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The Progressive - 'Changing Styles in Reform'

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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MEMO

The tradition of beheading the messenger who brings sad tidings must be as old as bad news itself. A generation ago, the axe fell frequently on a special set of messenger-prophets: the men in our Foreign Service stationed in the Far East who dared to send home the truth—bad news, most of it. They were then warning of the coming of Communism to power in their part of the world—not, mind you, as an invasion of Slavic hordes pouring down from the steppes of Red Russia, but as an indigenous revolution feeding and fattening on the hunger, the poverty, and most of all the feeling of hopelessness that engulfed countless Asians compelled to live under despotic oppressors—whom the U.S. Government supported.

These Foreign Service officers were branded as "soft on Communism" by the likes of Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon, their warnings were systematically ignored, and several of them were pilloried to the point that they became outcasts in their own land.

Now, a generation later, these messenger-prophets are having their moment of redemption as many Americans come to realize that it was the pigeon-holing of their warnings and their banishment from public service that did so much to lead us down the road to disaster in Korea and Indochina.

Several weeks ago, some of these dedicated public servants were honored at a luncheon of the American Foreign Service Association. Among them, and the one we feel the most possessive about, is the able, soft-spoken O. Edmund Clubb, who, before McCarthy and Company set out to destroy him, had served with distinction as an officer with the U.S. Foreign Service in Asia for two decades and for a time as Director of Chinese Affairs in the State Department.

It was during Mr. Clubb’s period of "exile" that The Progressive invited him to contribute articles on the Far East. He has written more than a dozen. One of the articles we treasure most appeared in our April, 1962, issue. It was entitled "Trap in Vietnam." In it Mr. Clubb predicted—to the merriment of the best and the brightest in the Government—that if we continued the policies then being pursued, our handful of military "advisers" in Saigon would swell to an army of 500,000. Here, all too tragically, Mr. Clubb was as prescient as he had been a generation before on China.