

T
Wednesday, September 6, 1967

(9)
FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Jim Jones

SUBJECT: Meeting with Vietnam Election Observers in the Cabinet Room.

Meeting Convened: 11:09 AM

Meeting Adjourned: 12:05 PM

The President opened the meeting thanking the observers for a good job and saying he is glad they are back safe. He pointed out that he had not asked any of them except one (John Knight) for their views in advance on Vietnam. John Knight volunteered the information. He said this group is reasonably representative of the United States at its best. "I am proud of you." He said he would call for individual reports around the room but none need to speak if they don't desire.

Governor Richard Hughes of New Jersey opened the individual reports pointing out that he went with an open mind. "These were clean elections." Hughes said the formal election safeguards were unimpeachable in his opinion. He talked to about 200 election board officials peasants, village chiefs, etc. The enthusiasm of the people was great and more so than he finds in Jersey City. They had a sense of nationhood and pride. The Government spent 175 million piasstras and this money was evenly divided on the election. "I was very enthusiastic including my enthusiasm for the talks with our military people."

Senator Bourke Hickenlooper said "I agree completely with Governor Hughes. All of us observed the preparations for the elections, and we observed the voting, and the counting of the ballots. I must echo what Governor Hughes said that the elections were fair. I was very impressed with the effort they put into making this an open and fair election. We have never been that careful."

Mayor Joseph Barr of Pittsburgh said "I was very impressed by the fact that they gave us every protection and I was greatly moved by our own troops. Their spirit is great and they know why we are there. I learned a lot about elections from these people."

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Governor Bill Guy - "Too much attention has been placed on the possibility of irregularities, and not enough on the other aspects. These people with great courage came out with a moving and profound example of desire for self-determination as much as I have seen anywhere. We visited a precinct at which a bomb went off and killed three and wounded six during the voting. They closed it for 45 minutes and then reopened it for more voting. I was very impressed." Guy pointed out that the winning candidate got 35% and his opponents got 65% - this is a fact that points out that there was no irregularity.

Governor Tom McCall said that of the 21 standards for voting which were given to the observers, the Vietnamese rated very favorably with any state in the United States.

Mayor Theodore McKeldin acknowledged that Ambassador Lodge and Eugene Locke did a good job of helping the Vietnam observers. He noted that he traveled with Mayor Barr over many parts of the country. In all of these travels he noticed only ^{very} slight irregularity at the Saigon City Hall. He said the Vietnamese were "splendid, wonderful people." He also noted that 35% was an excellent vote when you consider there were 11 in the race.

Reverend Edward L. R. Elson said "I think this is a great start toward nationhood. I was impressed with the plan laid out in Saigon and to see how well it was executed in the provinces. This was a noble political exercise for self enhancement and self determination." Elson said he was also impressed by the chaplains and the evacuation hospitals and he was impressed by the quality of young people in the diplomatic and military services.

Archbishop Robert Lucey said he was impressed by the so called second war of revolutionary development. "We saw men out in the hamlets teaching illiterate men how to practice democracy." He also said we should kill this stalemate issue. "There is no stalemate and there hasn't been." He pointed out that we should stop this wave of inaccurate statements adding that some people are "talking through their hats or berrettas." Those who talked against our action in Vietnam should go to Vietnam. Lucey also paid tribute to the "fine type of military men." He said they were just magnificent and it is just terrible that these men are called murderers. "This isn't the time to lie about the United States."

Rabbi P. Rudin - "There is nothing to which I would take any exception whatsoever. It was a great experience to watch the young, old, men, women, nuns and soldiers perform this most serious obligation of voting. The United States sometimes has a callousness about voting, but this was not true there. It was something new and different. I was deeply impressed by the quality of people you have there representing us. These young people are dedicated and dignified. Also, I want to point out that we were completely free agents and can travel wherever we want. This was America at it's finest."

Whitney Young - "I left here with some cynicism and skepticism based on newspaper accounts which I read. However, I returned completely satisfied that these were free elections as well as could be expected under the conditions." Young also pointed out that it was unprecedented even for older nations to have elections such as this. He said there were so many candidates, there is a high degree of illiteracy and they are in the middle of a war, but the elections were fair. We could put some of the lessons of the Vietnam elections to use in our own country, Young said. For example, he pointed out that all the candidates are given money, that women vote, and that 18 year olds vote. Young said he was also very pleased to see the military integrating into all aspects of the war. "There will come a time when they ^(S. V. M.) will take over the war." Young also said he met with several Negroes in the military. Young said the Negro in the military today in Vietnam is concerned with the effect of the riots in the U. S. They are disturbed by a Congress who penalizes all of the Negroes because of a handful of extremists.

