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Nguyen Khac Vien

THE LONG RESISTANCE

(1858 - 1975)

HANOI - 1975

S. HARRISON


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Foreword

The great victory of the spring of 1975, which led to the complete liberation of South Viet Nam, was the result of more than a century of struggle waged by the Vietnamese people to regain their independence and freedom. This struggle was successively conducted against the French colonialists, the Japanese occupation troops, those of Chiang Kai-shek, British troops, and lastly American forces. It went through many stages. While the entire Vietnamese people took part in it at all times, the political line adopted, like the methods of action and the prospects for the future, differed from one stage to another according to the social classes, personalities, organizations and parties at the head of the national movement.

In this book we try to analyse this complex and eventful period which is but an introductory step to Viet Nam's contemporary history.

Hanoi, June 1975

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I — THE LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE

The Can Vuong Movement

On April 15, 1847, French warships sank five armoured junks of the Vietnamese fleet in Da Nang port. On August 31, 1858, a French squadron attacked Da Nang again, thus marking the beginning of a war of colonial conquest by French imperialism, to be waged in many stages from 1858 to 1884, until the total annexation of the country. Facing that aggression, there were, on the Vietnamese side, two parties with opposite views: one standing for compromise, the other for resistance. The king and the high dignitaries of the Court were frightened by the modern weapons used by the French and misjudged the latter's intentions, believing that, coming from so far away, they were less interested in conquering the country than in wresting commercial advantages. Moreover, the Nguyen monarchy, retrograde to the core and constantly busy repressing internal insurrections, was neither able nor willing to mobilize all the energies of the nation to oppose the aggression. All these reasons urged the king and the high dignitaries to practise a policy of peace and negotiation, trying to placate the aggressors with more and more important concessions. On the other hand, a number of mandarins, the great majority of the scholars, and the people as a whole, heirs to a long tradition of struggle for national independence, put up a fierce resistance. While the royal troops offered only weak resistance, that of the popular forces was powerful and protracted, and compelled French

imperialism to wage a long and costly war. But the defection of the monarchy, the only force which could then play a guiding role on a national scale, undermined the efforts of the Vietnamese patriots.

The French colonialists used particularly cunning tactics. They began by gaining a foothold on a portion of the territory and having it ceded to them by the Court of Hue through a treaty in due form. The aggressors thus won a springboard to prepare for new annexations, and a respite to annihilate the people's resistance in the occupied zones. They then violated the treaty, and resumed the conquest. New concession by the Court, new treaty. New violation, new conquest. The same scenario recurred again and again until total annexation; from concession to concession the monarchy ended in capitulation and betrayal. The king and the high dignitaries preferred selling out national independence in exchange for a few privileges that the conquerors left them to win them over. Responsible for the safeguarding of national independence and honour, they gradually became agents of the foreigners and put themselves at the latter's service by repressing the people's patriotic movement. The support that the Court of Hue tried to obtain from the Chinese empire – itself on the decline and exposed to Western aggressions – could not deviate the course of events.

Loss of Saigon and the Three Eastern Provinces of Cochinchina

After having occupied Da Nang, the French troops burnt it down, but were not strong enough to threaten the capital city and compel the Court of Hue to make concessions. Bishop Pellerin proposed to the French command to attack the Red River delta where 400,000 Catholics, he said, were ready to rise up in support of the operation. The French command, however, preferred taking its troops to the South, where rice trade was thriving.

Saigon was beleaguered on the morning of February 17, 1859; in the evening the royal troops evacuated it. Meanwhile, reinforcements were pouring in from the neighbouring provinces, among them 5,300 volunteers recruited by local notables. Thus reinforced, the Saigon garrison encircled the French troops who had entered the town, putting them in a difficult position. However, the Court of Hue did not order any counter-attack, hoping for a compromise by negotiation. The French took advantage of this indecision to gain time. In 1860, after a new victorious offensive of the Western powers against China, France was able to concentrate the whole of its naval force operating in the Far East to break the siege of Saigon and conquer, in 1861, the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina, which comprised, besides, three western provinces.

The defeat of the royal troops did not put an end to the Vietnamese resistance. Under the direction of patriotic leaders, the population everywhere rose up against the French troops. The French officers who wrote the *Military History of Indochina* had to recognize that

The defeats of the Annamese army had no effect on the insurrectional state of the occupied territories.

The resistance was general. The French historian Pallu de la Barrière, an eye-witness, wrote :

The fact is that the resistance centre was everywhere, subdivided *ad infinitum*, nearly as many times as there were living Annamese. It would be more exact to consider each peasant who was fastening a sheaf of rice plants as a centre of resistance.

(History of the 1861
Cochinchina Expedition)

The popular character of the resistance was also seen in the change in tactics. Whereas the royal troops operated in close formations and greatly feared French long-range weapons, the popular forces practised guerilla

warfare or surprise attacks with close combat. The troops commanded by the patriot Nguyen Trung Truc, attacking at close quarters, succeeded in setting fire to a French warship, *l'Espérance*, and inflicting on the French a bitter defeat at Nhat Tao. The popular forces managed to re-occupy many localities, and the French command had to ask for quick reinforcements.

It was the Court of Hue which got the French troops out of this fix by asking for negotiation. On June 5, 1862, Phan Thanh Gian negotiated with French Admiral Bonard a treaty by which the Court of Hue ceded to France the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina, consented to pay an indemnity of 20 million francs and open three ports of Annam and Tonkin to French trade. The Court immediately ordered the popular forces to withdraw from the aforesaid provinces.

The order was not obeyed. The French historian F. Vial wrote :

At the very moment the admiral thought he had brought the war to a victorious end, he found that it had become perhaps even more active and redoubtable than a serious war against the King's regular troops.

(The First Years
of French Cochinchina)

The insurrection was led by Truong Dinh, who was head of an agricultural settlement when the French attacked Saigon. Together with volunteers he came to the rescue of the town. After its fall he withdrew to Go Cong province where he recruited a 6,000-strong army, and was appointed deputy-commander by the Court. After the signing of the 1862 treaty, the king ordered him to retire to An Giang province and give up the resistance (appointing him commander). Truong Dinh hesitated for a long

time. A sincere patriot, he did not want to renounce the struggle, but, brought up as a Confucian, he did not feel he could disobey the king. He was about to obey the latter's order, when delegates of the popular forces and the people flocked to his camp and besought him to remain leader of the movement, dubbing him "Commander-in-Chief, Pacifier of the French." Truong Dinh complied with the people's will and took command of the insurrection.

The patriotic resisters fought heroically.

The Annamese, armed with weapons ineffective against our carbines, rushed at our men with a blind energy that testified to a rare courage and extraordinary abnegation.

(F. Vial, op. cit.)

Their guerilla tactics put the French troops to a hard test. Pallu de la Barrière wrote :

There is no more painful, dull and tiring sight than that of the French moving over land and water. One of the adversaries is continually in sight, the other never. As the enemy persistently slips away, it seems as though we were hitting only a vacuum.

(op. cit.)

Civil resistance was also organized in all forms. The majority of notables and mandarins refused to collaborate with the enemy. The poet Nguyen Dinh Chieu, though a blind man, left the occupied regions and, together with other scholars, wrote highly patriotic works.

However, the order coming from the Court to stop all resistance sowed confusion in the people's minds. It had sent to France a mission led by Phan Thanh Gian to negotiate the retrocession of the lost provinces. France then, entangled in the Mexican war, gave some promises.

On August 20, 1864, Truong Dinh, wounded during an engagement, committed suicide in order not to fall into the enemy's hands. His son Truong Quyen continued the resistance. Meanwhile, in 1863, France had imposed a treaty of protectorate upon the king of Cambodia. Cambodian patriots, led by the bonze Pokumpo, then joined forces with the Vietnamese insurgents against the French.

In 1867, France, having settled the Mexican affair, switched to the offensive in Viet Nam. French troops marched on the three western provinces of Cochinchina. Judging all resistance to be hopeless, Phan Thanh Gian, the governor of these provinces, ceded them to the French, then committed suicide. Popular resistance in the western provinces brought together Vietnamese, Khmers and other nationalities - Cham, Mnong, Stieng - and covered a vast territory extending from the Cambodian Great Lakes to the vicinity of Saigon. From 1866 to 1868, fierce fighting occurred in Tay Ninh province, and Khmer insurgents came very close to Udong, the capital. Unfortunately Pokumpo was killed and the resistance in north-western Cochinchina and the Cambodian border areas gradually died down. In the west of the Mekong delta two of Phan Thanh Gian's sons took the lead of the popular movement, while the patriot Nguyen Trung Truc, who had set fire to the frigate *l'Espérance* in 1861, conducted the operations. On June 16, 1868, in particular, he seized the Kien Giang post in Rach Gia province. Captured some time later, he refused to submit, and, facing the firing squad, cried out :

"As long as grass grows on our soil, there will be men to resist the invaders."

After the occupation of Cochinchina the French hastened to explore the Mekong river in the hope of draining all the trade of South China towards Saigon. This was soon proved impracticable.

The Embarrassing Plight of the Court of Hue. The Fall of Hanoi

The loss of Cochinchina caused great concern in Viet Nam. Many patriots sent petitions to King Tu Duc advocating reforms apt to strengthen the defence potential of the country. Nguyen Truong To in particular recommended reforms in all fields : political, administrative, agricultural, commercial, industrial, educational, financial, diplomatic and military. Many urged that the country be opened to international trade, handicrafts renovated, industry and trade developed, the educational system changed, students sent abroad, and the army re-organized along Western lines.

The Court, stuck in its conservatism, refused to take those recommendations into consideration. Ignorant of the international situation, it did not know how to capitalize the difficulties encountered by France and wrest back the initiative of operations. With its policy of "peace and negotiation" it was still hoping to come to terms with the aggressor, and also counted on the support of the Manchu Ching dynasty, then reigning in China.

The deep reason for this conservatism and weakness lay in the fact that the reactionary feudal regime of the Nguyen was facing many popular uprisings. In 1862, near Hanoi, Cai Vang led a movement of protest against waste by the administration ; in 1866 the workers and labourers employed in the construction of Tu Duc's tomb revolted. The French missionaries took advantage of this instability to foment unrest within Catholic communities in the Red River delta. This turmoil came to a head with Le Bao Hung's open rebellion.

Another difficulty was the penetration into Viet Nam from China of Taiping bands pursued by Ching troops. Taking refuge in Upper Tonkin, these bands, known as White, Yellow and Black Flags carved out fiefs for themselves. Only the Black Flags led by Luu Vinh Phuc submitted to the authority of the Court of Hue.

Thanks to the Catholic missionaries, the French command was well aware of this situation. The impossibility of reaching southwest China by the Mekong led the French to demand the opening of the Red River and the ports of Tonkin, if need be by force. In 1872, without asking for the permission of the Vietnamese authorities, hundreds of mercenaries headed by the French adventurer Dupuis sailed up the Red River towards Yunnan, carrying weapons for the Chinese general Ma. On his first trip, the mandarins showed conciliation, but on his second passage Dupuis was blocked.

The pretext which the French command had been looking for was immediately exploited. Lieutenant-Commander Francis Garnier was at once sent to Hanoi with an armed escort, and soon got in touch with Bishop Puginier, who gathered the routed partisans of the rebel Le Bao Hung. On his own authority, Francis Garnier decreed that henceforth sailing on the Red River was free and customs duties abolished. The Vietnamese authorities refused to comply with this dictate. On November 19, 1873, the French opened fire and seized Hanoi. The old General Nguyen Tri Phuong, defender of Hanoi, wounded and captured, rebuffed all advances by the French, and let himself die of starvation. The French troops rapidly seized Nam Dinh, Hai Duong and other localities in the delta, thanks to the complicity of some Catholic communities. But the Vietnamese forces counter-attacked and encircled Hanoi, and Garnier was killed on December 21, 1873, in an ambush in the vicinity of the town.

Still suffering from the effects of the 1870 French-German war, France stood in dread of committing herself too deeply. King Tu Duc, faithful to his policy of compromise, failed to exploit a favourable military situation; he signed with the French the 1874 treaty, by which France returned the conquered towns but obtained permission to garrison troops in Hanoi and Haiphong, as well as the opening of the Red River for trade.

The Capitulation of the Monarchy and the Setting up of the Colonial Regime

In the last two decades of the 19th century, the Western capitalist economy rapidly developed, the European powers swooped on the other continents, and carried out a partition of the world. France's colonial policy, at times hesitant, began to be conducted in a more energetic and systematic way. The conquest of Burma by Britain speeded up the execution of French plans against Viet Nam.

Violating the 1874 treaty, in 1882 France sent to Tonkin new military units under the command of Henri Rivière. Declaring himself threatened by the "bellicose preparations" of the Vietnamese, he sent an ultimatum to the governor of Hanoi, demanding the destruction of the defence works, and the evacuation of the Vietnamese forces from the town. On April 25, 1882, the French troops attacked and seized Hanoi. Governor Hoang Dieu committed suicide. The mandarins in Tonkin wanted to counter-attack, but King Tu Duc still believed he could recover Hanoi through negotiation. Meanwhile, the French occupied the coal districts of Hon Gai and Cam Pha, then Nam Dinh. Tu Duc, who had little confidence in his own troops, called for help from the Court of Peking. The latter dispatched 10,000 men who came and camped northeast of Hanoi, but did not move any further.

As in 1873, the Vietnamese forces, encircling Hanoi, defeated the French troops in a battle near the town, killing Henri Rivière right at the place where Francis Garnier had died. Paris dispatched 4,000 reinforcement troops, but Tu Duc kept sounding out France for negotiations, and dismissed those mandarins who advocated armed struggle.

In July 1883, Tu Duc died without leaving an heir. In Hue, clans and factions scrambled for power. Within a few months, three kings were successively enthroned, while the high dignitaries were divided over what policy to adopt towards France. Some were partisans of armed

resistance, others of negotiation, some openly planned betrayal and collaboration with the aggressors. The Court was not even aware of the military successes recorded in Tonkin by the Vietnamese forces.

Turning to account this confusion, the French command concentrated troops to seize Da Nang and march on Hue. As soon as they heard the boom of French artillery coming from the Thuan An channel which defended the access to the capital city, the mandarins hurriedly accepted all the conditions imposed by the French. Viet Nam, losing her sovereignty, became a French protectorate (August 25, 1883). The mandarins split into two groups. Many disobeyed the Court and resigned their posts so as to continue the resistance, while the remainder, bowing their heads, put themselves at the service of the French.

There remained the Ching troops, sent by the Peking Court which, seriously weakened, did not want a confrontation with France; Paris and Peking signed the Tientsin treaty (May 11, 1884). Regents Ton That Thuyet and Nguyen Van Tuong, hostile to the 1883 accord, had to resign themselves to ratifying the treaty of protectorate in June 1884. However, as the Ching troops withdrew through the Lang Son pass, they clashed at Bac Le with French troops, who were defeated. The French command launched a big attack on China, landed troops on Taiwan (Formosa), and bombarded Foochow port. The Vietnamese forces, co-operating with the Ching, inflicted another defeat on the French at Lang Son in February 1885.

But the Peking Court did not at all want to prolong the hostilities, and signed with France a new treaty (June 9, 1885) by which it renounced all its rights in Viet Nam.

The Can Vuong Movement and the Popular Struggle

Even after the 1883 capitulation, the partisans of resistance headed by Regent Ton That Thuyet continued to be active at the Court, while in the country, the entire

population and the scholars got organized to continue the struggle. The regent ordered the construction in Quang Tri province of the Tan So fort where he had the royal treasure transferred. In July 1884, a twelve-year-old king, Ham Nghi, was enthroned. France tried to impose a new treaty by which Viet Nam was to be divided into three zones: Cochinchina, a colony; Tonkin, half-colony and half-protectorate; and Annam, a protectorate. The unity of the country was profoundly impaired.

In the meantime, popular resistance in Tonkin remained vigorous. The French command wanted to strike at Hue itself to deprive the movement of its leaders through the dismissal of the high dignitaries partisans of the resistance and in particular of Regent Thuyet. It demanded that the Court should hand over its cannons, reduce its armed forces, replace the royal council by a new one composed of pro-French mandarins. In June 1885, French General de Courcy landed at Hue and demanded the disbandment of the Vietnamese troops. Regent Thuyet and the mandarin Tran Xuan Soan reacted by ordering an attack on the French positions on the night of July 4. After a bloody battle the French troops seized the capital city.

But King Ham Nghi together with the Court took to the hills, where he issued a proclamation calling on the entire population to support the monarchy in struggle (*Can Vuong*). The mandarins who had been dismissed for their stand in favour of the resistance were reinstated, and everywhere in the country, the people and scholars warmly answered the appeal. However the defeatist faction of the Court came back to Hue where, in collusion with the French, they enthroned a new king, Dong Khanh, on September 19, 1885.

The main base held by Ham Nghi was the mountainous part of Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces, linked to the north by a road communicating with Laos. Early in 1886, as popular resistance in Tonkin intensified, the French command was obliged to concentrate troops there.

The Vietnamese resistance in Quang Binh expanded towards the sea and along the rivers flowing from the Truong Son Range. However, the Vietnamese patriots were soon short of weapons and were gradually driven deeper into the mountain regions of Quang Binh, thinly populated and barren. Thuyet had gone to China to ask for help; Ham Nghi failed to move his HQ to the north, where the resistance base was larger and more populated. The French carried out a methodical encirclement of the retreat of Ham Nghi, who was betrayed by a Muong chief, captured on November 1, 1888, and exiled to Algeria.

Ham Nghi's appeal had caused a mobilization of important forces in many regions, from north to south. In the southern provinces of Annam, the patriot Mai Xuan Thuong led the resistance movement until he was captured and executed in 1888. In Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Thanh Hoa provinces the resistance was particularly vigorous. There, well-known scholars called on the population to rise up, recruited volunteers, and organized armed forces with courageous and resolute men of the labouring classes.

In Thanh Hoa, patriots led by Dinh Cong Trang had built the Ba Dinh fortress in the middle of a swampy region. Cleverly camouflaged, Ba Dinh from afar looked like a simple village; in reality it was surrounded by high ramparts and a deep moat; on the ramparts were thousands of earth-filled baskets which left between them loopholes through which the defenders could watch and fire at the assailants. A thick belt of bamboos protected the fortress and the surrounding areas were planted with sharp stakes. Trenches were dug inside. Masson, a French officer who participated in the attack, wrote:

Reconnaissance inside Ba Dinh gave us quite a surprise by showing how skilfully the fortifications were built. Supplies were abundant and discipline strict. Two theatrical troupes gave performances for the fighters. In the mountain region of Thanh Hoa, a retreat position, Ma Cao, had been built in anticipation of the fall of Ba Dinh.

From September 1886 to January 1887, many French attacks were repelled. The French command had to dispatch there 2,500 more men with a powerful artillery on four gun-boats. The missionaries mobilized the Catholics of Phat Diem to help supply the troops. Whereas the Hanoi citadel defended by the royal troops had held out only one day in face of a much smaller French force, the Ba Dinh garrison resisted 35 days in spite of French artillery. The French officers had to pay tribute to the bravery of the defenders. Masson wrote:

Another prisoner closely questioned calmly answered: 'You are wasting your time trying to ask us for information we don't want to give you, for we consider it prejudicial to the interests of our country. Do what you will with us...'. These facts, among the hundreds we have witnessed, suffice to give an idea of the character of the Annamese race, and if we have only quoted the mandarins we can add that the ordinary people and the simple soldiers are their equals in bravery and contempt of death.

In the Red River delta, the French had to launch repeated mopping-up operations against many insurrectional centres, particularly against the Bai Say resistance base commanded by Nguyen Thien Thuat. Here, the patriots did not build fortresses but carried on an active guerilla war, sometimes also fighting great engagements with the support of the population. Such was the case in all provinces. The "pirates" were none other than the peasants rising up against the occupier. Here is a letter from the French administrator resident of Bac Ninh, written in 1886:

A strong gang of pirates has just attacked the Yen Son post, thanks to the complicity of the Yen Son villagers. No one had warned us of their arrival and they went away without pillaging the local population.

It was the same courage and skill everywhere. The French and their lackeys had to build a close network

of posts, and launch repeated raids. Only at that price was the Bai Say region temporarily pacified by 1889.

In the mountain regions of Tonkin, the French only succeeded in occupying some main highways and strategic points. The country was entirely controlled by the local chiefs, who co-operated with the insurgents of the delta in harassing the French troops. In the North-West, the delegate of Ham Nghi, Nguyen Quang Bich, conducted the operations together with the chiefs of local ethnic groups. To compel him to surrender, the French and their valets arrested his old mother, but neither the son nor the mother submitted. Only by the end of 1888 were French columns able to reach Lao Cai, Nghia Lo and Dien Bien Phu.

In the North-East the French held very loose control over the Hanoi-Lang Son road ; on the coast, the frontier town of Mong Cai, recaptured by the patriots in 1885, was definitively occupied by the French only in 1886. In Viet Bac, the French were hardly able to venture out of the towns of Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang, which they had occupied since 1884.

This patriotic and popular resistance stirred up by Ham Nghi's appeal, unlike that of the royal troops, caused enormous difficulties to the French troops, inflicted heavy losses on them, and gave rise in France itself to vigorous reactions in public opinion and in Parliament. At certain moments, under the pressure of public opinion the French Parliament had to cut down credits intended for the conquest of Viet Nam ; however, the colonialist clan eventually got the upper hand.

Second Phase of the Resistance

The capture of Ham Nghi did not put an end to the people's patriotic movement. Loyalty to the king was only the manifestation of a profound patriotism ingrained in the people's and the scholars' minds. Many uprisings continued to break out in various provinces till 1897.

In Thanh Hoa, the scholar Tong Duy Tan, allied with the Muong, pursued the struggle after the fall of Ba Dinh until 1892, when he was captured. Put in a cage by the enemy, he used the handle of his brush to rip up his belly and take his own life. His Muong lieutenant, Cam Ba Thuoc, continued the struggle until 1895.

In Ha Tinh, the scholar Phan Dinh Phung and his principal lieutenant Cao Thang organized a strong resistance base in the region of Huong Khe and the sphere of action of the insurgents covered the four provinces of Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Thanh Hoa. Sprung from the common people, Cao Thang was a great military chief who knew how to organize his forces efficaciously and succeeded in equipping them with home-made guns modelled after the 1874 French rifle. The movement began in 1885. In 1893, at the head of his men he marched on the provincial capital of Nghe An and seized many posts. His death in combat, at the age of 29, cast a damp over the insurrection. The French and their lackeys had to mobilize as many as 5,000 men to clear up the region. In 1896, Phan Dinh Phung died of dysentery and the movement gradually came to an end.

From 1889 to 1893, in the valley of the Da River (Black River) and the upper valley of the Red River after the death of Nguyen Quang Bich and the desertion of the Thai chief Deo Van Tri, who crossed over to the French side, the leadership of the movement passed into the hands of De Kieu and Doc Ngu.

Of all the movements of struggle which went on after the capture of Ham Nghi, the most remarkable was unquestionably that of Yen The, begun in 1885 ; in this mountainous region on the edge of the Red River delta, the peasants rose up against the colonialists who had robbed them of their lands. They were joined by insurgents coming from the delta, and the leader of the movement, Hoang Hoa Tham (De Tham) gave it a vigorous impetus by skilfully waging a protracted guerilla

war. His regular forces numbered only a few hundred, the main force being composed of peasants who worked the land and fought the aggressors when the need arose.

From its base in Yen The, the movement spread to the provinces of Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Thai Nguyen and Lang Son. Many French operations against Yen The failed. Frey, a French officer, wrote :

One cannot understand how those men, gathered in a narrow area, crushed by the fire of four artillery pieces firing from a distance of 300 metres, could hold out so long... If the enemy has not the fanaticism of a Kabyle or a guerilla of the Sudan, he has a keener intelligence, and a remarkable power of assimilation in the use of our means of action and tactical methods. He shows great skill in choosing his positions and fortifying them, and the same indifference, the same impassivity, when facing death... The insurgents are commanded by true chiefs... and fight at very close quarters to kill a great number of their adversaries.

In 1894, the French proposed a truce, yielding the administration of four cantons to De Tham. In 1895 they broke it, and unexpectedly attacked Yen The, but the patriot was on his guard ; his scattered troops led a deadly guerilla war against the French. In 1897, the latter again negotiated a truce. By that time, nothing remained to the insurgents but the Yen The base, the other movements of resistance having been successively crushed.

In the mountain regions inhabited by many national minorities the population resisted for a long time ; but the French knew how to stir up and exploit dissensions between them and win over the local chiefs. After having conquered some strongholds the French command applied itself to hatching schemes of political division before launching new operations. Little by little the various

movements of resistance were defeated and the mountain regions came under French control.

From 1861 to 1897, contrary to the royal army, which literally collapsed under French attacks, the popular resistance, waged with the participation of the population, organized by valiant chiefs and using varied forms of combat, carried out a nation-wide and protracted struggle. However, the defection of the monarchy deprived it of all possibility for united action on a national scale. A monarchy knowing how to rely on the people would certainly have resisted the aggression successfully.

II — THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLONIAL REGIME (1897 — 1918)

Owing to popular resistance the war of conquest waged by the French colonialists dragged on until 1896 ; only then could the colonial regime be truly established, the people's armed struggle having been temporarily stifled — the sole notable insurrectional centre left was the region of Yen The held by De Tham. The appointment of Paul Doumer as Governor General of Indochina marked the will of French imperialism to set up a classical colonial regime with all its components — economic, political, administrative, military and cultural.

Political and Administrative Organization

The first concern of the conquerors was to establish a stable and efficient political and administrative organization. In Cochinchina, occupied since 1862, the French were faced with systematic non-collaboration on the part of the mandarins and scholars. Wrote the French historian Cultru :

... and if, by some sort of miracle, the scholars sided with the French and betrayed their sovereign, the administration of Cochinchina would have been

mere child's play for us. However, the educated Annamese, the élite loyal to their country, could but regard us as their enemy ; the peasants bound to their fields and their cattle stayed in the country in a state of apparent submission which did not at all imply moral submission.

The French had to resort to direct administration, by recruiting native subordinate agents with neither culture nor prestige, to serve as intermediaries ; moreover, all their attempts at enticement having failed owing to the permanent insubordination of the population, they shamelessly resorted to the most violent and cruel repressive measures. To the end, the colonial administration was to be marked by this double taint : on the one hand, its cruelty, and on the other, its collusion with the most retrograde and corrupt elements of the Vietnamese nation. American neo-colonialism in South Viet Nam only magnifies in the extreme these evil features inherent in all colonial enterprises.

As early as 1866, a report by Resident Muselier to the Resident-Superior of Tonkin already admitted :

...the native mandarins hesitated to rally to us or at least to serve us without ulterior motive, and gave up their jobs, preferring retirement, while a few others, more energetic, became real, political, chiefs of the rebellion. One found in administrative functions only a few ambitious and forward-looking mandarins, the rest being intriguers, disreputable characters or ignorant men that events had brought to our side and whom we had sometimes invested with high honours which became tools in their hands to fleece the country unscrupulously and bring shame upon our intervention. Upstarts without merit and promoted in contravention of all rules of hierarchy, they enjoyed no prestige...

Vice-Admiral Rieunier also complained, "We have only scoundrels on our side."

To get a base of support, the colonial administration entered into direct collusion with the feudalists, at least with the most reactionary elements of this class. The feudal regime was not abolished but reinforced, the king, the mandarins and the notables becoming the auxiliaries of the French administrators, while the landowners continued to exploit the peasants at will.

Viet Nam was divided into three different "countries" with different administrative regimes: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, each being separately integrated into French Indochina, which also included Cambodia and Laos, and was headed by a French governor-general. The aim, it was evident, was to break the unity of the Vietnamese nation in order to subjugate it more easily.

Each of the five Indochinese "countries" (Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia and Laos) had a French resident. All the important services - security, finance, public works, post, agriculture, public health, trade - were in French hands. The governor-general administered the whole of Indochina with the help of a Superior Council of Indochina which gathered around him the residents-superior and French directors of the most important services.

The Vietnamese administrators were maintained only for form's sake or charged with menial jobs. The council of Vietnamese ministers was presided over by the French resident-superior and each minister had a French adviser. The resident-superior also headed the council of the royal family. In 1899, the French administration took away from the royal administration the right to levy taxes and pay its functionaries. In Tonkin and Annam, at the provincial level, there subsisted besides the residency a Vietnamese administration whose members were mere puppets. The residents-superior were helped by "elected councils" carefully selected among a tiny group of landowners, wealthy merchants or industrialists and high functionaries to serve as a mere adornment for the colonial administration.

The administration set up by Doumer was to undergo no great alteration until the end of the colonial regime.

This administration could not subsist but for a constant military protection; after 1896, sporadic uprisings still broke out which testified to the permanence of the national movement. Around a nucleus of French and African troops and elements of the Foreign Legion, the French organized a "native militia" at the provincial level. The Vietnamese royal guard only served for parades. The "native militia" was mainly entrusted with "pacification" tasks, which did not prevent the militiamen from turning their weapons on many occasions against their French officers and siding with national movements.

Educational and Cultural Organizations

On the cultural plane, the colonial administration strove less to raise the level of instruction of the population than to create on the one hand subordinate agents for the administrative apparatus and on the other to form a "denationalized" intelligentsia, without any contact with the national culture and any spirit of independence on the cultural plane.

At one time, before Doumer, the first governors had thought of using traditional education as a tool at their service. Doumer maintained the regime of mandarin examinations until 1915 in Tonkin and 1918 in Annam. Starting in 1862, the *quoc ngu*, a latinized transcription of the Vietnamese language, was used in Cochinchina then gradually in the whole country. In 1896, the colonial administration introduced it into some tests of the mandarin examinations, and in 1903, a test on the French language also became compulsory.

For traditional education was substituted little by little a so-called Franco-Vietnamese education especially aimed at recruiting a few workers and subordinate functionaries for the colonial regime. Some professional schools were set up and in 1901 a Medical School opened to train

auxiliary physicans (health officers). At all levels, it was a third-rate education. Even the Indochinese University, opened in 1908, dispensed a truncated and deformed education. French was the teaching medium, the study of the national language and history was reduced to a minimum. School and college students learnt by heart that "our ancestors were the Gauls," and disserted all day long on Racine or Chateaubriand without ever seriously tackling the study of Vietnamese culture. Even French authors of the 18th century such as Montesquieu and Rousseau were prohibited; there was neither faculty of sciences nor engineering school at the Indochinese University.

The main feature of colonial education was its restricted character. The diffusion of instruction was restricted to the utmost. In traditional Viet Nam, despite all the hinderings of the feudal regime, the population, who craved for instruction, managed to set up classes for children in almost every village. The substitution of the colonial education for the traditional one provoked a sharp decrease in the number of schools and pupils, an extension of illiteracy. One of the most pressing demands of the Vietnamese people during the colonial period was the diffusion and the Vietnamization of education. Under this constant pressure the colonial administration was compelled to set up a few educational establishments. The university created in 1908 was mainly meant to keep in the country the youths who wanted to go and study in Japan. But never was there any important diffusion of education: 90 per cent of the children could not go to school. There never were more than three secondary schools for the whole of Viet Nam (the same number as for the children of the French, who totalled only a few score thousand). Thirty years after its founding, the university had an enrolment of only 600 students.

For a better survey of the resources of the country, the colonial administration set up a few research institutes by the end of the 19th century: Far Eastern French School, Pasteur Institute, Meteorological Office, Geolog-

ical, Geographical, Forestry Services... In a few domains some French researchers succeeded in doing interesting work, but these institutes were as a whole geared to serve colonial exploitation. Besides, Vietnamese were systematically kept away from research work.

One of the most important cultural elements was the substitution of the *quoc ngu* for the old ideographic script. The printing of newspapers and books in *quoc ngu* quickly forged ahead. The colonialists wanted to use it as a tool serving their own ends, but the *quoc ngu* rapidly became for the Vietnamese national movement a means to diffuse the ideas of independence and progress.

Taxes, Excises and State Monopolies

The maintenance of a huge, vexatious and oppressive colonial administration was a very heavy burden for the country. French functionaries and soldiers received very high salaries; the colonial administration was overstaffed with clients and protégés of French politicians and parties. As early as 1910, the number of French functionaries in Indochina amounted to 5,000 - nearly that of their British counterparts in India.

Taxes were substantially increased; in 1897 the capitation tax went from 0.5 piastre. to 2.5 piastres, land tax from one piastre to 1.5 piastres. Revenue for the general budget came mainly from three state monopolies: alcohol, salt and opium.

