

February 1966

Interview:

AN EXCHANGE
WITH
VICE-PRESIDENT
HUMPHREY
by Robert Scheer



The Johnson Administration, despite continual reiteration of its offer of "unconditional discussions" on Vietnam, has left the main questions unanswered. Is the United States willing to negotiate a settlement which would allow the people of South Vietnam to determine whether it is to be the government in Saigon, the Viet Cong, or some combination of these or other forces which shall govern them? Would "our" side be willing to negotiate such a settlement with the Viet Cong? If the answers are negative, then the United States has imposed a very real condition—Hanoi's prior acceptance of the illegitimacy of the N.L.F. (Viet Cong).

On December 4th a group including Special Forces veteran Don Duncan (see page 15), University of California Mathematics Professor Morris Hirsch and myself raised these questions in an interview with Vice-President Humphrey at Moffett Naval Air Station. We felt that his answers deny the Administration's professed desire for a fair and negotiated peace. The meeting was closed to newsmen and although the Vice-Presidential staff recorded the interview, we were refused a copy. The partial transcript which follows was composed from our notes.

QUESTION: 1) Is the United States willing to negotiate with the N.L.F.?; 2) Does the United States favor free elections in which the N.L.F. would participate and would these elections be recognized if the N.L.F. won?

HUMPHREY: *The Administration's policy has long been one of self-determination and free elections in Vietnam; the winner is of no concern to us. If and when there is peace, elections will be held.*

QUESTION: Would the elections be recognized if the N.L.F. won?

HUMPHREY: *The Communists could never win a free election. Do you have any other*

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questions, gentlemen?

QUESTION: Mr. Humphrey, if the N.L.F. did win, however, would we abide by the results?

HUMPHREY: *The United States Government does not engage in 'ifs'. Do you have any other questions?*

QUESTION: Do you favor free elections in which the N.L.F. could participate?

HUMPHREY: *The Viet Cong is not a legitimate political force; it is an illegitimate, subversive, terroristic organization, supplied, directed and controlled by a foreign government.*

QUESTION: Would the United States allow the N.L.F. to participate in free elections?

HUMPHREY: *The Viet Cong is not a legitimate political party; elections are for people, not for terrorist groups. We would like to see elections held under the auspices of the United Nations or some other non-partisan organization.*

QUESTION: According to article 14 of the Geneva Accords, democratic liberties of all persons and organizations are to be upheld. Is not the N.L.F. a political organization?

HUMPHREY: *We believe in the freedom of political parties, but there is a difference between peaceful and terroristic, subversive parties.*

QUESTION: Why has there not been a clear statement made regarding the United States' willingness to negotiate with the N.L.F.?

HUMPHREY: *We will negotiate with the North Vietnamese and whomever they bring in. The United States negotiates only with governments, not with a band of wandering minstrels.*

QUESTION: But a peace was negotiated with the Viet Minh in 1954 and the Pathet Lao in 1962, and neither group was a government.

HUMPHREY: *The N.L.F. is not recognized as a government.*