W. P. Gullander called this one of his most interesting assignments ever. He was impressed by the enthusiasm of the people in Saigon and in the hamlets. "The important thing is at long last they have begun the democratic process. Even though we don't know about the make up of the Senate which was picked. This was an election of integrity." Gullander also praised the military saying its "top management are really tops." He said that there is not a man with one star and above that he would not be proud to serve under. He is very impressed by Westmoreland and Westmoreland's concern for his people. As far as answering the question - do we belong in Vietnam - Gullander said yes for two reasons: a.) our selfish interest, and; b.) "more so having seen the Vietnamese people, we just can't let them down."

Professor Donald Herzberg of Rutgers University - said he agreed with Governor Hughes and the others and cited some individual examples of impressions he received, particularly when he asked an old man why he was so excited. The old Vietnamese man replied "I'm 87 years old and I have never voted for a President before."

Eldon James, Former National American Legion Commander said he was impressed by many things but primarily by: a.) the feeling of warmth of the people; b.) the feeling of the desire of these people to be a part, and; c.) the feeling of pride of the Vietnamese people. James cited the example of an old man who got his ballot, was helped into the polling place and when he came out he was waving his ballot and smiling broadly. James said "this is magnificent."

John Knight of Knight Newspapers pointed out that he was the one that sought some assurances from the President before going to Vietnam that he would be an independent agent. Knight said he was very impressed by the documentation given to the group by the State Department and Bunker. Knight called Bunker the right man. He said he was very impressed by the top flight military staff. He also saw no voting irregularities. Knight said there are some problems, many of which depend upon how the elected government reacts. He said we cannot overlook the vote given Dzu. He said the pacification effort will be long and arduous. He doesn't agree with the liberty of the press impressions from Vietnam citing that two of the newspapers were closed before the election and one has been closed for about 10 months. Knight said he sought out the dissidents such as the suspended editors and the candidates who were not permitted to run and he heard them out thoroughly and fully and at the close he had the opinion that he would not want them running his country.

Senator Edmund Muskie said he could not add much to the impressions already mentioned except to say "I was impressed." He cited the regular training preparations for the election workers and said the election day spectacle was very impressive. As to the accusation of the pressure (which he described as hard to put your finger on) Muskie said on election day he deliberately watched the voters and he could not feel any pressure. "They came in freely and they voted freely." He said the problem now is one of unification and he did not know if Thieu and Ky are up to it. They are schooled in the authoritarian tradition, Muskie said.

James Antell, National Jaycee President, said that everything he saw indicated a free and fair election. He said the election workers followed the regulations to the letter. He was in Hue and a voter from Saigon tried to vote in Hue but the local official said this could not be done. He was also impressed by the fact that the ballots were made up so that the illiterate people had no trouble recognizing the candidates. Antell said that several of the younger U. S. military personnel expressed concern about what the people back home were thinking and whether they supported the war.

Ed Munro of the National Association of Counties said he was impressed by the devotion of the military and diplomatic corps to the democratic processes.

Professor Howard Penniman of Georgetown University stressed that there were more observers at this election than any election anywhere. He said no corruption had been proved nor had it been stated nor observed. Penniman said there are a lot of people who saw the elections and didn't want it to come out this way but it did.

Eugene Patterson of the Atlanta Constitution said this was a reasonably fair election, clouded only by the fact that two newspapers were closed and two candidates not permitted to run. He also pointed out that there were 48 slates and only six slates could be elected and this was not good to an unsophisticated electorate, but the organization of the election was good and it was a fair count. He cited the example of a village where one side of the road was controlled by the Viet Cong and another side by the government. He was talking to one Vietnamese Army Major who was trying to get out the vote. He pointed out that the Viet Cong said to these voters "you vote, you die." The Vietnamese Major told them "you vote, you live."

Joseph Scerra, National VFW Commander called this a "showcase election."

Stanford Smith of the American Newspaper Publishers Association said there was no plot to rig the election. "I had some misgivings before I left but I readily agree that this was a fair and free election. This was wise for us to do."

At this point the President praised Ambassador Lodge and called on him for comments. The President said Lodge has earned the President's gratitude and the appreciation of the world. "This was one of your proudest moments."

