

PRELIMINARY MOBILIZATION MEMORANDUM

by A. J. Muste

On November 26, 1966, a conference took place of some 150 individuals holding varying views about the war in Vietnam and connected with a great variety of organizations holding a strong anti-war position. They set up a Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. The provisional officers of that Committee are Rev. A. J. Muste, Chairman, and Vice-chairmen Edward Keating, publisher of Bumparts magazine; Professor Sidney Peck of Western Reserve University and Professor Robert Greenblatt of Cornell University (both members of the Council of the Inter-University Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy); and David Dellinger, editor of Liberation magazine. These officers and other members of the Spring Mobilization Committee, as was also the case with those attending the Cleveland November 26 conference, serve as individuals and not as formal or official delegates from organizations or parties.

The members of the Spring Mobilization Committee, as the name indicates, believe that 1967 should begin with a major effort to bring the Vietnam war to an end, hopefully culminating in a huge mobilization on or about April 15 in San Francisco for the West Coast and New York for the East. Members of the Committee believe that a rallying of forces is needed which is quantitatively so much more impressive than any previous effort as to constitute a qualitatively new development in the stop the war movement.

However, we are keenly aware that this is an immense undertaking. Its effectiveness will depend largely on the extent to which it represents unprecedented unity, in spite of differences, in the anti-war movement. This memo is, therefore, not a "Call" for a spring mobilization. This, we believe, should come from a broader base than we, at least as of now, represent. The purpose of this communication is accordingly to spread the idea among peace workers that a mobilization is contemplated, to facilitate discussions among many elements in the movement and to take in from the start as many persons and tendencies as possible in making plans for 1967.

It does not require a lengthy argument to convince opponents of the war that the months, perhaps it will prove to be days, ahead of us are certain to be critical. The Johnson administration will be forced to make very basic decisions. It may be a decision to escalate the war in such dimensions as to create a world crisis. It will almost certainly require the prolongation of the war and hence of the martyrdom of the Vietnamese people in the pursuit of the balance of power strategy in Asia in the nuclear age with the American power state seeking to play the dominant role by virtue, in the last analysis, of its military might. This is the outlook and strategic concept which expresses itself in such characteristic ideas of the American Establishment as the license of the President to wage undeclared war in support of any regime, so long as it is anti-Communist, in Asia or elsewhere; the President's idea that "we have what they" (the enemy, the "Communists", the impoverished masses) "want and will take away from us before long if we do not stop them now," all which leads to the exhortation to the GI's in Vietnam "to nail that coonskin to the wall."

It is conceivable that the Johnson administration may "get away with it" again. But it should be unthinkable that we ease the way by a feeling of let-down or hopelessness. Johnson and the war machine are things to be faced, to stand up to, as 1967 begins, not to stand in awe of or cringe before. Our task is to disarm them, not to be morally and politically disarmed by them.

Moreover, there are many factors moving in our favor: the wide-spread distrust

of the President, the "credibility gap"; the breach in the AFL-CIO which opens the way for the expression of criticism and dissent in the ranks of labor; the growth of radical anti-war sentiment in sections of the civil-rights movement; draft resistance among youth. There are multitudes of informed, professional and religious people in this country who radically dissent from the Johnson-Rusk-McNamara-Rostow line. There are probably some hundred thousand American leaders who privately share this dissent. If such people would make that public and act upon it, a great and salutary change in American life might take place. It could mean the breaking of an evil spell, a new day for mankind.

What, then, should be the program for the U.S., set forth by a spring mobilization? It has been suggested that it might read as follows:

1. Stop the bombing of North Vietnam.
2. Initiate unilateral cease-fire in South Vietnam.
3. Inclusion of the National Liberation Front - Vietcong in negotiations.
4. A clear commitment to withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region on the principle of self-determination for the Vietnamese.

The character of the event would be to direct our appeal of opposition to the war to humanity itself, and to build and strengthen ties of solidarity with people everywhere.

Along with such items relating specifically to foreign policy and the ending of the war, it has been emphasized in discussions so far held that during preparations for the Spring Mobilization, and the Mobilization itself, much attention should be given to what the war is doing to Americans and American life, such as the youth, the economy, the universities, the labor movement, the black people.

At the Cleveland Conference there were vigorous exchanges between those who felt that the anti-war movement desperately needed and could mount a visible demonstration of unity, the largest ever, against the abomination being perpetrated in Vietnam by the government of this country; and those on the other hand who emphasized instead the on-going work of organizations, the need of work on the campus and neighborhood level, geared to the immediate problems of people, thus seeking to develop a "truly democratic power base for radical action." We are assuming that, properly dealt with, these two approaches need not be antithetical but should and in fact have to be creatively integrated.

Our approach also assumed that, while we eagerly pursue the goal of an unprecedented mobilization in April and an unprecedented unity, we do not wish to reduce the program of any anti-war organization, nor do we have any desire to impose joint action or a particular form of joint action on others. We believe the crisis demands joint action, that the situation makes it urgent, and that in any event the possibilities should be honestly and vigorously explored without delay. We urge all who are interested and concerned to join in that effort.

Some years ago a crusader who called for action against war said: "What else are we waiting for?"

In a column which appeared in the N.Y. Post on Christmas Eve, Pete Hamill wrote: "Somehow, let the statesmen find a way out of Vietnam...Let the holiday truce never end. Let a Marine and a Vietcong look each other in the eye before shooting, and let them both miss. Somehow just stop the killing!" The truce ended promptly. The bombers took off from Guam on one of their biggest attacks on North Vietnam. The killing has been resumed.

AGAIN, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?