

KY and 1967

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Ho! Ho! Ho-chi Minh!

We will fight and we will win!

At some risk of falling into anecdote, I'd like to insert a few political thoughts about the tour by the war criminal Ky in January 1967 during which I had the pleasure of being part of protests in the four cities he polluted.

After returning to Brisbane for the school holidays in December, I helped anti-war activists bring out thousands of copies of a four-page newsheet no bigger than one could carry on the footpaths under the Labor government's social-fascist laws, which Bjelke-Petersen inherited when he fluked the premiership a few months later. If the pages were small, the typeface on the front was as large as the printer possessed to proclaim nothing but '**STOP KY**'.

Before the Hitler-love got to my hometown I had left for Canberra where he was to make his first stop. The anti-war committee there had decided that posters were not going to be much use since the wallopers would not let us get close enough for him even to see them. What he could not miss, and what would get right up his nostrils, were NLF flags. So the flags were sewn. When we joined the protest, instead of being assaulted by NSW cops, it was Tom Uren who tried to tear them down.

Ky's next stop was Sydney to be met by the Saturday morning rally at Kirribilli under the northern pylons. I brought the Canberra flags but the idea had caught on and more were being turned out. They were supposed to play a part in an action so stupid that I cannot believe that we ever came up with it. Hall Greenland and I agreed that once we got to Kirribilli House we would throw our flags over the wall and go over after them. Fortunately, the police blocked off the narrow street at the bottom of a steep dip at least a kilometer from our rendezvous with fractured skulls. The thousands who had marched from the rally could neither go forward nor home as the police inspector and Uren, from the high side of the divided road, were urging us to do through a police megaphone. To call on the masses to hold their place, Hall and I ran back towards the start of the split in the street.

Meanwhile, Bob Gould was clawing his way up the sandstone dividing wall screeching 'I want to speak! I want to speak!' Irrespective of the crowd's feelings toward Bob, they were mesmerized. Surely he must fall. But no, well before Hall and I came panting up, Bob had crooked his arm around a white guard-rail post, keeping up his 'I want to Speak!', doing better impressions of 'Cocky' Calwell than Arthur was capable. So amazed was the police officer that he handed Bob the megaphone as he pulled himself to safety. Waving the flags, we doubtless denounced all and sundry, Calwell and the NLF excepted. After Ky left Government House, we watched a Manly ferry making its way to Circular Quay with several hundred coppers on board – the reception committee inside the grounds of Kirribilli from whom Providence had delivered us.

Entrusted with the flags, that night I took the Southern Aurora for Melbourne to resume teaching. More flags had been made there. When we raised them, the Secretary of the Council for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD), Sam Goldbloom, came over to say how glad he was to see me back in town and how much he supported our support for the NLF – but - Arthur had asked him to request us not to spoil the protest by displaying them. None of us was of a mind to take orders from the revisionists – doubly so with the memory of Arthur's welcome the day before. As Goldbloom moved away, Arthur was making his way over to thank us, shaking my right hand while the left one held the offending symbol of anti-imperialism so dear to him.

As amusing as some of these details remain, they are but frost on the ground compared with the political context of 1966 to 1968, a course of events now so distorted that it is widely believed that it was Whitlam and not McMahon who withdrew the troops, to leave only forty advisers by the 1972 elections.

Calwell's 'last hurrah' had been to lead the ALP to electoral disaster at the 1966 poll by holding to a principled and total opposition to conscription, home or abroad, and to what he called 'that filthy little Asian war.' Helping him towards defeat was the treachery of his deputy, Whitlam, who undermined his anti-Vietnam stance at every opportunity to position himself as leader of the loyal

opposition – just as he had done in 1966 by welcoming the Indonesian massacres, foreshadowing his bastardry towards the slaughter of the East Timorese.

The failure of the electorate to fulfill Calwell's faith based on the anti-conscription votes of 1916 and 1917 set me down the track of writing *A New Britannia*, subtitled *An argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism*.

In 1966, a trio of us had put out leaflets calling for the anti-war movement to back the NLF. Next year, the Monash Labor Club became the target of special legislation to stop it aiding the enemy. By then, Whitlam had got the ALP National Conference to endorse the disgrace of staying in Vietnam to help our great and powerful friend extricate itself from an unfortunate mistake. After ten years in the ALP, I did not need to renew my membership. In those strange times, I joined other revolutionaries in handing out how-to-vote cards for the Liberal Reform candidate in the Corio by-election. One bright spot came when *Ramparts* exposed CIA funding of *Quadrant*. In the mood of despair following the Calwell's defeat, a blow-in like me could become Secretary of the Vietnam Day Committee, organising the July 4 protest at the U.S. Consulate on St Kilda Rd, which led to another run-in with Goldbloom.

Knowing every trick in the book, Sam had already invited me onto the CICD executive where the July monthly meeting provided a memorable moment. We met two days into the Six Day War, which no one in this peace organisation mentioned. Next month, they returned with their crafted motions appeasing either the Soviet line or the Zionists who gave the CICD most of its funding.

So anti-war work limped along until that morning, a year after Ky's visit, when we turned on our radios to hear that VC flags were flying over the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. LBJ resigned. Even Whitlam had to tack to the wind from the East. That was just the start: Paris ... Shanghai ... Prague ... Chicago ... though not until May 1975 could we celebrate the success of what our hope had been from 1966: 'Drive the murdering swine into the sea!'

One more thing. Let nobody here boast that we stopped the war against the peoples of Indo-China. We did no such thing. That victory was won by the peoples themselves, killing the invaders and their running dogs and being massacred at their hands.

*One side right! One side wrong!
Victory to the Viet Cong!*