APRIL 8

CANBERRA CITIZENS' STATEMENT ON WAR IN INDO-CHINA

In a statement issued last night, a number of Canberra citizens, including Bishop Burgmann, Professor Davidson, Professor Fitzgerald and Professor Manning Clark, expressed concern over recent developments in Indochina.

The statement said: "There is increasing evidence that the French Government, as well as the governments of the Asian members of the British Commonwealth, are becoming deeply concerned about recent developments in American policy towards Asia.

"It would be most unfortunate, if, at this stage, the Australian Government gave unqualified support to American policy without the fullest consultation of members of the British Commonwealth and the United States Parliament. Before Australian policy is determined there should be full and public discussion of this issue between the governments of the British Commonwealth."

"NATIONALIST MOVEMENT"

"It is often forgotten that the Vietminh movement, led by Ho Chi Minh, arose in Indo-China long before the Communist Government had come to power in China and was, in its original form, not a Communist but a nationalist movement aiming at the total independence of Vietnam from French rule.

"During the latter stages of the war, Japanese forces which already occupied Indo-China disarmed and interned the French garrison and put an end to French rule," the statement continued. "The Emperor of Annam, Bao Dai, thereupon declared the total independence of his country and ruled as an independent sovereign under Japanese protection until the Japanese surrender several months later. Bao Dai then abdicated and handed over his power to a government presided over by Ho Chi Minh, with whom he subsequently proclaimed the republic of Vietnam.

"By the terms of the Japanese surrender, Chinese Nationalist forces (the armies of Chiang Kai-shek) occupied northern Indo-China to disarm the Japanese troops, while South-East Asia Command troops (originally British) undertook this duty in the southern half of the country.

"The Chinese authorities protected and sustained the republic of Vietnam, that is to say, the (Communist) Vietminh movement. On the other hand, the returning French forces took charge of Saigon and put an end to Vietminh authority in that city.

"Subsequently, prolonged negotiation between the French Government and the republic of Vietnam, during which Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues visited France for a conference, failed to produce more than a temporary agreement under which French troops were admitted to Hanoi at the time that the Chinese Nationalist garrisons were withdrawn.

"Open strife between these French forces and the Vietminh followed the failure of the French Government to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam."

Victor Lee
Editorial Collective.