The monopoly for making and selling alcohol was conceded in 1902 to a French firm (Fontaine) and the people were compelled to consume alcohol, a quota being imposed on each village according to its population. All private distillation of alcohol was forbidden and severely sanctioned by prison terms, confiscation of property and even deportation. With a capital of 3.5 million francs, Fontaine annually reaped from 2 to 3 million francs' profit. A litre of alcohol, which cost from 5 to 6 cents, was sold 29 cents in 1906.

The administration bought all the salt from the salt-producers to resell it at an increasing profit : 0.5 piastre on every 100 kilos in 1897, 2 piastres in 1907 ; from 1889 to 1907 the price of salt went up five times.

The administration held the monopoly of buying and selling opium, the consumption of which was encouraged. From 1896 to 1899, the price of one kilo jumped from 45 to 77 piastres. When Doumer left Indochina, receipts from opium amounted to 15 million gold francs, twice as much as in 1897. In 1907 the administration listed 210,000 smokers, many times the pre-colonial number.

Revenue from these monopolies went up from 8 million piastres in 1899 to 10.4 million in 1903, 12 million in 1911, constituting an important part of the general budget (i.e. that under the governor-general) which jumped from 20 million in 1899 to 32 million in 1903 and 42 million in 1911. After Doumer's term of office, the Vietnamese people had to pay over 90 million gold francs in tax, nearly three times as much as in the past. Wrote Colonel Bernard in the *Revue de Paris* (October 1908) :

It is this inexorably heavier tax burden which has dominated the financial policy of Indochina these last eight or nine years.

The establishment of those monopolies was accompanied by a system of repression both odious and costly. At the least denunciation, excise agents searched houses, gardens and fields without any warrant and could arrest anyone they pleased. Crushed under the burden of taxes many families had to go even without salt, which had become an expensive luxury.

Colonial Economic Exploitation

In the last analysis, all this administrative, military, financial and cultural apparatus served the colonial economic system, the economic exploitation of the country for the benefit of French capitalist firms which had invested

capital in Indochinese enterprises. The colony was to become an outlet for French industrial products and a supplier of raw materials and manpower at cheap prices. Hence the priority import of French industrial products which dangerously competed with traditional goods and ruined handicrafts, the refusal to set up developed native industry, the concentration of French capital in sectors turning out immediately exportable products : coal, ores, rubber... the recourse to every means to prevent the birth of a Vietnamese capitalist industry. A customs barrier ensured to French products a quasi-monopoly of the Indochinese market. Moreover, in opposition to the heavy tax burden weighing on the Vietnamese, the French societies were subjected to a very light taxation and enjoyed exemptions, subsidies, and profitable contracts with the administration – all this of course being covered by the taxes levied on the Vietnamese.

As early as 1897, a decree allotted particularly advantageous mining concessions to French companies ; and by the beginning of this century, together with coal (in Quang Yen), tin, gold, wolfram and antimony were exploited. Most of the products were exported. Processing industries were little developed, for fear of competition with French products. In the early years of this century, in Cochinchina a number of husking-mills were built to serve export, which came to handle hundreds of thousands of tons of rice. Various companies were set up in Tonkin : a cotton-spinning and weaving-mill in 1900, a company of water and electricity in 1900, a brewery in 1901, a company for forest exploitation and match manufacturing in 1909, brick-kilns, then a cement plant in Hai-phong, a paper-mill in Dap-Cau, a cigarette factory in Hanoi. In Annam, the French invested much less ; there were saw-mills and match-factories in Vinh and Thanh Hoa, a lime-kiln in Hue and a silk-weaving mill in Phu Phong.

All these industries turned out only a small quantity of products, their profits accruing from low wages rather

than from increased production. As the profits were transferred to France, Viet Nam suffered a constant financial deficit aggravated by the repatriation of French functionaries' savings.

In agriculture, the administration favoured the appropriation by French colonists and societies of rich and thinly-populated lands. In the midlands of Tonkin, whole villages were evacuated during military operations and their lands grabbed; in the Tay Nguyen highlands, vast tracts of land were allotted to colonists or societies; in Cochinchina, as a result of drainage work in the Mekong delta, vast domains were awarded to French colonists or Vietnamese agents of the colonial administration. Thus, from 1897 to 1913 French colonists and societies grabbed 470,000 hectares, including 306,000 in Cochinchina, without mentioning 90,000 hectares conceded to a society for forest exploitation. Before 1918, nearly all the concessions to the French colonists were planted with rice because Indochina, particularly Cochinchina, had to supply an increasing quota of this cereal: 800,000 tons in 1900, 1,200,000 in 1920.

However, no technical innovation was brought to traditional rice-farming, whose yield remained one of the lowest in the world - 1.2 tons per hectare on the average. The colonists only thought of intensifying the exploitation of the Vietnamese peasants' labour and the export of rice continued at an implacable rate even when famine was rampant.

In trade, French goods dominated the market, being exonerated from all customs duties. They were sold at high prices while Vietnamese products were exported at low prices. From 1892 to 1913 exports went up from 26 to 102 million piastres, imports from 19 to 110 million. The profits of foreign trade went for the most part to a few big companies: l'UCIA, Denis Frères...

To serve its economic and strategic ends, the colonial administration, particularly under Doumer, gave a fillip to the development of communication means. Single-

tracked narrow-gauge railways were built from Hanoi to Lang Son in 1902, from Hanoi to Vinh in 1905, from Hue to Da Nang in 1906, from Saigon to Nha Trang in 1919, from Hanoi to Yunnanfou in 1919. In Cochinchina, many canals were dug to increase the acreage of ricefields and facilitate the export of rice. The first years of the century saw the biggest development of communication lines during the whole colonial regime.

Changes in the Structure of Vietnamese Society and New Forms Taken by the National Movement

The establishment of the colonial regime gradually and profoundly changed the structure of traditional society, new social classes appeared and new ideas penetrated into people's minds while misery was aggravated owing to colonial exploitation and the many burdens imposed by the occupier.

Pauperization of the Peasantry

Owing to protracted military operations, the countryside was heavily devastated, a number of villages were completely razed. Land grabbing by the colonists, and by mandarins and notables who had put themselves at the service of the French, the proliferation of taxes, the alcohol and salt monopolies with the attendant vexations and exactions, and the ruin of handicrafts considerably aggravated the peasants' misery. The colonial administration was more concerned with the building of railways and roads of strategic importance or serving colonial enterprises than with the construction of hydraulic works to protect the crops from natural calamities. Drought and floods further worsened the fate of the peasantry, who lived in permanent want punctuated

with periodical famines. The dykes received some attention only after many catastrophic floods.

While bearing all the burdens of the colonial regime, the peasants did not receive the slightest benefit : they were too poor to buy French industrial goods and nobody taught them the new agricultural techniques likely to better their production. Moreover, they were subjected to the unbridled brutality of the administration's agents.

Far from being impeded by the colonial regime, feudal exploitation and oppression was reinforced. Little by little land-owners and notables became the best agents of the colonial administration for maintaining "order" and collecting taxes in the countryside. The interpreters, servants, security agents of the French were allotted land, thus forming a new stratum of land-owners. The concentration of land holdings increased.

A few years of colonial domination sufficed to decrease per capita rice consumption : from 262 kilograms in 1900 it went down to 226 kilograms in 1913. A French observer remarked at the beginning of this century :

Those who toured Indochina were struck by the utter misery of her inhabitants. Most of the dwellings were mere huts built of wood or mud and covered with straw. Yellow or red bands or paper bearing Chinese script hung on the walls, a few implements made of wood, sometimes of brass, remains of a lost prosperity, adorn the ancestors' altar.

("Indochina, Errors and Dangers"
by Colonel Bernard)

The peasants' lot, already bad enough under the feudal regime, grew even worse.

Working Class, Bourgeoisie, New Intelligentsia

The setting up of colonial industrial and commercial enterprises, the building of railways and other communication means resulted in the

birth of a new social class, the working class. Without having the numerical importance of its European counterpart, the Vietnamese working class none the less had a most important role to play, for it was born before the national bourgeoisie and its fate was closely linked to that of colonization. Right at its birth, it entered into direct contact with hard colonial realities in the mines, construction sites, factories : starvation wages, exhausting work without any limit or guarantee, brutalities.

For public works, the building of roads and railways, in particular, the colonial administration requisitioned peasants in all villages. Turned "coolies" on the construction sites, they worked in infernal conditions. Jean Ajalbert, a French author, reported :

Requisition becomes ill-disguised deportation... The public work services drive whole communities to construction sites, from which only a small part will return. In 1901, I travelled in the Lang Biang region, where I stayed for several weeks. The public works services were represented by a captain of cuirassiers. The mortality rate was appalling. Rice supplies came only irregularly. There was one physician for a stretch of 120 kilometres.

For the building of the Hanoi-Yunnanfou railways 80,000 people were commandeered, of whom 25,000 lost their lives. One could not speak of class consciousness as yet, but right from the start, movements of struggle, opposition, and protest broke out on these construction sites.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie came into being only later ; in the early years of this century there were only some inchoate elements. Traditional Vietnamese society hampered the development of even a moderately important class of traders. For their commercial operations, the French preferred to deal with Chinese merchants. However, some agents of French companies managed to amass a fortune, thus forming the first core

of the comprador bourgeoisie. But the Vietnamese bourgeois who tried to start a few enterprises were discouraged or driven to bankruptcy by the administration. The nascent Vietnamese bourgeoisie thus had to fall back on real estate and usury, and could only be a "rickety" bourgeoisie.

New towns appeared on the sites of old administrative centres (Hanoi, Nam Dinh) or ports (Saigon, Haiphong, Da Nang). There a new life burgeoned: more intense trading activities, a few factories, some newspapers, electric lighting. But the workers lived in deep, often appalling, misery. Moreover, only a tiny part of the population lived in the towns.

In these towns, the first French-trained intellectuals did not yet play any appreciable role. In Tonkin and in Annam in particular, the scholars still constituted the main body of the intelligentsia, but their prestige had considerably decreased. It became evident that the Confucian doctrine could no longer serve as a basis for the restoration of national independence and for social progress. Modernist scholars emerged who sought other way for the national movement than those advocated by their predecessors.

Modernist Scholars and National Movement

By 1900, the armed struggle which had lasted from 1858 to 1898 had practically ceased; there remained one isolated resistance base in Yen The with Hoang Hoa Tham. But the resistance was carried on in new forms inspired by modern ideas, and varying with the means used by the colonialists for exploitation and oppression. Political struggle appeared in the towns while peasant demonstrations and workers' strikes were staged in support of clearly-stated economic and social claims.

The new social classes – working class and bourgeoisie – were in no position yet to lead the national movement which was still inspired by the scholars. However,

the latter had acquainted themselves with new ideas. Neither the missionaries nor the soldiers of the West had brought with them new ideas of science and democracy, and, as we have seen above, the colonial administration had banned from school curriculums the literary and philosophical works of the French 18th century. The new ideas, the new works – those of Rousseau and Montesquieu in particular – had come to the Vietnamese scholars through Chinese translations. Under the brutal impact of Western aggressions, China had undergone a modernist movement towards the end of the 19th century. Noted scholars – Keng Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao – had led a reform movement to regenerate Chinese traditional society. Then in the first decade of this century, the more revolutionary ideas of Sun Yat-sen dominated the Chinese political stage.

Influenced by these new ideas, Vietnamese patriotic scholars no longer contented themselves with advocating a struggle against aggression, for national independence, while preserving the old monarchic regime and Confucian ideology. They began to put forward programs of social and ideological reform. The scholars were divided into traditionalists and modernists. Of the latter some demanded reforms of the colonial regime, others advocated armed struggle to overthrow it.

In 1905, Japan's victory over tsarist Russia resounded like a clap of thunder throughout Asia. Thus an Asian state, by renovating itself, was able to defeat a European power. Forgetting that Japan had turned capitalist and conquered Taiwan and Korea, the Vietnamese patriots felt for it a great admiration and cherished the hope that, as an Asian power, it would give them some help, if not effective support, in the struggle against French colonialism. Many a scholar or student tried to go and study in Japan; it was the *Dong Du* (Go East) movement.

The prominent figure in the patriotic movement of the first two decades of this century was Phan Boi Chau

(1867-1940). A famous scholar, after 1900 he began gathering the partisans of the Can Vuong movement, which had failed to found a new organization, the *Duy Tan* (Renovation), which advocated the reorganization of forces within the country coupled with the sending of men abroad to study new military and political techniques, and the preparation for armed struggle. Phan Boi Chau thought he would ask for Japanese help. A member of the royal family, prince Cuong De, who was to lead an enlightened monarchy should the undertaking succeed, was sent to Japan to get in touch with the Japanese authorities. By 1908, about 200 young students had been dispatched there, most of them sons of scholars who had taken part in the national resistance. Fund collections were organized everywhere in the country to defray their studies.

Phan Boi Chau had failed to take account of Japanese duplicity. In 1901 in exchange for financial advantages, Japan recognized the French conquests in Asia and expelled the Vietnamese patriots. A Vietnamese student committed suicide by disembowelment to protest against these measures. Phan Boi Chau and Cuong De had to take refuge in China then in Siam, while other *Duy Tan* members fell into the hands of the French police.

In Viet Nam, the modernist scholars displayed great efforts for intellectual renovation. Thanks to collected funds, some scholars headed by Luong Van Can and Nguyen Quyen founded in Hanoi in March 1907 an association to give free instruction to the people, the *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* (Tonkin Study Institute). It enjoyed gratuitous help from many intellectuals and had a big enrolment rapidly running into thousands. Apart from regular courses teaching new subjects, public conferences gathered large and eager audiences coming to attend debates on economic and social problems or to listen to various papers. A group of scholars published a review, *Dang Co Tung Bao*, which advocated reforms, criticized obsolete customs and habits, castigated retrograde notables and called for industrial and commercial development. Books expressing similar views were also

published. Frightened by the successes recorded by the movement, the colonial administration closed the Institute, arrested and deported its leaders. With only one year of existence the *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* had marked an important turning-point in the intellectual evolution of the country and sown good seeds for the future.

Unlike Phan Boi Chau, a champion of armed struggle, another patriotic scholar, Phan Chu Trinh, advocated a movement to urge the colonial administration to carry out reforms, in particular the abolition of the monarchy and the mandarin system and the adoption of republican institutions. His reformism did not prevent him from being arrested in 1909 by the colonial authorities and he would have lost his life but for the intervention of French deputies. Phan Chu Trinh had the merit of being alive to Japanese ambitions since the start.

Peasant Demonstrations, Armed Resistance

The partisans both of progressive reforms and of armed action agreed, however, to wage common struggles, in particular against old customs or the exactions of notables and the colonial authorities. The popular masses rapidly answered the slogans put forward by the scholars; the peasants driven to misery and crushed under taxes soon added their own demands: reduction of taxes, abolition of corvées. A clash became inevitable between the masses and the colonial authorities.

In February 1908 a slogan: "No more taxes paid to the French" was launched and rapidly spread. The colonial administration and the Hue Court, its agent and accomplice, immediately started a harsh repression. The movement none the less gathered momentum. The first peasant demonstrations broke out in Dai Loc district, Quang Nam province: thousands of peasants coming from the villages

mustered in front of the French resident's office, demanding a tax cut. For weeks on end, thousands of peasants in rags camped there in turn, listening to speakers passionately urging them to oppose the collection of taxes.

From Dai Loc, the movement spread to other districts of Quang Nam, then to the neighbouring province of Quang Ngai, and finally to Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Thua Thien. Reactionary notables were arrested or executed together with members of the "native militia." The residence of the mandarin Nguyen Than, a traitor who had helped the French repress the Phan Dinh Phung insurrection, was sacked. In Hue, the demonstrators gathered in great numbers in front of the French governor's palace for two days. Then the movement spread to Ha Tinh province, where it lasted four months. For the first time, the popular masses carried out an unarmed political struggle in the form of big demonstrations, real shows of strength to back concrete claims.

Colonial repression was bloody. Many demonstrators were shot dead. Several patriotic scholars, among them Tran Quy Cap, were put to death; others like Phan Chu Trinh, Huynh Thuc Khang (who was to become a minister in the DRVN government in 1945), Ngo Duc Ke, Le Van Huan... were sent to the Poulo Condor prison island. Thousands of arrested people were exposed to a scorching sun for days on end. A number of villages were completely razed. Thus, in 1908, while the peasant masses demonstrated their strength, the colonial regime supplied every evidence of its cruelty.

During those years, Hoang Hoa Tham still held out in Yen The, being in contact with the *Duy Tan* of Phan Boi Chau and with groups of Vietnamese mutineers in the colonial army. In 1909, breaking the truce signed in 1897, the French launched against the Yen The base a big expedition with 15,000 men and a powerful artillery. Combining guerilla actions with pitched battles, Hoang Hoa Tham managed to hold out for ten months, but the absence of other armed uprisings elsewhere in the country

enabled the colonial administration to concentrate its forces against Yen The and to seize it. Hoang Hoa Tham resisted for another three years before being assassinated by a traitor on February 10, 1913. The Yen The base had held out from 1889 to 1909 thanks to skilful use of guerilla warfare supported by the peasant masses.

During the first two decades of this century, one must also mention many uprisings by the highland people, which unfortunately were not coordinated with the patriotic movement in the deltas and were thus doomed to failure:

- Uprising of the Muong in Hoa Binh (1909-1910).
- Uprising of the Meo in Ha Giang (1911-1912).
- Uprising of various ethnic groups in the Tay Nguyen Highlands: Sedang, Hre, Bahnar, Jarai...

Neither the fiasco of *Duy Tan* nor that of De Tham had discouraged Phan Boi Chau, who founded in 1912 a new league, the *Viet Nam Quang Phuc* (Association for the Restoration of Viet Nam) whose aims included the overthrow of the colonial regime and the establishment of a Vietnamese republic. After the triumph of the Chinese Revolution in 1911, Phan Boi Chau had taken refuge in China and his ideas had evolved along republican lines. However, as uprisings and demonstrations were harshly repressed, the *Quang Phuc* advocated the recourse to spectacular assassinations to awaken public opinion, passed death sentences on Governor-General Albert Sarraut and the traitor mandarins Hoang Trong Phu and Nguyen Duy Han. The latter was killed by a bomb in 1913; the same year, a patriot threw a bomb into a hotel in Hanoi, killing two French officers. Many people were arrested after these attempts and Phan Boi Chau was sentenced to death in his absence. When the First World War broke out, the *Quang Phuc* came to an end following the failure of some attempts at armed action on the China-Viet Nam border.

**Viet Nam During
the First World War
(1914 — 1918)**

While seeking to drain the natural and human resources of Indochina for the war, France brutally repressed all patriotic manifestations of the Vietnamese people. Indochina — mainly Viet Nam — had to supply 50,000 combat troops and 49,000 workers, drafted in the countryside and sent to various fronts in France. Indochina also contributed 184 million piastres in loans, and 336,000 tons of food supplies. These burdens were all the heavier as the years from 1914 to 1917 were marked by many agricultural calamities.

However, for lack of a unified national organization, the Vietnamese national movement, though deep-rooted, was not able to capitalize France's wartime difficulties and carry out big uprisings. The scholars' movement had lost its vigour whereas the new social forces were not yet mature enough to impel significant movements.

As a matter of fact, the *Quang Phuc* plotted to seize Hanoi by a combined action of patriots from within and a revolutionary army from without. But the plot was discovered and many members were arrested; the rest joined various other organizations, armed themselves with rudimentary weapons, and tried to win over soldiers of the "native militia." On January 6, 1913, 150 armed patriots stormed Phu Tho while other posts in several provinces, Nho Quan in Ninh Binh, and Mong Cai near the China frontier, were also attacked. All these assaults failed. The *Quang Phuc* planned a series of strikes against many military and administrative centres in Tonkin, but the project came to grief.

Also in Tonkin, on August 31, 1917, the Thai Nguyen garrison mutinied, led by Sergeant Trinh Van Can, a former partisan of Hoang Hoa Tham, and by Luong Ngoc Quyen, a member of the *Quang Phuc*. They succeeded in winning over many soldiers and killing the French commander, capturing a great quantity of weapons and

munitions, and freeing many political prisoners, who joined their ranks, Thai Nguyen was liberated. After discussing the situation, the insurgents decided to entrench themselves in the town to consolidate their forces, instead of carrying their action into other provinces.

On September 4, the French recaptured the town. Dispersed in the mountainous regions around Thai Nguyen, the insurrectionists carried on the struggle against the 2,000 men on the French side for six months.

In Annam, the salient event was an attempt by King Duy Tan — enthroned in 1907 at the age of 7 — who, acting on the counsel of patriotic mandarins and scholars — in particular Thai Phien and Tran Cao Van — called on the people to rise up. The main forces he counted on were the soldiers about to be sent to France and gathered by thousands in Hue. The signal for the revolt was to be given on May 3, 1916. Unfortunately, the secret was uncovered and the French disarmed the soldiers before the chosen day. Duy Tan sought to escape from the capital but was captured and deported to the Reunion island. Isolated armed groups were rapidly disposed of by the French. Thai Phien and Tran Cao Van were executed.

In Cochinchina, patriotic activities manifested themselves in the first years of this century in the founding of secret societies. The most important one was the *Tbien Dia Hoi* (Heaven and Earth Association) whose branches covered many provinces around Saigon. These societies often took the form of politico-religious organizations, and one of their main activities consisted in punishing traitors at the service of the French.

In connection with these secret societies, a movement was initiated in 1913 by a former bonze, Phan Xich Long, whose partisans, wearing white clothes and white turbans and armed with rudimentary weapons, stormed towns. Phan Xich Long was captured and executed by the French. In 1916 the secret societies in Cochinchina tried to attack several administrative centres, in particular the Saigon

central prison and the palace of the governor of Cochinchina. On the night of February 14, 1916, thousands of people wearing amulets and equipped with knives secretly came to Saigon but were routed by French police and troops after unsuccessful battles.

The colonial administration, while harshly repressing the national movement, tried to placate an "élite" by grudgingly carrying out a few reforms, and especially by promising through the voices of some reputedly "liberal" governors-general important changes after the war. Of course, these promises were never kept. France's ability to maintain her rule in Viet Nam during the war years was primarily due to the weakness of the national movement. Although there always were patriots to raise the standard of revolt, the new, still inchoate, social forces could give the national movement neither impulse nor orientation. One must wait for these forces to develop in the following decades before the national movement could grow again on new bases.

III — ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS AND FIRST LANDMARKS OF THE NATIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION (1919 — 1929)

The decade which followed the end of World War I was characterized by an intensification of the French colonialists' economic exploitation of the country, which wrought important structural changes in Vietnamese society ; on the other hand, with the emergence of new social forces, the national movement took on new forms, thus laying the first foundations of the future national and democratic revolution.

Intensification of Colonial Economic Exploitation

After World War I, French imperialism frenziedly pursued the development of its colonies to serve its own economic rehabilitation. The collapse of the franc and speculations on rubber in the world market hastened French investments in Indochina.

The *Banque de l'Indochine* increased its capital from 48 million piastres to 72 million. Set up by important French financial and industrial groups, that bank, which was also a bank of issue, controlled the main economic and financial activities of Indochina. It held actual sway over the country. The capital of *Credit Foncier* (Land Bank) was boosted from 6 million in 1923 to 50 million

in 1925, that of the *Compagnie Financière et Coloniale* from 5 million in 1920 to 50 million in 1926.

From 1888 to 1918, 490 million francs were invested in Indochina, and 8,000 million from 1919 to 1929. These investments were far from being beneficial to the local economy. The influx of capital corresponded not to the needs of the country but to the interests of French lenders, who were anxious to get profits from these investments. More than half of these were retained in France for the execution of contracts and for financial operations. The investments were chiefly made in mining and rubber planting, that is, in enterprises aimed at draining the country of important quantities of raw materials for export. The return to France of business profits, French officials' savings, payments of arrears and loan interests, created a permanent financial deficit, so much so that far from giving any new financial resources to the country French investments played the role of a suction pump on the Vietnamese economy.

By keeping away from the industrial sector, and concentrating all economic activities on the production and exportation of coal, rubber and mineral ores, these investments, far from fostering the national economy, made it dependent on the fluctuations in the world market.

Rubber provoked quite a rush; on the red soil of the basaltic plateaux of Nam Bo and Cambodia, vast plantations were granted to French companies, including Michelin. The areas planted with rubber-trees rose from 15,000 hectares in 1924 to 120,000 hectares in 1930, and the number of plantation hands from 3,000 to 80,000. From 298 tons in 1915, production rose to 10,309 tons in 1929. Coffee and tea plantations were also set up.

Indochina also ran a «mining fever». From 496 in 1923, the number of mining licences rose to 1,347 in 1924, 8,185 in 1928 and 17,685 in 1929. Most of the mines were located in Bac Bo. In 1913, 501,000 tons of coal extracted, and 1,972,000 tons in 1929; tin, wolfram and lead mines were in operation, but there was no iron mine, and all the ores were exported.

On the other hand, the processing industries knew but limited development; only those which did not compete with French industry were maintained, chiefly under French management, the national bourgeois having practically no share in them. There were for instance, rice mills, the Nam Dinh Textile Mill, the Haiphong Cement Plant, tile and brick kilns; in all, a few enterprises located mainly in the Saigon, Cholon and Haiphong areas, with 86,000 workers in 1929.

Fat profits were due chiefly to extremely low wages. In 1925, the *Banque de l'Indochine* announced a profit of 36 million for a capital of 72 million; the *Compagnie Financière des Caoutchoucs* pocketed 31 million for a 100-million capital. These profits were sent back to France and contributed in no way to the expansion of the enterprises.

The budget continued to be fed by poll and land taxes and the three state monopolies of alcohol, salt and opium, in short by the heavy contributions imposed on a destitute population for the benefit of a cumbersome administrative, military and police machine. Seventy per cent of this budget was for the salaries of functionaries and policemen. The French door-keeper at the University of Indochina earned three times as much as a Vietnamese professor. Imported goods were made very expensive by the customs barrier; Vietnamese rice and rubber fetched high prices in France, and the «development» of Indochina proved only profitable to the big colonial firms.

The colonial administration granted vast tracts of land to French settlers free of charge: 910,000 hectares in 1930.

In the political field, the promises loudly proclaimed during the war were not kept, the regime remaining as oppressive as ever. However, relying on the glib tongue of "liberal" and demagogic governors-general, the colonial administration tried to win over a small «elite» at the cost of grandiloquent speeches and a few benign reforms: setting up of a Great Economic and Financial Council of

Indochina and of a Chamber of Agriculture as advisers to the governor-general. In Cochinchina, delegates of Vietnamese landlords and bourgeois could sit in the Colonial Council on a par with French delegates, this council being a consultative organ to the French governor. In Annam and Tonkin, Houses of People's Representatives, elected by a minority of people, were consultative organs under French senior residents.

These carefully selected delegates or representatives only served as a smokescreen and the people called them *ngbi gat* ("yes deputies"). The colonial administration did not want to grant the Vietnamese bourgeois and feudalists any shred of power. To the king himself there remained only the privilege of awarding honorific titles and grades to... village genies.

Viet Nam remained divided into three «countries» with different regimes, none of them with the slightest democratic liberties. No freedom of association, of the press, of opinion and even of movement within the country. The only favoured religion was Catholicism.

Feudalists and Peasants

The process of social restructuration which began in the early part of this century was stepped up in the postwar years.

The feudalists were composed of the landlords and the members of the old state apparatus – king, mandarins and notables; to maintain their privileges, they placed themselves at the beck and call of the colonial administration, which in its turn, used the feudal apparatus to repress the people and levy taxes. Mandarins and notables used their power to grab fertile land: communal lands of the villages and lands belonging to the peasants. Despite the parcelling out of land among the landlords' offspring, the concentration of landed property actually grew owing to the rapid pauperization of the peasantry forced

by heavy taxes to sell off bit by bit what remained of their land. The clearing of virgin land as well as the rise in the price of rice resulting from rapidly growing exports were largely profitable to the landlords. The landlord class, which accounted for from 3 to 5 per cent of the population, grabbed about fifty per cent of the land. In Tonkin, where the land was divided into small parcels, the landlords possessed large numbers of scattered plots. In Annam, vast acreages of communal land were subjected in principle to periodical allotment, but the village notables always took the best ricefields. It was in Cochinchina, chiefly in the south and west of the Mekong delta that large estates were created under the colonial regime. The land made cultivable by canals dug and other works done by the population was distributed to faithful servants of the colonial administration. Estates of 50 hectares and more accounted for 50 per cent of the total acreage of cropland and were in 1930 owned by 6,500 landlords who made up a mere 2.5 per cent of the population. Some landlords owned up to several thousand hectares. The French colonists grabbed more than 200,000 hectares of ricefields in Cochinchina. Despite the size of their estates, here the landlords also leased them to *ta dien* (tenants) for rents amounting to as much as fifty per cent of the value of the crop. In Cochinchina, rents could be paid in cash, in Tonkin and Annam, only in kind. In Cochinchina, big Vietnamese landlords and French settlers founded a «rice-planters' society.»

This appearance of big estates as well as the presence of French settlers in no way changed the backward agricultural technique. The landowners resorted essentially to harsh exploitation of the peasants and never sought to improve technique. The mono-cultivation of rice was still predominant, and the increase in production brought about by the extension of acreage benefited only exports, while individual rice consumption decreased rapidly. The few existing rice-mills or motor-transport means worked solely for exports. On the other hand, observed Gourou, a

French geographer, throughout the Tonkin delta, there was not a single agricultural machine.

The peasantry made up over 90 per cent of the population.

With the development of a monetary economy, the rich peasants, who directly farmed their lands with the help of farm hands, grew in number. Their aim was not to become capitalists, but landowners. Meanwhile, the rapid concentration of landed property led to a diminishing number of middle peasants, who had just enough land to live on.

The poor peasants who had no or little land, made up the overwhelming majority. In Cochinchina all the *ta dien* were landless peasants; in Tonkin and Annam those who owned tiny plots were many; but millions of them, gradually robbed of their lands, buffaloes and farm tools, and unable to find employment in the towns, where industry was not developed, were obliged to rent land from landlords or colonists. Consequently, land rents were high, rural over population reached dramatic proportions, agents recruiting «coolies» for mines and plantations could impose Draconian conditions, and famine caused by natural calamities frequently occurred. At harvest time, thousands of landless peasants gathered at market places to hire themselves out. In the slack season, thousands of others went to the towns in a vain search for employment, returning to their villages only for the harvest.

In addition to high land rents, the peasants had to pay excessive interests (10⁰/₀ per month on the average) for their debts to landlords or other creditors. In case of illness or accident, the poor peasant ran into debts, often for life, owing to the accumulation of high interests. Frequently, to settle a debt, he had to sell his children or plot of land. On every festive or family occasion (anniversaries, weddings) the landlords would exact gifts or presents in kind from him.

The poor peasants had also to do *corvées* imposed by the rural mandarinal and colonial administration. The

payment of poll-tax, which represented about one month's labour, was a heavy burden. Each year, when the colonial administration collected taxes through the agency of mandarins and notables, the villages resounded with laments and cries of despair, hundreds of thousands of peasants were arrested and flogged until their families had paid their poll-taxes.

The colonial administration thus strengthened the feudal structures: with the rapid impoverishment of the peasantry and the disappearance of old customs, village life lost all charm. No innovation was made, no new light shed on the squalid villages where the overwhelming majority of the people were illiterate. The feudal and colonial society weighed down heavily on millions of poor peasants who were bled white and savagely oppressed but who, once they received a clear-sighted leadership, were to become the prime mover of the national and democratic revolution.

The Proletariat, the Force of the Future

Born, as we have seen, before the national bourgeoisie, the working class experienced a new development. There were in 1929 about 220,000 workers: 53,000 in mines, 86,000 in factories, 80,000 in plantations, chiefly rubber plantations. Most of the French enterprises in Cambodia, Laos and New Caledonia employed Vietnamese labour numbering some tens of thousands.

Numerically, the working class represented a tiny section of the population but was concentrated in areas vital to the colonial economy: mines, rubber plantations, big towns and cities. It was the sole social class that was directly subjected to daily economic exploitation by the colonialists and was in direct and daily contact with modern production technique. It thus played a "strategic" role of paramount importance in Vietnamese society.

There were few specialized or qualified workers having a stable job; many worked on an irregular basis and

returned to their villages when there was no work or when their contract had ended. Thus a close relation was established between workers and peasants, and the number of people who at some moment of their lives had worked in colonial enterprises was much higher than the official figures.

The workers were ferociously exploited. Many women and children were employed in hard work. Recruiting agents scoured the countryside and had illiterate peasants sign contracts (supposedly after reading them) binding them to work for a mine or plantation for from three to five years. The recruiting agent received a fixed sum of money per worker recruited. These hired labourers were sent to rubber plantations in Cochinchina and nickel mines in New Caledonia where they lived and worked in very hard conditions. There was no limit to a work-day; the workers were ill-fed and exposed to malaria, the *cai* (overseers) subjected them to severe surveillance and frequent corporal punishment, and fines deducted from their wages pared down their already tiny incomes.

