

- Filipino decisions on helping or not helping South Vietnam has provoked this column which concludes: "In this country there are no political parties, political philosophies, or political convictions."

POLITICAL INDICATOR

If one is interested in the dynamics of Philippine politics, the Vietnam bill is a highly fascinating case study. The bill threads through our entire political landscape making an excellent guide to the Philippine political system. One can look at the history of the Vietnam bill and see the forces of political action, or one can see the national reaction from our leaders to the barrio folk, and perceive the machine works of the national structure. The bill was first introduced during the Macapagal era. It was presented with the magnificent endorsement of the Secretary of Defense then. Speaker Villareal then returned from Vietnam and stated that aid of a military nature would be "provocative" and ill-advised. When the bill was introduced however, he descended the rostrum as Speaker and worked for the passage of the bill in two days.

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But elections had by this time excited the nation. The form of aid to Vietnam became a campaign issue. Macapagal was roundly scored by the opposition candidate for president, Ferdinand Marcos, stating in strong terms, that military action in the guise of engineers was foolhardy. After the elections, with the Marcos victory, there was a "change in emphasis" and the new President then unequivocally endorsed the bill which advocated the same form of military aid labeled army engineers, to Vietnam. Since Villareal remained Speaker of the House, it was merely a replay of his previous role. Thus, the Vietnam issue as political issue, was of no significance in actual fact because the candidate who won a mandate from the people while running on the stand on non-military aid to Vietnam, simply changed his mind.

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In the background thrives comments about US pressure. There is heavy hinting about "compensations" conditioned on our amenability to sending our flag into the battlefields of Vietnam. Aside from sudden and flattering visits from US officialdom, including Vice President Humphrey, Secretary of State Rusk, and Undersecretary William Bundy, we had President Marcos talking to US military personnel about fighting for freedom and being photographed in the cockpit of a US fighter plane wearing a pilot's headgear. Incidentally, this reminded us of the photograph of Gen. and Mrs. Cao Ky dressed like space pilots in their conference with President Johnson in Hawaii.

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With the US shadow in the background let us look at the reaction of our leaders. There were those gloriously happy to get into Vietnam and fight for freedom and democracy, including two congressmen volunteering to march into the fray. What is the party stand? Well, the Nacionalistas refuse to take a party stand, and the Liberals likewise. We are going resolutely to war, and neither of the major parties want to take a stand on it. Only President Marcos is assuming a stand, and only a handful of independent-minded legislators are against it, but they are on their own. In this country there are no political parties, political philosophies, or political convictions. —
By Alfredo R. Roces

GREATEST LIE

Popular opinion is the greatest lie in the world.
— *Carlyle.*