

Translation of the speech of
Mr. Palme, Minister of Educa-
tion, at the Vietnam demonstra-
tion on 21 February, 1968.

Democracy is an exacting system of government.

It demands respect for others. One cannot force a system of government upon a nation from outside. The people must have the right to decide over their own destiny. It therefore presupposes national right of self-determination.

Democracy demands justice. One cannot gain a people by filling the pockets of those who are already rich while the poor are driven into ever deeper distress. One cannot meet the demand for social justice by violence and military power. Democracy presupposes social liberation.

The goal of democracy can never be reached by means of oppression. One cannot save a village by wiping it out, putting the fields on fire, destroying the houses, captivating the people or killing them.

These are basic points for judging the war in Vietnam.

The opinion against the war in Vietnam gains strength by being able to point to facts. For this war is not some temporary bewilderment, it does not reflect a centre of crisis which has suddenly flared up. It has a long history where events have developed themselves with a terrible logic.

Three dates are of particular prominence in this chain of events.

The first date is 1945.

Vietnam was a French colony. It was captured by the Japanese in their endeavour to create an Asiatic empire. The Japanese were defeated. But the conception of the superiority of the white man was shaken. When the French tried to recapture its colony they were met by a people who demanded national right of self-determination. The resistance movement in the war against the Japanese became the core in a movement which demanded liberty from all foreign intruders. It derived inspiration from the American Declaration of Independence. It put reliance on the United States in its demand for independence. It was considered that promise had been given

to this effect. It proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

But the colonial power decided to recapture and assert its domination by force. And the United States decided to take side with the French.

That is how the war in Vietnam began, a war against foreign intruders. It is this war which is still going on.

The French and their local allies lost. They lacked the support of the people. The fighting spread to larger and larger parts of the country. The United States came to the aid. It is probable that early in the 1950's the Americans paid 70% - 80% of the French war-costs.

But it did not help. The dream of the French colonial power crashed at Dien-Bien-Puh. And peace negotiations started at Geneva.

So now we have come to the second date: 1954.

Cease-fire of the Vietnam war was concluded on 20 July, 1954. The country was provisionally partitioned. But it was a temporary, military conditioned demarcation line. After two years - in July 1956 - free elections under international supervision were to be held in the whole country. After that the country was to be united.

The United States had opposed the Geneva agreement. The United States would not sign the agreement. There were no free elections. Vietnam remained partitioned.

The United States declared instead that it wanted to build up a strong democratic alternative in South Vietnam. Organizational aid and enormous sums of money were staked on this alternative.

The regime in Saigon, which received support from the United States, combined a dictatorship's brutal persecution of the people holding different opinions with a total contempt of simple demands for justice in respect of the social and economic conditions of the people. There was some talk of land reform. Viet-Minh had distributed land to the farmers. But it was said that the old landowners and usurers accompanied the baggage-train trucks of the troops who declared that they had come as liberators to the villages. For the farmers it was not liberators who came. It was their old oppressors.

For this reason the people rose against the regime in Saigon. There is nothing which contradicts that, when the

fighting started afresh, it was essentially a question of a spontaneous popular rising against a corrupted and hateful regime.

Just as it had gone badly for the French it went badly for the regime in Saigon. The people starved and corruption flourished. The United States interfered on an increasing scale. The escalation started. The number of advisors rose, became units, became divisions, became large bodies of dispatched troops consisting of hundreds of thousands of men. The largest military machine in the world began to put in all its power to break down the resistance in this small country.

But it still went badly.

So now we have reached the third date, February 1965, three years ago these days.

At that time the bombing of North Vietnam began. As the Vietnam war was declared to be the deed of a foreign intruder, the blow had to be directed against this foreign intruder. There was no declaration of war. It has not yet been made.

But during these three years more bombs have been dropped over North Vietnam than over Nazi Germany during the last World War. We know what this has meant of material destruction, of suffering for the individuals.

These events give us a feeling of agitation, sympathy, despair. But feelings can quickly flare up and equally quickly disappear if they do not find a hold in a cause or context. We should therefore be aware that these sufferings of individuals are the bitter logical consequence of an erroneous and deeply unjustified policy conducted over the past 20 years.