Mines as well as plantations had their own jails where workers were detained without trial; the French manager in fact could dispose of the life of the workers. The latter had to buy food and other necessities from canteens run by the companies. Their wages thus came back to the latter in a kind of closed circuit. Many workers died of disease or ill treatment; those who tried to run away were hunted down by a ferocious police. There was no legislation to protect the workers and no trade-union freedom; a strike was punished as a crime, with arrest, tortures, deportation. It was true slavery, vehemently denounced by some French journalists (for instance Louis Roubaud in *Les Jaunières*).

An important feature was the absence of a "workers aristocracy," which ruled out all more or less consistent reformist tendency in the workers' movement in Viet Nam as well as all chauvinistic trend. Under the colonial regime the Vietnamese working class was, as it were,

homogeneous in its utter misery, because of the very harsh working and living conditions. In addition to the workers employed in more or less important enterprises, there were many poor labourers in the cities and harbours, and house servants living on uncertain jobs and reduced most of the time to chronic unemployment.

From 1919 to 1929, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie knew some development compared with the previous period but, crushed under the monopoly of French companies and suffering from strong competition by Chinese merchants, it always remained rickety. From 1924 to 1929 there appeared some Vietnamese capitalist firms which, however, never reached the size of the enterprises of the Chinese or Indian bourgeoisie. The Vietnamese bourgeoisie barely succeeded in acquiring some positions in home trade, small industry, transport and construction but were kept away from foreign trade, big industry and mining. Each firm rarely employed more than a few dozen workers.

Those bourgeois who tried to develop the national economy met with strong opposition from the colonial administration; they were the national bourgeois who nurtured aspirations of independence. Others were chiefly distributors of French goods or contractors of public works; they were the comprador bourgeois. The line between the two groups was not clear, the same bourgeois frequently shifting from one to the other. Bullied and stifled, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie often invested its profits in landed estates which it exploited according to the feudal mode. No important bourgeoisie ever developed in Viet Nam.

Numerically, the urban petty bourgeoisie was a more important section. It included small traders, craftsmen and chiefly students and intellectuals trained in the new schools; frequently school students took part in political and social actions. Neither school nor college enrolment was very great but the students were active and, like small traders in urban centres, responded quickly to events. Many intellectuals - professors, lawyers, doctors,

journalists – were strongly influenced by the ideas of French progressives.

The craftsmen, who were in fairly large numbers – from 200,000 to 250,000 – lived in both town and country. Like some villages in Tonkin, many town quarters specialized in handicrafts. The latter, subjected to severe competition by French manufactured goods and heavy taxation, could subsist only on condition that the craftsmen were satisfied with very small earnings in compensation for their labour, and sold their products very cheap. Many of them worked for capitalist firms, which reaped in the bulk of profits.

The petty bourgeoisie, particularly the lower strata, keenly felt the suffering and humiliations imposed by the colonial regime and its national aspirations easily turned to revolutionary ideas.

A New Upsurge of the National Movement

On Vietnamese society then undergoing deep changes, besides the internal causes, there were added important external influences, some of which were to prove decisive in the post-war years.

The October 1917 Revolution which ushered in a new historical era and heralded an irremediable general crisis of capitalism, created new conditions and opened up new prospects for national liberation in the colonies. In India, Indonesia, Egypt, this movement gained a new momentum; in China, things were moving swiftly while in France, the founding of the French Communist Party (1920) marked a new stage in the workers' movement.

Between 1918 and 1921, armed uprisings still broke out but were confined to some mountainous areas in Tonkin such as the rebellions of *Nung* and *Man* soldiers in the northeast and of *Meo* people in the northwest.

The bourgeoisie began to show signs of its political life by boycotting in 1919 not French goods – it was too weak

for a direct confrontation with the occupiers – but Chinese enterprises. Meetings were held and violence perpetrated against Chinese firms, but the movement never developed to any sizable scope. The colonial administration did not look askance at that movement, which created a diversion, but the population did not respond en masse to the slogans put forth. In 1923, the Saigon bourgeoisie openly opposed a project granting a monopoly of import-export through the port of Saigon to a French company; the movement was backed by Chinese merchants and a section of public opinion as well as leftist MPs in France. They succeeded in baffling the project. It was in that bourgeoisie, composed mostly of ex-officials of the colonial administration enriched by rice-growing, that the "Constitutionalist Party," established in 1923, recruited its members. The only thing that party did was to claim a better position for the bourgeoisie in the colonial regime.

Much more important was the general effervescence, chiefly that of the working class and urban petty bourgeoisie. Newspapers were published, either in the vernacular or in French, in Cochinchina: *La Cloche Fêlée* (The Cracked Bell), edited by Nguyen An Ninh, an intellectual returned from France, who took his inspiration from theoreticians of the French Revolution *l'Annam* by an advanced progressive, Phan Van Truong (both in French); in Saigon: *Dong Phap Thoi Bao* (French Indochina Times) edited by Tran Huy Lieu; in Hanoi: *Huu Thanh* by Ngo Duc Ke; in Hue: *Tieng Dan* (Voice of the People) by Huynh Thuc Khang (all three in Vietnamese). Publishing houses were set up, printing books calling on the people to put up a patriotic struggle or popularizing political or scientific knowledge. Political organizations and new parties and groups were founded and carried out a virtually permanent political agitation: meetings, demonstrations, petitions, strikes... Political activities were gradually carried out in modern forms, with this characteristic that, due to a severe colonial repression, the organizations worked

underground while the press was subjected to many restrictions and penalties : censorship, confiscation, closing down and frequently imprisonment or deportation of journalists.

After the failure of the armed uprisings staged during the war, the patriotic organization which had taken refuge in China disintegrated. Their leader, Phan Boi Chau, lived in China until 1925 when he was arrested and brought back to Viet Nam. Meanwhile, he had studied Marxism-Leninism, got in touch with the Communists, and attempted rapprochement with them. The youngest and most zealous members of those organizations jointly set up the *Tam Tam Xa* which in 1924 achieved a resounding deed : Pham Hong Thai, a young member, threw a bomb at the French Governor-General Merlin then passing through Canton on his way to Japan. The assassination failed and Pham Hong Thai committed suicide by drowning but the attempt had wide repercussions. Many of the 100,000 or so Vietnamese coming to study in France or mobilized for the war were influenced by French political current. Some came under the influence of non-revolutionary French leftist parties and were inspired by bourgeois democratic thinking. The most prominent of them was Phan Chu Trinh, a patriotic scholar who had been deported to Poulo Condor then brought to France by the colonial administration. He advocated a gradual struggle to abolish feudal institutions and win democratic liberties under the colonial regime in order to move little by little towards autonomy, dropping the idea of armed struggle. He did not found any political party.

The second tendency was directly influenced by the October Revolution through the medium of the French workers' movement. The most illustrious representative of that tendency was Nguyen Ai Quoc who later took the name of Ho Chi Minh. Coming to France where he practised various trades, he got in touch with many French left-wing parties, groups, personalities and many militants from Africa and Asia. He also visited the U.S.A. and Great

Britain. The October Revolution and Lenin's writing taught him that only Marxism-Leninism could provide the key to the liberation of the colonial peoples. A member of the French Socialist Party, at the Tours Congress in December 1920 he advocated joining the Third International and founding the French Communist Party. He regularly wrote for the French papers *l'Humanité*, *La Vie Ouvrière*, published *Le Paria*, set up the *League of Colonial Peoples*, wrote the pamphlet *French Colonization on Trial*. His militant activity and writings had a deep influence on the Vietnamese and other colonial residents in France and on public opinion in Viet Nam. In 1923, he left France for the Soviet Union and in 1924, came to Canton where he laid the foundations of a new-type revolutionary organization.

While its thinking and political organization were renewed, the working class began to put up struggles of ever wider scope. Strikes took place frequently. In 1919 and 1920, sailors and crewmen on board French ships struck ; by their travels to France and China, the sailors could keep in touch with the world revolutionary movement. The years 1924-1925 were marked by big strikes at Cholon, Nam Dinh, Hai Duong and Hanoi. A political strike broke out at the Saigon arsenal : when two French men-of-war bound for China moored there for repair, the workers launched a strike and delayed the repair work to help the Chinese revolution. They also demanded a 20% wage-lift and the re-admission of the workers who had been dismissed for claiming a thirty minutes' break. This 8-day strike involved several thousand workers and ended in a brilliant success. The two French ships left Saigon only four months later. One of the leaders of the strike was Ton Duc Thang, who had taken part in many movements in France together with French workers, and in the mutiny staged in 1918 by French sailors sent to the Black Sea to help crush the Soviet Revolution. He is now President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

On the national plane, three important movements were launched in 1925 and 1926 : two to demand the release

of Phan Boi Chau then Nguyen An Ninh, and the third on the occasion of Phan Chu Trinh's funeral. The colonial administration had to amnesty Phan Boi Chau who had been sentenced to death. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated on this occasion in big cities, especially Saigon.

One must always bear in mind the savage character of the repression by the colonial authorities in order to accurately appraise the courage and political maturity of the masses and leaders who had organized those strikes and demonstrations.

Regroupment of Patriotic and Revolutionary Forces

In face of that patriotic effervescence, the colonial administration attempted a few minor reforms in order to appease popular indignation and to placate some opportunist elements. The socialist Varenne buckled down to that task, but only the "Constitutionalist Party" of the big rice-planters in Saigon contented themselves with these scraps. Patriots and revolutionaries understood the necessity of organizing the masses, who had been set in motion in order to start an all-out struggle, a *sine qua non* condition for progress and liberation. So, starting from 1925, new patriotic and revolutionary organizations made their appearance.

In Canton, with the *Tam Tam Xa* as nucleus, Nguyen Ai Quoc set up the *Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi* (Young Revolutionaries' Association), Thanh Nien for short. From the homeland or from Siam, where lived a Vietnamese colony, youths came to China to attend a revolutionary training course organized by Nguyen Ai Quoc, and were sent back to the country to set up revolutionary bases. *Thanh Nien* had over the other organizations the advantage of a clearly set forth theory and organizational principles which made it possible for its cadres rapidly to win over the masses and set up solid

organizations. The militants learnt the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, summed up and adapted to Viet Nam's conditions by Nguyen Ai Quoc in his booklet *Duong Kach Menh* (The Revolutionary Road). Three entirely new principles were put forward for the patriotic and revolutionary movement in Viet Nam :

1. Revolution is the work of the worker and peasant masses and not of some heroes, hence the necessity of organizing them and leading them into struggle.

2. In order to triumph, the revolution must be led by a Marxist-Leninist party, hence the necessity of setting up a new-type party.

3. The national revolution must be integrated into the world revolution, the Vietnamese people must act in concert with the world proletariat, hence the necessity of conforming to the policy of the Third International.

Thanh Nien was the sole organization to publish a regular underground paper. Its members were directed to work in workshops, plantations, mines and to militate among peasants, students, small traders, intellectuals. They still knew little about Marxism and had little practical experience; yet, they made a successful criticism of the reformist and chauvinistic conceptions of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

An initial major test for Thanh Nien was the failure of the Canton Commune in December 1927; many of its members were arrested; the Koumintang tried to force it into taking a nationalist line. But Thanh Nien successfully faced the trial and continued to develop its network of mass organizations in Viet Nam, China and among the Vietnamese residents in Siam. By 1928, it was the most powerful underground organization in the country.

Parallel with Thanh Nien, a party of Marxist tendency, Tan Viet, was founded in the country to rally young students on the one hand, and political prisoners released from Pulo Condore on the other. It sent to Canton several of its members, among them Tran Phu, to receive a revolutionary training under Nguyen Ai Quoc's guidance

and to discuss the merging of the two parties. Tan Viet afterwards worked out a programme and rules similar to those of Thanh Nien.

In Cochinchina Nguyen An Ninh founded an underground party chiefly among the petty intellectuals in Saigon; its loose organization and ill-defined program did not survive the arrest of its leaders, the first time in 1925 and the second time in 1928.

The nationalist tendency found expression mainly in the founding of the *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang* (Viet Nam Nationalist Party) starting from a core, the *Nam Dong Thu Xa*, whose main activity was the publication of patriotic books. This publishing house was closed by the colonial administration; the advocates of armed struggle prevailed and the *Quoc Dan Dang* was set up on December 25, 1927, under the leadership of Nguyen Thai Hoc. Its membership was essentially made up of intellectuals, students, petty officials and patriotic-minded notabilities. It did not strive to set up mass organizations but to win over soldiers to prepare for armed struggle. It was heavily influenced by the Chinese Kuomintang and put forward a programme aimed at achieving national independence and setting up a democratic power, but its social program remained very ill-defined. Influenced by the Kuomintang, it displayed an anti-communist tendency. It established its bases chiefly in Tonkin and was practically unknown in the centre and south of the country.

In the South, the largest movement was *Cao Dai*, an original kind of politico-religious society which lumped together in a broad syncretism elements of many religions – Christianity, Buddhism, Islam – and various doctrines, the cult of various gods and historical personages ranging from Christ to Victor Hugo. Practices derived from spiritualism mingled with liturgical forms copied from Catholicism, but *Cao Dai* was chiefly characterized by a strict hierarchy modelled after the Catholic church, with a «pope» and a well-organized clergy. It had its «Holy

See" at Tay Ninh and was largely practised by the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie.

Its widespread influence was due to the religious background of a peasantry who had not yet been influenced by the revolutionary movement and to the necessity for some politicians to camouflage their activities. The colonial administration also planted agents in its midst to keep watch over the movement and give it a certain direction. *Cao Dai* had over one million followers and hundreds of churches. The upper echelon was mostly in the hands of landlords and high-ranking officials.

The appearance of all those parties, organizations and newspapers was to give the movement an ever stronger base for action. In particular, the period from 1927 to 1929 was marked by a series of strikes in Haiphong, Nam Dinh, Saigon and the rubber plantations. Even in Hue crushed under the monarchic and colonial administration, school and college students grew restless. The colonial administration gave up all show of liberalism as preached by Varenne and shifted to naked repression. Varenne was replaced in 1928 by Pasquier, a colonial official. A confrontation between the colonial administration and the Vietnamese patriotic and revolutionary forces was not long in coming.

Yen Bai : the Failure of Quoc Dan Dang and Its Disappearance

In February 1929, faithful to its tactics of terrorist actions and plots, the *Quoc Dan Dang* had Bazin, a recruiter of «coolies» for plantations and mines, assassinated. The colonial police closed in on that nationalist party, which faced complete dislocation. It reacted by resorting to strict partitioning, trying to suppress infiltrated traitors, increasing its membership among soldiers, and stepping up preparations for armed struggle. But it never carried out any mass action. Arms depots were

discovered by the colonial police : turncoats denounced many sections organized in army barracks. The party leaders came to the conclusion that it was necessary to accelerate armed action. They knew that conditions were not yet ripe but thought that «should the revolution fail, at least honour would be saved.» They made up their minds to switch over to action, taking the oath «to die for the world's peoples to know that the Vietnamese people's spirit remains fully alive.»

On the night of February 9 and 10, 1930, Vietnamese soldiers of the Yen Bai garrison, in the north-west of the Red River delta, rebelled, killed their French officers and seized the arms depot. Similar actions were carried out in the neighbouring provinces of Phu Tho and Son Tay, and a few bombs were hurled in Hanoi. In the provinces of Hai Duong and Kien An, people rose up in some localities. But the rest of the country did not budge, not even the popular masses in the towns and provinces where the uprisings took place. The insurgents failed to capture the town of Yen Bai. The insurrection could not last. The party leaders were arrested and executed. They died with the greatest courage. The Yen Bai uprising stirred up Vietnamese and French opinion. The newly founded Indochinese Communist Party backed the insurrection. In the French parliament, the French Communist Party also supported it.

Repression was bloody. The Quoc Dan Dang lost its entire leadership. Its basic organizations were dislocated. Yen Bai was its first and last feat of arms. Not deeply rooted in the popular masses, it could not withstand repression and reorganize itself. The younger and more dynamic elements rapidly turned to other revolutionary roads. Leaders and militants took refuge in China where under Chiang Kai-shek's aegis, they tried to reorganize their party, but in vain. The Quoc Dan Dang disappeared from the political arena ; those who returned to the country in the vans of Chiang Kai-shek's troops in 1945 had nothing in common with the Yen Bai patriots.

Founding of the Communist Party

The development of national and socio-economic struggles among the workers, peasants and intellectuals and the failure then disappearance of the Quoc Dan Dang required more than ever the creation of a party capable of leading the movement and co-ordinating the struggles. Thanh Nien members who were taking part in these struggles felt the urgent need for a Marxist-Leninist party. The first communist cell was set up in Hanoi in March 1929. In May of the same year, delegates to the Thanh Nien National Congress proposed the founding of a Communist Party. There was no opposition but the decision was postponed by the majority in order to have enough time for preparation. Upon its return home, the Tonkin delegation to the Congress, which had made that proposal, created on its own initiative the Dong Duong Cong San Dang (Indochinese Communist Party), issued a manifesto, recruited its members among those of the Thanh Nien, published a paper, «Bua Liem» (Hammer and Sickle) and set up a trade-union federation with a press publication which had a great influence, chiefly in Tonkin and Annam.

In its turn, the Thanh Nien Central Committee decided to found the *Annam Cong San Dang* (Annamese Communist Party). Tan Viet also turned into a new party, the *Dong Duong Cong San Lien Doan* (Indochinese Communist League). Thus under the pressure of grass-roots militants and because of historical exigencies, three communist parties successively saw the light of day : the Thanh Nien and Tan Viet, having fulfilled their historical mission, gave way to the new parties. Immediately, the latter's merging became an urgent necessity.

In February 1930, Nguyen Ai Quoc presided over a conference of delegates of the three parties at Kowloon (China) ; on February 3, the merging was decided and the rules of a unified party adopted, together with those of mass organizations : trade-unions, peasants' unions, communist youth unions, women's associations, red relief associations.

It was a great turning point in the history not only of the working class, but also of Viet Nam's national movement, now led by a party armed with a scientific theory and well-tested principles of action and organization, closely linked to the world revolutionary movement and capable of leading the popular masses into a multiform struggle, elaborating a well-defined program and opening up clear prospects for the future of the nation and the various social classes - things which were tragically missing in the organizations and parties which had preceded it in the anti-imperialist struggle.

At its first plenum held in October 1930, the Central Committee of the new Party gave it the name of *Dang Cong San Dong Duong* (Indochinese Communist Party) and adopted the political theses prepared by Tran Phu, the Party's first Secretary General.

After a concrete analysis of Viet Nam's colonial and semi-feudal society, the Party's political programme considered that the Vietnamese revolution was in essence a bourgeois democratic revolution but was led by the working class and heading directly for the socialist revolution without going through the stage of capitalist development. It had to carry out two essential tasks :

- To fight against French imperialism, and wrest back national independence ; and
- To fight against feudalism, and give land to the peasants.

These two tasks were closely linked together. It was the first time that a party explicitly joined the national question to the peasant question, while the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties, incapable of formulating a clear-cut agrarian programme, had also been incapable of carrying through the struggle for national salvation.

The political theses made it clear that the essential motive force of the revolution was the workers and peasants. The principles of action consisted in involving the popular masses in a daily struggle for their interests and

rights in order to raise their political consciousness and their organizational capacity, and, when conditions are ripe, launching an armed insurrection, seizing power and setting up a worker-peasant state. The essential condition of success is the existence of a Marxist-Leninist leading party capable of defining a correct political line, maintaining in its ranks strict discipline and identity of views, remaining in close touch with the masses and displaying absolute loyalty to the revolution.

On that basis, the Party began a complex and arduous struggle which was to result, fifteen years later, in the seizure of power.

**IV — FROM THE ECONOMIC DEPRESSION
TO WORLD WAR II
— REGROUPING OF NATIONAL AND
DEMOCRATIC FORCES
(1930 — 1939)**

The 1930 economic depression laid bare the utter fragility of the colonial economy and greatly increased the misery of the masses, thus creating conditions for major upheavals. In the ensuing years, the rise of fascism in the world, in particular the setting up of the Hitlerite regime in Germany and the Japanese aggression against China, together with the subsequent development of the anti-fascist struggle, and the advent of the Popular Front in France — all had profound repercussions in Indochina, especially in Viet Nam. Within the country, the decisive factor was the founding of the *Indochinese Communist Party* which was to become the leading organization of the national and democratic movement. The colonial administration, faced with the development of the national and popular movement, reacted by a large-scale brutal repression but proved itself incapable of checking it. The Vietnamese national movement was brought to a new peak when the Second World War broke out.

The Economic Crisis

The economic depression of 1930 assumed an exceptionally grave character in Indochina due to the congenital weakness of the colonial economy, which had more-

over to bear part of the consequences of the French crisis, the "mother country" seeking to make up for its losses by intensifying its exploitation of the colonies.

The drop on the world market of the prices of raw materials, in particular rice, rubber and coal, profoundly affected the Indochinese economy, the "prosperity" of which rested on the export of these products. Exports fell from 228 million piastres in 1929 to 102 million in 1932 while imports dropped from 227 million to 94 million. The prices of rice and rubber were as follows :

	1928-30	1930	1932
Rice (100 kg)	10.8 piastres	6.72	4.25
Rubber (kg)	22 francs	5	3

Exports of rice dropped from 1,900,000 tons in 1928 to 960,000 tons in 1931 and the rice-growing area from 2,200,000 hectares to 1,850,000 hectares. Hundreds of rice-husking factories closed down and thousands of junks were left idle. Only one-third of the 126,000 hectares of rubber was exploitable.

The labour force in the mines fell from 46,000 in 1930 to 33,700 in 1932 ; most of the workers were, moreover, only half employed. Coal production dropped from 1,972,000 tons in 1929 to 1,592,000 tons in 1933. The chromium mine in Co Dinh was closed. All construction work was brought to a halt. Here are the indices of construction in Saigon :

1922	1929	1930	1931
100	214	90	39

Except for a few branches which were able to maintain normal production (power, cement, alcohol) the whole economy sank into a recession. The above-cited figures chiefly concern colonial capital ; it was difficult to evaluate the ruin of the Vietnamese small producers, peasants, craftsmen, small traders and landowners. More

visible was the mass unemployment which struck the workers, employees and small functionaries ; those still with a job saw their income drop sharply.

Even a number of French petty functionaries became jobless and some of them, in order to stress their claims, went so far as to work as rickshaw pullers in Saigon streets. The number of unemployed workers and employees was rated at one-third of the total ; no relief or subsidies were granted and the great majority of the jobless had to return to their families in the villages already plunged in growing misery. Wages dropped sharply :

Daily wages	1931	1934	1936
Coal mining worker	0,7 piastres	0,4	0,36
Skilled worker in Saigon	1,5	1,22	1,13
Unskilled woman worker in Hai Phong	0,31	0,21	0,17

According to the French economist Paul Bernard, a Vietnamese workingman in the thirties earned an average of 49 piastres or 490 francs per year, against 6,200 francs for a French worker and 12,500 for an American worker in the same period.

The functionaries went through hard times. Worktime was augmented, while work was cut, resulting in the laying-off of numerous functionaries and employees while salaries were cut by one half for the newly-recruited. In 1931 the administration dismissed one-seventh of its personnel, reduced salaries by 25⁰/₀ and compelled many functionaries to go into premature retirement. Many secondary-school and even college graduates could not find any job and had to teach in private schools or take up journalism. Many of them later joined the revolutionary ranks.

To cope with the crisis, the colonial administration took a series of measures aimed chiefly at making up for the drop in tax revenue, the result of the general impoverishment of the population, and rescuing the major colonial

firms ; all these new burdens fell on a population already suffering from heavy taxation and unemployment. Customs duties on imported goods were increased.

Important credits were granted to the rubber plantations - 100 million francs a year to 14 companies grouping 1,005 planters, chiefly Frenchmen, who received a subvention of 2-3 francs for every kilogram of rubber produced. The indebted rice-growers also received loans ; but since no loans amounted to less than 5,000 piastres and none could be granted without mortgage of land, the money went mostly to the big landowners. The *Ta dien* - the landless peasants who suffered the most from the crisis - received neither subsidy nor relief. In a word, the administration took money away from the most destitute strata to give to the big companies and latifundists. Never had colonial exploitation taken such a naked form.

The Indochinese economy was bound even more tightly to that of France ; the piastre was tied to the franc and to gold, the rate being fixed at 10 francs to one piastre. Bringing into play "imperial preference," France considerably increased her share in the foreign trade of her colonies. The Vietnamese economy was therefore more and more cut off from its geographical environment and tied to France ; loans voted in Paris placed new credits at the disposal of the colonial administration, but the population would have to pay the interests, and the French industrialists would try all the harder to prevent the industrialization of Indochina. Therefore, the big colonial companies sailed through the crisis without any major damage while smaller societies, mostly founded by Vietnamese, disappeared one after another. All velleity of "autonomous" economic development was shattered,

It might seem at first that the fall in rice exports would lead to a lessening of hunger in the countryside. Nothing of the kind happened. In order to pay their taxes, the poor farmers had to sell three to four times more rice to get the necessary money ; whereas before 1930, 15 work-days would get them enough money for the headtax, two

to three months of work would not suffice during the crisis years. Food shortage appeared even in the richest provinces of Cochinchina, Bac Lieu for instance, while famine occurred in the northern provinces of Annam. The price of land dropped considerably ; in Cochinchina, one hectare of ricefield, which used to sell at 1,000 piastres, was now sold at 150 or 200 piastres. Indebted farmers had to sell their plots to the big landowners. The latter in their turn mortgaged their land to the *Credit foncier* (Land Credit Bank). Thus, the concentration of land and the pauperization of the peasantry were more and more accentuated.

Another indication of economic recession : currency circulation in 1935, in Paul Bernard's estimates, dropped by 35% compared with the twenties.

The economic crisis thus revealed in all their magnitude the defects and servitudes of the colonial economy.

The Large-Scale Struggles of 1930-1931

The failure of the *Quoc Dan Dang* in Yen Bai in no way prevented the development of the national and popular struggle. Among the masses, whose living conditions were upset by the economic crisis, the Communist Party, as soon as it was founded, was to act as veritable ferment. The Party took in hand the leadership of the popular struggles, giving them an impetus and new forms.

In 1930, underground trade-unions formed by the Party grouped about 10,000 members ; the Party's policy consisted in organizing the working class to enable it to lead the revolutionary action of the masses. The question was to transform the factories into revolutionary fortresses. Big strikes were launched ; the colonial administration gave these figures : 43 strikes in the period from April 1929 to April 1930, and 32 from May 1st, 1930 to May 1st, 1931.

What was even more important than the number of strikes was their character of bitter struggle, their level

of organization and the political consciousness of the participants.

A strike is legal in Europe ; in Viet Nam a striker risked a prison term of up to five years, and often deportation if he was accused of being a "Communist." Police and troops never hesitated to fire on strikers and demonstrators. Against police brutalities, the strikers reacted often vigorously : in March 1930, strikers at the Phu Rieng rubber plantation disarmed the soldiers of the local post, and felled trees to erect roadblocks ; women violated by Foreign Legionaries blinded their ravishers with a mixture of ashes and lime.

For the first time Vietnamese workers celebrated May Day at Ben Thuy, in Nghe An province. The French employers and police opened fire on them, killing 7 and wounding 13.

Strikes required big material sacrifices from an already destitute working class. This did not prevent the 4,000 workers of the Nam Dinh textile mill from striking for three weeks, and the 1,200 workers of the Ben Thuy match factory from launching two strikes in 1930 alone, one of them lasting 40 days. Not only workers of other factories, but also peasants from neighbouring villages came to the help of the strikers. The worker-peasant alliance was strengthened, with local Party organizations leading the struggles of both the worker and peasant masses. The leadership of all the strikes was firmly in the hands of the underground trade-unions and the organizations of the Communist Party ; no nationalist party, no yellow trade-union succeeded in establishing bases in the factories. All the strikes were followed with sympathy by the rest of the population who saw in them, not without reason, not only struggles for the interests of the workers, but also manifestations of anti-colonialist patriotism. The strikes of 1930-1931 soon expanded to a national scale, reaching nearly all the major factories : rubber plantations, the Haiphong cement factory, the Nam Dinh textile mill the locomotive repair shops in Vinh and Di An, the Sai-

gon power plant, the depots of the Shell and Standard Oil companies, the coal mines, etc.

Along with the workers' strikes, big peasant demonstrations totalling about half a million participants broke out in 25 provinces especially in Tonkin and Annam. Here too, their leadership was also assumed by the grassroots organizations of the Communist Party, which had set up farmers' unions grouping about 70,000 members in 1930. The close union between the workers' and peasants' struggles under the leadership of the Communist Party became the new and essential factor in the national movement; no other political party had ever succeeded in setting up a worker-peasant alliance, which was to play a decisive role in the national struggle.

The workers' strikes as well as the peasants' demonstration took place under watchwords of both an economic and a political character: wage increase, reduction of work hours, abolition of corporal punishment, freedom of trade-unions and freedom of strike for the workers; equitable distribution of communal lands, reduction of land rents, interest rates and taxes, cancellation of debts and granting of subsidies against famine for the peasants. The slogan "land to the tillers" was put up in some places; farmers burnt debt acknowledgements and title deeds in the hands of rich landowners, and assaulted administrative offices.

It was in the provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh (Nghe Tinh) that the struggle reached its climax. The Vinh - Ben Thuy town was at the time a fairly important workers' centre; local peasants led a miserable life on unproductive lands; and the traditions of national struggle were particularly strong, Nghe-Tinh being the birth place of many patriotic scholars.

On May 1st, 1930, workers and peasants demonstrated together in celebration of International Labour Day, and the movement grew increasingly in the following months. On September 22, near Vinh town, 20,000 peasants held a demonstration; the colonial administration ordered troops

and airplanes to fire on the marchers, killing 217 persons and wounding 126 others. These acts of terror, however, could not prevent the movement from intensifying. In 9 districts of the two provinces of Nghe - Tinh, the local functionaries fled to town while the village authorities handed over their seals to the peasants. Peasants' associations took over local administrative functions, thus creating an embryonic form of revolutionary power on a territory with 100,000 inhabitants.

The revolutionary power redistributed the communal lands, allotted to poor peasants lands belonging to reactionary landlords, ordered the reduction of land rents and interest rates, the cancellation of debts and the abolition of the head-tax. It also organized production, and launched a campaign for the abolition of backward customs and habits and the elimination of illiteracy. People's self-defence militia units were created, and the traitors punished. Enthusiasm prevailed in the liberated regions. Numerous songs and poems were composed to express the joy of the masses. It was a veritable people's democratic power, which the population called the "Nghe-Tinh Soviet."

For several months, the Nghe-Tinh Soviets opposed a grim resistance to the troops and aircraft of the colonial administration; however, conditions were not yet ripe for a victorious insurrection. The movement came to an end by the middle of 1931. Nevertheless, the Nghe-Tinh Soviets constituted an important landmark, a veritable prelude to a future revolution. Parallel with the Nghe Tinh Soviets, a peasant revolt broke out in the province of Quang Ngai; in Cochinchina many peasant demonstrations took place in Sadec, Vinh Long, Soc Trang, etc.

Colonial Repression and Terror

Deeply worried about the development of the popular movement, and compelled to cope with it on all fronts, the colonial administration sought to retrieve the situation by a more and more brutal repression. Police, regular

troops and air forces were unleashed against the crowds ; torture was widely used ; prison, deportation and death sentences were given lavishly ; and in the worst cases, the troops, particularly the Foreign Legion, carried out summary executions, sowing terror in numerous localities.

The following figures released by the colonial administration – though much watered down – give an idea of the magnitude of the repression :

1929 : 1,490 arrests, 3 death sentences, 300 prison sentences.

1930 : 699 persons killed during the strikes and demonstrations, 2,963 persons detained, 83 death sentences, 543 life sentences to hard labour or imprisonment, 795 sentences to prison terms totalling 3,648 years, and 780 cases of deportation.

1931 : in the first four months alone : 1,419 arrests, 1,023 sentences to life imprisonment, 604 sentences to hard labour.

In 1932, the number of political detainees in various prisons including the jails of Poulou Condor and French Guiana rose about to 10,000.

That repressive campaign achieved some results, notably depriving the movement temporarily of leadership. The Secretary General of the Communist Party, Tran Phu, was arrested and tortured to death. The scope of the disturbances and the repression aroused a movement of opinion in France in favour of the condemned, a movement inspired by the French Communist Party and the CGTU (Confédération générale du travail unitaire).