Ambassador Lodge paid tribute to the group, who were "short of sleep, endured very hot conditions and three became ill." He said they were always in good humor and uncomplaining, and they were very intelligent in their observations. They studied the past of these people to understand the elections.

At this point Mayor McKeldin interrupted to say "and no one tried to brainwash us." (This referred to Governor Romney's charge a day earlier that he had been brainwashed on Vietnam.)

The President then introduced the Members of the Cabinet who were filing into the Cabinet Room for the Cabinet meeting which immediately followed the report of the Vietnam observers.

Before the meeting was closed Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara thanked the Vietnam observers for a clear, concise and interesting report.

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The President then invited the Vietnam election observers to lunch at the White House at 1 o'clock and said they were free to talk to any press people they wanted in the meantime, or that they could go to the mansion and clean up before the luncheon.

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

17

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September 13, 1967
3:30 p. m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: George Christian *GC*

Here are the final minutes of the meeting with the observers.
We discussed at the Tuesday luncheon the desirability of
making the minutes available to Cabinet members.

Yes

No

*Present
at meeting
Cabinet
meeting
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MEETING WITH VIETNAM ELECTIONS OBSERVERS
WITH THE PRESIDENT

Wednesday, September 6, 1967
11:09 a.m. - 12:05 p.m.

The President thanked the observers for their service and expressed his pleasure that they had returned safely. He said he would welcome comments from each, if they wished to offer comments.

Governor Richard Hughes of New Jersey said he'd gone with an open mind, was convinced there had been clean elections, with unimpeachable local formal election safeguards. He said the enthusiasm he found among 200 election board officials, peasants, village chiefs and others was great -- "greater than in Jersey City," he noted. He said the people showed a sense of nationality and pride, and that he was very enthusiastic about the Vietnam people and our military leaders there.

Senator Bourke Hickenlooper said "I agree completely with Governor Hughes. All of us observed the preparations for the elections, and we observed the voting, and the counting of ballots. I must echo Governor Hughes that the elections were fair. I was very impressed with the effort made to make this an open and fair election. We have never been that careful here."

Mayor Joseph Barr of Pittsburgh said he was greatly impressed, that he learned a lot about elections from the Vietnamese people, and was also much impressed by our troops there.

Governor William Guy of North Dakota said he felt too much attention had been placed on the possibility of irregularities "and not enough on the really significant thing - that these people, with great courage, came out to vote, and gave as moving and as profound an example of the desire for self-determination that you could find anywhere." He said he'd visited one precinct where a bomb had killed three persons and wounded six, whereupon the polling place was closed for 45 minutes and then reopened for more voting. He observed that the final vote -- 35% for the winning candidate and 65% for opponents -- testified to the lack of irregularities.

Governor Thomas McCall of Idaho said the observers had considered 21 standards for fair elections, and found the Vietnamese "rating favorably with any state in our country."

Mayor Theodore McKeldin of Baltimore said he'd travelled widely on

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election day, visiting 12 polling places in the south before going to Da Nang and Saigon. He said he saw one minor irregularity -- three voting tickets in one envelope -- but otherwise found "splendid, intelligent people there." He said he thought 35 % for the winning candidate was "a terrific vote -- if they'd wanted to rig the election, they'd have gotten 51%."

Reverend Edward L. R. Elson of National Presbyterian church, Washington, said he found the election "a great start toward nationhood." He said he was impressed with the plans made in Saigon and the execution in the provinces, calling the effort "a noble political exercise for self-enhancement and self-determination." He said he was much impressed with chaplains and troops, and said he visited men in hospitals "who know what it's all about better than the people back home."

Archbishop Robert Lucey of San Antonio praised "the so-called second war, for revolutionary development." He said "We saw consecrated and devoted men and women way out in the hamlets teaching people to practice democracy. I think the press has a wonderful chance to bring that out. And second, the press has the opportunity, once and for all, to kill the idea that there is a stalemate in the military situation. There hasn't been any for a long time. There ought to be a way to stop statements from prominent citizens talking through their hats -- and their birettas. They should be better informed. It would be a fine thing for some of those talking about the war to go over there and see it. They tell (the President) to negotiate now, but they don't say how to do it. That doesn't make any sense at all." He praised our troops, said it was too bad they were called murderers, and added "those statements should be stopped -- and the press will have to help, for this is no time to lie about the USA."

