On Tuesday in Federal Parliament the Labor Party moved urgently to have the House discuss its view that there should be immediate withdrawal of our troops from Vietnam, and sought, as the Labor Party put it, "international action to end hostilities and undertake rehabilitation in Indo-China."

That debate was interesting, for it showed up the ALP's policy of withdrawal, of desertion of our allies at a time when demonstrable progress has been made in Vietnam and of Labor's desire that we should turn our backs on the South-East Asian region and isolate ourselves on our own soil.

In the debate I pointed out that to withdraw completely from the region would not add to Australian security, but would do a great deal to harm it; damage it over a period. Our objective in Vietnam is the same as it always was - to establish the circumstances in which the people of South Vietnam can work out their own future without interference, without aggression and without fear.

I considered it of the utmost importance that I should point out to the House the sort of progress that has been going on in Vietnam. There has been military, political and economic progress. The one million men in the South Vietnamese forces have been improving their capabilities and accepting additional obligations, especially in the last 18 months. Elections were held throughout the country in conditions of turmoil. At the end of last year there were over 2,000 villages and nearly 10,000 hamlets which had elected administrations and only 90 villages and 330 hamlets which had appointed administrations. Elected governments have been established at the national level. Rice production has been rising and imports this year are likely to be half what they were last year.

The United States has announced a phased withdrawal programme. From a peak of 550,000 troops in November 1968, the U.S. Government has at the moment over 400,000 troops of all services in Vietnam and these, according to announcements, will reduce to something like 260,000 during the middle part of next year. This, however, is still a strong commitment to help preserve and maintain the integrity of South Vietnam. The Australian Government has announced the withdrawal of a battalion - the 8th - and some supporting troops, and these will be home in Australia in November.

But to help the South Vietnamese undertake the additional military obligations in Phuoc Tuy Province, we are establishing mobile advisory training teams - probably 15 altogether - to assist the regional force and popular force companies. Already five teams are operating, and initial reports indicate that this new programme is being successful. The jungle warfare training school which we are helping to establish with the South Vietnamese will ultimately train about 500 junior leaders at any one time.
I pose the question — why does the Labor Party want to withdraw from Vietnam immediately? Was it, I asked, because that Party was tired? Was it because it was merely looking for votes in Australia, knowing that everyone would prefer to have troops here if this were the responsible and proper course to undertake? Did the Party believe that South Vietnam was not worthy of protection? Did it consider it a civil war? On this last point, it is pertinent to ask if North Korea now attacked South Korea, would the Labor Party say it was just a civil war? I would have thought that what has happened in Cambodia has revealed North Vietnamese aggression even to the most blind.

While he may not be one of the most blind, the Cambodian situation certainly revealed North Vietnamese aggression to the Labor Party Victorian member, Mr. Gordon Bryant, whose recent denunciation of that blatant aggression came as a shock to his political colleagues.

I went on to show how, in the face of 41 international efforts to bring peace to Vietnam, it was the North Vietnamese negotiators or those of the National Liberation Front who had opposed or obstructed these bids for peace. At home we had the sorry spectacle of Victoria's Dr. Cairns — a possible Minister for External Affairs in a Labor Government — who sought to bring to Australia representatives of the National Liberation Front so that they could publicise their cause in a future Moratorium. What would the parents and relatives of Australian troops think of a political leader in this country asking the spokesmen of the very people against whom our troops are fighting to come to Australia and put their case?

If the Australian Labor Party wants the North Vietnamese to win in Vietnam, they should stand up and say so, as their colleague in the Senate, Senator Wheeldon, had stated so clearly. In short, withdrawal of our troops, as the Labor Party has proposed, would involve repudiation of our allies on both sides of the Pacific. And there are other allies in the South-East Asian region, and if we fail to live up to our responsibilities this is something that we will never live down. After all, the years of struggle on their part and the shorter period of support from her allies, it would be tragic now if our own stamina and fortitude gave up when we are getting into the last stretch of the Vietnam conflict. At least, that is the hope...that is the belief...and that is what we are working for.

Isolation, renunciation of responsibilities, call it what you like — is the only logical conclusion that comes from the Labor Party's policy. It is withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Whitlam spent his time in the area on a recent visit lecturing the Malaysians and Singaporeans on what they should be doing at the very time when the British defence minister was in those two countries beginning to work out the terms and
conditions in which there would be a continuing British military presence in those countries. I made the point in the Parliamentary debate that the Opposition sometimes spoke as if they were the only advocates of peace. But there is not a person in the Parliament who does not want peace in this region and security in South East Asia. But we want a peace which does not deny what decent men stand for. And, I continued, the Opposition's policies would I believe make that denial.

The Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Country Party, Mr. John McEwen entered the debate. He spoke following a Labor member, Mr. Morrison, who had summed up his remarks with the words that it was past time for the withdrawal of all Australian forces. Mr. McEwen talked about how our whole democratic system of government was based on the fact that although there were differences of opinion within a community, free elections were held, a government was elected by the majority and the laws that the Parliament passes prevail. But now the left wing of the unions with their leader Mr. Hawke and the left-wing dominated ALP with Mr. Whitlam as its voice all combined by demonstrations, strikes and threats of strike, to defy elected government and defy the laws of Parliament. An attempt was being made, he said, to undermine the will of the people to continue resistance to Communist aggression. He said he thought there were moves, desperate efforts, to embarrass the Government and to give effect to the urgent ambition of some who, for the passing advantage of destroying a Government and changing sides in the House were willing to pay the price of sacrificing all respect for Australian democracy.

Men in our community had, through turmoil and tears, built our reputation as a staunch and reliable ally, Mr. McEwen said. The proposal Labor put before the House would be an act of shame in the eyes of the United States, South Vietnam, South Korea, New Zealand and others.

He went on and I quote - "Who in the world wishes to destroy the treaty with the United States? I am not accusing the Labor Party of wishing to destroy it. Who but the Communists wish to destroy it? I am saying that there are many who are unwittingly acting as tools of the Communists. The Communists wish to destroy our alliance with the United States and to end the trust in which we are held in South East Asia ..."

Mr. McEwen said with one stroke Labor's proposal would make Australia a shameful object of derision internationally. Most important, it would draw the attention of the world to the fact that Australia, by its own choice, alone in a lonely part of the world, had thrown away its alliances. Could we turn to another ally? Where was there another powerful ally in the world to whom we could turn? Labor, influenced by ambition and by sinister leftist forces, would leave Australia friendless internationally, Mr. McEwen said. It would put a
label on this country - "I am a lonely, remote, rich, helpless country; come and take me.". Labor's policy, the Deputy Prime Minister emphasised, was to destroy the authority of Parliament at home and to spurn alliances abroad. There had never been a more tragic policy in the national interests of Australia and her survival than the policy that Labor was propounding today.
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