To screen the repression, the colonial administration carried out some semblance of reform in order to deceive the popular masses and to woo the "elite". "Conciliation commissions" were created in the factories and a program was worked out to set up small farms of 5 to 10 hectares for the peasants in western Cochinchina, in the Central Highlands and in the midlands of Tonkin, some modifications were brought to school curriculums while the Court

of Hue created a "Ministry of Education". Some additional seats were given to Vietnamese in the colonial councils. King Bao Dai, who was then living in France, was brought back to Hue, allegedly to reform the monarchy. The French assigned two assistants to Bao Dai : Pham Quynh, a faithful servant of the colonial administration, as "cabinet director", and the Catholic mandarin Ngo Dinh Diem who had distinguished himself in the 1930-1931 repression. A bitter rivalry soon developed between these two men, each supported by a colonialist group. Out of vexation, Ngo Dinh Diem resigned, and turned to Japan.

The colonial administration also relied on the activity of Catholic missions to regain control over the troubled regions, and promoted the creation of Buddhist groupings and of organizations working for the renaissance of Confucianism. It sponsored the organization of dancing clubs, fairs, beauty contests... with a view to turning a section of the youth toward pleasure-seeking.

A New Start for the National and Popular Movement

The repression had eliminated the nationalist parties and groups from the political scene, but could create only temporary hindrance to the activity of the Communist Party, which had struck deep roots in the popular masses. Many militants, especially in the villages, had escaped arrest thanks to the people's protection ; others, who had taken refuge abroad, returned to the country, and those who had been sentenced to only short prison terms resumed their activities immediately after their release. In the prisons, political and theoretical courses were held which were to give the detained militants a solid training. A leading committee was formed with Le Hong Phong as its head ; as early as 1932 a program of action laid down a general line for the militants, and mass organizations gradually resumed their activities.

Strikes broke out anew in the rubber plantations, printing offices and rice-husking mills, notably in Saigon. The year 1935, one of economic recovery, also saw big strikes break out in Saigon. Also in this city, Vietnamese landowners and bourgeois, acting in concert with a number of Frenchmen, campaigned against the tying of the piastre to the franc and the domineering position of the Bank of Indochina. Thus a process of differentiation began within the colonialist clan itself.

New forms of action were undertaken ; Nguyen Van Tao and Nguyen An Ninh founded the journal *Trung Lap* (Neutrality) ; in 1933, in the Saigon municipal elections, a "workers' ticket" headed by Nguyen Van Tao won many seats in spite of restrictions in the electoral system. Big meetings often grouping thousands of persons were organized where the speakers defended the interests of the working masses and demanded democratic freedoms. A French-language paper, *La Lutte* (Struggle), was published, which had a great influence on the intellectual circles. The rostrum of the Saigon Municipal Council became a platform from which to popularize some claims. Thus in conjunction with actions by the masses, which remained the most important ones, appeared the first forms of legal struggle, the first-ever in the history of the national movement.

In 1934, a fact-finding mission sent by the CGTU, the French Popular Relief and the French Committee of Action for the Amnesty of Political Prisoners came to Viet Nam, led by the French Communist deputy Gabriel Péri ; its activity had profound repercussions in Vietnamese public opinion, which highly appreciated the militant solidarity shown by the French working class.

In 1935, new municipal elections were held in Saigon : the Nguyen Van Tao ticket won four of the six seats reserved for the Vietnamese as against 12 seats reserved for the French. Success was also recorded in the elections to the Colonial Council. In the eyes of the Communist Party, these election successes in no way constituted the

main goal of the struggle ; yet they afforded opportunities to popularize slogans and arouse the political consciousness of the masses in order to prepare them for more important actions.

The situation was evolving rapidly. The fascist powers had consolidated their alliance, forming the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis while a rapprochement took shape between the Soviets Union and the Western powers with a view to coping with the fascist danger. In China, Japanese aggression moved southward and war was approaching the borders of Indochina. The Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang got allied with each other to resist Japanese aggression. Japanese fascism aimed not only at conquering China but also extending its domination to South-east Asia as a whole.

In France faced with the fascist danger, a vast coalition was formed, grouping within a Popular Front the three big leftwing parties : communist, socialist and radical. The success of the Popular Front in the 1936 elections led to the formation of a government headed by the Socialist Party and supported by the Communist Party. Fascism was defeated in France and the French working class made important political and social gains. A law granting amnesty to political prisoners in the colonies was promulgated and a fact-finding commission was appointed to define the necessary conditions for reforms. The formation of the Popular Front government in France incontestably created favourable conditions for the Vietnamese national movement to make rapid progress.

It was evident, however, that the decisive factor remained the actions of the Vietnamese popular masses who had resumed their activities, and the prime condition for success was a judicious course to be charted by the leading body, the Indochinese Communist Party, the sole political organization with bases throughout the country and among all social strata.

The Party Central Committee took a series of important decisions in the summer of 1936 :

In the present circumstances, the Indochinese Revolution must be part of the anti-fascist world front for democracy and peace, the watchwords: "Overthrow French imperialism", and "Confiscate the landlords' lands and distribute them to the peasants" were temporarily withdrawn. The Party called for the founding of a broad "anti-imperialist popular front" which would rally all social strata, political parties, religious and ethnic groups in Indochina in order to struggle for elementary democratic liberties, freedom of meeting, association, opinion, publication, movement, freedom to go abroad, amnesty for political prisoners, an 8-hour workday, labour legislation, and the broadening of the elected economic and social councils.

However, these slogans failed to differentiate the ranks of the colonialists, and a Central Committee plenum meeting in March 1938 decided to found an *Indochinese Unified Democratic Front* in order to rally all democratic and progressive forces and spearhead the struggle against the most dangerous enemy at the time - the French fascists and the reactionary colonialists.

The Central Committee advocated legal and semi-legal action with broad mass participation in a resolute struggle for democratic freedoms. But the Party continued to keep its underground bases and its objectives concerning the national and democratic revolution.

The colonial policy of the French Popular Front provided the Party with the opportunity to launch a vast campaign for the holding of an "Indochinese Congress," a kind of States General where the different social strata and groupings would put forward their claims while the working masses in the towns and countryside would continue their struggle for the improvement of their living conditions. Committees of action were created throughout the country, campaigning among numerous segments of the population. Under the double influence of the popular movement in Indochina and progressive opinion in France, the colonial administration had to set free many

political detainees who were thus able to bring a precious contribution to the movement. From Saigon where a Provisional National Committee was elected, the movement spread to Annam and Tonkin; here under the auspices of the "Indochinese Democratic Front" and animated by able militants, big meetings were held and patriots were elected to the Hanoi Municipal Council and the People's Chambers of Representatives in Hanoi and Hue.

Political meetings and demonstrations and strikes succeeded one another without let-up. The colonial administration took a series of measures aimed at impeding this seething political activity; it banned all gathering, and enjoined the provisional National Committee of the Indochinese Congress to submit its claims and then to dissolve. The Committee refused. The administration then brought pressure to bear upon the leaders of the Constitutionalist Party to make them leave the Congress and convene a conference to submit the "people's aspirations." Then the administration ordered the arrest of the chief promoters of the Congress and its dissolution.

However, the dissolution of the Indochinese Congress could neither block the movement, nor prevent the population from winning new, important, successes.

First, the amnesty of political prisoners. This watchword quickly became very popular, and the most diverse groups as well as newspapers of all shades fought for the amnesty. Several thousand detainees were thus set free who, as already said, made important contributions to the movement. There remained, however, several thousand others whom the colonial administration continued to keep in its jails.

Another success was the promulgation of some social legislation. As from November 1936, the work-day should not exceed 10 hours; 9 hours as from the first of January 1937 and 8 hours as from the first of January 1938. It was forbidden to employ women and children in night shifts. The workers were entitled to a day off every week and from 5 to 10 days of paid holidays every year. Wages should be paid in cash, and it was forbidden to deduct fines

from them. Women workers were entitled to an 8-week maternity leave. It was not a paid leave but the employer was no longer allowed to dismiss pregnant women workers as he had been wont to do previously. This social legislation did not include freedom of trade-union, freedom to strike and social insurance, in short, the fundamental rights of the working people. It nevertheless represented an important step forward. Its implementation was to meet with stiff resistance from the colonial administration as well as the employers and persevering struggles were needed to carry it into effect.

In this general political atmosphere, stimulated by the gains obtained, the Vietnamese working class went through a period of great effervescence. In the second half of 1936, 361 strikes were recorded, some of which were truly political ones, like that staged by Saigon workers in protest against the arrest of promoters of the Indochinese Congress. The most important strike was that of the 25,000 workers of the Quang Yen coal mines. Wage increases, reduction of work hours, trade-union freedom and democratic liberties were the principal demands of the strikers. 1937 recorded 400 strikes. In 1938, the political leadership of the movement spearheaded the struggle against the big colonial companies while some form of accommodation was sought with the small national capitalists in order to broaden the democratic front.

Trade-unions continued to be banned but workers and employees formed "friendly societies" or sports associations and reading clubs. A paper, *Lao Dong* (Labour), was the organ of the movement.

In connection with that period, mention should be made of the activities, especially in Cochinchina, of a Trotskyite group whose influence was felt among politically inexperienced elements of the petty bourgeoisie lured by the leftist or extremist slogans of the Trotskyites. However, the anti-communism of the Trotskyite leaders found no echo among the members of basic organizations. Hostile to a policy of broad national union, the Trotskyites opposed the creation of "friendly societies" of workers

and employees and tried to involve the masses in ill-advised strikes. Most of all, Trotskyism brought an element of division into the national and popular movement. It was not to survive when big confrontations took place.

In the villages, political activity also made big strides. Meetings and demonstrations multiplied beyond reckoning. On the occasion of major anniversaries, peasants in villages around the towns went to the provincial capitals to voice their claims or support demonstrations organized by the townspeople. Underground peasant unions were replaced by "friendly societies", associations of rice transplanters, reapers, house builders or even associations for funerals, for fishing, etc.; these associations drew large strata of the peasantry into multifarious political and social activities.

The Communist Party then launched the following program of action for the peasantry :

- Reduction of land rents, which must not exceed one-third of the crop.
- Exemption of land rents in case of crop failure.
- Equitable distribution of communal lands, which should not be put to auction.
- Freedom to reclaim waste lands and allotment of such lands to those who had reclaimed them. Handing over to the peasants of lands left waste by the owners.
- Setting up of branches of the Land Bank in the villages in order to grant low-interest loans to the peasants ; a ban on usury.
- Abrogation of the head-tax.
- Promulgation of elementary democratic liberties.

Meanwhile, numerous associations and "friendly societies" were set up everywhere, grouping women, the youth and members of various trades. An association for the popularization of *quoc ngu* (national script), mainly aimed at struggling against illiteracy, played an important part on the cultural front.

It was a period of political effervescence when the political parties played a much less important role than the mass organizations, because the various political

parties of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie did not possess any real strength while the Communist Party remained practically underground, only some of its militants working in the open to animate the popular organizations. The Democratic Front, which was founded to replace the Anti-imperialist Front, was in no way a grouping of parties like the French Popular Front, but a rallying of different social strata, political, religious and cultural groups with a view to certain common actions. It even included the French sections of the Socialist Party in Hanoi and Saigon, which had begun to recruit members among the Vietnamese.

The Situation in Viet Nam on the Approach of the World War

From 1938 onward, the international situation evolved very rapidly ; the fascist powers in Europe and in Asia, encouraged by the meekness and even the complicity of Western governments, switched to the offensive. The threat of war loomed. In early 1939, the Japanese occupied Hainan island, less than 300 kilometres from Hai-phong, while in China their troops came close to the Indochinese frontier. What should be done in face of imminent Japanese aggression ?

In France, the government of the Popular Front gave way to a rightwing government which, while preparing for war, devoted its efforts to liquidating the reforms achieved. As early as the beginning of 1939, repression resumed in Indochina with the colonialist clique seeking to abolish all democratic liberties. In 1938, the colonial administration floated a public loan of 40 million piastres allegedly to buy war material in France. Early in 1939, 10 million piastres of new taxes were levied to build air bases and finance other war preparations. The French government decided that Indochina should supply France with 1.5 million soldiers and workers, or 15 times as many as during the 1914-18 war.

In October 1938, the Indochinese Communist Party, in a public manifesto, denounced France's and Great Britain's policy of compromise with the fascists, drew attention to the danger of Japanese aggression, and called on all parties, groups and social strata, including democratic Frenchmen to unite in the Indochinese Democratic Front in order to fight for freedom, peace, the daily interests of the working masses, and the defence of the country.

The campaign for the defence of Indochina against Japanese aggression was accompanied by the struggle against the big colonial interests, against the diversion manoeuvres of the colonial administration. The latter had in fact decided to merge Tonkin with Annam under the aegis of the Court of Hue, presenting this as a step toward a reunified Viet Nam, in an attempt to involve the population in the anti-Japanese defence. This manoeuvre, however, could deceive nobody : a big campaign was launched to convince the population that this operation could only lead to a further curtailment of the already scanty democratic liberties in Tonkin by putting this region under the sway of the monarchy completely controlled by the colonialists. The paper *Dan Chung* (The Masses), organ of the Communist Party published in Saigon, wrote that the road to the reunification of the country could not pass through the merging of Tonkin and Annam under the aegis of the monarchy, but through a long and arduous struggle for democratic liberties, against the reactionary colonialists and Japanese aggression. Faced with this grim opposition the colonial administration had to scrap the project.

Thus, at a time when the Second World War was about to break out, the Vietnamese popular masses displayed an intense political life and the Vietnamese people possessed a solidly-organized and experienced political party. These factors were to play a decisive role in the future course of events. The situation was therefore much more favourable than that on the eve of the First World War.

V — VIET NAM DURING WORLD WAR II. THE AUGUST 1945 REVOLUTION (1939 — 1945)

The First Struggle

At the beginning of the war, the colonial administration tried to reinforce the defensive potential of Indochina while mobilizing its human and material resources for the benefit of France. The Indochinese armed forces were increased to 100,000, the effectives of police and security services doubled. Towards the end of 1939, tens of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers and workers were sent to France.

A Supreme Economic Council was set up to control the economy. Paris ordered Indochina to supply France with 3.5 million tons of food stuffs, 800,000 tons of tea, coffee and sugar, 30,000 tons of cable, 600,000 tons of rubber. Work-hours were increased from 48 to 60 hours a week for men and 54 for women. Heavier taxes and duties were imposed.

On the political plane, all supposedly "communist-inspired" activities were forbidden, all supposedly "communist-led" organizations dissolved and all "communist" propaganda literature seized. Even many Cao Dai sanctuaries were closed. Thousands of political prisoners and suspects were jailed and some deported to Madagascar. The most notorious prisons were Lao Bao, Nghia Lo, Poulo Condor. Governor-General Catroux declared that

communism should be rooted out to ensure "peace" in Indochina and safeguard her "loyalty".

The fear felt by the colonial administration for the Communist Party — the only party to have maintained and developed its bases and worked out a comprehensive program — was not without reason. The Party having got ready to go underground, it suffered only insignificant losses. Most of its activities were transferred to the countryside where the colonial repressive machinery was comparatively weaker. However, its cadres remained active in the towns.

In November 1939, the Party Central Committee made an analysis of the situation and defined the tasks to be fulfilled :

— The 1939 war was merely an inter-imperialist war for a new division of the world.

— The essential task of the Vietnamese revolution was to overthrow imperialism, no matter what colour the skin of those who led it. National liberation was the prime objective. All objectives, including the land problem, must remain subordinate to it.

— It was imperative to form an anti-imperialist United Front. The slogan of land reform was temporarily replaced by that of confiscating the lands of the traitor landlords ; that of forming a democratic republican government was substituted for that of founding a worker-peasant government.

A new political line of great importance for the years to come was elaborated at that 6th plenary session of the Central Committee.

The French defeat in June 1940 plunged the colonialists in Indochina into confusion. All attempts to resist Japanese aggression soon fizzled out. The colonial administration yielded to all Japanese demands. Control of the Sino-Vietnamese border fell into Japanese hands and the Japanese could land troops in Tonkin to attack the Chinese army from the rear. Japanese troops coming from

Kwangsi (China) routed the French garrison in Lang Son, who fled to Hanoi by way of Bac Son.

Taking this opportunity, the Bac Son people rose up, disarmed the battered French soldiers and captured the Vo Nhai post, winning over a part of its garrison.

The colonial rulers, strongly opposed to the Vietnamese national popular movement, joined hands with the Japanese fascists who, hostile to the revolutionary movement and anxious to exploit to the utmost the resources of Indochina, sought to make full use of the French colonial administrative machinery. This collusion between the French colonialists and the Japanese fascists, aimed at checking the Vietnamese national movement, lasted till 1945.

The Lang Son incident was quickly settled between French and Japanese and the colonial administration could concentrate its forces to repress the Bac Son uprising. The insurgents took to the forests and formed the first guerrilla nuclei led by the Communist Party.

In the south of Indochina, the French were faced with the demands of Thailand. With Japanese blessings, Thailand claimed areas of land northwest of the Cambodian great lakes and on the right bank of the Mekong River in Laos. Units of Vietnamese soldiers were moved against the Thais. Some, based in Saigon, planned a mutiny in order not to be sent to the front. This project was in agreement with the program elaborated by the Cochinchina Party Committee which had been actively preparing for an insurrection since 1940. A plan of action was worked out to combine the mutiny with actions by worker-peasant organizations all over Cochinchina.

The insurrection broke out on the night of November 23, 1940. Unfortunately, the colonial administration, having got wind of the plot, had disarmed the rebellion-prone units, and so the Saigon uprising failed to take place. However, insurrections broke out in no less than 8 provinces (out of 20) in Cochinchina. In My Tho province 54 out of 100 villages took part. Here, the gold-starred

red flag, which was to be the national flag of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, made its first appearance. With the tacit consent of the Japanese, the insurrection was subjected to barbarous repression. Many villages were razed to the ground, over 20,000 people arrested and killed.

Another uprising took place on January 13, 1941, at Do Luong, Nghe An province. A garrison mutinied and marched on Vinh, the provincial town, but was quickly dispersed by French troops.

So, in the first year of the Second World War, the Vietnamese people, under the leadership of the Communist Party, made clear their determination to win back independence by means of revolutionary violence. Though falling short of success, the first engagements constituted a valuable experience. It was proved that one could not count mainly on the co-operation of the soldiers in the colonial army, but should prepare the entire people, politically and militarily, for the struggle for power to be waged at a propitious moment.

The Franco-Japanese Double Yoke

From 1941 to 1945 Viet Nam was subjected to a Franco-Japanese double yoke. The French and the Japanese combined their efforts to exploit the country's resources to the utmost, maintain "law and order", and suppress the revolutionary movement. This collusion, however, did not keep them from pursuing each their own policies to consolidate their respective positions in anticipation of eventual confrontations. Economic exploitation was stepped up to meet both French interests and the requirements of the Japanese war economy. Patriotic movements were repressed with increasing violence while political manoeuvres multiplied in an attempt to hoodwink public opinion and rally reactionary or politically inexperienced Vietnamese elements.

Admiral Decoux, appointed Governor-General of Indochina by the Vichy Government, carried out a double-faced policy of dictatorship and demagoguery. At the end of 1940, the few councils which had been set up to give the colonial regime a semblance of democracy were dismissed and all powers fell into the hands of the Governor-General, especially into those of the all-powerful security services. The Decoux administration did its best to launch a cultural movement to promote allegiance to France and reactionary conceptions inspired by Petainism and Confucianism. New schools were opened and enrolment after 1942 increased from 450,000 to 700,000. Money was raised to build the Hanoi Students' Quarters, and Vietnamese mandarins, landowners and bourgeois were encouraged to set up funds to help needy students. The colonial administration strove to seize control of the anti-illiteracy movement until then in the hands of the patriots. It held literary competitions, art exhibitions, gave prizes and sought by all means to enhance French culture.

A particular attempt was made to establish political control over the youth by grouping them into sports associations, para-military and boy-scout organizations. Civil servants were allowed to engage in sports activities on week-ends. A few favours were granted them: increase in salaries and allowances, transfer of certain categories to a metropolitan regime, promotion to higher posts.

The youth and civil servants were even allowed to speak of "patriotism," so long as it was a "local patriotism" within the framework of loyalty to France.

All these measures by no means changed the nature of French policy: complete submission to the Japanese occupier and brutal crack-down on the national movement.

The French had had to agree to the stationing of Japanese troops in Tonkin and to cede 70,000 square kilometers to Thailand, an ally of Japan. The so-called joint defence treaty concluded on December 9, 1941, put the whole of Indochina under Japanese control. Indochina

then became a Japanese military base and a supplier of raw materials to the Japanese economy.

First, the French colonial administration supplied Japan with rice: 585,000 tons in 1941, 973,000 tons in 1942, 1,023,000 tons in 1943, 900,000 tons in 1944. At the beginning, Japan paid in gold or industrial goods, but Japanese reserves were quickly exhausted and after December 1942, she paid in "special yen," a sort of worthless military bonds.

In fact, it was the colonial administration that helped cover Japanese war expenditures by putting more and more bank-notes into circulation: 723 million piastres, that is 7 times as much as the 1939 Indochinese budget. In 1944, the total of paper currency in circulation increased to 1,052 million (216 in 1939). As a result, prices spiralled upward.

To meet Japanese needs, the colonial administration stored up a whole range of products: cement, jute, sugar, oil, coal... by monopolizing the sale and purchase of a great number of goods. Meanwhile there was a lack of raw materials, equipment and transport to keep the economy going. Only the big colonial firms got huge profits from the new current of exchange with Japan. For them the French surrender to the Japanese was a paying proposition.

The heaviest burden for the people was the compulsory sale of rice to the administration. Even Tonkin, where food was tragically scarce, had to supply 130,205 tons in 1943; 186,130 tons in 1944. Whether the crop was good or bad, each region had to supply a quantity of rice in proportion to the tilled acreage at the derisory price of 19 piastres a quintal. In lean years, the people had to buy rice on the market at 54 piastres a quintal to meet those obligations. To provide gunny bags to the Japanese economy, the peasants were forced to root up rice plants on vast areas and plant jute instead.

In 1944, when the transportation of coal to Saigon was cut off by US bombing, the French and the Japanese used

rice and maize as fuel for power stations. They vied with each other in storing up rice. During that time, agriculture was not improved. Dams and dykes were neglected. The slightest natural calamity caused food shortages which developed into horrible famines. Starting in 1943, famine became more and more serious from 1944 onward.

While joining hands with the French administration to exploit to the utmost the resources of the country and harshly repress all revolutionary activity, the Japanese conducted demagogic manoeuvres. They dangled the bait of "national independence" to be won for Viet Nam with Japanese help within the framework of Asian solidarity against the whites and of a co-prosperity zone in Greater Eastern Asia. In particular, they sought to recruit lackeys, either individuals like Tran Trong Kim, Ngo Dinh Diem, Nguyen Van Sam, or tiny groups like the Dai Viet clique in Tonkin. However, until the end of the war, it was more important for Japan to maintain "law and order" with French help than to back any group of puppets. When the French reacted too strongly, the Japanese preferred to send their agents away, to avoid clashes. Even in 1944, after the fall of the Vichy Government in France, they carried on this policy.

The Birth of Viet Minh

The people were writhing under the Franco-Japanese double yoke. From 1940 to 1944, prices increased by 400⁰/₀, wages only 20⁰/₀. In Tonkin and Annam, the peasants starved; in Cochinchina, goods were so scarce: millions of people went about in rags, even clad in leaves. Dissatisfaction mounted among rich peasants and landlords, compelled to sell their products cheap, and among businessmen and industrialists, who lacked raw materials and equipment and were pressed down by Government monopolies. The only ones to profit were the big colonial companies, black-marketeers and professional speculators.

Whereas some patriots at first had harboured illusions about a possible Japanese aid, the Communist Party had the merit of denouncing the Japanese danger and steering the struggle along the right course. In May 1941, Ho Chi Minh convened at Pac Bo (Cao Bang province) the 8th session of the Central Committee which put the Vietnamese revolution unreservedly in the world anti-fascist camp, of which the keystone remained the Soviet Union. The plenum held that Hitlerite fascism would attack the Soviet Union and this would certainly end in its own annihilation. The world war would end with the formation of new socialist countries. It was in this perspective that the strategy of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement was to be defined.

The present essential task was to liberate the country from Franco-Japanese domination, which was bearing hard on the entire people; national liberation must be put above all other things; the interests of all social classes must be subordinated to this primary objective. Broad national union should be achieved against French colonialism and Japanese fascism and a national front be established to rally all social classes and strata, parties, political and religious groups. Lands belonging to the imperialists and traitors should be confiscated and distributed to poor peasants, land rents reduced and communal lands equitably distributed, all these measures to be progressively applied with a view to realizing this slogan: "Land to the tillers". Thus, national unity could be achieved without the poor peasants' fundamental interests being neglected.

The Central Committee decided to prepare for an armed insurrection and for this purpose to reinforce guerilla and self-defence units and to set up guerilla bases.

"The war in the Pacific and the resistance of the Chinese people to Japanese aggression," the resolution of the plenary session declared, "will develop in a way favourable to the Indochinese revolution. At the right moment, with our forces ready, we

shall be able to launch partial insurrections, and secure victories in various areas to pave the way for a general uprising."

Truong Chinh was appointed Secretary-General of the Party.

On those bases was founded the Viet Minh Front (abbreviation of *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh*) which rallied workers', peasants', youth, women's organizations and guerrilla units operating in the highlands. These national salvation organizations rallied all social strata, including the bourgeoisie and the landlords as long as they agreed to fight against French and Japanese imperialism. The Viet Minh adopted the gold-starred red flag as emblem.

The Viet Minh quickly gained popularity among the labouring classes writhing under the Franco-Japanese double yoke. This yoke also brought about a profound polarization among the bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and students, who swung away from pro-Japanese and pro-French groups and gravitated towards the Viet Minh.

In 1943 a group of intellectuals and bourgeois founded the Democratic Party to rally part of the national bourgeoisie. That Party adhered to the Viet Minh. The same year, the Communist Party launched a programme of action in the cultural field which aroused great interest among the intellectuals. A Cultural Association for National Salvation was founded and affiliated to the Viet Minh. Then a Military Association for National Salvation was formed, rallying all patriotic elements in the colonial army. As the war went on and Franco-Japanese contradictions grew more acute, the Viet Minh exercised increasing influence upon the masses. It also tried to win over democratic Frenchmen opposed to Japanese occupation and to the Vichy Government.

The Viet Minh not only elaborated a programme but also stirred the people to action, both military and political.

On the military front, the guerillas who had launched the 1940 Bac Son Insurrection and had had to scatter or take refuge among the people, also stepped up their political activities while trying to set up armed units. A new form of action came into being: "armed propaganda." In 1943, these forces were big enough to form the Bac Son-Vu Nhai base from where they pushed towards Thai Nguyen and Bac Can provinces and even Vinh Yen in the Midlands. By the end of 1943 Viet Minh "armed propaganda units" were operating in a vast region embracing several provinces in the Highlands, north of the Red River.

In 1944, a truly liberated zone took shape in those provinces. Guerilla bases came into being in Central Annam and Cochinchina. In the border provinces of Cao Bang and Lang Son mass organizations got ready for an insurrection. Ho Chi Minh, back from China, thought the slogan premature, called off the insurrection and ordered the stepping up of political activities. In December 1944, an "army for propaganda and liberation" was formed (the name was used to stress the political character of its activities). Vo Nguyen Giap was made its commander. On December 24 and 25, 1944, it overran the Phay Khat and Na Ngan posts. Thus began a glorious history.

Along with the armed struggle which developed in the Highlands, in the plains and in the towns the people's struggle gained momentum. The Viet Minh encouraged the peasants to oppose the orders to root up rice and plant jute instead. Starting in 1943, in many villages, the peasants - men, women, and children - armed with sticks and forks, opposed the destruction of rice crops.

Another slogan was to oppose the forced sale of rice: led by the Viet Minh, the peasants put up a fierce opposition to the French and the Japanese. In the villages, drum-beats stirred the people to fight against the requisitioning of rice with whatever means available, pitting picks and axes against the guns of Franco-Japanese troops.

In the towns, the workers and other labouring people stepped up their struggle. A Workers' Association for National Salvation was set up. It staged strikes and demonstrations to demand higher wages and an end to ill treatment. The workers' struggle gave a great impulse to the activities of intellectuals and students.

Against the background of this seething struggle, de Gaulle's December 8, 1945 promise to "liberate Indochina" found no echo.

The Great Turning Point : 1945

By the beginning of 1945, the defeat of the Axis became obvious ; the Vichy Government fell. The Japanese suffered defeat after defeat in China as well as in the Pacific. In Indochina, the Gaullists, particularly the military, were thinking of preserving the colonial regime. On February 8, 1945, speaking in Brazzaville, De Gaulle promised some autonomy to Indochina. The new French Government was to use French troops to safeguard the French presence in the Far East. The Japanese found themselves in a predicament, faced with an ever-developing revolutionary movement and a possible French volte-face. However, the Japanese stole a march on the French. On March 9, 1945, they disarmed them after meeting only a faint resistance. The colonial "edifice" collapsed overnight. Meanwhile, famine was raging. The requisitioning and hoarding of rice, and unbridled speculations had considerably worsened an already precarious situation. The masses were seething with anger. The Viet Minh called upon the people's forces to step up guerilla warfare, and upon the peasants to seize Japanese ricestores.

The pro-Japanese parties, the Dai Viet in particular, tried to convince the population of Japanese "generosity," of the myth of an "independence" won back with Japanese help, and to get support for the slogans put forward by the Japanese : economic co-operation, national independ-

ence, military alliance to form a Greater Eastern Asia. This propaganda had no effect upon the population, whose sympathy was with the Viet Minh. The declaration of independence by King Bao Dai annulling all the treaties concluded with France and establishing an alliance with Japan did not change the situation in the least. At long last, the Japanese and Bao Dai succeeded in finding a Prime Minister, Tran Trong Kim. The Tran Trong Kim government, formed on April 17 with the participation of a few intellectuals, was completely powerless in face of the problems of the day. Famine continued to play havoc, no new institution was set up, political amnesty was denied to "communists," i.e. nine out of ten prisoners. A decree dated June 13 threatened with a death sentence anyone attacking communication lines, rice-stores, warehouses, and forbade all gatherings of more than 10 people. Another, dated July 15, prohibited all political activities by trade-unions. Thus the Tran Trong Kim government revealed itself as an agent of the Japanese.

The Viet Minh for its part warned the people, the petty bourgeoisie in particular, against any illusion of winning back independence through negotiations with the Japanese or through the Bao Dai-Tran Trong Kim puppet government. On the night of March 9, while the Japanese troops disarmed the French, the Communist Party's Central Committee met at Dinh Bang, 30km from Hanoi, made an accurate analysis of the situation and came to extremely important resolutions.

Without underestimating the possibility of a French comeback, it held that the principal enemy was now Japanese fascism. However, while the French administration had collapsed, the one in the service of the Japanese did not function as yet. The world war entered a decisive phase. A Japanese defeat was imminent. In the country, the people, who were starving and seething with hatred for the occupier, demanded action. A pre-revolutionary atmosphere prevailed. The time had come for the Party and the Viet Minh front to prepare the masses for a general insurrection to seize power.

The pre-insurrectional mobilization of the masses consisted of three essential aspects :

- Development of guerilla activities in the Highlands and Midlands ;
- Capture of rice-stores by the peasants ;
- Political agitation in the major towns.

Under the leadership of a National Liberation Committee, liberation committees, the first form of revolutionary power, were set up at different levels : village, district and province. In April, the revolutionary armed force merged into a "Liberation Army" under the command of a Military Committee among whose members were Vo Nguyen Giap, Chu Van Tan, Van Tien Dung. A military school was founded.

After March 9, guerilla units overran important posts in Thai Nguyen, Bac Can, Tuyen Quang provinces. In the North, Centre and South, political prisoners who had escaped from prison set about organizing the population in the surrounding areas. Traitors were punished, revolutionary power was established in many localities and regions. By June 1945, most of the six provinces north of the Red River, (Lang Son, Cao Bang, Bac Can, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen) were liberated and served as the main revolutionary bases of the country. The guerilla forces laid ambushes and inflicted serious losses upon the Japanese troops. In Hai Duong and Quang Yen provinces, uprisings took place in some localities and revolutionary power was set up.

In the Centre, an armed insurrection took place in Ba To, Quang Ngai province.

While guerilla warfare was developing, in Tonkin and the northern provinces of Annam, famine took on unprecedentedly tragic proportions : within a few months, two million people died of starvation. Many villages lost half or one-third of their population ; in the towns, the streets were littered with dead bodies. The Viet Minh called on the people to count neither on the Japanese nor on the puppet government but on their own efforts, and urged

them to capture Japanese rice-stocks and convoys of supplies. This resulted in large-scale mobilization of the people, who grew conscious of their strength. Self-defence units and liberation committees were formed in the course of this struggle. Rice-stocks were seized and distributed to the population, thus lessening the havoc of famine. This was really a pre-revolutionary action.