It is sometimes discussed if the policy of the United States in Vietnam is due to misjudgments or an expression of an imperialism of capitalism. My opinion is: No wise capitalist can be so unreasonably foolish. But no one can be so unreasonably foolish unless there are also economic interests in the picture.

In spite of the enormous military contribution, things are going badly, presumably worse and worse for the United States in Vietnam.

The whole world therefore trembles at the thought of the next step. The questions are put in fear: Shall it be nuclear weapons? Who then remain to liberate? And would this not mean that a third World War is a fact?

Shall the blow be directed against the dams of the Red River? It would be a terrible annihilation of human beings.

Or shall the inexorable series of illusions and failures result at last in giving the people of Vietnam peace and national right of self-determination?

Negotiations is a worn word. For many in Vietnam it has a bad resonance. For them negotiations have often meant not the end of a war, but the introduction to treachery. Their distrust must therefore be considerable. For this reason they look for guarantees that the negotiations will not become only a temporary cease-fire, but will lead to obvious results, to peace and liberty from foreign intruders. They also know better than others the devastation of war and they have the largest military power in the world, with half a million troops, as their opponent. They have from bitter experience been forced to become realists.

It is sometimes said that Hanoi and FNL do not want to negotiate and that they reject all proposals to this effect. But this is not quite right. As recently as in a New Year's message, Foreign Minister Trinh stated that North Vietnam is prepared to enter into negotiations on the unconditional stopping of the bombing of North Vietnam.

It is therefore that a growing international opinion stubbornly and with ever increasing strength has agreed upon an appeal to the United States. Put an unconditional stop to the bombing of North Vietnam. Admit FNL as equal partner to the negotiation table. Not until then will there be any negotiations. Then there may be peace. Then there must be national right of self-determination for the people of Vietnam.

It should be a self-evident obligation for all European Governments to give an expression of this opinion with force and resolution.

In this way facts and evaluations can lead us to certain conclusions.

The United States maintain that they want to defend the democratic rights of the people of Vietnam against foreign

intruders. But if one is to speak of democracy in Vietnam, it is obvious that this is represented in a considerably higher degree by FNL than by the United States and its allied juntas.

This is an assertion based on facts. The foremost characteristic of democracy is the support of the people, anchorage among the people.

Nobody denies that in 1945 Ho-Chi-Minh had the support of the people against the French colonial power. Nobody denies that at the free elections which, according to the Geneva agreement, were to be held in 1956, Viet-Minh would have won an overwhelming victory. President Eisenhower has pointed out that Ho-Chi-Minh would undoubtedly have received 80% of the votes. It was for that reason that no elections were held. Nor does anybody deny that the Diem regime, which was installed in Saigon to represent the so-called "democratic alternative", became intensely detested by the people. It was overthrown in 1963 and is missed by nobody.

Nor would anybody allege that, in reality, the present junta bases its position on the support of the people. It is, as you know, an established fact that corruption, inefficiency, indifference to social demands are more widespread than ever. A regime which requires the aid of more than 500,000 American soldiers to be able to survive one single day has not got the support of the people.

The fighting which has been going on during the last few weeks has shown to the opinion throughout the world that the Vietnam war is a revolt against those who oppress fundamental social and human rights. This revolt constitutes a social movement with deep roots among the people. If this revolt had not, in all essentials, had the support of the people, the attacks against towns all over South Vietnam could not have been so successfully accomplished.

But somebody may then say: Maybe FNL has the support of the people today. But we cannot support FNL, because if FNL wins and comes into power the new regime will oppress the people.

Today we know nothing with certainty about this because FNL has had so few chances to show its deeds in peace-time. But we have access to the programme of FNL. I recommend a study of this programme. It demands a wide coalition in the

fight against the Americans and a coalition government when victory is won. The domestic policy programme could be accepted on the whole by, for example, the political parties in Sweden. But it is obvious that we cannot today adopt an attitude to and take responsibility for what a movement in another country may do when it comes into power.

