

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
December 6, 1972

TO ALL NCERS, ORGANIZERS AND ANTIWAR DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed are two reports on the current situation in the antiwar movement: the report prior to the National Peace Action Coalition-Student Mobilization Committee joint steering committee meeting on December 2, 1972, by Syd Stapleton and the report to the antiwar fraction at the YSA convention on November 23 by Mark Ugolini.

For further information on the war and the antiwar movement, comrades should refer to the recent issues of The Militant, International Socialist Review, and Intercontinental Press. The International Report to the YSA convention will appear in a forthcoming issue of The Militant. The YSA reports that the Political Report to the YSA convention will appear in a YSA internal information bulletin soon.

Comradely,

Lew Jones (RS)
Lew Jones
National Office

JOINT SMC-NPAC STEERING COMMITTEE FRACTION REPORT

by Syd Stapleton

A period of critical danger for the Vietnamese revolution opened last May, when it became clear that the Soviet Union and China had simultaneously reached a detente with the United States at the expense of the Vietnamese, which permitted the mining of Haiphong harbor.

The Vietnamese are under fierce U.S. military pressure especially from the unprecedented bombing level. The lack of response by the Soviet Union and China and their desire to see a settlement has made the situation of the Vietnamese even more precarious. Under these circumstances the Vietnamese national liberation front and North Vietnamese government have agreed to make major concessions to imperialism in Southeast Asia, in the form of the "9-point proposal."

It is our estimate that the present delays in signing the accord by the Nixon administration does not mean that Nixon and Kissinger are unwilling to accept these concessions as the basis for a cease-fire. What the Nixon administration is actually doing we believe is attempting to gouge even more concessions from the Vietnamese.

A recent issue of the New York Times listed some of the further agreements that the U.S. would like to extract from the Vietnamese. Those that have been publicly acknowledged include: extension of the cease-fire to Laos and Cambodia, re-establishment of the DMZ, greater withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, and agreement which would insure an unlimited supply of conventional weapons to the Saigon forces.

Further, the U.S. has now made clear that it will retain at least 54,000 military personnel on air bases in Thailand, and another 60,000 in the Seventh Fleet off the shores of Vietnam.

Every indication remains that the most likely variant in this situation is that the cease-fire will be signed within a relatively short period of time--perhaps even within a few weeks. This likelihood is not a certainty, but there has thus far been no indication that either side is not prepared to sign the agreement.

The 9 points resolve none of the social contradictions that originally produced the war. Even if the accords are signed, a highly explosive and unstable situation can exist in Vietnam for a considerable, if not indefinite, period of time.

The explosive potential of the Vietnamese situation, however, cannot be the basis of our assessment of what it is possible to do in terms of building the antiwar movement. We must base our projections on the situation as it is today, while keeping in mind that an explosion, while not likely, could change our tasks almost overnight.

The National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) and the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC) are mass-action coalitions. They have existed on the basis of an agreement to march down the street on a particular day under a particular demand, attempting to mobilize in action the mass opposition to American involvement in Vietnam. If the accords are signed the U.S. will have agreed to withdraw its combat troops within 60 days. This fact plus the Vietnamese characterization of the accord as a "just settlement" will cause the American people to feel that the war is over,

even though all the basic social problems will still exist in Vietnam. This situation will curtail the ability of NPAC and the SMC to organize mass actions. In the event of the 9 points being signed, we believe that there is very little that the mass-action coalitions could do.

This does not mean that we propose that NPAC and the SMC should be dissolved. The cease-fire has not been signed, the bombing is going on at an unprecedented level, and there are 30,000 U.S. troops still in Vietnam. Protest actions may be required. It may even be possible for local actions of some significance to be held if the signing of the cease-fire is delayed for several months. Over the longer term, assuming that the cease-fire is signed, there will remain a need for coalition forms to be available to respond to possible developments in Vietnam.

NPAC and SMC's ability to respond in such an event will depend on their maintaining their character as coalitions based on mass action. There will be a temptation--because of the present narrowness of the coalitions--to forget that they exist on a very simple and rigidly defined political basis. NPAC and the SMC exist to build mass actions against the war. They do not have a worked out ideological framework, nor can they. They are not organizations to defend political prisoners, or fight for amnesty or whatever.

The limits on NPAC and the SMC can be seen in relation to the situation around the 9 points. NPAC and the SMC cannot take a position on the role of the Soviet Union and China in the Vietnam war without reducing the potential breadth of the coalition to Trotskyists and their supporters.

NPAC and the SMC can explain to the American people that the U.S. is not "out now"--and has no intention of getting out. But NPAC and the SMC are not in business to polemicize with those forces (including the Vietnamese) who maintain that the 9 points represent something of a victory for the Vietnamese revolution.

Anyone who thinks that the 9 points are a step forward, but who is still ready to march for "out now," should be, and must be, welcome in NPAC and the SMC. Otherwise, they will not be coalitions in any sense of the word.

The recent perspective for NPAC and the SMC means that more areas will not be able to sustain paid staffs and rented offices. This will mean a post office box, a person responsible for the mail, etc., and minimal activities depending on the status of the cease-fire. One important part of this perspective will be that the coalitions settle their financial obligations and work out a serious plan for dealing with whatever political problems may arise as the result of debts.

We have to keep in mind that this will be a difficult period for the independents whose main political activity for the last several years has been through the antiwar movement. Every single independent we have talked to is concerned with the means of continuing NPAC, and many think the SWP and YSA are in the process of trying to bury NPAC and the SMC. We must be sensitive to this fear, explain that this is not our position and judge proposed activities on their own merits--not reject any suggestions out of hand. The criteria for our support to any proposed activity should be whether or not it is possible, and whether or not it would adversely affect the character of the coalitions if it was carried out. We should certainly be prepared to put energy into whatever coalition

activities will be of real service in the struggle for self-determination of Vietnam.

It is our opinion that a call for an NPAC convention should not be issued at this time. It would obviously be difficult to build, and would very likely involve a confrontation between the assorted sects present at such gatherings and ourselves. There would be no major proposal for action and only a very thin layer of independents. Under such circumstances, the convention would only be a demoralizing experience, a defeat, and would undermine the united front character of NPAC.

In the absence of a convention, we will want to make every effort to discuss the situation around the war with activists around the country. Formal meetings or informal discussions will allow us the best opportunity for the broadest possible discussion of our ideas.

Beyond that, the SWP and the YSA have a large role to play in the coming months. Our propaganda campaign, especially in The Militant, forums, etc., in defense of the Vietnamese revolution can be crucially important in drawing the lessons of the recent experiences in Vietnam for thousands of activists around the country. Every activity that the SWP and YSA conduct in this area will pay off--not only in strengthening the revolutionary movement in this country--but in laying a solid basis for continued struggle against U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

December 2, 1972