

Comment by Michael C H Jones
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The speeches and responses to questions by Presidents Obama and Quang in Hanoi Vietnam are memorable and potentially launching a new epoch in Asian history over the next few decades. Arguably they might have been made, in different locations and by different Presidents, at the end of the Second World War and during the establishment of the United Nations and negotiation of the two Human Rights Covenants during the late 1940s. Ho Chi Minh made the offer, but Harry Truman under pressure from Winston Churchill rebuffed the opportunity. In Australia the Ben Chifley led Federal Labor Government went weak at the knees and lost the 1949 election.

Historically, for thousands of years, the great barrier to the alleged Downward Thrust of China - Imperial, Communist or otherwise - has been Vietnam. We argued so in 1965 when the US and Australia, against the stringent opposition of Europe, particularly France, England and West Germany, intervened in the Vietnamese Civil War with the resulting debasement of all our Christian and Human Rights values and pretensions in what was essentially a racist war. Australia's internationally reputation was only saved, certainly prior to the Vietnam Moratoriums of 1970/71, by the draft resisters, those relatively few young men who refused to register for conscription at age 20 and went to jail. The solidarity with the progressive side of the US Democratic Party, the Bernie Sanders supporters of the 1960s, reaffirmed linkages that went back to the Second and First World Wars and the trade union traditions of the IWW of 1905 and their forebears of the 19th century. There was a unity of purpose between the hundreds of thousands opposing the draft in the US and the thousands across Australia.

And so after more than a decade, 1962-75, of needless bloodshed and carnage, and the ongoing over 40 years of trying to repair the horrendous legacy of US and Australian intervention, we arrive at the start, 1945-49, again. Will Malcolm Turnbull or Bill Shorten apologise for Australia's inhumanity if and when they are elected Prime Minister in early July, after all we live in the age of our leaders saying "I am sorry". Who are now the forgotten people? The 500 Australian dead "heroes" or the relatively few jailed draft resisters, the "cowards and traitors" of their era. US President Bill Clinton changed US foreign policy to Vietnam in 1995, he visited the country in November 2000 and again with perhaps the next US President, his wife Hillary, in July 2015, and now President Obama is visiting both Hanoi and Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City. The next Australian Prime Minister needs to officially visit Vietnam as a matter of priority.

There are lessons to be learnt from the debacle of Vietnam and subsequently Iraq. Our protests against the Australian "advisers" from 1962 were not understood by the politicians, media, business, unions and most of the churches - they were all totally wrong and Australian lives were lost or damaged as a result, not to mention the 4/5 million dead Vietnamese including about 3 million civilians - just visit the Saigon War Museum as I did in October last year. Again the biggest demonstration ever in Sydney was the protest march against Howard's support for the Bush invasion of Iraq. The media claimed 500,000 marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the aboriginal "Sorry Day", if so the Iraq protest was bigger re 600,000, and I sat on the corner of George and Park streets counting. What an unmitigated disaster was and is Iraq. Someone once said "Don't get involved in land wars in Asia". The old Soviet Union re Russia also learned the hard way in Afghanistan. But US President Obama now has his drones !!!! I wonder how effective they would be if the Chinese PLA ever decided to put a million men across the Taiwan Strait/ Black Ditch, part of the South China Sea, into Taiwan Province?

A principal lesson about Power is that those with power will never give it up voluntarily, they will seek to institutionalise it by laws and inevitably use the coercion of the state to enforce/maintain

their power. It can be draconian and murderous as in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, brutal and arbitrary as in today's China and Vietnam or subtle and discriminatory as in the present US and Australia - some would argue that modern western police forces have until recently been the guidians of white collar criminals !!!! Police "murders" of mentally disturbed, mostly unarmed, poorly educated and semi-impooverished citizens are an anathema to a 21st century civilised democratic society.

And so in a globally Americanised world, even among the young in the urban centers of China and Vietnam, history will be re-invented every 3/5 years with new sensations and distractions as money spinners for those with real power. But this time it is a new global multicultural monied elite, best universities, best homes and luxuries, best high technology careers and constant travel - who cares what national governments think? Both the Liberal and Labor Parties, as well as the Green, in Australia - and their media groupies particularly in Canberra - are essentially an obnoxious short term and powerless deception that an ever increasing number of Australians are realising. Money is king, and that means in the medium to long run global corporations.

My experience in the protests of the 1960s Vietnam era taught me the lesson of real power or don't get in the way of business and money. But also the moral authority of the "minority of one" and the unnerving will of a people to resist arbitrary coercion. The Vietnamese people won their right to national sovereignty with that unseemly evacuation from the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975. However forty years later the big money corporations are back and the arms dealers have a huge new market. Remnants of colonialism remain, especially in the South West Pacific, communism is in semi-retirement despite the best efforts of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang, the European Union appears to be in "freefall" with structural governance impediments everywhere, and the United States faces an overwhelming rejection of its rulling elites. Nevertheless I put my faith in economic "money" over political "status" - just give the majority of people globally more bread and circuses.