government on the memorandum which was delivered to them by an American diplomat three weeks ago or so?

A. I think my opening statement covers that point.

[Comment: Nowhere in Rusk's opening statement was there any reference to this memorandum. If there was no reply, why not say so?]

Q. Aside from what we can all read, were you telling us that you have had no response from Hanoi or no satisfactory response?

A. Well, I think that I would again go back to my statement: "I regret that I cannot report to you any positive and encouraging response to the hopes of the overwhelming majority of mankind."

[Comment: This seems to imply that there was a response but not one we considered "positive and encouraging." A questioner tried another tack:]

Q. Mr. Secretary, despite that fact, Hanoi and Peking have been discussing out loud your 14 points in some detail, and quarreling with them, of course. Has the United States made an effort either—through any channel—to clarify some of the questions that have been raised on the other side, as to the

Now You See It, Now You Don't

Mr. Spivack: Well, Mr. Secretary, can you tell us whether the report that the Washington Post published on Saturday that there had been a response from North Vietnam but that we considered the response negative but ambiguous?

Secretary Rusk: No, no, I have not had—and I think I would know about it if there were such a response—I have not seen a response direct or indirect to the United States by Hanoi in this situation.

—On Meet the Press, Jan. 23

"By specifying a reply 'to the United States,' it was learned, Rusk was distinguishing between responses by Hanoi to other nations who passed comments back to the United States and the absence of a reply specifically addressed to the United States."

—Murray Marder in the Washington Post, Jan. 24

Later that same day, on leaving a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Rusk said there had been "no constructive or responsive move" from the other side. (Washington Eve. Star, Jan. 24)

exact meaning of these points?

[Comment: Instead of answering, the Secretary made an angry little speech:]

A. If they want clarification, they know how to get it. Why are they afraid to come to the table? Why are they afraid to engage in discussions. Why? . . .

[Comment: One possible reason is that they fear we intend to cheat again, as we did after 1954. When Rusk finished his tirade, he was asked:]

Q. Well, is the answer to the question "No?"

A. I beg pardon.

Q. Is the answer to the question "No?" That we have made no effort?

A. No, the answer to the question is the one I gave.

[Laughter].

[Comment: The answer clearly was "No." It implied that clarification could be obtained only at the conference table. But since coming to the conference table may seriously strain Hanoi's relations with Peking, and leave it at the mercy of our good faith, can it afford to do so without some guaranty that this time we really mean to abide by the Geneva agreements?]

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