By Mr. Malcolm Fraser, Member for Wannon and Minister for Defence

The parades in protest against the Vietnam war known as the Moratorium were held on May 8, 9 and 10. With the exception of some minor isolated disturbances - some of which were probably understandable - they were peaceful and orderly.

Everyone wants to see protest or dissent carried out in a responsible, orderly manner. This was a demonstration that had been planned for some time, and had been given no small amount of publicity. Many of the people who gathered to attend these parades were people who genuinely and sincerely yearned for peace, either in Vietnam or anywhere else where there was military conflict. The Moratorium went ahead against the sobering background of recent student deaths in the United States and public discussion in Australia on the possibility of violence taking place here.

On the Monday following the Moratorium period the news stories came in from overseas telling of violence and injury in demonstrations against U.S. intervention in Cambodia in many major overseas cities. One report said 60 London policemen were injured in incidents in those cities. We have been used to the gathering toll of protest violence overseas, the increasing acts of extremism, the destruction of property, the injuries to people - many of whom are often innocent bystanders. This has ensued through takeover of the streets, through violent demonstration in the streets. I am not saying that it would necessarily happen in Australia in future demonstrations of this sort, but the history of these occurrences shows the potential dangers inherent in mass street demonstrations.

Often there is no intent to violence. But a crowd urged forward, a gathering of people caught up with the emotion of a crowd not under real discipline, is often hard to stop. Sometimes, it does not take much to turn order into unruliness - perhaps a small minority in a crowd resorting to violence, sometimes in outbreaks between protest groups and those controlling them. In these circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine order dissolving into violence and I think this is generally more well understood than many demonstration organisers are prepared to admit. It is very much to the credit of the demonstration that violence did not occur in Australia.

This, then, is the situation in which many sincere people find themselves. They abhor war; they would like to see it ended. They would prefer to see nations living in understanding and respect of each other. We would all want that situation. Unfortunately, it is not the perfect world we would all want it to be. It is a very real and often harsh world, and one has to be realistic about it. If a drought comes it is no good saying that it does not exist; if a flood, it is no answer to turn one's back and say that the raging water will die down. To want peace is one thing; to achieve it is another.
Everyone has a right to protest, to express his or her views against what may be regarded as socially, morally or in any way wrong - to express opposition, however mild or bitter, against laws, regulations, and decisions. But in the opinion of many people - and I do not include only politicians in this - those sincere people seeking peace are going the wrong way about it. They probably see around them other sincere and genuine people bent on the same mission. They perhaps do not often see the other people who have other objectives - the cause of the Communist Party. These are the people who say they want peace, but who really want and work for a North Vietnamese victory in Vietnam. The foreign policy of the Communist Party has always been that Australia is wrong, that the United States is wrong, that our friends are wrong, and that our enemies are always right. The Communist Party has never had any other view. One might recall that they considered World War II wrong until Russia was attacked - and then suddenly it was a "just" war. Today, it must be difficult for many people to understand the support generally given by the Labor Party for the Moratorium. It is assumed ALP members had the insight to perceive the hands of the Communists at work in that campaign. Here were members of the Labor Party in step with the Communist Party, against a background of unfurled Viet Cong flags. It is, I believe, a tragedy that their advocacy for these demonstrations gives such an aura of respectability to the Communist Party.

Many people were surprised when Senator Wheeldon said in Parliament during the week, and I quote, "I personally, I do not deny, do support the Viet Cong because I believe that the Viet Cong represents the great mass of the South Vietnamese people. I make no apology for this." Those were the words used by Senator Wheeldon. They were received with a sense of shock. I never thought I would see the day that a member of the Australian Parliament would stand and declare his support for an enemy who were ranged against our own troops in the battlefield.

In a speech during debate on this present issue in Parliament, I referred to the Member for Lalor, Dr. Cairns, who has said that individuals have a right to break laws. He has said that he hoped that the commercial and industrial life of cities would be held up as a result of demonstration. He said there was a right to occupy the streets - a term strangely reminiscent of the circumstances that occurred in Paris time and time again during the course of France's history when one republic was overthrown by revolution and replaced by another.

Numbers of Australian Labor Party members, from the Federal and State spheres, consistently backed the Moratorium and supported this disturbing of the normal business and commercial life of our cities. This leads me to a charge which cannot easily be denied - that they are therefore seeking to change Australian policies by demonstration and this is not part, nor should it be part, of our democratic process. The way of occupying the streets, the way of disrupting...
traffic, obstructing pedestrians and interfering with the rights of citizens generally is designed to change the policies that have been supported in election after election by the Australian people. It indicates a lack of willingness by the Australian Labor Party to accept the verdict of the Australian people in elections. Australian citizens and members of political parties have full opportunity to seek to change laws if they muster a majority of the Australian people in their support. But the Australian Labor Party through its long and sorry history in recent years has not been able to muster that majority support and therefore it has taken to the streets to try to achieve what it has not been able to achieve through the ballot box. What the Party appears to be accepting is a denial of acceptance of majority rule, and this is not part of the Australian way.

I recall that I told Parliament that it should be noted that the war in Vietnam had always been more difficult to understand, and therefore always more capable of confusion by those who wanted to defeat the purpose which is in Australia's best interests. This confusion had arisen out of the nature of the conflict. The Communists had learned in Korea that if ever again they amassed armies and moved across a border at one stroke they would bring the wrath and power of the free world upon them. So they tried a different kind of tactic. They tried a war of national liberation, a war in which they dribbled a few people over the South Vietnamese border at a time. This seeks to undermine the structure of the country to demonstrate that the national government cannot offer and cannot afford security. As the years passed the aggression developed into a more conventional kind. Divisions of North Vietnamese troops infiltrated down the trails and across the borders into South Vietnam. Despite this continued aggression, there have been significant progress in recent years.

For example, there have been a number of nationwide elections, there has been great military progress in the performance of the South Vietnamese Army and greater responsibility for its own defence. There has been progress in the civil field - with greater production of the basic commodities. Given time, I believe the tactics and purposes of fighting for the independence and the right of the Vietnamese to determine their own future will succeed. However, it is the objective of the Moratorium - and the policy of the Labor Party - to withdraw immediately. The apparent conclusion is that if Americans and Australians withdraw from Vietnam there will be peace and security for everyone there. Nothing could be further from the truth. Withdrawal now would ensure that the time will not arrive for the people of South Vietnam when they can continue on their own account. In that event, a northern Communist victory would be assured.
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