

VIETNAM

and

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

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As the war in Vietnam has been escalated to major proportions, so have the number of thinking people who have serious doubts about the wisdom of our policies and who are deeply concerned about the depth of American involvement. The press is increasingly outspoken in its criticism of the Administration. Vietnam is a subject that could prove to be the most important political issue of this generation, and yet it is virtually ignored by the Republican Party and its leadership.

New York's Mayor John Lindsay has alluded to its potential as a political issue by referring to this war as the most unwanted war in our history. The people have no taste for it. They are confused and puzzled by the alternating inconsistencies in the Administration's pronouncements, and they have no clear-cut view of either the purposes or goals of the war or of our reasons for being in it. Congress doesn't want the war and the President has repeatedly said he doesn't want it, while he continues to lead the nation step by step into deeper and deeper involvement.

This war is not only unpopular but it is the most mis-managed war in our history. The basic military conflict has been in existence now for nearly ten years with United States assis-

tance but there is no sign of either victory or a solution. When President Johnson transformed our role from that of adviser to major military participant he subjected American prestige to the risk of the outcome of an internal conflict in a distant nation, over which we cannot have full control. Contrary to his campaign pledges, he increased American involvement in the war to previously undreamed of proportions, without any noticeable progress toward an end of the war or a decrease in the power and influence wielded by the Viet Cong. The Administration has no plan for the future except to do more and more of what has failed in the past, with the possibility of extending ourselves so as to weaken our ability to resist the enemy on other fronts.

The Administration has also demonstrated no skill in handling the political and diplomatic problems involved in the Vietnam conflict. The frantic attempts at diplomacy during the brief lull in the bombing raids, the belated and half-hearted appeal to the United Nations Security Council and the fanfare of the Honolulu conference bore the earmarks of contrived publicity. We are still fighting a lonely battle and criticism of our action is increasing in the capitals of the world. Anti-American street demonstrations have become widespread in the nations we count as friendly, including the nation we profess to help. The Administration is making the mistake of trying to solve a political



problem by military means.

Not only is the war unpopular and the Administration's leadership blundering, unproductive, and possibly dangerous, but there is very respectable opinion that the action of American armed forces in Vietnam is a violation of the United Nations Charter and our commitment to uphold the Geneva Accord and is not justified by the Southeast Asia Treaty. The able government lawyers are attempting conscientiously to convince the world that there is a sound legal basis for our intervention. But our unilateral use of force without the sanction of the United Nations is not the kind of precedent that helps to build the strength and effectiveness of the international peace-keeping machinery that our government has devoted such effort to fostering during the past 20 years.

With such a wealth of political issues, how can the Republican Party ignore them? A very few Republicans, such as Governor Hatfield of Oregon, have spoken out forcefully. But most of the opposition to the President has come from a group of Democratic senators. However, with some exceptions, it is equivocal opposition, since their hands are tied by political obligations. Nevertheless they are sensitive to the importance of these issues and are making a real contribution in voicing their criticisms of the Administration without being restrained by a false sense of patriotism. Senator Gruening of Alaska has



gone so far as to say that we should admit we have made a mistake and withdraw, but there are many other alternatives to the Administration's ill-conceived policies.

The Republicans, generally, have expressed very little criticism of the Administration. Some of them have even attacked the Democratic senators for their criticism of the President. If the Party would seize the opportunity presented, it could carry on a much more effective attack on the Administration for its tragic mistakes, because the Republicans are not restrained by party loyalty as are most of the Democrats. Is the Republican Party so deflated as a result of the Goldwater debacle that there is no one with the vision and leadership to seize on this most vital issue and crystalize the vast latent opposition to the Administration's policies and performances?

Eisenhower was such a leader in 1952 when he promised to end an unpopular war, and he did it - without pressing for any new victories. Charles DeGaulle was such a leader in France, who saved his country from a disaster in Algeria without calling for a military victory. Eisenhower also refused to allow American troops to become involved in a land war in Vietnam, in spite of all of the arguments now used by the Johnson Administration to justify its large-scale use of troops.

If such a Republican leader should now press the attack on the current unpopular war, I have no doubt that the people

would rally around him. At present a popular poll would probably show the majority supporting the President's policy, but most of the people would not know what that policy is. Some would support a policy proclaimed today and others would support the opposite policy that was proclaimed yesterday. A strong opposition led by forceful Republican leadership could capture the imagination of the American people and save this country from mistakes that might prove disastrous. Such leadership could also regain for the Republican Party the confidence of many Americans which it lost in the 1964 campaign.

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