In the towns - Hanoi, Saigon and Hue in particular - political agitation gained momentum. In Hanoi, though the Town Party Committee was, in the period from 1941 to 1945, five times broken up by the police, each factory, in 1945, had its own workers' organization for national salvation. Self-defence units were formed. Strikes were staged in big factories ; meetings, at which orators spoke under armed protection, were held in streets, schools, factories and city-outskirts. Pro-Japanese meetings were turned into ones supporting the revolution. Isolated Japanese soldiers were disarmed and traitors punished in the very heart of the city. Peasants in the neighbourhood of Hanoi, acting in concert with workers, seized rice-stores.

In Saigon, after March 9, the workers' organizations had a membership of 120,000 (3,000 before that date). The Vanguard Youth, led by such well-known intellectuals as Dr. Pham Ngoc Thach and lawyer Thai Van Lung had, in Saigon alone, a membership of 200,000 and of one million all over Cochinchina.

The August Revolution

In the summer of 1945, throughout the country, in the North, South and Centre, in the countryside and in the towns, and also among the ethnic minorities of the mountain areas, popular effervescence was at its height and revolutionary activities, both political and military, were on the increase. The decisive factor was that the Viet Minh was leading and co-ordinating all these activities on a nation-wide scale.

On August 13, after the destruction of its Kwantung army by the Soviet Army and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered. The same day, a National Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party decided to put forward these slogans :

- Put an end to foreign aggression ;
- Wrest back national independence ;
- Set up people's power.

Instructions were issued to combine political and military activities, to demoralize the enemy, to persuade him to surrender and to concentrate efforts on the most important centres.

On August 16, the Viet Minh held a National Congress attended by delegates of various parties and organizations, and different ethnic and religious groups. The Congress decided "*to wrest power from the hands of the Japanese and the puppet government before the arrival of the Allied troops in Indochina, so that we, as masters of the country, would welcome these troops coming to disarm the Japanese.*" The question was to forestall the "Allied powers" (Chiang Kai-shek, the British, French and Americans) which intended to occupy Indochina, each pursuing its own interest.

The Congress adopted a 10-point program :

1. To seize power, found a Democratic Republic of Viet Nam on the basis of total independence.
2. To arm the people. To strengthen the Liberation Army.
3. To confiscate the property of the imperialists and the traitors and either to nationalize or to distribute it to the poor.
4. To abolish French and Japanese-imposed taxes, and to replace them by a just and light tax policy.
5. To proclaim the people's fundamental rights :
 - Human rights.
 - Right to ownership.

- Civil rights : universal suffrage, democratic liberties, equality among all ethnic groups and between man and woman.

6. To distribute communal lands equitably, reduce land-rents and interest rates, decree a moratorium of debts, and give help to victims of calamities.

7. To promulgate labour legislation : an 8-hour working day, minimum wages, social security.

8. To build up an independent national economy, develop agriculture, set up a National Bank.

9. To build a national education system : elimination of illiteracy, compulsory elementary education. To build a new culture.

10. To establish friendly relations with the Allied powers and the countries fighting for their independence.

A National Liberation Committee was set up, acting as a provisional government headed by Ho Chi Minh, who issued a stirring appeal :

The decisive hour for the destiny of our nation has struck ! Let all of us rise up and strive to liberate ourselves. Many peoples in the world are standing up to wrest back their independence. We must not lag behind.

Forward ! Under the banner of the Viet Minh, march courageously forward !

Soon, the Liberation Army liberated Thai Nguyen. Everywhere, people's organizations, guerilla and self-defence units moved into action. A revolutionary tidal wave swept the country. From August 14 to 25, in every village, in every town the people stood up, and, supported by armed units, attacked administrative centres. The local authorities either fled or surrendered power to the revolutionary forces. Most of the demoralized Japanese and puppet troops laid down their arms. Only a few provincial towns could not be liberated : Lai Chau, occupied by a strong French column coming back from China where

it had sought refuge at the time of the Japanese *coup de force* ; Mong Cai, Ha Giang, Lao Cai on the Sino-Vietnamese border, occupied by Chiang Kai-shek agents.

In the three major towns, Hanoi, Hue and Saigon, the quick victory of the insurrection was of the greatest importance. In Hanoi, pro-Japanese elements, in an attempt to oppose the revolutionary movement, set up a "Committee for National Liberation" but failed to rally the people. On August 17, a meeting held by the Federation of Civil Servants to support the puppet government was turned into a huge mass rally in favour of the Viet Minh ; a general strike was staged ; on August 19, more than 100,000 people took to the streets, and the puppet government had to resign and surrender power to the revolutionaries.

Hue was the capital of the monarchy and of the pro-Japanese puppet government. To avoid bloodshed, the Viet Minh persuaded Bao Dai to abdicate and his prime minister Tran Trong Kim to resign. The reactionaries, wanting to cling to power, asked the Japanese for a 5,000-strong guard. To frustrate the scheme, the people of Hue and of the neighbouring villages, supported by armed units, took to the streets and occupied various ministries. It was August 23, Bao Dai agreed to abdicate ; the Tran Trong Kim cabinet collapsed. On the 25th, a delegation of the people's government, coming from Hanoi and headed by Tran Huy Lieu, received from the hands of Bao Dai the dynastic seal and sword, the symbols of royal power. Bao Dai became the citizen Vinh Thuy.

In Cochinchina, the pro-Japanese had set up a United National Front on August 14. The delegate of the king, Nguyen Van Sam, sent from Hue, asked the Japanese to arm the Front, but it soon collapsed under the pressure of the people. On August 25, one million people in Saigon and the outlying districts, protected by armed groups, took to the streets and set up revolutionary power.

Throughout the country, the insurrection had won complete victory.

The August 1945 Revolution ended 80 years of colonial domination, abolished the monarchy and restored Viet Nam's national independence. A telling blow at the colonial system, it ushered in, together with other movements in the world, a period of break-down of colonial empires.

In its development, the August Revolution was characterized by a judicious combination of political struggle with armed struggle, one supporting the other, priority being given one form or the other according to the situation. It proved the political maturity and the capabilities of the masses for action, the able leadership of the Viet Minh Front and the Communist Party. Victory was the outcome of sound leadership, which had taken the right course at the right time and worked out forms of struggle that were best suited to each period and each locality. It was also the result of long-term preparations, both political and military, starting right after the outbreak of the Second World War, preparations that had brought about a solid national unity on the basis of a close worker-peasant alliance and succeeded in inspiring the people with a fighting spirit capable of withstanding any trial.

VI — THE FOUNDING OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM (1945 — 1946)

After the triumph of the August Revolution, brought to power by an irresistible revolutionary tide, the insurrectional Provisional Government presented itself before the people in Ba Dinh Square in Hanoi on September 2, 1945. Before a huge and enthusiastic crowd President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of the country :

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered us, and have won independence for the Fatherland. Viet Nam has the right to be free and independent and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property, in order to safeguard their freedom and independence.

Independence and freedom ! After 80 years of colonial domination these words aroused immense fervour among the millions of Vietnamese. Now that their fatherland was again an independent state, everybody felt that a new era had begun and all, either poor or rich, Communist or Confucianist, Buddhist or Christian, peasant or worker, people of the mountains or of the plains, intellectual or manual workers, were ready to sacrifice their lives for the defence

of that independence which was being threatened from all sides. Indeed, the situation was extremely precarious ; famine was rife, the state coffers were empty, in the North Chiang Kai-shek troops were to occupy the country while in the South British-French troops were about to land. Viet Nam was alone, no allied or friendly country could give her any help. The DRVN government had no previous economic, administrative, military or diplomatic experience ; its only assets were the close unity cementing all strata of the population, the determination of the entire people to fight, and the just and chearsighted leadership of a Marxist-Leninist party.

As early as September 2nd, the Viet Minh Central Committee stressed :

Our independence is still fragile. To seize power is difficult ,but to maintain it is still more so.

And the Provisional Government issued this call :

In this hour, let everybody devote his thoughts and his actions to the struggle for independence against foreign aggression. Only by so doing can we break the yoke of serfdom and escape annihilation.

Creation of a People's Democratic National State

People's power was to be the key factor in safeguarding independence and promoting national revolution. While the anti-imperialist task, the defence of national independence, took pride of place, the democratic task was no less important. One had to consolidate national unity while mobilizing the immense energy of the labouring masses, and build ever closer ties between the revolutionary power and the people. Against the imperialists who assailed the country one had to oppose a united and solid front, a determined people, an inflexible will, and at the same time most supple tactics. In domestic affairs many

urgent tasks came to the fore : struggle against famine, broadening of the national front, pressing democratic reforms, consolidation of the people's state, immediate struggle against illiteracy.

The famine of 1944 was not yet checked when in 1945 an unprecedented flood submerged the most populated provinces of the Red River delta. Then came a protracted drought. Manpower, cattle and seeds were scarce, about 250,000 hectares could not be sown, a third of the November crop – the most important of the year – was lost. Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces even lost 50 per cent of their crops. One could not get rice from the South, because the French had reoccupied Saigon since September 23.

Famine was the hardest trial for the people's power. As early as September 3rd, President Ho Chi Minh had launched a double campaign of mutual aid and solidarity, and one for the intensification of production.

Fired by the enthusiasm born of recovered independence, roused by immense patriotic fervour, millions of people, following President Ho Chi Minh's example, saved the least bit of food and shared their rations with the disinherited. The tiniest plot of land was put under cultivation. Short-term crops such as sweet potatoes and vegetables were planted in every available place, even in public parks, while each family kept a relief rice jar and groups of volunteers scoured the country to collect supplies. The harvest of subsidiary food crops in late 1945 and early 1946 showed a leap forward :

230,000 tons of sweet potatoes as against 65,000 tons in 1938-43.

220,000 tons of maize as against 56,000 in 1938-43.

60,000 tons of soya as against 26,000 in 1938-43.

These figures are for Bac Bo, i.e. Tonkin, only.

Meanwhile, the dykes were repaired over 1,200km, which had required 11 million work-days and the moving of 2 million cubic metres of earth.

For the first time in Viet Nam's history, a government had been able to eradicate famine through active meas-

ures; the mobilization of the popular masses gave a bumper crop in the summer of 1946 after the success of the last winter-spring crop. Famine was curbed, then checked. After this great trial, the entire people felt deeply attached to the revolutionary power which had proved its organizational ability and its devotion to the people.

The struggle against famine did not prevent the government from waging another battle on a nation-wide scale, that against illiteracy. On September 8, the Department of Popular Education was set up ; nearly 100,000 people volunteered as instructors and over 70,000 classes were organized in pagodas, village halls, temples, factories, hospitals, in the shade of banyan trees, in market places, on paddy dykes, etc. Old folks sat beside youths to learn to read and write ; even children became tutors for their parents and grand-parents. Within a year, from September 1945 to September 1946, while large numbers of foreign troops still remained in the country and the struggle against famine required considerable efforts, two million and a half people had learned to read and write. At the same time, bases for a national education were laid down ; in particular, the Vietnamese language, which had been shoved in the background throughout the colonial period, became the vehicle used at all levels, higher education included.

Right in its first year, the new power had thus won two great battles and stood the test, having fulfilled to the letter the revolutionary program long dreamt of by patriots : to provide the people with rice and education.

This mobilization of energies could only be accomplished on the basis of a broad national union. After the triumph of the revolution, the Viet Minh Front was enlarged and consolidated, rallying new people's organizations and new personalities : patriotic associations of traders and industrialists, Buddhists, students functionaries... Particular importance was attached to cementing union between various nationalities and religions. On December 8, 1945, delegates of 20 nationalities coming

from all corners of the country met in Hanoi to assert the principles of union, equality and mutual aid between all ethnic groups. Representatives of various religions - Buddhists, Caodaists, Hoa Hao believers, Christians - also voiced their adherence to those principles, thus cementing the common will to defend independence and build a new Viet Nam.

In 1946, to achieve the largest possible union, the Lien Viet Front was founded. The national united front constituted the direct support of the organs of power at all levels, its foundation remaining the alliance of workers and peasants. On this basis, the building of people's power was carried on and state organs were rapidly installed.

On September 8, President Ho Chi Minh signed a decree providing for the election of a National Assembly. The election campaign turned into a vast movement to consolidate the revolutionary power in face of the manoeuvres of the imperialists, especially of the French colonialists whose armed forces had landed in Saigon as early as September 23. This was the first general election in the country's history. Every citizen upwards of 18 enjoyed the right to vote, and voting was regarded as a personal contribution to the safeguarding of threatened national independence, particularly in the South where the French troops had begun their operations of reconquest.

On January 6, 1946, the entire people went to the polls; in the South, despite repression by the French colonialists, over 90 per cent of the population voted. The great majority of the electors opted for the candidates of the Viet Minh, the architect of the reconquest of independence. Thus the Vietnamese people clearly confirmed their support to the Viet Minh and their confidence in the government presided over by Ho Chi Minh to whom went 98 per cent of the Hanoi votes. More than 300 deputies belonging to various social strata, political parties, ethnic and religious groups, were elected. The National Assembly expressed full confidence in the Ho Chi Minh government. All the counter-revolutionary manoeuvres aimed at under-

mining the authority of the revolutionary government failed. The Ho Chi Minh government remained the only genuine representative of the Vietnamese nation, vested with the people's confidence, holding legitimate power and having proved its capabilities in two major fields, the struggle against famine and that against illiteracy. Against it the imperialists could only line up tiny groups gathering unknown placemen, without any credit among the population and often with a patent record of treason.

At the local level, the authorities of the old regime, mandarins and notables, in nearly all provinces, districts and villages, had handed over power to the insurrectionists at the outbreak of the August Revolution. A new decree, bearing the number 63, set up at every echelon elected people's committees, which then elected an administrative committee for each locality. Thus, from the capital down to every village, people's power was established, took public affairs in hand and administered them efficiently with the people's confidence and support.

The new government immediately set to work, devoting itself especially to carrying out a series of democratic reforms, strengthening the people's armed forces, and ensuring healthy and independent finances.

In the social field, one had to meet the legitimate claims of the peasants and the workers while preserving national union. Strategically, the two tasks, the anti-imperialist and the anti-feudal, were linked together, but tactically they could be carried out at different tempos. The safeguarding of national independence then took pride of place and the democratic reforms, albeit substantial, did not take on a radical character.

In the agrarian field, an equitable distribution of communal lands, which covered nearly 12 per cent of the tilled acreage in the whole country, was effected, Land rent was reduced by 25 per cent and many debts could be cancelled. The lands confiscated from the colonialists and traitors were allotted to the poor peasants, on a provisional basis. The peasants acquired the right to reclaim waste or virgin lands and to become owners of these lands.

A social legislation was promulgated : eight-hour working day, trade-union liberty, right to strike. Enterprises of national import with absentee owners were nationalized or requisitioned and the workers acquired the right to participate in their management. Many public enterprises and workshops were opened which gave jobs to many of the unemployed.

Head-tax and the forced buying of opium and alcohol and the salt monopoly instituted by the colonial administration were abolished.

At the start, the new State had only 1,250,720 piastres in its coffers. The Bank of Indochina, a bank of issue, had escaped the control of the insurrection during the August Revolution, but it had nevertheless to execute the payment orders of the Vietnamese government. However, on October 23, 1945, the Bank stopped all payments, in the hope of causing a financial crisis which would be catastrophic for the people's power. In the very first days, the government had launched among the population a vast fund-raising campaign in which gold, precious objects and money were collected to defray the most urgent expenses ; all social strata had enthusiastically responded and the civil servants worked for several months without pay. But an independent currency had to be issued at all costs.

On January 31, 1946, a decree was promulgated providing for the issue of Vietnamese dongs, first in Central Viet Nam, then, by the end of 1946, throughout the country. What was the security for this currency ? The government had neither gold nor foreign currency reserves ; the Vietnamese state was not yet recognized by any country nor did it have any foreign trade relation as yet. This paper money was supported by the patriotism of the popular masses, their confidence in the government and their will to preserve national independence. The dong was exchanged at par with the Indochinese piastre. The first step for building an independent national economy was made.

All those urgent political, social and financial tasks did not prevent the new State from discharging its foremost

duty at that time : to safeguard independence at all costs. Therefore, the greatest attention was to the building up of the armed forces, both a regular army and regional and local self-defence forces.

Hardly born, the Vietnamese people's democratic State was thus sufficiently armed in every respect to fare the trials ahead.

Struggle against Chiang Kai-shek's Plots

The danger came mainly from external forces. By virtue of the armistice agreements, Indochina was occupied by Chiang Kai-shek troops north of the 16th parallel, and south of that line by British troops who set about preparing for the return of the French.

Behind the 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek troops led by General Lu Han loomed American imperialism, and coming in their waggons were tiny groups of politicians and adventurers, debris of old nationalist parties, which Chiang Kai-shek sought to force upon the Vietnamese people as puppet rulers. In some provincial capitals near the China-Viet Nam border Lao Cai, Lang Son, Quang Yen, Chiang Kai-shek troops and men of the tiny Viet Cach and Viet Quoc nationalist groups had eliminated the revolutionary power and set up puppet organs. However, it was not easy for these troops to overthrow the revolutionary government supported by the entire people. Yet they demanded a Cabinet reshuffle and even the resignation of President Ho Chi Minh in favour of Bao Dai. At the end of December 1945, General Lu Han sent the government an ultimatum asking for the recall of Communist ministers, the handing over of the administration to the nationalist reactionaries, the outright allotment to the latter of 80 seats in the National Assembly (even before the elections took place) and the replacement of the national flag. Meanwhile, the Viet Quoc and the Viet Cach groups sought to win over bourgeois and feudal landowners and rally agents of the French and the Japanese in order to sow discord amidst

the national united front and cause disturbances. They kidnapped and murdered men of the government, and liquidated French people, then accused the Viet Minh of being the instigator. They demanded seven ministries : interior, national defence, finance, economy, youth, education, overseas Vietnamese and foreign nationals, and the posts of Prime Minister and Chief of Staff. All these disturbances were kicked up and demands made at the very moment when the French troops had begun their attempts at reconquest of the South.

It was easy to struggle against these tiny groups for they had no popular backing, but to their masters, the Chiang Kai-shek men, one had to oppose a policy that was both intransigent in principle and flexible in practice. Of the two imperialisms, France was the more dangerous enemy because Chiang Kai-shek, threatened in his own country by a revolution in full swing, had little chance of being able to launch a direct attack on Viet Nam. Lu Han's 200,000 men, however, constituted a permanent danger for the new Vietnamese state.

One had to avoid direct conflicts with these troops while checking their intervention in the internal policy of the country by mobilizing the masses for a political struggle each time they tried to encroach upon our national sovereignty. As for the Viet Cach and the Viet Quoc, their sabotage acts and crimes were denounced before public opinion and punished if need be, but they were also offered political concessions. Asked to present their own candidates for the general elections and anticipating defeat, they rejected the proposal but agreed to send 70 of their men to the National Assembly, as demanded by General Lu Han. Under the pressure of Chiang Kai-shek troops, in January 1946, the government had to appoint Nguyen Hai Than, of the Viet Cach, Vice-President of the Republic, and Nguyen Tuong Tam, of the Viet Quoc, Foreign Minister. All the counter-revolutionary acts of these tiny groups were to no avail, for everywhere the population rejected them and power at all levels was well in the hands of the revolutionaries.

French Aggression in Nam Bo

In the summer of 1945, the French government took a series of urgent measures in an attempt at re-establishing French sovereignty in Indochina after the Japanese defeat. On August 16, it despatched to Indochina the «Massu» detachment and the 9th division of colonial infantry with General Leclerc as Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Corps and Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu – a religious – as French High Commissioner in Indochina. The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Southeast Asia, Mounbatten, did all he could to speed up the sending of French troops to Indochina, for British imperialism, concerned about the future of British colonies in Asia, was eager to see France re-establish her domination in Indochina.

On August 23, a number of Frenchmen including Cédile, delegate of the High Commissioner, were parachuted in Nam Bo ; Cédile was allowed by the Japanese to contact the French in Saigon (the insurrection had not yet broken out in this city). On August 29, Cédile contacted the Nam Bo Revolutionary Committee to inform it that France recognized neither Viet Nam's independence nor her unity. The Committee answered him that Viet Nam had won back both her independence and unity and that the Vietnamese people would not recognize any form of colonial administration. On September 2, during the big popular demonstration for independence, French colonialists and their agents hidden in a church opened fire at the crowd, killing and wounding 47 people.

In the first days of September, British-Indian troops landed in Saigon ; they released thousands of Frenchmen who had been detained since the Japanese coup de force and gave them weapons. Confident of British protection, these Frenchmen indulged in many provocations. On September 13, British troops occupied the offices of the Nam Bo Committee, let the French hoist the tricolour and allowed French troops to relieve the Japanese in some places. In face of these provocations, on September 19, the

Nam Bo Administrative Committee called on the population to stand ready to oppose armed resistance to any attempt at reconquest by the French. The same day, Cédile declared that "order" had to be re-established and "government" set up in conformity with de Gaulle's statement of March 23, 1945.

On September 20, British General Gracey banned all Vietnamese papers. The next day he instituted a curfew and ordered the disbandment of the Vietnamese security forces and the handing over of their weapons. The order was naturally ignored. Gracey then freed and rearmed 1,400 French prisoners of war, who carried out many provocations, occupying several police stations on Sept. 22. On the night of that day, the French launched their attack on Saigon. A war of reconquest began. The Nam Bo Administrative Committee immediately called on the population to riposte. The motto: "Independence or death!" appeared everywhere. On September 26, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed:

The Government and our compatriots throughout the country will do their utmost to support the fighters and people of the South who are fighting selflessly and making sacrifices in their struggle to maintain national independence.

Units of the people's army were immediately sent to Nam Bo.

From August 25, date of the seizure of power, to September 23, the revolutionary power installed in Saigon had not had time to consolidate its armed forces yet; however the ardent patriotism of the masses, the enthusiastic atmosphere created by the triumphant insurrection, had roused extraordinary combativeness in all. Armed with mere bamboo spears, the Nam Bo population rose up as one man to resist the enemy.

In Saigon where the enemy had occupied the main administrative buildings, the population immediately waged an armed and political struggle. In many quarters,

French troops, helped by British and Japanese troops, ran into barricades; fierce fighting took place in streets and factories, during which the Vietnamese patriots' unequalled heroism more than made up for their lack of weapons. A general strike was decreed as well as non-cooperation with the French, who were encircled in the European quarters and isolated in a city deprived of light and water. The workers burnt down many French enterprises or took the machines to pieces and carried them to the countryside. The French could not extend their control beyond Saigon and were harassed every night by resolute partisans.

The French then sought to negotiate. On October 2nd, contacts took place. The Nam Bo Administrative Committee demanded recognition of Viet Nam's independence. The French refused and hostilities resumed after a week-long truce. Meanwhile, the first units of the French Expeditionary Corps landed and British General Gracey threatened to use force. The Nam Bo Committee sent him a note affirming that:

We respect the British-Indian troops engaged in discharging their task, but if they try to re-establish French sovereignty, they will face an entire people standing up to defend their independence.

On the Committee's order, the urban population began to evacuate the towns in order to prepare for the resistance. British-Indian troops were greeted with calm, but against the French, guerrilla warfare was intensified and the blockade tightened around Saigon. However, with the arrival of their Expeditionary Corps the French acquired new strength. The British opened the way for them by occupying, step by step and in the name of the Allied Powers, the urban centres and localities outside Saigon. On October 21, Franco-British troops began their offensive against the Mekong delta, the country's rice granary, and the rubber plantations. Then they headed for the Tay Nguyen Highlands and landed troops in Southern Trung Bo; all this was done in November and December 1945.

By the end of January 1946, with their armour and naval forces the French succeeded in controlling the main towns and communication lines in Nam Bo, Southern Trung Bo and the Tay Nguyen Highlands. Outgunned, the Vietnamese forces withdrew from the towns and began organizing the resistance in the countryside. Economic blockade and sabotage remained the main patriotic activities in the urban centres. The major resistance bases were located in the Plain of Reeds, the region of Thanh Phu (Ben Tre province) and that of U Minh (Western Nam Bo). The Vietnamese central government then considered that the essential task consisted in reinforcing to the utmost the resistance in the South.

In December the leadership of the resistance was unified, and Nam Bo divided into three military zones. The political, administrative and military apparatus of the resistance was re-organized on new bases. The French were compelled to scatter their forces and ran up against many difficulties in setting up councils of reactionary notables. They intensified terrorist operations against the population, carried out summary executions, and tortured patriots, but could not break the morale of the masses. On November 5, President Ho Chi Minh declared :

The French colonialists should know that the Vietnamese people do not want bloodshed, that they love peace. But we are determined to sacrifice even millions of combatants and fight a protracted war of resistance lasting many years in order to safeguard Viet Nam's independence and preserve our children from slavery. We are sure that our war of resistance will be victorious !

On November 25, the Communist Party's Central Committee formulated these instructions for the resistance :

... Cut off communications between the towns occupied by the enemy, blockade them economically, encircle them politically and harass them militarily...

wage all-out guerilla warfare, persuade the inhabitants of these towns to practise non-co-operation and those of the countryside to carry out the scorched-earth policy. Maintain liaison between the various military zones to ensure a unified command. The plans for both attack and retreat must be drawn up in detail...

From the North, despite all economic and financial difficulties, reinforcements in men and supplies were kept up ; many people volunteered to go and fight in the South ; the population saved every cent for the defence of the South. On January 17, 1946, Vo Nguyen Giap declared on behalf of the armed forces :

The preparation of a protracted resistance and the sending of reinforcements to the South constitute at present the number-one concern of the government and the entire people. We must make every contribution and every sacrifice for the resistance, for the Southern front !

The re-organization of the resistance soon bore fruit. French General Pellet admitted :

The enemy is everywhere. No continuous front, no fixed lines of defence where our powerful and modern war means could be effectively used. Each cluster of bamboo, each hut perhaps, gives shelter to the enemy. How strained our soldiers' nerves are, for they face an elusive enemy in every place and at every moment !

Following is the testimony of another Frenchman, a sailor of worker stock who, on being sent to Indochina, had thought that he was going to fight the Japanese :

In Indochina, the French troops are acting as the German fascists did in France. I am sick of their behaviour. Why should our planes daily strafe unarmed fishermen ? Why should our soldiers plunder, burn, kill ? Is it to civilize the country ? Facing us is not a handful of rebels but a people determined to

defend its freedom. Here everybody is a Viet Minh. In any event, one cannot exterminate an entire people.

The man who wrote this to his family in 1946 was Henri Martin.

Thus, in the first months of 1946, the situation was delicate both for the French and for the Vietnamese government. The French had occupied the main towns in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo, but were powerless in face of the guerillas ; besides, so long as there was a revolutionary government installed in Hanoi the occupation of the South remained precarious. While continuing their military operations and the sending of reinforcements from France the colonialists began to draw up a plan for the secession of Cochinchina with an "autonomous government" made up of men of straw. On the Vietnamese side, while the will to defend independence remained unshakable and popular support fully ensured, material and military forces available were insignificant ; time was badly needed to build them up. Moreover, the presence in the North of Chiang Kai-shek troops backing the reactionary parties constituted a permanent threat.

The French colonialists then set about negotiating with Chiang Kai-shek, so that he would let French troops take over in North Indochina in exchange for the cancellation of France's extraterritorial rights in China, a section of the Yunnan railway, a "special zone" in Haiphong, and a special status for the Chinese residents in Indochina. An agreement was signed on February 28, 1946, without the Vietnamese government, whose sovereignty was involved, being consulted. Four thousand French troops, who had taken refuge in China, then crossed back into Lai Chau while reinforcements from France were to land in the North.

In order not to have to fight both French and Chiang Kai-shek troops, the Vietnamese government preferred seeking a compromise with the former to end the occupation of the country by Chiang Kai-shek men. A compromise

was necessary in order to gain time ; it was possible because the French, while preparing for a total reconquest, were not yet ready to wage war throughout the country. They just wanted to introduce first a few troops into the North to gain a foothold there and then to extend the occupation with the arrival of reinforcements.

On March 6, 1946, President Ho Chi Minh and Sainteny, who represented the French government, signed an agreement with the following main clauses :

"1. The French government recognizes the Republic of Viet Nam as a free state having its own government, parliament, army and finances, and as a member of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. As regards the reunion of the three Ky¹, the French government undertakes to abide by the decision taken by the population consulted by referendum.

"2. The Vietnamese government declares itself ready to receive the French army in friendly fashion when, in accordance with international agreements, it comes to relieve the Chinese troops.

"3. Immediately after the exchange of signatures, each contracting party will take all necessary measures to end the hostilities, maintain its troops on their respective positions, and create an atmosphere conducive to the speedy opening of friendly and frank negotiations. These will deal with the diplomatic relations of Viet Nam with foreign countries, the future status of Indochina, and French economic and cultural interests in Viet Nam."

After the signing of the March 6 agreement a complex struggle - military, political and diplomatic - began with a view to implementing it. 15,000 French soldiers entered Hanoi, but on the other hand, the 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek troops withdrew from the country, taking with them the adventurers of the Viet Quoc and the Viet Cach. From

1. The three "Ky" were the three regions of the country : North, Centre and South.

now on the struggle was to be concentrated against the French colonialists' military and political schemes.

In Nam Bo, the French kept up their mopping-up raids and bombardments and their repression against the Vietnamese patriots. Barely a few weeks after the signing of the agreement, French High Commissioner Thierry d'Argenlieu rigged up, with the help of some stooges, the "government of the Nam Ky Autonomous Republic" in order to perpetually separate Nam Bo from the rest of the country. On his arrival in Hanoi, General Leclerc provokingly declared that "Hanoi is the last stage of the liberation." As soon as they arrived in the North, the French troops committed countless provocations, murdered Vietnamese patriots and encroached upon Viet Nam's sovereignty. The French colonialists and the Paris reactionary leaders firmly believed that the military reconquest of Indochina would be a walk-over and that the Vietnamese people would have no way to resist French military power.

In those conditions the negotiations between the French and Vietnamese authorities could only be a long-drawn-out battle which would lead nowhere. The preliminary parleys in Da Lat, beginning in April and lasting until May, could only record the fundamental differences in the positions of the two parties. The Vietnamese party defended national sovereignty both internal and external, the unity of the country from North to South, while the French put forward a project of an "Indochinese Federation" with a French governor at its head, and claimed to represent Viet Nam in all her international relations. The French also wanted to include Viet Nam in the franc zone. This amounted to giving a new name to the old colonial structure. The main conflict was about the status of Nam Bo, which the French wanted to sever from the rest of the country. For its part, the Vietnamese delegation stood pat on the principle of Viet Nam's unity. Vo Nguyen Giap, head of the Vietnamese delegation, declared :

If ever Nam Bo is separated from the rest of the country, the Vietnamese people will devote all their

energies to struggling for its return to a reunified Viet Nam.

President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed :

Our brothers in Nam Bo are citizens of Viet Nam. Rivers may dry up, mountains may erode, but this truth will remain for ever.

On July 6, 1946, negotiations opened in Fontainebleau, near Paris. The French were adamant. The conference was deadlocked. On August 18, Marius Moutet declared that "Cochinchina was a French colony." While France's representatives negotiated in Fontainebleau, the French High Commissioner in Indochina held a conference of puppets in Dalat on August 1 to rig up an Indochinese Federation. In Viet Nam, French troops multiplied their provocations. The Fontainebleau conference had therefore no reason to continue. President Ho Chi Minh, who was then in France made a last effort at reconciliation by signing with Marius Moutet a *modus vivendi*. However, French reinforcements kept coming. The French government actively prepared for a war of reconquest.

In October, the Vietnamese National Assembly entrusted President Ho Chi Minh with the task of forming a new government on a broad national union basis. At the same session, the Assembly adopted the Constitution, which affirmed as its fundamental principle that "all power belongs to the people," and proclaimed the people's democratic rights, and equality between man and woman and among all ethnic groups. The Constitution declared that Viet Nam is a unified country from North to South.

However, French troops continued their provocations ; the colonialists' manœuvres became so cynical that their placeman, Nguyễn Văn Thinh, president of the Cochinchinese "autonomous government" was driven to suicide. French troops sought to create incidents everywhere in order to violate Viet Nam's sovereignty. In Haiphong, the only port through which the North communicated with the outside world and whose customs duties supplied an

important part of the revenue of the Vietnamese budget, the French wanted to establish their own customs service ; on November 20, French troops opened fire at Vietnamese forces in Haiphong. French warships also shelled populous quarters. The French attacks caused several thousand victims there. By occupying Haiphong and Lang Son, the two points of entry to the North, the French command revealed its intentions. While getting the people prepared for more French attacks, the Vietnamese government made an ultimate effort for peace, but the few agreements concluded were quickly sabotaged by the French.