But the objections are first and foremost founded on principles. On what grounds can we deny the right of the Vietnamese people to choose its own regime? It cannot be the object of democracy to make itself a guardian for other peoples. On the contrary, it is an abuse of the fundamental ideas of democracy.

One thing we know with certainty. Worse social conditions than now, greater human sufferings than now - when it is alleged to be saved for the sake of democracy - the people of Vietnam will conceivably not have to suffer at any time.

Maybe somebody will say: In Vietnam thousands of American soldiers are killed who feel that they are fighting for democratic ideals. It is, without a doubt, horrible. It is horrible that young men shall be killed, wounded, mutilated - sacrificed unnecessarily for an unworthy purpose in an unjustified war. They could have important tasks to build a better society in their own nation or in constructive work in the fight against poverty and starvation in the world. They could promote the tradition of candour and generosity, of bold efforts for the future which still survive in America. An active international opinion should be able, among other things, to contribute towards giving them this possibility.

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For many years we have heard that the war in Vietnam is also necessary in order to protect other people's democratic freedom from Chinese aggression.

They say that if Vietnam falls then the whole South-East Asia will fall, then all the countries in the world run the risk of falling like ninepins in the face of a new imperialism having its centre in Peking. All democratic countries should therefore, in their own real interest, support the American military contribution in Vietnam.

This argument was propounded already in 1945 as a reason for supporting the French colonial power. The difference is only that the present regime in Peking did not exist then.

The allegation is really exceptionally doubtful. Maybe it is to the contrary. For example, it pays no heed to the history of Vietnam. But it is the principal aspect with which I am most immediately concerned.

Consequently, it would thus be that it is for the sake of our welfare that the people in Vietnam are suffering.

We are thus offered to sacrifice the right of self-determination, welfare, the physical existence of a small nation so that we may live in better security.

This is not the way we want to meet our future.

Because, what is the utmost consequence of the line of thought, not least if this situation is to be inexorably repeated time after time?

The national right of self-determination becomes a danger, the social liberation a threat, changes in the established order of things a risk to prevent. We are called upon to man the entrenchments and redoubts of the privileged groups, to furious defence of a way of living which has been accorded the rich.

And the circle will become more and more limited. Because the people will begin to search for their liberty, the demand for social liberation will become increasingly stronger, the longing for justice, better standard of living, freedom from poverty and starvation will on an increasing scale leave its impression on the world we live in. If we try to erect armoured walls around the rich, then the road will lead to reaction and fascism in our cultural circle.

But it need not be so.

Because within the international opinion there is another current growing, which is becoming stronger and stronger, an opinion which wants to put its reliance on generosity and fraternity across the frontiers, which acknowledges human rights and which knows that it is the social reality which first and foremost needs to be changed.

The opinion against the war in Vietnam is a hopeful and joyful sign, not only for peace and liberty in Vietnam, but

also when seen in a wider perspective.

It is an international movement of solidarity which is not based upon narrow selfish interests, but puts its reliance on joint responsibility, the feeling of a common obligation, willingness to exercise fraternity in a practical way. It therefore points towards the future in a constructive reality.

Sometimes it is alleged that Europe supports the war of the United States in Vietnam. It is said that it is only small groups which are driven to resistance by reason of a fanatic hate of America.

This is wrong. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of people in Europe disassociate themselves from this war, want to have an end put to the sufferings, want to give the people of Vietnam the right to decide over their own future. This democratic opinion does not experience the war of the United States in Vietnam as a support for democracy, but as a threat against the democratic ideas, not only in Vietnam but also throughout the world.

We believe in democracy because a democratic system of government, in spite of all its shortcomings, provides an active participation and an everyday consideration of the individuals which no despotism can dream of ever achieving. But democracy must never imply resistance against national liberty and social justice. It should be a road leading to the liberation of people. We do not wish to have a future where the rich, with the aid of force and oppression, shall guard their privileges. We want to have a world of equality in which people can live.

Therefore, Vietnam is not far away. Its people are near us. These people must at last be given peace and independence.