Rabbi Jacob P. Rudin of Great Neck, L.I., president of the Synagogue Council of America, agreed with the previous speakers. He said "it was a great experience to watch the old, young, men, women, nuns and soldiers perform the serious obligation of voting." He said he sometimes noted callousness about voting in this country, but saw none of that attitude in Vietnam. He praised the American officials and troops, as well as the freedom of movement available to the observers.

Whitney Young of the Urban league said he'd left with some criticism and skepticism, but returned completely satisfied that the elections were free. There were problems in the number of candidates, illiteracy of the people and the pressures of war, but all these were well met, he said. He suggested the United States might well copy voting for 18 year olds and government funds for campaign expenses.

Young said his talks with American Negro soldiers convinced him that they are determined, are indifferent to communist propaganda aimed at them, but are perplexed by domestic riots that destroy their homes.

He said they are also concerned about a Congress that seems to react to the few Negro extremists to block programs that Negro soldiers and their families need.

William P. Gullander, of the National Association of Manufacturers, praised the enthusiasm of the Vietnamese people for the elections, and said he was certain that "this was an election of integrity." He praised our military, saying "its top management is really tops," and that he'd be pleased to serve under every general he met. He said on the question of whether we belong in Vietnam, "when I went I believed that we belonged there because we had a selfish interest, but I am just soft-hearted enough so that I also believe that these are beautiful, wonderful people, and we cannot let them down."

Professor Donald Herzberg, Director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers university and author of "The Right to Vote" (one of the experts assisting the observer group) said it might have been that there were some election irregularities, as might be expected with five million people voting, but that the election plan made serious fraud impossible.

Eldon James, Hampton, Virginia, past National Commander of the American Legion, said his strongest impressions were the feeling of warmth among the people, their desire to be a part of their own government, and their pride in going to the polls.

John Knight, of the Knight Newspapers, reminded the President of some personal doubts before departure, and asked for a private talk later. He praised Ambassador Bunker as "the right man" and said "the military staff was top-flight." He said he saw no election irregularities and that the "size of the vote would indicate there was no concerted effort to build up the margin."

Speaking of the future, he told the President "you have some problems. It all depends on the government that was elected. I don't think we should overlook the votes that went to Dzu. I think pacification is going to be a long and arduous job." He cited some restrictions on freedom of the press, and added that he had sought out the suspended editors and candidates who were not permitted to run. Knight observed "I heard them out fully and found them fervent and intense, but I had a feeling I would not want them running my country."

Senator Ed Muskie of Maine said he'd anticipated pressure on voters, and had tried to sense it at polling places, but found none. He said "the people

came in freely, and they voted freely. I was impressed." He said he still had questions whether Thieu and Ky could unify the country "because they are schooled in in the authoritarian tradition."

James Antell of Burlington, Vermont, President of the U. S. Junior Chamber of Commerce, said he felt there had been a free and full election. He was impressed that ballot symbols helped illiterates know how to mark their ballots. He was impressed that a very glib man from Saigon tried to vote in Hue but had been turned away by firm election officials.

Ed Monroe of Seattle, Washington, President of the National Association of Counties, said he was impressed by the devotion of American diplomatic and military forces to principles of democracy, which he felt served as an example to Vietnamese.

Eugene Patterson, of the Atlanta Constitution, said he considered the election organization good and the count fair, though he thought there were too many candidates for an unsophisticated electorate. He said he repeatedly asked voters and poll watchers about their complaints, but heard none. He cited two factors that reassured him about the honesty: one was the margin of the winners, the second was that early returns by radio from the provinces proved correct when officially tabulated.

Patterson said he'd met a Vietnamese major whose hamlets had been flooded with warnings "you vote - you die." The major had told the same people "you vote - you live," and they had voted.

Joseph Scerra, National Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, called it a "show-case election." He cited two victories: "one was that they had an election, and the other that when our military was placed under a curfew to avoid incidents, the security for the entire election was provided by the Vietnamese people."

David Sullivan, Vice President of the AFL-CIO and President of the Building Service Employees Union, read a statement he had issued in Saigon praising the will and spirit of the Vietnamese people and the positive role played by unions there.

Stanford Smith, General Manager of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, said he'd had some misgivings before going to Vietnam, but came home convinced "this was a free and fair election -- it was wise for us to go."

The President praised the help given the observer effort by Henry Cabot Lodge, saying to the Ambassador "This was one of your proudest moments."

Ambassador Lodge responded by praising the energy and good-will of the observer group.

Mayor McKeldin interjected "And we weren't brain-washed, either."

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