French provocations now took place right in Viet Nam's capital. On December 17, a French assault on Vermicelli Street in Hanoi killed about one hundred people. On December 18, the French occupied the Ministry of Finance and that of Communications and multiplied their provocations in the streets. The population and the self-defence militia erected barricades, made openings in walls for house-to-house communication and prepared for French attacks. President Ho Chi Minh sent a message to Leon Blum, the newly-appointed French Premier, asking him to get the signed agreements implemented. No answer came. On December 19, the French command sent the Vietnamese government an ultimatum demanding the dismantling of the barricades, the disarming of the self-defence militia, and the handing over to the French troops of the maintenance of "order" in the Vietnamese capital.

On the evening of December 19, President Ho Chi Minh issued an appeal to the nation :

Compatriots all over the country,

As we desired peace, we made concessions. But the more concessions we made, the further the French colonialists went, because they are resolved to invade our country once again.

No ! We would rather sacrifice all than lose our country and be enslaved. Men and women, old and young, regardless of religious creed, political affiliation and nationality, all the Vietnamese must stand

up to fight the French colonialists to save the Fatherland. Those who have rifles will use their rifles, those who have swords will use their swords ; those who have no swords will use spades, hoes or sticks. Everyone must endeavour to oppose the colonialists and save the country. The hour for national salvation has struck. We must sacrifice even our last drop of blood to safeguard our country. Even if we have to endure the hardest privations and greatest sufferings we are ready to make every sacrifice. Victory will surely be ours.

The war of resistance, so far limited to the South, now spread to the whole country. The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, hardly born, had to undergo a decisive trial : war against a strongly-armed imperialist power by far superior to her technically and economically.

VII — THE RESISTANCE TO FRENCH AGGRESSION * (1945 — 1954)

On September 2, 1945, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of the Vietnamese nation and the founding of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (D.R. V.N.), thus putting an end to nearly a century of French domination. A new page was opened in the history of the Vietnamese people who were thus among the first to cut a deep gap in the colonial system immediately after the end of the Second World War.

From its first days, the infant democracy had to face numerous difficulties. Indochina was then occupied by Japanese troops in surrender and by British and Chiang Kai-shek troops; the French forces, badly mauled by the Japanese *coup de force* of March 9, 1945, were feverishly beefed up with British aid while France dispatched an expeditionary corps to Saigon.

On September 23, 1945, the French forces opened fire in that city. Furthermore, the economic situation was, so to speak, desperate. Five years of Japanese occupation following 80 years of colonial rule had left behind a completely devastated economy; hoarding and speculation by the French and Japanese authorities, plus natural calamities, had caused close to 2 million people to die of starvation in 1944-45.

* Written in collaboration with Nguyen Xuan Lai.

Thus the first years of the DRVN's existence was marked by complex struggles — political, military and economic.

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After a whole series of attacks and encroachments, in December 1946, the French armed forces thought that they could already make a final crack-down on the Vietnamese national movement and reconquer Viet Nam in a lightning offensive. But the Vietnamese people and government were fully prepared: on December 19, 1946 armed struggle spread throughout the country. The National Resistance began.

Under the great impulse of their love of the country, the entire people responded to the calls of the government (December 20, 1946) and of the Party (December 22, 1946). "Liberty or Enslavement," "Independence or Death," there was no other choice. "The people had made the choice since September 2, 1945." Apparently it was a "fight between the locust and the elephant." How could one fight with sticks, swords, picks and obsolete guns against a modern army of a great power, equipped with tanks, cannons, armoured cars and aircraft?

The Resistance first broke out in the capital. Then it extended to other big cities (Nam Dinh, Hai Duong, Vinh, Hue, Da Nang, etc.) where French troops were stationed under the terms of the March 6, 1946 Agreements.

In Hanoi, the French Command ranted about "wiping out all resistance within 24 hours": fighting there lasted two months. During 60 days, the Hanoi Regiment, 2,000 strong, made up mostly of young people, equipped with 1,500 ancient rifles of all calibres, faced an enemy army of 6,500 crack troops, supported by 40 tanks, hundreds of armoured cars and 30 aircraft. It was an unequal battle indeed, but these Hanoi patriots, "resolved to die to make sure that their Fatherland might live on", heroically accomplished their mission. During two months, they pinned

down the enemy in the Capital, creating favourable conditions for the country to switch from the state of peace to that of war. Relying on the population and barricading themselves behind dwelling-houses in a maze of streets, they inflicted heavy losses on the enemy (500 killed and 1,500 wounded). The battle over, the "Regiment of the Capital" withdrew.

The "Hanoi battle" was a source of confidence and hope. It inspired other cities to fight. At the very outset, it had the character of a "people's war" in which participated all social strata swearing to "live or die with the Capital." It made it possible to foretell that "the Resistance will win."

With reinforcements coming from the South, the enemy counter-attacked and tried to enlarge his occupation zone and control the main communication lines; while new political intrigues were carried out. Puppet administrations were set up in the villages with the idea of creating a stooge government. To divide the patriotic forces, anti-communist campaigns were launched. On March 6, 1947 the French Parliament ratified the policy of the Ramadier Government instituting Indochina as a Federation of autonomous states "independent within the framework of the French Union," with foreign affairs and national defence always assured by metropolitan France. This position was obviously a retrogression compared with that defined in the Agreements signed on March 6, 1946 under which France already recognized Viet Nam as an independent state. The radical-socialist Bollaert was called upon to replace Thierry d'Argenlieu as High Commissioner in Indochina and entrusted with the application of this new policy which implied the formation of a puppet government and political parties styled as "nationalist" or "collaborationist."

In face of the counter-offensive by a powerful and exceedingly well equipped army, the Vietnamese armed forces practised "a strategy of long-term armed struggle." They withdrew from the cities and consolidated their rural

bases for the conduct of a long war of resistance. The scorched-earth tactics was applied wherever the enemy advanced. The guerilla force was organised on a nationwide scale. All the para-military forces were unified into the people's militia.

Though forced to take up arms, the Vietnamese people never ceased reaffirming their desire for peace. After December 20, 1946, President Ho Chi Minh launched appeals to the French people, Parliament and government, urging them to cease hostilities and solve the Viet Nam problem by peaceful methods. French policy-makers, far from taking account of these peace offers, exerted themselves to discredit the Vietnamese Resistance through slanders and trumped-up stories. Didn't Paul Reynaud allege that the "Vietnamese government was installed by the Japanese?" Ramadier went so far as to pretend that "the letter addressed by President Ho Chi Minh to ex-premier Leon Blum bore a forged signature." Marius Moutet even hinted that "nobody has seen Ho Chi Minh since December 19, 1946 and there is no knowing if he is still alive."

On April 26, 1947 the Vietnamese Government formally proposed an armistice and negotiations to the French Government. Forced to give an answer, Ramadier sent Paul Mus who met President Ho Chi Minh on May 11, 1947. The French conditions calling for :

- disarming of the Vietnamese armed forces.
- free movement for the French troops on the whole of Vietnamese territory,
- return of French or foreign troops who had crossed over to the ranks of the Vietnamese Resistance, and
- release of French nationals and Vietnamese "collaborators"

were tantamount to a capitulation, pure and simple. In his speech on September 10, 1947 in Ha Dong, Bollaert showed his intention to annihilate the adversary by military action. The war raged on unabated.

In autumn-winter 1947, the French launched a big offensive, the "Lea" operation, against the Viet Bac where were the leading organs of the national Resistance.

With 20,000 well-trained troops, 40 aircraft and 800 armoured cars, they thought they could "finish with the Viet." They did not obtain the desired results ; 3,300 of their men were killed, 4,000 others wounded, 18 planes shot down, 38 river craft and 255 armoured cars destroyed and 8,000 weapons of different types captured by their adversary... This was their biggest defeat since their return to Indochina. Their lightning war was definitely a failure.

The "Viet Bac victory" helped strengthen confidence and consolidate unity. With it ended the first phase of the Resistance.

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Being compelled to wage a protracted war, the French, from 1948, sought to pit Vietnamese against Vietnamese and drain this country's resources to the utmost "to feed war by war itself." This policy envisaged large-scale "pacification" which would ensure them a solid rear for the realization of the "oil spot" tactics. This called for the setting up of a puppet administration and army against the powerful mass movement. Thus they set about rigging up a puppet administration and a "national army". From then on, their strategic plan was to "pacify the occupied regions," instead of "occupying territory." Lightning offensive gave way to defensive tactics.

Major mopping-up operations were launched throughout the country, especially in Nam Bo and in the 5th interzone. Whole villages were razed and transformed into "no-man's land".

The war assumed a new aspect. Economic and political actions were taken as well as military ones, since the country's material and human resources were to be squeezed as much as possible.



· Viet Nam in the First Resistance

Faced with this policy of "pacification and cleaning-up," the Party decided to intensify guerrilla warfare in the whole of the country.

At the beginning of 1949, great changes took place in the world with consequent repercussions on the Viet Nam situation. The socialist camp, essentially the U.S.S.R. had completed its reconstruction. The capitalist world faced its first major post-war economic crisis. The national liberation movement was growing in South-East Asia and Africa. The Chinese Liberation Army marched on South China and the Chinese Revolution approached its final victory. France encountered numerous difficulties ; governments fell in quick succession, the people's struggle for social benefits and for peace in Viet Nam gained momentum, the economic situation worsened because of the heavy war burden, and U.S. interference in the country's home and foreign policies augmented.

In Indochina, Pignon replaced Bollaert as High Commissioner. Mopping-up operations involved heavy losses : on an average, 1,000 soldiers were wiped out every month.

In October 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded, an event of capital importance which tipped the balance of forces in favour of the socialist camp and constituted a sure guarantee for the struggle for peace and democracy. The emergence of this great ally and neighbour on the international scene was an invaluable source of encouragement for the Vietnamese people and inspired them to redouble efforts in their struggle.

At the beginning of 1950, China, the U.S.S.R., then the other socialist countries, recognized the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

The policy of "pacification" did not bring the French the expected results. Instead, they were confronted with an ever-growing guerrilla movement.

In this international juncture and especially as the Chinese Liberation Army approached the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, General Revers was dispatched in a hurry to Indochina on a "save-the-situation" mission. New opera-

tional plans were worked out by the French command to :

- send more reinforcements to Bac Bo, the country's principal front,
- consolidate and extend the occupation of the delta,
- close the Sino-Vietnamese frontier to cut off any link between Viet Bac and People's China,
- strengthen the east-west corridor in Bac Bo,
- defend the Lang Son - Hong Gai - Hanoi - Hai-phong parallelogram,
- develop the puppet army destined to replace the metropolitan troops in the occupation of the territory, and
- set up mobile units with French and African soldiers and those of the Foreign Legion for sweep-and-clean operations and for anti-guerrilla fighting.

A series of campaigns was launched during 1949-1950 :

- Campaign Pomone on Phu Tho (April 29, 1949),
- Campaign Bastille to occupy Bac Ninh and Bac Giang (July 13, 1949),
- Campaign Canigou to occupy Vinh Yen and Phuc Yen (August 18, 1949),
- Campaign Anthracite to occupy Bui Chu and Phat Diem (October 26, 1949),
- Campaign Diabolo to occupy Ninh Giang and Hung Yen (December 22, 1949),
- Campaign Tonneau to occupy Thai Binh (February 8, 1950),
- Campaign David against Van Dinh (Ha Dong) (April 21, 1950),
- Campaign Nine to occupy Ninh Binh (April 27, 1950)
- Campaign Foudre to occupy Phu Ly (May 21, 1950).

In one year, the enemy succeeded in occupying almost all the important centres in the Bac Bo delta. The liberated zone was narrowed. Along the Sino-Vietnamese

frontier, strongholds and Road 4 were powerfully defended. Thirteen battalions of reinforcements were moved in. Two powerful mobile groups were maintained on a permanent basis and ready for emergency intervention. Pressganging of youth increased to reinforce the puppet army whose strength rose from 96,000 men in 1949 to 122,400 in 1950, accounting for half the total number of troops under the French Command in Indochina.

But the more mopping-up operations were intensified, the more the enemy met, not only with an increasingly intense guerrilla war, but also with strong popular opposition covering almost the whole population in the occupied areas. Self-defence force were organized in the countryside. "Resistance villages" were built everywhere. Storage depots, strategic and economic centres and communication lines were under constant attacks and destroyed. The war was brought to the very heart of big cities - Hanoi, Haiphong, Hue and Saigon - where the French thought themselves secure. From the free to the occupied zones, from the delta to the mountain regions, everywhere, men and women, old and young alike, all took part in the guerrilla war, vying with one another in initiative. Armed struggle in the countryside gained in strength and scope. The ground was cut from under the enemy's feet. War was fought anywhere and everywhere. It became "total" and one "of the entire people." Together with the guerrilla force, the people's army launched a series of campaigns during 1949-50 in the whole of the country, causing heavy losses to the enemy (more than 10,000 killed), destroying more than 200 fortified positions and liberating a territory of 42,500 sq. kilometres in the mountain regions.

During the last period, especially the three years 1948-50, the Resistance had to surmount great difficulties, not only in the military but also in the economic field. At the very outset, the Party had defined the general principles of the long-term armed struggle :

- to be prepared for a war of resistance which would be hard, long and complex, but which would surely end in

victory, and for all-round Resistance waged by the entire people,

- to rely chiefly on one's own strength and not on any foreign aid.

In this spirit, the entire people made all-out efforts to boost development in all fields.

The liberated zones, mainly covering the countryside, were narrowed after the occupation of the delta by the enemy, but their economy, at first worse, was gradually stabilized. All means were employed to achieve a self-sufficient economy, to increase production, essentially agricultural production, so as to ensure supplies for the front. Thoroughly implementing President Ho Chi Minh's slogan "*Sufficient food, powerful army*" our people brought every plot of idle land under cultivation, practised food saving and kept "pots of Resistance rice"¹. In the whole of North Viet Nam, annual rice output reached the 1940-44 average.

Thanks to the encouragement brought to small industries and handicrafts, most consumer goods hitherto imported were produced on the spot. Not having machines, workers and technicians tasked their minds to produce arms, medicine and sanitary material for the front, etc., by hand.

In the monetary and financial spheres, the Vietnamese *dong* gradually took the place of the Indochinese piastre, the use of which was banned by a government decree in 1948 and which completely disappeared in the liberated zones early in 1949. State expenditure was mainly covered by land-tax : 83 per cent in 1950 as against 67 per cent in 1947. However, as the budget disequilibrium increased day by day, the receipts hardly covering one-quarter of the expenses, an ever-growing inflation was necessary in order to finance the Government budget.

In spite of the hard conditions of war, education was not neglected : literacy classes and general education

1. In every family, some rice was put aside, kept in a pot and destined for the armed forces.

courses continued functioning : a medical school and a basic sciences school were founded deep in the jungle.

Autumn 1950 : the national Resistance moved into its 5th year and the war entered a new stage.

The victory of the Chinese revolution worried the imperialist powers. They tried to seal off the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, a task entrusted to the French army in Indochina. Along this frontier, the well-fortified positions of Cao Bang and Lang Son and the important posts of Dong Khe and That Khe were strengthened. Important reinforcements composed of elite European and African units were quickly brought in.

The Viet Bac region, where the central organs of the Resistance were to be found, was thus caught in a pincer movement. This encirclement had to be broken and the frontier liberated at all costs. The "Frontier Campaign" was thus decided upon by the High Command of the Vietnamese army.

On the night of September 16, 1950 the attack was launched. After 6 weeks' fierce fighting, the French fled from the frontier, leaving 10 regiments totalling 8,000 men in our hands. All the strongly-defended frontier posts fell.

The pincers were broken and the frontier completely disengaged. Cao Bang, Lang Son, Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, Hoa Binh and a series of other centres were liberated. The Viet Bac region henceforth a "wholly secure zone" was linked with the socialist camp as with a vast rear extending from China to Czechoslovakia.

This great victory won by the Vietnamese army sowed disarray among the enemy. Martial law was proclaimed in Hanoi. French nationals received orders to prepare for their evacuation. The morale of the French troops was at its lowest ebb. In France, contradictions became sharper and sharper : with more vigour, the people demanded cessation of hostilities and repatriation of the Expeditionary Corps, political parties were divided, some calling for more effectives and more direct U.S. intervention,

others advocating abandonment of Indochina to reinforce the defence of North Africa and other colonies. French policy became more and more dependent on the U.S.

Though entangled in their war of aggression in Korea, the Americans granted every necessary financial and material aid to France for war intensification. American arms poured in ; American military and aid missions succeeded one another in Indochina. At the Singapore Conference in May 1951, French, Americans and British reached agreement on a joint defence of Bac Bo which they considered the main anti-communist bastion in South-East Asia.

De Lattre de Tassigny, one of the best, if not the best, French generals, was sent to Indochina as High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief, to try and *turn the tide*.

Soon after his arrival, de Lattre put into operation a plan tending to :

- increase the reinforcements coming from metropolitan France, and American aid in arms, especially aircraft,

- re-organize and strengthen the "national army" by intensifying mopping-up operations,

- consolidate the "Vietnamese State" with Bao Dai as puppet Chief of State,

- strengthen the defence of the delta by creating a "white belt" in which all dwellings were to be destroyed,

- intensify the pacification of the occupied regions with a view to realizing at all costs the policy of "setting Vietnamese against Vietnamese" and of "keeping up the war by war itself."

Thus the war continued on a wider and wider scale. Air raids on the free zone became more frequent and destructive, demolishing all irrigation works of primary importance for agriculture and seeking to obstruct all agricultural activity. Sweep-and-clean operations by re-equipped mobile units were launched more deeply into the liberated territories, causing devastation, and

perpetrating crimes and atrocities against the population. The enemy tried their best to defend Bac Ho and regain the initiative.

Judging that the occasion was favourable, de Lattre decided to "strike hard." In November 1951, he launched an attack against Hoa Binh and occupied it.

The rebuff was not late to arrive.

Since the "Frontier Campaign" the Vietnamese army had grown numerically, materially, technically and ideologically. It had become a regular army, powerful enough and capable of carrying out large-scale operations far from its bases and practising mobile warfare. In 1951, it launched 2 campaigns in the Bac Bo delta: the Hoang Hoa Tham campaign to break the coastal defence line (Dong Trieu - Uong Bi) and the Quang Trung campaign in Ha Nam, Phu Ly, Ninh Binh and Phat Diem along with guerilla activities in the enemy's rear.

As the enemy attacked Hoa Binh, the High Command of the Vietnamese army decided upon a counter-offensive on two fronts: on the one hand, the bulk of the regular army was dispatched to besiege Hoa Binh: on the other hand, two divisions infiltrated into the occupied regions to co-ordinate their action with that of regional forces and guerrillas. The enemy thus found themselves between the devil and the deep sea. If they sent in reinforcements to relieve Hoa Binh their rear would be at the mercy of the adversary. What was to be done?

Salan, replacing de Lattre who was taken ill in the thick of the Hoa Binh battle and sent back home where he died some time later, declared that Hoa Binh should be defended at all costs.

After 3 months of fierce fighting, the French beat a retreat, leaving behind 21,500 dead and wounded, both in the rear and in Hoa Binh. The de Lattre plan was shattered. The "national army" and the puppet administration went to pieces. "Pacification" was reduced to failure. The morale of the French troops was seriously affected.

Following the Hoa Binh debacle, Letourneau, former Minister for Overseas France, was nominated High Commissioner in Indochina. Together with Salan, he went all-out for a "total-war" in the delta, with increasingly destructive mopping-up operations conducted by forces of from 15 to 18 battalions and supported by massive bombings: Operation Amphibie in Nam Ha (March 1952), Operation Mercure in Thai Binh (April 1952), Operation Poloturco in Bac Ninh (April 1952), etc.

Counter-raid actions were taken everywhere by the regional armed forces and the guerillas in co-ordination with the regular army, and heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy. The guerilla movement was carried to its peak.

Although the principal front always remained Bac Bo where big battles had taken place, fighting in Nam Bo was no less hard and heroic. In the first days of the Resistance, Nam Bo was regarded by the French as "pacified." Nevertheless the war raged on there. As it constituted a kind of "reserve" in human and material resources, ruthlessly exploited by the enemy to serve his war of reconquest, it experienced, like the rest of the country, bloody repression, especially in the early fifties. Large-scale mopping-up operations were launched against the Plain of Reeds and various provinces (Tan An, Bien Hoa, Ben Tre, Gia Dinh, etc.) Everywhere, the enemy met stiff resistance from the people. Guerilla fighting was carried on even to the vicinity of Saigon. Big attacks causing heavy losses to the enemy were made by the people's army in 1947, 1948 and 1949 in Giong Dua, La Nha and Tam Vu; in 1951 in Cai Be; in 1952 in Cape St. Jacques and particularly in Phu Tho against an ammunition depot, destroying 3 million litres of gasoline, 2 million litres of fuel, one thousand 500-kilo bombs and 200 million cartridges, etc. At the end of 1953, fighting increased especially in the provinces of My Tho, Long Xuyen, Chau Doc and Ha Tien where more than 2,000 operations were launched against the enemy.

Alongside armed struggle, political and economic struggle was also carried out. Plantations were burned. In major cities, especially in Saigon - Cho Lon, big demonstrations took place with the participation of hundreds of thousands of people. A case in point was the demonstration held on March 19, 1950 against the arrival in Saigon of American warships.

Thus, after being the first to start the anti-French Resistance in 1945, Nam Bo was also the first to wage anti-U.S. struggle from 1950.

During the Resistance years, great transformations took place in the liberated zones. The people's regime distributed 650,000 hectares of land to poor peasants, combated illiteracy, democratized village administration (out of a total of 1,214 villages, 1,075 were placed under its authority), etc.

After the «Hoa Binh Campaign,» the years 1952-1953 were marked by two big campaigns launched by the Vietnamese army :

- the «Tay Bac Campaign» in October-November 1952, when a zone of 28,000 sq. kilometres with a population of 250,000 inhabitants was liberated. The free zone now extended from Viet Bac to the Laos-Viet Nam border ;

- the «Upper Laos Campaign» in April 1952, in co-ordination with the Laotian patriotic forces, following which a vast zone embracing the provinces of Sam Neua, Xieng Khoang and Phongsaly came under the authority of the Pathet Lao and was linked with Viet Bac.

The Vietnamese Resistance now possessed a vast and solid rear.

In February 1951, historic event, of capital importance, occurred : the 2nd National Congress of the Indo-chinese Communist Party was held and the Party henceforward officially took the name of Viet Nam Workers' Party. At this Congress, the guiding line of the new stage of the Resistance was defined, with the watchword "Everything for the Front, everything for victory."

In the economic field, this period (1951-1953) was characterized by the stabilization and development of

the national economy. The main preoccupations remained the boosting of agricultural production. An emulation movement was launched to stimulate the peasants to produce as much as possible. In the occupied regions, production was carried out alongside counter-raid actions, attacks on enemy convoys and military posts, destruction of communication lines, etc.

In the financial fields, radical measures were taken to control galloping inflation and to check budgetary disequilibrium. In May 1951, decisions were taken on :

- the founding of a National Bank ;

- the putting into circulation of a new currency (the new *dong* being equal to 10 old *dong*) ;

- the imposition of a unique agricultural tax, which replaced all duties, taxes and other contributions incumbent on the peasants ; and

- the establishment of the State Trade Service.

The receipts, covering 82 per cent of the budget expenditure in 1952 as against 23 per cent in 1950 and 30 per cent in 1951, reached a record figure in 1953 : 116 per cent.

Prices were established day by day : in Viet Bac in one year, the price of rice was lowered by 35 per cent, that of salt by 55 per cent and that of cloth by 39 per cent.

As the war proceeded, the partition of zones was abolished ; trade intercourse between the two zones, occupied and free, was established, to the advantage of the latter.

With the opening of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, trade with People's China augmented.

The economy of the DRVN took on a new aspect. The outlines of a democratic and people's economy, prelude to a socialist economy, showed more clearly.

In feudal and agrarian Viet Nam, the peasantry, especially the poor peasants, made up the majority of the population. Agriculture constituted the principal sector, on which the country's economy depended. From the

beginning of the Resistance, the poor peasants played a decisive part in it, ploughing, harvesting, repairing dikes and dams, building roads, organizing the guerilla force and hunting down enemy spies, without mentioning the fact that they constituted the bulk of the soldiers of the People's Army and of the army of voluntary porters who ensured food and ammunition supplies for the front, and that they made the greatest contribution in taxes and other contributions to war expenditure.

With the continued extension of the war and intensification of mopping-up operations and raids it would have been impossible to cope with the situation without a general mobilization of the whole population, particularly the poor peasantry who constituted the decisive force. Therefore it was necessary to break the feudal shackles which had weighed on the peasants for centuries: exorbitant land rent and interest rates on loans, bullying, brutalities, extra-economic burdens, etc. It was high time to break the old structures in the villages and abolish the centuries-old land ownership by the feudalists, in other words, to "bring land to those who till it."

In January 1953, the Central Committee of the Party formulated its theses on Land Reform and decided to launch a campaign of mass mobilization for its accomplishment. On December 4, 1953 the National Assembly voted the Law on Land Reform. This historic event roused great enthusiasm in the peasant masses, in the army and in the entire people who were ready for every sacrifice to annihilate the enemy.

In order to group all social strata of different political leanings and religious creeds, the Viet Minh Front was merged in March 1951 with the Lien Viet into a broad National United Front.

*

Winter 1953: the war reached a turning-point.

The Americans, especially after their defeat in Korea, sought to take the place of the French in the conduct

of the war in Indochina. American aid accounted for up to 60 per cent (375 million dollars) of the French war expenditure in 1953 and 80 per cent in 1954 as against only 12 per cent in 1951. American arms supplies, averaging 6,000 tons per month in 1951, reached 25,000 tons in 1953 and 88,000 tons in July 1954. American missions led by high-ranking officials, including Secretary of State Foster Dulles and Vice President Nixon, came and inspected the Indochinese front. Airlifts were organized from France, the Philippines and Japan for supplies to Indochina. Two aircraft carriers of the 7th Fleet were dispatched to the Tonkin Gulf, 250 American pilots took a direct part in the fighting.

In May 1953, Navarre replaced Salan. The "Navarre Plan" was elaborated in conformity with the Pentagon's instructions. It aimed at annihilating the Vietnamese forces and completely "pacifying" the country in 18 months and 3 stages.

With increased American aid, Navarre busied himself with re-organizing the "national army" which soared to 320,000 men in 1954 and consisted of 86 battalions. By the end of 1953, the strength of the French Expeditionary Corps had reached 250,000 men, with an artillery 26 battalions strong, an air force of 528 craft and a marine force of 390 units.

Major mopping-up operations were launched in the whole of the country, involving dozens of battalions and air and naval units:

- Operation Camargue in Binh-Tri-Thien,
- Operation Brochet in Thai Nguyen - Hung Yen in September 1953,
- Operation Gerfaut in Thai Binh in December 1953,
- Operation Tarentaise in Nam Dinh in August 1953.

Attacks with massive bombardments were directed against the liberated regions such as in Ninh Binh, Phu Tho and the 4th and 5th Interzones.

The situation seemed to "have improved" after Navarre's arrival.

To smash the Navarre Plan was the immediate task of the People's Army in the Autumn - Winter Campaign of 1953. The Vietnamese High Command then decided to launch an offensive in the direction of the Northwest and Central Laos. In the 5th Interzone, it was also urgent to open the road towards the High Plateaux to the regular forces. Together with the regular army, in the occupied regions, the regional armed forces and the guerillas were to attack the enemy's rear. The hub of this offensive plan was Dien Bien Phu.

In an effort to win back the initiative, Navarre opened Campaign Mouette in October 1953 directed against the free region of Ninh Binh, an operation which incurred heavy losses.

On December 10, 1953 the big Winter-Spring Campaign of 1954 of the People's Army was opened with an attack on Lai Chau, which the French had evacuated on December 5 to withdraw to Dien Bien Phu, a powerfully-defended entrenched camp. Lai Chau was liberated on December 12, with a vast area of 10,000 sq. kilometres and 160,000 inhabitants.

In Laos, in face of the offensive launched by the Vietnamese and Pathet Lao armed forces, the French abandoned Thakhet and other centres to take refuge in Seno which they transformed into a fortified position.

All these offensives compelled Navarre to scatter his forces which were concentrated in the Bac Bo delta in order to "preserve territory" and build up systems of "hedgehog" positions believed capable of resisting the assault of the Vietnamese armed forces and holding up the adversary.

In January 1954, Navarre embarked upon the 2nd stage of his plan with the opening of Campaign *Atlante*

launched against the 4 provinces of Phu Yen, Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai and Quang Nam of the 5th Interzone. Instead of putting up a frontal resistance against the adversary, the People's Army moved the bulk of its troops to the High Plateaux, liberating Kontum, encircling Pleiku and driving the enemy out of the northern part of the district. After that the free area of the 5th Interzone was extended to the frontiers of Cambodia and Lower Laos. The offensive on the High Plateaux compelled Navarre to deploy his forces destined for Campaign *Atlante* to Pleiku which he transformed into another fortified position. Thus Campaign *Atlante* was smashed.

In March 1954, almost all the French mobile units, hitherto concentrated in the Bac Bo delta, were moved to different fronts. The "pacified" regions were left exposed and seemed difficult to protect from intensified guerrilla activity.

The Navarre Plan seemed to be heading for utter failure.

In January 1954, the People's Army encircled Dien Bien Phu. After 55 days and nights of fierce fighting, this entrenched camp, commonly described as "impregnable" by the French, fell under the blows of the Vietnamese armed forces. On May 7, 1954, General de Castries, field commander, surrendered with 16,200 men. This victory of the Vietnamese army and people brought to nought all the manoeuvres intended to torpedo the Geneva Conference which had been going on since April 1954 to discuss the re-establishment of peace in Indochina. In spite of its desperate efforts, Washington could not prevent the signing of agreements which put an end to hostilities.

Every bit of the French imperialists' will for reconquest was smashed forever, and the danger of a war having to be fought against a joint Franco-American front was averted.

On July 20, 1954 the Geneva Agreements solemnly recognized the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Viet Nam (and of Cambodia and Laos).

A provisional demarcation line, drawn at the 17th parallel, enabled the two belligerent armies to regroup in the two zones, North and South.

On October 10, 1954, the Government of the DRVN returned to Hanoi. In the completely liberated Northern zone, the building of socialism commenced, while in the South, the struggle to complete the national and democratic Revolution continued against U.S. imperialism and its valets.

VIII — THE BUILDING OF THE FIRST BASES OF SOCIALISM AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST AMERICAN NEO-COLONIALISM (1954-1975)

The Geneva Agreements on Viet Nam gave formal recognition to the fundamental national rights of the Vietnamese people : independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. But the correlation of forces between the Vietnamese national resistance on the one side and the imperialist clan, in particular the Franco-American coalition, on the other only made it possible to achieve the complete liberation of the northern half of Viet Nam.

Of course, the Agreements stipulated that the southern half would only have a provisional existence for two years at the most, under a temporary administration, and that general elections held by 1956 at the latest would unify Viet Nam under a single government.

In fact, as soon as the agreements had been signed, Washington rushed to set up in South Viet Nam — with the connivance of the French government — a neo-colonialist regime with clearly laid down counter-revolutionary aims : to liquidate the national and revolutionary movement in South Viet Nam, turn the South into a military base and American colony and create a military and police machine capable of serving as a tool for the subjection and reconquest of the North.

The complete liberation of the northern half of the country made it possible for the Vietnamese people to

create a solid revolutionary base for the national and revolutionary movement as a whole. The country's partial liberation created a special situation imposing different tasks on the Vietnamese people in the North and the South. The Vietnamese revolution, one in its historical development, found itself, in 1954, faced with complex task :

- carry through the national and democratic revolution in the South ;
- defend the North against all aggression, all imperialist designs of destruction and sabotage ;
- build socialism in the northern half, which must rapidly develop its economy and culture in order to become the great rear base of the South fighting in the front line against US neo-colonialism.

For more than twenty years, from 1954 to 1975, the Vietnamese people in both North and South were engaged in a fierce and bitter struggle against American neo-colonialism ; but in the northern half the radical renovation of socio-economic structures and the setting up of the political, social and economic bases of socialism were successfully carried out despite American aggression. As the situation evolved, the struggle between the entire Vietnamese people and US colonialism wore the character of the crucial confrontation of our epoch. US imperialism wished to make Viet Nam into an example, a testing ground for its world strategy ; hence its ruthlessness in continuing hostilities by every possible means. For the Vietnamese people the trial was a very hard one, but they were aware that they were not only defending their own independence and freedom, but also fighting for world peace, the liberation of other peoples, and the defence of the socialist camp.

These twenty years 1954-1975 can be divided into three periods :

- 1954-1965, period of the setting up of the first bases of socialism in the North and the struggle of the South Vietnamese people against repression and neo-colonialist war.

- 1965-1973, period of total struggle by North and South against direct US aggression, ended by the signing of the Paris Agreement in January 1973.

- 1973-1975, period of the collapse of the neo-colonialist regime rigged up in the South.

We will leave the study of the cultural development of the period 1954-1975 to a separate chapter.

The First Bases of Socialism (1954-1965)

With the northern half of the country completely liberated the immediate question was - which road to follow, that of capitalism or socialism ? The Viet Nam Workers' Party programme specified that, once the national and democratic revolution had been completed, the country should move directly to the building of socialism bypassing the stage of capitalist development.

The main obstacle to the building of socialism lay in the particularly backward state of the economy, the inheritance of centuries under feudal and colonial rule, an economy further ruined by the long years of war. In 1954, modern industry accounted for only 1.5% of the total production and not a single motor could be found throughout all the villages of North Viet Nam. There was an extreme lack of arable land - 1/10 of a hectare per head - and the frequency of natural calamities (floods, typhoons, drought) was a permanent threat weighing over agriculture. The North-South division had brought a serious economic imbalance. One year after liberation, for example, the annual production of electricity had only risen to 53 million kw/h and the proportion of modern industry in total production to 3.4%.

The Workers' Party had, however, made clear that these would be outweighed by the favourable factors for socialist construction : a strong worker-peasant alliance, the sure leadership of a Marxist-Leninist Party which had the confidence of the whole people and effective aid from the socialist countries.

In these conditions it was necessary to rapidly heal the wounds of war while carrying through the land reform began in 1953 in order then to move on to the structural changes required for the building of socialism. By 1957 the land reform was completed and production as a whole had reached its pre-war level. In 1958 opened the period of socialist transformation which rapidly culminated in 1960 with :

- the formation of an important State economic sector - industry, foreign and home trade, agricultural and forestry plantations - which would play the leading role in the national economy ;

- the conversion of private capitalist enterprises in industry and commerce into State or joint enterprises. This operation was rendered relatively easy by the extreme weakness of Vietnamese capitalism;

- the creation of handicraft cooperatives grouping together the majority of craftsmen ;

- and, most fundamental of all, the setting up of agricultural cooperatives which, by late 1960, included about 86% of all peasant households.

By the end of 1960 North Viet Nam was already essentially equipped with socialist socio-economic structures. With the completion of the land reform, and thanks to the effort made by a people expressing their joy at the reconquest of independence, production showed satisfactory progress. Some new enterprises were set up with aid from other socialist countries, the railway lines destroyed by the war were partially restored and agricultural water control works were constructed.

In 1960 the economic data were as follows :

Population : nearly 16 million.

Cultivated area : 1,877,100 hectares.

(See attached table)

Notwithstanding these far-reaching changes in the relations of production, the North Vietnamese economy remained underdeveloped, through its lack of technical

	1939	1955	1957	1960
- Cultivated area (1,000 ha)	2,139.0	2,654.0	2,666.0	2,870.0
- Irrigated area (1,000 ha)	345.7	922.0	1,428.0	2,024.0
- Food production (paddy and subsidiary crops calculated in terms of paddy — 1,000 tons)	2,728.0	4,114.0	4,585.0	4,698.0
- Electricity (million kw/h)	123.0	53.0	121.2	256.1
- Coal (million tons)	2,789.0	641.5	1,084.8	2,600.0
- Cement (1,000 tons)	283.0	8.5	165.1	408.0
- Textiles (million metres)	55.0	8.8	63.1	76.0
- Machine-tools	—	—	—	799.0
- Part played by industrial output (including handicrafts) in the total value of industrial and agricultural production		19.0	33.0	43.8
- Part played by modern industry in the total value of industrial and agricultural production		3.8	11.2	17.8
- Part played by modern industry in the total value of industrial and handicraft production		20.2	33.5	40.7

and scientific expertise matters. The economy, which was still backward and predominantly agricultural, depending mainly on manual and handicraft labour, contained serious weaknesses :

- agricultural production, the chief sector of the national economy, remained unstable and very much dependent on climatic conditions. The material and technical basis of agriculture remained very weak and so was the level of organization and management of cooperatives and State farms ; thus agriculture was not able to constitute a solid base for industrial development.

- heavy industry, still in embryo, was not able to provide equipment for the different branches of the economy, in particular for agriculture.

- the infrastructure of communication lines remained rudimentary.

- qualified workers and technical and scientific cadres were still few in number and with rather low qualifications. This was equally true of the management cadres.

The Third Party Congress, held in September 1960, defined the general line of economic development and laid down the broad outline of the first five-year-plan, 1961-1965, for the construction of the first material and technical bases of socialism. The socialist way had to be made to triumph and a backward economy of small-scale individual production transformed into an economy of large-scale socialist production. This called for a triple revolution, a revolution in the relations of production, a cultural and ideological revolution and a technical and scientific revolution with the latter as the linch-pin. It would be necessary to mobilize completely all energies and forces of the nation under the leadership of the Party while seeking to benefit from the most effective aid possible from brother socialist countries (the Soviet Union, People's China and other countries).

The development of heavy industry should have priority but this must be done in a rational way for great efforts should also be directed to developing agriculture,

the main support for industrial development, and light industry. These efforts should form an important investment, but at the same time an attempt must be made to raise the standard of living of the population, who had greatly suffered during the war ; nor could the problem of national defence be neglected for the country was constantly threatened by the aggressive designs of the USA.

Big campaigns were launched to carry through socialist changes and improve the organization and management both of enterprises and, above all, of the newly-formed agricultural cooperatives. While centrally-based industry developed rapidly, regional industry, utilizing handicraft or semi-mechanized techniques, was also not neglected, both essentially being geared to the service of agriculture.

Large-sized industrial enterprises came into being : the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Complex, completion of a superphosphate factory, new electrical centres.... In 1964 the figures were as follows :

Irrigated area	2,368,000 hectares
Electricity	592.2 million Kw/h
Cement	600,500 tons
Textiles	107.2 million metres
Total food production	5,515,000 tons
Coal	3.6 million tons
Machine tools	
Part played by modern industry in the value of industrial and handicraft production	769 pieces
Part played by modern industry in total production	36.7 %

The North Vietnamese economy had begun to break loose from its bonds, little by little taking on the form of a national and independent economy. Certainly the general level still remained very low, both from a technical and

from a managerial point of view : but the bases had been laid for a rapid and sure development in the future.

American aggression forced the DRVN to give a new direction to its national economy.

Repression and Neo-Colonialist War (1954-1965)

Washington's interference in Vietnamese affairs does not date simply from 1954. In June 1950 an American military mission was already working hand in glove with the French Expeditionary Corps command.

Despite French opposition, US hold upon the puppet government and army grew steadily. As early as September 1951, an agreement on "economic cooperation" was signed between Bao Dai and Washington, which brought pressure to bear upon the French and implanted its agents step by step in the Bao Dai administration. In 1953, in exchange for substantial aid to France for the implementation of the Navarre plan, the Americans obtained direct participation in the training of puppet troops. Early in 1954, General O'Daniel headed a mission to this effect.

When French defeat became imminent, particularly in April 1954 during the siege of Dien Bien Phu, the "hawks" with Vice-President Nixon at their head wanted to send US troops to Indochina. Massive bombings were to be carried out by bombers taking off from the Philippines and escorted by fighters of the Seventh Fleet. But the victories recorded by the Vietnamese resistance and the reactions of French and world opinion kept the British government out of the venture and Operation "Vulture" was called off. Moreover, it was also opposed by US generals, among them Ridgway, former C-in-C of US troops in Korea, who had learnt that to send GIs to Asia was to court certain defeat, or at least to get caught in a protracted morass.

Washington then strove to prevent the convening of the Geneva Conference on Indochina and, having failed,

directed its efforts along two fronts : on the one hand to torpedo the conference, back the preposterous claims of Bao Dai and his like for an outright capitulation of the Vietnamese resistance, and on the other to rally imperialist and native reactionary forces in Southeast Asia into a coalition for carrying on the war. The first move fizzled out. The Geneva Conference ended on July 20, 1954, with the conclusion of cease-fire agreements which put an end to the war. The project of military cooperation in Southeast Asia had to be put off until a few weeks after the signing of the armistice in Indochina.

Meanwhile, Washington had succeeded in imposing on the French Ngo Dinh Diem as Bao Dai's Prime Minister (June 1954).

The US-Diem Regime

The cease-fire in Indochina was signed, but Washington did not reconcile itself to its setback and wasted

no time. Its goals were obvious : to turn South Viet Nam into a new-type US colony, a military base from which to start the reconquest of North Viet Nam, and a political and strategic base for the domination of Southeast Asia. The plan was briskly carried into effect.

In September 1954, there was set up the Southeast Asia military bloc (USA, Britain, France, Australia, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines) with a protocol in the treaty which made intervention in Indochina possible. Countless US economic and military missions and US advisers in all fields supervised the functioning of the Saigon administration. They took in hand all branches of activity and all projects from the drafting of a constitution, the training of the armed forces and police to the preparation of an "agrarian reform" and school curricula. Rapidly, through the Paris agreement and the granting of a few economic and cultural advantages to France, the Americans stopped all direct French influence. Pro-French sects and

parties were liquidated either by corruption or by force of arms.

On April 28, 1956, French troops finally evacuated Viet Nam : Paris shirked its responsibilities for the implementation of the Geneva Agreements which provided for the holding of general elections that year to bring about the peaceful reunification of the country.

The Americans' Viet Nam policy, however, was based on frenzied opposition to this reunification. In open violation of the Geneva Agreements, Washington sent weapons and military personnel en masse to South Viet Nam, in order to build a large puppet army and set up logistic, air and naval bases, and a dense network of strategic communications.

Flouting these accords, the Americans also advised Ngo Dinh Diem to create a separate state of South Viet Nam, with its own "National Assembly" and "Constitution". A rigged referendum overthrew Bao Dai and brought Ngo Dinh Diem to the highest office.

US neo-colonialist policy in 1954 was thus clear :

- To eliminate French presence and take direct control of South Viet Nam ;
- To set up a puppet dictatorship devoted to Washington ;
- To liquidate the national and revolutionary movement in South Viet Nam ;
- Lastly, to embark on a reconquest of North Viet Nam.

The liquidation of the national and revolutionary movement was a sine qua non for an American hold on the country. With the help of US advisers, right from the start the Diem administration applied a bloodthirsty policy against the whole population. The experience of old and new colonialisms in the field of repression, the Nazi-inspired fascist methods, the medieval practices of the Vietnamese feudalists, of whom Ngo Dinh Diem was the representative - everything was resorted to in an attempt to terrorize the population and suppress all opposition.

A repressive apparatus covered the entire country, from the capital to the remotest villages. Mass slaughters, tortures, deportations, mass detentions, mopping-up of vast areas - never had the South Vietnamese people gone through so dark a period. The few years of so-called "peace" from 1955 to 1959 made more victims than many years of war.

Faced with American and Diemist terror, in the first years after the armistice, the population, in order not to violate the signed agreements, only resisted by using political means : demonstrations, petitions, meetings... The peasants, in particular, fiercely opposed the landlords' and headmen's attempts to rob them of their lands. From 1945 to 1954, in many areas they had been granted land by the revolutionary power and had lived under a democratic regime. During that period the feudalists had fled to the towns to live under the protection of the French expeditionary corps. With the Diemist dictatorship they now returned to their villages to wrest back their lands and reestablish their administrative and political control.

The Americans and Diem had set up a repressive apparatus which included armed forces and an omnipresent police. Besides regular troops, the army included security units at provincial level and civil guards at village level. Several parallel police services were in operation. Anyone who had in any way participated in the anti-French resistance was charged with "communism" or "connivance with the communists," the parents of cadres and fighters regrouped in the North were subjected to a real witch-hunt. The charges of "communism" could cause anyone to be jailed for an indefinite period and often to be tortured to death. "Tiger cages" had existed since the early days of the regime.

After July 1956, having refused to hold general elections as scheduled in the Geneva Agreements, the Saigon administration stepped up its repression. Popular opposition having developed, repressive measures became ever more brutal and bloody. Vast areas were subjected to sweeps involving up to 10,000 and even 15,000 men, and

people were concentrated or deported wholesale allegedly to build "agrovilles" or "agricultural settlements" (agrovilles in rural areas and agricultural settlements in mountain regions).

Except for a small group gathered around Ngo Dinh Diem's family and adventurers who would do everything just to get a few dollars, all social classes and strata were hit by the repression: peasants, workers, intellectuals, bourgeois who either were patriotic-minded or simply wanted normal relations to be established with the North, ethnic minorities, non-catholic religious sects... Even Cabinet ministers had to go into self-exile to escape the police. With US blessing and advice, Diem and his brothers – and sister-in-law lorded it over the country and held power of life and death over the people. Washington came to think of the US hold in South Viet Nam as unshakable and dubbed Diem the "Churchill of Asia".

But the Americans had underestimated the capacity of the Vietnamese people. Since 1860, the South Viet Nam population had untiringly waged an arduous political and military struggle against French colonialism; between 1945 and 1954 this national and democratic struggle had reached a very high level and involved all strata of the people. It should be recalled that as early as March 1950, when the war against the French colonialists was raging, hundreds of thousands of people had demonstrated against American intervention. How could the Americans hope to camouflage this interference, now that it was even more open? The anti-national policy of the Ngo Dinh Diem family which perpetuated the division of the country and the bloody repression which hit the bulk of the population provoked an ever wider and stronger opposition.

In 1959 this repression was even given a legal cover: in May that year the Saigon "National Assembly" passed Law 10-59 which empowered special military tribunals to try and execute, on the spot and without delay, anyone arrested by the police or captured during a mop-up operation. A threat of extermination hung over the patriotic

movement and the whole population. From political struggle the latter gradually shifted to an armed struggle of self-defence. The first engagements with the Diem army and police broke out in remote villages and mountain areas. In January 1960, in Ben Tre province (Mekong Delta) the people's forces wrested power from the Diemists in many places and set up a people's self-management. This "chain insurrection" rapidly spread to many provinces, thoroughly shaking the Diem administration in the countryside.

The crisis of the Diem administration spread to the towns and even to part of the Saigon army. On November 11, 1960, some officers and units attempted a coup. Although it aborted, this was evidence that the regime was deeply undermined.

Face to face with the neo-colonialist regime rigged up by the Americans, there had risen up a vast national and popular movement including all social classes and ethnic groups and various religious and political groups, among a people who had had a long experience of political and armed struggle. On December 20, 1960, those organizations and groups born of the opposition and resistance to the US-Diem regime merged into a National Front for Liberation (NFL) whose program called for the overthrow of the Diem administration, the liquidation of all foreign interference, the establishment of a national-coalition government, the setting up of a democratic regime, a foreign policy of peace and neutrality, and a gradual advance toward the peaceful reunification of the country. Early in 1961, the People's Liberation Army came into being.

Special War

The Kennedy administration which had just come to power in Washington was placed before this alternative: either to let down the Diem regime and renounce its attempted hold on South Viet Nam, or to make war upon the Vietnamese people. It chose the latter solution. With

Kennedy, US global strategy was firmly directed against the Third World which was regarded as the revolutionary hotbed to be urgently suppressed. The Kennedy-Taylor-McNamara team set up a whole political and military apparatus, and even worked out a "doctrine" to try and conquer the Third World, and crush or deflect them from their goals the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Attention was paid in particular to "counter-insurgency" methods and weapons to deal with guerilla warfare and other forms of armed struggle of the colonized peoples.

Thus the "special war" strategy saw the light of day. As it has become ever more difficult in our time to send classical colonial expeditions with direct intervention by US troops, Washington sought to carry out a war by proxy. With its material and financial power, it could sustain a large puppet administration and army and equip these mercenaries with most up-to-date weapons, and needed only to cap this army with US "advisers" specially trained for this kind of war in which carefully studied politico-military moves helped by an ultra-modern war technology could check the revolutionary war of colonized peoples.

Washington then chose South Viet Nam as a testing ground for this new strategy of "special war". The preparations having been completed in February 1962, a US operational command was set up in Saigon with a staff of advisers to direct the puppet troops, its number swelling to 25,000 in 1964.

All categories of puppet troops - regular, regional or local - were strengthened, totalling half a million in 1964. An air force with 500 aircraft, an armoured corps with hundreds of vehicles including amphibious tanks, many river flotillas, ultra-rapid submachineguns, a huge artillery and many electronic devices, gave this army great mobility, considerable fire-power, ultra-modern means of detection and intelligence gathering. For the first time in the history of mankind, toxic chemicals were dropped on vegetation and crops.

Thus, both in terms of manpower and armaments, Washington mobilized for this special war more resources than France had done in 1954 at the time of Dien Bien Phu. Starting in 1962, the US-puppet command launched repeated operations, several each month, some involving up to 15,000 - 20,000 men.

Washington pursued a double goal: on the one hand to wipe out the liberation armed forces by swift military operations, and on the other to pen up the rural population in more than 16,000 strategic hamlets, concentration camps where Saigon could enforce a direct and draconian control behind barbed wire fences.

The helicopters, in particular, were to ensure absolute supremacy for the puppet troops, enabling them to strike anywhere by surprise and pounce upon tracked down guerillas like "hawks upon sparrows", to quote the promoters of this weapon. Systematic bombings, continual artillery poundings, toxic chemical sprayings and indiscriminate terrorism were to stamp out any attempt at resistance on the part of the population and compel it to join the strategic hamlets. In fact, this implacable war, these huge means of destruction and slaughter, did make many victims and at the start, particularly in 1962, had caused many difficulties to the popular resistance. That year, 20,000 operations were launched and 600 million dollars of US aid were granted to the Saigon administration - four times the 1960-figure. In the minds of the American leaders, the pacification of South Viet Nam was to be achieved by late 1962 (Staley - Taylor plan).

However, the South Vietnamese and their armed forces quickly found an answer to US armaments and strategy. Combining armed with political struggle, building combat villages everywhere, fighting both in the countryside and the towns, in the plains and in the mountains, using rudimentary weapons, traps and modern arms captured from the enemy, the population and the liberation armed forces set up a vast net which paralysed the giant US-puppet military and administrative apparatus while inflicting heavy losses upon it. Explanation and political

persuasion work among the puppet forces completed their demoralization.

In January, at Ap Bac, 60 kilometres from Saigon, the two trump-cards of special war – helicopters and amphibious tanks – proved to be quite vulnerable. After Ap Bac, 1963 was marked with severe setbacks for the puppet army ; the victories of the liberation forces greatly helped the population to wage a tenacious and vigorous struggle against relocation. Many strategic hamlets were demolished or turned into combat villages. Many of them changed hands repeatedly, with the Americans and their puppets vainly seeking to reimpose their control on those freed. The entire population, men and women, old and young, in all localities, was engaged in this merciless struggle. By the end of 1963, 80 per cent of the strategic hamlets had been destroyed.

The repeated military setbacks and the failure of the relocation program showed Washington that Diem was no longer equal to his task. On November 1, 1963, Diem and his brother Nhu were liquidated, and the US services brought to power a military junta with General Duong Van Minh at its head. In 1964, McNamara came to Saigon to work out new pacification plans and Washington sent new technical means to Viet Nam. But the deeply shaken puppet administration and army were plunged into an irretrievable and endless crisis : coups d'état followed one another in Saigon where the US services tried in vain to find a formula of government likely to allow the war to be conducted in an efficient way : military junta, associated military-civilian government, dictatorship under one general, rule by veterans or "young Turks".

For their part, the population and the liberation armed forces, having rapidly mastered armed and political struggle, went on to the offensive. When 1965 began, the failure of the "special war" was patent :

– The puppet army was disintegrating and losing all combativeness ;

– The puppet administration was undergoing a deep crisis ;

– The "strategic hamlet" policy had fizzled out ;

– The liberation armed forces, far from being wiped out, had become ever more battle-seasoned and were able to foil all US arms and tactics ;

– the NFL liberated zone covered nearly four-fifths of the territory with two-thirds of the population ; and

– American opinion began to stir while US international prestige began to suffer. On the other hand, the NFL's international audience steadily grew.

Once again, Washington was placed before an alternative : either to give up its attempt at domination over South Viet Nam and make peace, or to carry on the war and intensify it – in sum to escalate – so as to try to save the collapsing puppet regime at any cost, and cling to Viet Nam and Indochina by hook or by crook.

Escalation and "Limited" War

As early as late 1964, foreseeing the fiasco of the "special war", the US command made a first escalation step. On August 5, 1964, planes taking off from Seventh Fleet carriers bombed several coastal localities of North Viet Nam. Washington's line of reasoning was simple, even simplistic ; the threat of annihilation through air bombing should be enough to bring Hanoi to its knees and consequently cause the South Vietnamese resistance to give way. But the planes coming to bomb the DRVN met with a strong riposte while the South Viet Nam people's forces pressed on. President Johnson ordered further escalation. On February 7, 1965, US planes again struck at the DRVN and more raids took place in the following weeks ; on March 6, a first contingent of marines landed in Da Nang. On April 7, while stepping up the bombing, Johnson put forward peace proposals which amounted to a capitulation of the Vietnamese resistance. In the minds of the American leaders, an intensified threat

of extermination would force the Vietnamese people to accept American terms.

However, the Vietnamese people did not flinch. Washington then set its military machine in motion: US strategists had decided that in case the "special war" failed US forces with their tremendous fire-power would intervene to carry the day and impose Washington's diktat. Within a few months, while bombings were stepped up against North Viet Nam, the best American divisions landed in force in South Viet Nam, accompanied by mercenaries from satellite countries (Park Chung Hee's South Koreans, Australians, New Zealanders). The Seventh Fleet and Thailand-based US air force participated in the operations. By November 1965, when the dry season began, US forces in South Viet Nam had reached 190,000 (more than the French expeditionary forces in 1954); together with the puppet army, the mercenaries from satellite countries, the Seventh Fleet and the US units in Thailand, they added up to 800,000 men with several thousand planes and helicopters (450 helicopters for the US Air Cavalry Division alone), and several thousand pieces of artillery.

The whole of Viet Nam, North and South, was engaged in a total war against Yankee imperialism.

People's War

Against Aero-Naval War of Destruction

The acro-naval escalation against North Viet Nam had a twofold aim in view:

- To prevent all aid from the population of the North to the people and fighters of the South.

- to deal severe if not mortal blows to the socialist regime in the North, bringing North Viet Nam back to the "Stone Age".

The North Vietnamese people, under the leadership of the Viet Nam Workers' Party and the DRVN government, did not limit themselves simply to fighting back the American raids with energy; the national economy

and social and cultural life were reorganized on new bases.

The question that was asked was whether the building of socialism should be halted in order to concentrate all efforts on national defence; the general line laid down by the Party called for defence to be considerably strengthened while, at the same time, the building of socialism should continue to be pressed forward. Despite appearances, the escalation against North Viet Nam, like the landing of the GIs in the South, were not offensive operations but operations conceived and carried out by Yankee imperialism in a strategic situation of defeat and passivity. The raids against the North could only be carried out in the form of an "escalation", that is to say step by step, feeling out the ground and watching the reaction of world opinion. To openly attack a sovereign country like the DRVN, a member of the socialist camp, would put Washington into a position of political isolation which could only be aggravated. Thus North Viet Nam could ensure its own defence while continuing the work of building socialism.

The defence of North Viet Nam, mobilizing the whole of the population, was directed towards several important points:

- to set up an anti-aircraft defence of various arms which would attack the US planes at every altitude and in every region: rockets, fighter planes, heavy and light artillery, small arms. Wherever they went the US planes were met by a barrage of murderous fire. In particular, the ever-present people's defence maintained by the local militia, with the important participation of young women, using infantry arms or light artillery, prevented the US planes from the low altitude flights and dives which would enable them to pinpoint their targets with precision. The US naval units found themselves up against a coastal defence organized on the same model; all the sabotage commando groups landed or parachuted in were rendered harmless or rapidly captured.

- to ensure, at any price, continued movement along the communication lines in order to bring supplies to the "great front" of the South and meet the economic needs of the various regions. The whole population worked by the side of the technical units and services to repair damaged roads, bridges and railway lines, construct new routes and transport goods, materials and munitions.

- to intensify aid to the South until final victory. The more the Americans poured down bombs and shells on the South, the more GIs they landed, the more - despite the ferocity with which the US planes and fleet attacked this Herculean effort - the aid from the North increased.

The defence effort and the aid for the South could only be achieved if the economy was prevented from falling into a state of stagnation as a result of the repeated bombings. A new economic organization, adapted to war conditions, was introduced, whose most important measures consisted in :

- the evacuation and dispersal of the large factories of the towns and industrial centres into the villages and forests. The population of the towns, workers, technicians and civil servants were dispersed to the villages, following their machines and offices, living with the people or in temporary barracks. Schools, faculties, laboratories, hospitals were also dispersed, continuing their activities in the countryside or in the jungle. Operation "so tan" (evacuation and dispersal) was a complete success. Though large-scale works were halted the economic and social life of the country never stopped for a single moment ; never was there the slightest sign of disorganization or panic.

- the development of the economy, especially of regional industry, on a province and district scale. Each province, forming an economic unit within the order of a million and a half inhabitants, tried to make itself self-sufficient in staples and everyday consumer goods by exploiting its own natural resources and developing workshops and factories at first on a handicraft basis, then semi-mechanized and finally mechanized. Already set

forth by the Third Party Congress in 1960, this policy of regional industrialization was given a great momentum by the war.

- The maintenance, thanks to a strict reorganization of internal trade, of price stability for staple commodities sold by State trade : rice, textiles, salt, paraffin.. the population, regularly provided with such staples, found their conditions of life not too adversely affected by the war.

- The development of transport and communications, of which we have already spoken.

International aid, above all from the Soviet Union, People's China and the other socialist countries made an enormous contribution to the maintenance of economic stability.

One important aspect of economic life during these war years has been the consolidation and progress of the agricultural cooperatives. The vital use of rural manpower in ensuring defence and communications did not prevent the agricultural cooperatives from carrying on with water control work and the rearrangement of their fields or from gradually introducing new agronomic techniques. Mechanization, in particular the use of pumping equipment, rice-husking and threshing machines, was rapidly developed. New short growth and high-yield rice strains were introduced, allowing the farming calendar to be restructured, yields to be increased and a gradual change-over to be made from a rice monoculture to a greater crop diversity. It is here that we find the most important progress made by North Vietnamese agriculture during these critical years. In a few years the Vietnamese countryside has been completely transformed.

The newly set up socialist system has brilliantly surmounted the test of war ; its structures carried on the resistance and became consolidated. In vain did the Americans intensify their aero-naval bombings, gradually destroying the industrially important regions and hitting at the principal towns like Hanoi and Haiphong ; the US command failed to attain a single one of their strategic

aims while the Vietnamese people have succeeded in fulfilling all their national and international obligations. The work of reconstruction started as soon as the bombing stopped in 1968, and, in 1972, after the violent bombings of the second escalation, the balance sheet was as follows :

	1964	1968	1971	1972
Total food production	100	84.0	89.2	104.1
Electricity	100	63.2	127.6	92.5
Cement	100	11.6	58.8	25.8
Coal	100	66.7	94.4	47.2
Textiles	100	78.0	102.2	68.4
Price of a kilo of rice (dong)	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40
Number of planes shot down between 1965 and 1972 :				4,181.

**People's War
Against "Limited War"**

The arrival of a massive US expeditionary corps in South Viet Nam to provide assistance to the puppet army completely changed the character of the war. Against the Pentagon's "limited war" strategy, the people and liberation armed forces of South Viet Nam waged a "people's war" carried to its highest level.

Confident of success, the US Command launched its first dry-season counter-offensive in November 1965. One hundred battalions were hurled in five directions in Nam Bo and Central Viet Nam with a view to crushing the NFL regular forces, reconquering a great part of the liberated areas, and driving the Vietnamese resistance to the remotest mountainous regions. Never had any army had at its disposal such immense fire-power, such great mobility and such numerical superiority over its adversary. What was to be done in face of this huge war machine? Should the Vietnamese people unconditionally accept American

terms? Especially in view of the fact that the war was conducted in a merciless way : massive artillery poundings, B.52 carpet bombings, intensive use of chemical products, napalm, steel-pellet anti-personnel bombs. Even while the first engagements were taking place, American propaganda already sang victory.

The 1965-1966 dry season came to an end. In April 1966 the US command had to order a retreat and admit that no major objective had been achieved. For its part, the NFL announced that it had wiped out 100,000 enemy troops including over 40,000 GIs. Put to the test the myth of an invincible American war machine had been exploded.

The failure of its first dry season counter-offensive was attributed by the US command simply to insufficient means. Fresh US and puppet troops were thus mustered. By late 1966, American effectives in South Viet Nam had risen to 380,000 and by early 1967 to 440,000. Counting the puppets and mercenaries from satellite countries, the figure reached over one million. The number of planes and helicopters amounted to 4,500, that of artillery pieces to nearly 3,000, and that of armoured vehicles to 3,500. Each month, the Americans rained 1,700 million shells and 50,000 tons of bombs on Viet Nam.

Despite this increment in military power, for the 1966-1967 dry season the US command displayed more caution, assigning less ambitious objectives to its counter-offensive, and concentrating its forces particularly in Tay Ninh province, northwest of Saigon, where the headquarters of the NFL was supposed to be located. Greater attention was paid to pacification, specially entrusted to the puppet army. Destruction of villages, relocation of people and massacres of civilians became current practice.

From late October 1966 to April 1967, the US command successively launched three big operations in the direction of Tay Ninh, the most important of which, Junction City, involved as many as 45,000 men, 800 armoured vehicles and several hundred planes. For their part, the puppet troops helped by 40,000 "civic action"

agents specially trained for that purpose, tried to "pacify" the country. Never had the US military effort in South Viet Nam been boosted to such a level, while the bombing of the North was stepped up.

The big operations in Tay Ninh failed, so much so that even as they were unfolding Washington had to dismiss two generals commanding the sector. 175,000 American and puppet troops were put out of action during that dry season, 1,800 planes and helicopters destroyed or damaged on the ground. The US command had to put off *sine die* the project of re-occupying the Mekong delta. Early in 1967, while the US-puppet troops suffered heavy setbacks northwest of Saigon, the liberation forces opened another front on Route 9, near the 17th parallel: Westmoreland hastened to send the best American and puppet units to this new theatre of operations, thus leaving the Nam Bo front exposed. The US-puppet troops lost all initiative and had to fall back to ensure the defence of Saigon and the major bases and communication lines. Desertion rates increased in the puppet army.

Throughout 1967, Washington tried to send new reinforcements to Viet Nam, but owing to the increasing opposition of American opinion it was able to dispatch only 100,000 men (180,000 in 1966). By the end of 1967, US effectives in South Viet Nam numbered 480,000 and by the beginning of 1968, over half a million, not counting the units stationed in Thailand and the Seventh Fleet. With the swelling of all categories of puppet troops and mercenaries from satellite countries by early 1968, the US command had 1,200,000 men at its disposal.

This colossal army could not prevent the US side from being subjected to repeated onslaughts by the liberation forces: firmly holding the initiative, the latter attacked the US-puppet bases and posts northwest of Saigon or on the Central Highlands in the course of regular operations, while guerilla war was intensified in the Mekong delta.

It was in those conditions that the South Vietnamese people and liberation armed forces started their 1968 Tet

offensive. On the night of January 29 and in the following days, armed attacks and popular uprisings broke out in about sixty cities, towns, population centres and military bases. The population closely coordinated their action with that of the liberation forces. On the night of January 30, a series of key-centres inside Saigon itself were assaulted: the US embassy, the "Presidential Palace", the H.Q. of the puppet Inter-arms General Staff, the radio station, the H.Q. of the puppet commands of the marines and paratroops, the Central Police H. Q. and many depots of munitions and fuel. The 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th districts of Saigon city were occupied by the liberation forces and the population immediately organized self-defence units and people's self-management committees.

In Hue on January 31, the liberation forces entered the city, hoisted the NFL flag on the main tower of the Imperial City and freed 2,000 prisoners. On February 6, an NFL special communique announced that Saigon, Hue, Dalat, Nha Trang, Da Nang, Qui Nhon together with tens of provincial and district towns had been attacked, and that everywhere the population had cooperated with the armed forces, putting out of action 50,000 enemy troops, including 10,000 Americans, and destroying 1,500 planes and helicopters, most of them on the ground.

The 1968 Tet offensives and uprisings proved that the liberation forces were able to spring closely coordinated onslaughts everywhere at a time when the Americans and the puppets had brought their own effectives to the highest level, and when their propaganda unceasingly tries to convey to the world the impression that the NFL had been completely crushed by US military power. The NFL's resounding victories deeply stirred world and American opinion¹ Washington had to relieve Westmoreland of

1. On February 7, 1968, Walter Lippmann wrote in *Newsweek*: "The Johnson-Rusk policy in Asia is crumbling. What is crumbling is the notion that the United States can by military forces determine the order of things on the continent of Asia."

his command in Indochina and replace him by General Abrams.

Not only was the Pentagon compelled to appoint a new commander-in-chief, it had also to completely change its strategy. It was impossible to send to Viet Nam the 200,000 men required by Westmoreland after the 1968 Tet losses. Abrams received the order to hold on to a defensive strategy, and instead of launching operations to "search and destroy" the NFL regular units, he confined himself to "clearing and holding" the areas surrounding major cities and bases, particularly Saigon.

This did not mean that the Pentagon had relinquished the idea of imposing a *pax americana* upon Viet Nam by force. Obligated to cut down the scope and number of ground operations, the US command intensified its aerial and naval bombardments, artillery poundings and chemical sprayings. The areas surrounding Saigon and other cities were practically razed over tens of kilometres, and every shrub doused with chemical products. The bombing of North Viet Nam was stepped up.

However, American opinion grew impatient as Johnson and the Democratic Party started their election campaign. What angered world and American opinion most was the air escalation against the DRVN, an independent and sovereign state and a member of the socialist camp. On March 31, 1968, Johnson had to state that the bombing would be restricted to a limited area of North Viet Nam, that he would not stand for re-election, and that Washington agreed to hold discussions with representatives of the DRVN Government.

The proposal was rapidly accepted and talks began in Paris in May 1968.

After March 31, US air forces concentrated their raids on the southern part of North Viet Nam, from Vinh down to the 17th parallel, hoping to cut all communications between the North and the South, and to terrorize the population of this region by systematically destroying towns and villages. As a matter of fact, in this sector

the population and the communication lines were concentrated in a narrow corridor between the mountains and the sea. For seven months the region was subjected to intensive aerial and naval bombardments of unprecedented savagery. But this supreme effort against the DRVN was in vain. The US presidential election was drawing near. On November 1 Johnson had to order the unconditional cessation of the bombing of the DRVN. This last-hour manoeuvre failed to save the Democratic Party which lost the presidential election: the American people held lost confidence in Johnson and his party, whom they held responsible for the aggravation of the war in Viet Nam. With his promises of peace, Richard Nixon got himself elected. The Republican Party came back to power.

Nixon's War

Talk peace but make war, such was the policy adopted by Johnson in 1964 before his re-election. Nixon was to follow the same path. A dedicated champion of war, in 1954 he had advocated direct US intervention to back the French colonialists. This time, having come to power, he was determined to win the war. But the situation in 1969 did not enable him to act as freely as Johnson had been able to do in 1965. Unable to reinforce the US expeditionary corps, he was compelled to start bringing the "boys" home. American losses in Viet Nam had reached unacceptable proportions for the American people. War expenditure for Indochina amounted to 30 billion dollars a year, while many projects for social welfare and educational development were neglected for lack of money. Opposition to the war policy ran high, especially among the students. America was restive.

To carry on and win the war while cutting down American casualties and spendings to a level acceptable by American opinion and still seeking to impose American terms upon the Vietnamese people - Nixon wanted to

solve this thorny problem through the "Vietnamization of the war."

The question was :

- To provide the puppet army with enough men and material to make it the main force that would liquidate the Vietnamese resistance and constitute the essential prop of a Saigon government fully devoted to Washington's interests.

- To gradually withdraw US ground forces.

- To maintain in Viet Nam enough US air and artillery forces to give effective support to the puppet army. This American military occupation should last as long as required.

- To step up pacification, that is to make life unbearable for the population by massive aerial bombings and unceasing chemical sprayings so as to drive them to the towns controlled by the Americans and their puppets.

This "forced urbanization" was to turn the remaining part of South Viet Nam into a desert pockmarked with millions of bombs craters, where no vegetation would grow, no bird would sing, and consequently no revolutionary forces could set foot or be revived while millions of country folk, forced to take refuge in the towns, finding themselves without any job could only stay alive by enlisting in the puppet army or police force.

In the zone under US control, "pacification" was stepped up with continuous raids, militants and suspects were murdered and hundreds and thousands of people were imprisoned and deported. The land was ravaged unceasingly by the army and police and the white terror pushed to a maximum. 44,000 specially trained pacification agents supplemented the regular police force in the work of terrorizing the population.

Nixon was all the more in a hurry to apply this barbarous policy as the South Vietnamese resistance was not only developing in the military field but also rapidly growing politically just at a time when he was compelled to begin withdrawing GIs step by step. Soon after the 1968

Tet offensive took place, the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces (ANDPF) was born, which rallied the intellectuals and middle classes in the occupied towns for joint action with the NFL. Then in June 1969, the NFL and the ANDPF convened a national congress which decided to set up the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of the Republic of South Viet Nam, rapidly recognized by many governments and international organizations. Revolutionary people's committees were elected in most villages, districts and in many provinces. This deepening implantation of the national and democratic movement and power in all regions and social strata stands in sharp contrast with the mounting and irretrievable crisis of the puppet regime.

Indeed, the massive intervention of American troops had saved that regime from collapse, but only to make glaringly evident the anti-national character of the placement put by Washington at the head of the Saigon government. While the increasing US economic aid enabled the regime to survive, it also aggravated inflation and precipitated the ruin of local industries. And above all, the pressganging of youths triggered ever more violent opposition from the draftees and from all other strata of the population. Debauchery, corruption and the brutal introduction of the "American way of life" brought about a deep anti-Americanism, even among those who profited by US largesse. Whereas the supreme goal of "Vietnamization" was to rig up a puppet administration that could hold its own without the presence of American troops, the puppet regime needed this presence more than ever.

In those conditions and under the pressure of the coming presidential elections, Nixon had more and more recourse to total war. In 1969, while North Viet Nam was bombed only sporadically, the tonnage of bombs dropped on Laos and particularly on South Viet Nam far exceeded that of 1968, running to 1,389,000 tons, not to mention the artillery poundings and chemical sprayings, the latter covering several million hectares and resulting in real biocide.

Extension of the War Neither the intensification of bombardments and destructions nor the build-up of the puppet army in effectives and armaments succeeded in crushing the South Viet-Nam popular forces, still less in ensuring the solidity of the Saigon regime. While Vietnamization meant the prolongation of the war in Viet Nam it also led to an extension of the war throughout Indochina, the "protection" of South Viet Nam being only ensured if Laos and Cambodia were integrated in the American sphere. French colonialism had already trodden the same road.

Losing South Viet Nam, Nixon rushed headlong into hazardous operations that none of his predecessors had dared to launch.

In Nixon's view, Vietnamization was to be completed by "Indosinization" then "Asianization" : Indochinese are to fight against Indochinese, Asians against Asians to ensure US domination in Asia. Washington will have to supply only dollars and weapons ; the colour of the corpses will change but US hold will be maintained.

In Laos, as early as 1969, Washington strove :

- to shore up the rightist forces on the military and political planes ;
- to vigorously build up the mercenaries of "General" Vang Pao to spearhead them against the liberated zones ; and
- to bring in Thai troops.

Bombardments of regions controlled by the Lao patriotic forces were rapidly stepped up. Up to 600 sorties were made daily by all kinds of planes, including B-52s. The population of many villages was forcibly taken by helicopters to "refugee" centres for relocation.

In August 1969, there were 12,000 US advisers in Laos ; 50 battalions supported by a mighty aviation attacked the Plain of Jars - Xieng Khoang area. The fighting was to last until February 1970 when the Lao patriotic forces in a powerful offensive drove the enemy

out of the region, inflicting severe losses upon him. In this operation the US command had mustered all its most effective means for a first test of the Nixon doctrine : specially trained mercenary troops, many American advisers and considerable air support.

The failure of this operation led to a new flight forward. On March 18, 1970, the American services masterminded a coup d'état against the Cambodian neutralist government ; Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a staunch advocate of Cambodian independence and neutrality, was overthrown by pro-US agents, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. However, the Lon Nol government soon ran against a firm popular resistance. The appeal launched by Norodom Sihanouk, followed by holding of a Summit Conference of the Indochinese Peoples in April to concretize, through a common program of action, the founding of the National United Front of Kampuchea (NUFK) then of the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (RGNUK) greatly stimulated Khmer popular resistance.

To take the Lon Nol government out of these dire straits, on April 30 the US command hurled Saigon and American troops against Cambodia : 70,000 men invaded this country while US and Saigon planes struck at cities and villages, and Cambodia in turn knew all the horrors of an American-style war. But the Khmer people valiantly fought back. Answering the NUFK appeal, the bulk of the rural population rose up and rapidly organized itself to deal smarting blows at the Phnom Penh puppet administration. Led on the internal plane by Vice-Premier Khieu Sam Phan, the RGNUK not only waged a victorious military resistance, but also pushed strongly forward with economic, medical and educational work. The coup d'état against Norodom Sihanouk brought thoroughly unforeseen consequences to Washington : the great majority of the population of a so far neutral country now carried out a resolute armed struggle against US imperialism and its lackeys, in close unity with the Vietnamese and Lao peoples.

Owing to American and world public reaction against the invasion of Cambodia, Nixon was compelled to withdraw US ground troops after June, but through an increasing aid in weapons and dollars, Washington continued to back up the tottering Phnom Penh regime at all costs. The most important task, military support, was entrusted to the Saigon troops, who came and occupied Cambodia like a conquered territory. This was the Nixon doctrine in its full meaning : to make Asians kill Asians for the sake of US interest.

Nixon's warmongering and adventurist policy firmly strengthened the unity of the three Indochinese peoples, a unity which has accounted for the most severe setbacks of the GIs and the Washington mercenaries. To isolate the national and local resistance in each country in order to stifle it more easily and to cut all communications between the Indochinese countries became, after the heavy setbacks of 1970, a major goal for the US command. The liberated zone of Southern and Central Laos constituted an umbilical cord which the Pentagon wanted to cut early in 1971.

The Southern Laos operation was thus launched in February with all the means available : 2,000 US planes and helicopters, the best Saigon units (paratroops, rangers, First Infantry Division, armour), and strong US ground units, a total of 45,000 men, were involved in the front along Route 9, which runs near the 17th parallel from the coastline of South Viet Nam to the Mekong river. With such a display of forces, particularly of aviation, the US command hoped to cut its adversary's communication lines, thus preventing him from supplying the force fighting further south, and to crush him under the almighty US aviation if he engaged in combat. Under the protection of their air force, helicopters landed Saigon troops on the hills which line the road while armoured columns fought their way to Chepone, a road junction. But the popular forces opposed a strong resistance. Their heavy A. A. fire downed helicopters loaded with men and material by the hundred, while the posts set up on the peaks along Route

9 were crushed by their artillery. Falling into ambushes and mine-traps, the enemy's armoured columns were decimated. The battle which began on February 8 ended on March 22 with the annihilation of nearly all the puppet forces engaged in Southern Laos and heavy losses for the Americans and puppets stationed in the South Vietnamese sector of Route 9 : 23,000 men put out of action, 730 planes and helicopters downed, and 1,400 military vehicles destroyed. It was one of the greatest battles of the Indochina War since 1954.

For the US command, the gravity of this defeat lies in the fact that it had played its best trumpcards ; crack units drawn from the strategic reserves of the Saigon army, maximum US air support, carefully studied tactics. Washington had wanted to use this operation as a test for the policy of Vietnamization of the war : this new strategy had proved a fiasco.

Thus in mid-1971, with the presidential elections 18 months away, Nixon faced a none too brilliant situation : the resistance of the Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer peoples was steadily growing, the support they receive from the socialist countries and the peoples of the world was on the increase and the reaction of American opinion was gaining momentum.

On July 1, 1971, on behalf of the PRG Mme Nguyen Thi Binh presented a 7-point plan for the settlement of the Viet Nam problem, with two fundamental conditions : withdrawal of the US troops and resignation of the Thieu government. A new administration would start talks with the PRG with a view to forming a government of national concord. This proposal, warmly supported by world public opinion as well as 70 governments, met with no serious response on the part of Washington. Announcing his trip to Peking, Nixon tried to make believe that the Viet Nam question could be settled, not with the representatives of the Vietnamese people, but between the great powers. "Nhan Dan" central organ of the Viet Nam Workers' Party, dotted the i's and crossed the t's : "Nixon is heading in the wrong direction. The way out is open, yet he

rushes headlong into a blind alley. The time when the great powers could decide the fate of small nations is past and gone."

However, Nixon persisted in his military and political manoeuvrings in the hope of imposing his diktat. On September 21, 200 US aircraft heavily raided Quang Binh province in North Viet Nam, and on October 3, Thieu had himself re-elected president with an alleged "94 per cent of the votes." Pacification operations continued, but ran into a vigorous resistance, especially in Tra Vinh province in the western part of the Mekong delta in October. On October 11, Kissinger presented an American peace plan, but without giving a date for American troop withdrawal, while demanding the maintenance in Saigon of Thieu as the sole government. Military operations intensified in the last months of 1971, in Viet Nam as in Laos and Cambodia. In South Viet Nam, the "pacification" of the U Minh region in the west of the Mekong delta cost Saigon 16,000 men killed or wounded. In Cambodia, battered Lon Nol forces in December had to put an end to Operation Chen-La 2 begun in August - the most severe setback so far for the Phnom Penh administration. In Laos, the patriotic forces almost completely freed the Plain of Jars, annihilating many Vang Pao and Bangkok units. American aircraft continued to fly reconnaissance and bombing raids on some regions of North Viet Nam. Repression was intensified in Saigon while in Cambodia Lon Nol, more and more isolated, engineered a new coup d'état on March 10, 1972, dissolving the National Assembly and arrogating to himself the titles of President of the Republic and Prime Minister.

1972 was for Nixon the year of the presidential elections. In order to get himself re-elected, he had to give the impression that he was determined to put an end to the Indochina war. But being an obstinate neo-colonialist, he wanted to keep the American hold on Viet Nam and impose his terms on the Vietnamese people. Three years of "Vietnamization" had made it possible for him to

strengthen considerably Thieu's army and police, which now numbered as many as 1,200,000 men, supported by air, naval, river and armoured forces equipped with the most modern war means. Thirteen elite divisions (rangers, paratroops, marines) spearheaded this army, whose task was to destroy the adversary's regular forces and protect the major cities and bases. American air and naval power gave strong support to those forces, while merciless pacifications sowed untold terror in zones controlled by Saigon. Liberated areas were turned into wastelands by continuous bombings.

More than 70,000 officers were trained to command that army; they controlled the political levers and were mixed up in all sorts of rackets. The type of this group is Nguyen Van Thieu himself; before putting himself at the service of the Americans, he was a paratrooper in the French army, and his wife and close relatives would collect considerable profits from various shady businesses. This "military-political-trafficking" caste, indoctrinated by the Americans, constituted the country's real ruling class. It was neither a bourgeoisie nor a native feudal class, but a purely American creation, just as the enormous military and police apparatus it commanded was created by American dollars and, with it, the policy of systematic destruction of the South Vietnamese countryside which left millions of people with no other choice but to enlist in that army. Hooligans and thugs were given special training and used to kill and torture people, control the troops, carry out dirty jobs and sow terror. By relying on this gigantic machinery and by undertaking large-scale diplomatic manoeuvres - trips to Peking and Moscow - Nixon thought he could successfully complete "Vietnamization" and gradually withdraw his ground forces, the more so since he could order heavy bombing raids on North Viet Nam at any time. Great efforts were also made to secure a certain prosperity to regions that had remained under Saigon control.

In some ways Nixon might be said to have achieved a certain success. The enormous economic and technical

potential of the United States which was brought to bear on a small country for so many years was bound to produce some effect ; thus it was not without reason that Nixon began his electoral year with confidence.

The confrontation of 1972 was to be decisive. On the Vietnamese side, the answers had to be found to several military questions of major importance :

- Was it possible to shake the peripheral defensive system set up by the Americans and the Saigon regime ?

- Was it possible to decimate the crack units of the Saigon army ?

- Was it possible to neutralize the firepower of American aero-naval forces ?

- Was it possible to ensure continuous supplies for a prolonged offensive ?

Great light was shed on the problem by the offensive started by the popular forces on March 30. Up to May 1, fortified positions north of Quang Tri province near the 17th parallel, those located northwest of Saigon in the Loc Ninh and An Loc areas, and important bases along Highways 14 and 19 in the Central Highlands all fell to the powerful blows of the PLAF artillery, tanks and infantry. The best Saigon units failed to hold out in spite of strong American air and naval support. Quang Tri province was wholly liberated.

"Vietnamization" had gone bankrupt. Washington was forced to "re-Americanize" the war. Important aero-naval units came to reinforce those still in Indochina. The number of tactical aircraft and fighter-bombers was increased to more than 1,300, and that of B.52s to 200. Saigon had to be rescued for not only were the peripheral defences threatened but also the "pacified" zones in the rear began to stir. Guerilla warfare was raging and the administration set up by Saigon in many regions such as Binh Dinh and the western part of the Mekong delta was broken. In order to help Saigon troops reconquer Quang Tri town, American air and naval forces had to pour 15,000 - 20,000 shells on this citadel every day, while 200-300 aircraft operated over hostile lines.

In order to save his Vietnamization policy from utter failure, Nixon started a new escalation against the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. On April 16, B.52s destroyed many quarters in Haiphong, the second largest city in North Viet Nam, which was to be systematically bombarded until the end of 1972. American aircraft conducted their raids over North Viet Nam in two ways :

- they launched terror raids against the population by carpet bombing towns and villages ; and

- carried out pinpoint bombings with sophisticated engines (laser-guided, for instance) against economic targets, ports, factories, etc.

Almost all North Vietnamese towns were either wholly or partially destroyed and all industrial installations were hit. The aim of Washington was systematically to destroy the whole of the country's industrial economy. Agriculture was also struck at, and the more important water conservation projects relentlessly bombed. The network of river and sea dykes was subjected to numerous raids with a view to causing catastrophic floods when the rains came in July-August.

To complete the effects of the bombings, on May 8, Nixon ordered the mining of all ports of the DRVN so as to cut off all supplies from the outside. North Viet Nam hit back hard. Many American aircraft were downed, while transport operations continued to be ensured and the population remained calm and determined to fight. Saigon forces failed to retake the town of Quang Tri in spite of desperate efforts. Although massive intervention by American forces had saved the Saigon army and regime from collapse, Nixon had failed to impose his will. In the North, there was little rain during 1972 and the raids against the dykes did not give the expected results. In Laos an attempt by Vang Pao mercenaries to reconquer the Plain of Jars was foiled. Nixon was unable to hold up any peace prospect before the American electorate and the nomination of McGovern as the Democratic presidential candidate was a serious threat. Intensified bombings had caused great losses to the Vietnamese people and

given a breathing space to the Thieu regime, but the Nixon policy remained in a blind alley.

On September 11, the PRG proposed a fair and reasonable solution : withdrawal of US troops, formation of a tripartite provisional government of national concord, to include the PRG, the Saigon government, and the other political forces in South Viet Nam. Neither a Communist regime nor a US-controlled government was to be imposed on South Viet Nam. Nixon found it more and more difficult in an electoral period to oppose an obstinate refusal to all peace plans put forward by the Vietnamese side. He had to resign himself to allowing the negotiations to progress, the more so since American losses in planes and pilots had increased. From April to October, 554 US aircraft were shot down over North Viet Nam, and on October 17, the 4,000th plane brought down in North Viet Nam since 1964 was of the latest type produced by American technique : a swing-wing F.111.

In the first weeks of October, negotiations progressed apace between the delegations of the DRVN and the USA. It was agreed that an accord would be initialled in Hanoi on October 22, and officially signed by the two countries' foreign ministers in Paris on October 30. On October 22, Nixon sent a message to the DRVN Prime Minister. Thus he was able to present himself before the American electorate as having solved the Viet Nam problem. Once this result had been obtained, on October 23, Washington used difficulties raised by Saigon as pretexts to put the whole matter of the accord and the agreed schedule back in question. Military operations continued in the South while bombing raids were carried on against the North. The US command took advantage of the lull to send important shipments of arms, especially planes, helicopters and armoured vehicles, to the Saigon army. By the end of 1972, the Saigon air force numbered over 2,000 aircraft, the third largest air force in the world. US officers disguised as civilians and technicians worked as "advisers" for Thieu's army. US air and naval forces struck hard at North Vietnamese provinces located between the 20th

and 17th parallels. Intending to deprive the Vietnamese people of their fundamental national rights, Washington demanded that changes (126 in all) be made in the key clauses of the agreement reached in October.

Having failed to force the Vietnamese negotiators to accept his terms, on December 18 Nixon hurled his B.52 strategic bombers at the major cities of the DRVN. From December 18 to 30, hundreds of fighter-bombers and about 150 B.52s operated every day over North Viet Nam. Vietnamese anti-aircraft defences brought down 81 American planes, among them 34 B.52s, until then considered invulnerable. A large wave of protest rose in the world. The failure of his B.52s to sow panic among the North Vietnamese population, the heavy American losses in planes and pilots, and the indignation which swept the world compelled Nixon to halt the bombings and come back to the negotiating table. January 27 saw the signing in Paris of the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Viet Nam, which stipulated in particular that the USA had to respect the Vietnamese people's fundamental rights and that all US troops, military advisers and military personnel, and those of US allies, were to be withdrawn from South Viet Nam by March 27. The withdrawal of American forces opened the way to a political settlement. Implicitly, the Paris Agreement recognized the existence in South Viet Nam of two administrations and two armies, and of three political forces, which should work to bring about national concord. On February 21, in Vientiane, the two Lao parties signed an Agreement on Restoring Peace and Achieving National Concord, which guaranteed for the Lao people the exercise of their fundamental national rights. The USA had to stop all intervention and aggression, and all military involvement in Laos, and to disband the special forces it had set up in the country. A new provisional national union government was to be formed as well as a political consultative council with equal participation from the Vientiane government and Lao patriotic forces.

Thus, in January and February 1973, Washington had to recognize at least in principle the right of the Vietnamese and Lao people to settle their own affairs without American intervention. The most important fact was the obligation for the USA to take all their military forces out of South Viet Nam. If one remembers the systematic character of the policy of intervention pursued by the USA in Viet Nam since 1950, one realizes that this was a serious setback, a grave defeat for US imperialism. Its strategy has hinged on the subjection of the Third World and for more than twenty years it had striven to crush the Vietnamese national movement. Yet now it was compelled to recognize the existence of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam. The American nation was torn by dissensions, doubt was gnawing at its youth and army, and its national honour was indelibly stained by the scale of the crimes perpetrated. This indeed was a grave failure for the neo-colonialist leaders in Washington.

The Cultural Development of the Years 1945-1975

Thirty years of war and social upheaval did not put a stop to the continued development of Vietnamese culture. This cultural development has been an inseparable part of the revolutionary movement, while in its development, culture has formed one of the main arms of national liberation and social renewal.

Never, throughout the whole of Vietnamese history, have cultural activities made such a rapid leap forward both in quantity and in quality. Not to speak of the birth of new arts like the cinema, the abundance of literary, musical, theatrical and artistic works of every kind pouring out over the last thirty years has far exceeded the production of several centuries in the past.

Traditional culture and the germs of any form of modernization or renewal had been smothered by 80 years

of colonial rule. After the triumph of the August Revolution, and above all with the complete liberation of the northern half of the country in 1954, thanks to the great attention paid to the development of science and culture by the Party and government, conditions were favourable both for a revival of the traditional heritage and for the creation of a national culture adapted to the present era. Viet Nam was living through a real Renaissance.

Several social and historical factors played a part in this :

- the replacement of French by Vietnamese as the teaching medium at every level of education. The national language rapidly became enriched in every field and several tens of thousands of scientific and technical terms were added to the language.

- the complete eradication of illiteracy, the rapid introduction of schooling for the population. By 1958, literacy was universal and after 1960, even during the American bombings, one-third of the population was attending school. The number of intellectuals saw a considerable increase as did the number of the masses actively taking part in cultural activities, reading newspapers and books, going to the theatre or cinema...

- the renaissance of traditional culture and cultural modernization also took place among the various ethnic groups of the mountain regions and Vietnamese culture began more and more to take on the character of a multinational culture.

- close contacts were build up with the other socialist countries - the Soviet Union, China, European-socialist countries, Cuba - and also with intellectuals from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Japan and western countries. This opening to the outside world, although hampered by the war, has been maintained, making it possible for the national culture to assimilate the wealth of the culture of other peoples.

The immense material and human destruction caused by the war and the division of the country put a brake

on this cultural leap forward ; many scientists and men of letters fell in combat, many artistic works and historical monuments have been destroyed or damaged. Artists, writers and scientific workers have had to carry on their work in very hard material conditions.

We will pay special attention to the development of education and literature.

Education and Scientific Development

The literacy campaign launched in September 1945 met with rapid success. With

the use of the national language and the elimination of out-of-date or reactionary elements in textbooks and syllabuses a new system of education was being introduced. In the liberated zone a thorough educational reform carried out in 1950 set up a single system of general education with 9 classes, closely linking political and armed combat, production work and schoolwork. Gradually teachers' colleges and courses in technical and higher education were also organized.

The complete liberation of the North in 1954 created the conditions for a rapid leap forward in the field of education. Illiterates in newly liberated regions speedily learnt how to read and write while schools were unified into a single 10-class system of education. Nursery schools also developed, not only in the towns but even in the villages, where the agricultural cooperatives bore the necessary expense. For literate adults there were complementary education courses enabling them to raise their cultural level ; such courses were particularly directed towards militants and cadres.

By the time American aggression began, North Viet Nam had a complete educational system from nursery school to University, with numerous complementary education courses for adults. Each village has at least one first level school (7 to 11 years) and most have also a second level school (12 to 15 years) ; each district has at least one third level school (15 to 18 years).

The US aggression was to be a test of the educational system. Over the ten years since 1954 the schools and universities have formed a new generation of youth ; with their fairly high level of education they provided the armed forces with fighters who knew how to use modern arms : artillery, rockets, radar, jet planes - things which did not exist at the time of Dien Bien Phu. Politically and ideologically educated by the new schools, the youth have shouldered their wartime obligations with enthusiasm, in the front as well as in the rear.

The Party and government directives were explicit : despite the war the development of education must be continued, not only to fulfil war requirements but also to meet future needs. Schools and colleges in the towns should be evacuated to the forests and villages, village schools should be scattered into small units. Each school which was evacuated or dispersed had to build new quarters, shelters and trenches, it had to find lodgings for teachers and students, rooms for libraries and laboratories, either in people's homes or in makeshift buildings. This immense work was successfully carried out thanks to the devotion of teachers and pupils and the affectionate help of the whole population.

As a result education continued its development during the war years, even in the provinces, like those close to the 17th parallel, which suffered most from the bombing. In 1955 the Department of Higher and Technical Education was detached from the Ministry of Education to form a separate ministry.

In the mountain regions, with their great ethnic and linguistic variety, backward economic and cultural level and much more scattered population than in the plains, conditions were even more difficult. Specialised committees worked out scripts for the most important languages of the different mountain peoples. The schoolchildren of these regions could thus study their own mother tongue at the same time as they were learning Kinh, the common national language.

	1955	1964	1972
Numbers in general education (not counting nursery schools)	716,000	2,666,000	4,882,000
Higher education	1,200	26,000	53,000
	(not counting numerous students taking correspondence courses and those studying abroad)		

Numbers of those attending schools in the whole of Viet Nam (North and South) in 1939 :

General education	567.000
University	600

In the field of scientific and technical research the inheritance of the colonial regime was practically non-existent, in both equipment and research workers. As the first students at the new colleges and universities did not graduate till 1959-60, it is only after that date that one can speak of a birth of scientific research in Viet Nam. In 1959 the State Committee for Science and Technique was founded to guide and coordinate researches ; in 1967 this committee was split to form a State Committee for Science and Technique on the one hand and a Committee for Social Sciences on the other. In fact the first bases and techniques for scientific research could only really be installed after 1966. Several dozen specialized institutes were set up, many actually during the anti-US war. There is an Association for the Diffusion of Science and Technique with many members and branches right in the villages and agricultural cooperatives. The magazine *Khoa Hoc Thuong Thuc* for popularizing science

has had a great success. The social sciences – history, archaeology, linguistics, ethnography – have seen a vigorous development.

Arts and Letters

The 1945 August Revolution freed writers and artists from the cramped and stifling atmosphere in which they had floundered under the colonial regime, particularly since the start of the Second World War. Almost all the best writers and artists left the towns to join the first resistance. Combat, a daily life spent with the masses, and political and ideological work, little by little brought a complete change to these artists and writers of the old regime, while new writers and artists began to emerge, formed by the resistance itself.

The complete liberation of the North in 1954, the building of the first bases of socialism created the conditions for a flowering of cultural life. Many exhibitions, congresses and festivals were held and numerous specialized journals and publishing houses established. Both at the central and at the provincial level the State maintained artistic groups for theatre, music, dance, set up art schools and offices and studios to develop cinema. Amateur companies were founded in factories, villages and army units. Such an effervescence had never been known before.

Despite the country's division, US intervention was unable to break the national and revolutionary unity of the artistic movement ; the works of the period 1954 – 1975 flow from the same source, in the North as in the liberated areas of the South. The political writings, especially those of leaders like Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong, Vo Nguyen Giap, with their concise style and fine language, also form literary works of art, which have marked this period.

National and revolutionary reality has formed the principal theme of writers and artists : the bitter struggle of the whole people against aggression, in particular

against American intervention, the work of building a new society. The era of romantic dreams, hermetic literature and art for art's sake has gone for ever. But while it may be relatively easy to translate the national struggle into literary and art forms, the building of the new society, the new man and socialism, now still in its early stages, has proved much more difficult to express. And in this field the changes in village life and the problems of the peasants are much more often and more easily reflected than those of industry and the workers. There is also the problem, especially in theatrical or musical arts, of preserving the traditional heritage while, at the same time, modernizing it. Such are the problems facing a rapidly developing literature and art. It is only by the fight itself and in its light that the true value of the ancestral inheritance can be appreciated ; it is only by continuing the national tradition that present-day culture can be truly modernized.

The works of the period 1945-1950 tended to be short : poems, short stories. It was after 1950 that the first novels appeared. The new orientation was taken for the creation of a national, scientific and popular culture. During the period 1954 - 1960 it was still the first resistance which formed the main inspiration of literary and artistic works ; after that date stories, novels and films on the problems of the building of socialism in particular in agricultural cooperatives, began to make their appearance. The peasant's doubts about joining the cooperative, the inter-generational conflicts between old and young, the fumbings, the lawsuits, the enthusiasm of the militants, the promotion of women - all these are drawn with more or less vigour and finesse. From 1965 to 1975 many poems, short stories and novels, in the South as in the North, dealt with the struggle against the US. It was often enough simply to describe the life and struggles of a combatant and a good work would emerge for the reality of the struggle was itself so rich and moving.

In poetry, if To Huu still remains the leading poet, the pre-1945 generation of romantic poets, Xuan Dieu, Che

Lan Vien, Te Hanh, Huy Can, had undergone a profound change and now sang, with warmth and talent, the heroes and high exploits of the revolutionary advance. In addition to these, a whole constellation of young poets emerged, often still hampered by a certain awkwardness of expression, many of whom came from worker or peasant families or ethnic minorities like Nong Quoc Chan or Ban Tai Doan. The poems from the South of Thanh Hai, Giang Nam, Thu Bon, touched a deep chord in the whole country. A generation of child-poets was born of whom Tran Dang Khoa is the best known.

Novels and short stories flourished. Veterans of the pre-1945 period like Nguyen Cong Hoan and Nquyen Tuan continued to produce. Many talents came to light during the first resistance, Nguyen Dinh Thi, Nguyen Van Bong, Vo Huy Tam, Nam Cao, and after 1954 still younger ones were revealed : Nguyen Ngoc, Nguyen Khai, Chu Van, Vu Thi Thuong, Bui Duc Ai.. From the South came the novels of Anh Duc, Nguyen Thi, Phan Tu, Nguyen Trung Thanh, reflecting the particular fierceness of this combat. With the people's government a new literary genre was born, children's books, and the Kim Dong publishing house for children has published about a million titles over the last fifteen years (since 1958).

The revolution saw the start of a far-reaching renewal in musical and scenic arts. A large-scale attempt to restore the national heritage was undertaken ; the revolutionary mass song was born, symphonic poems were written for the traditional orchestra. Nor was Western music neglected and musicians performed the great musical genres like opera, symphony.. The development of music also made an effective contribution to the development of other artistic branches such as theatre, cinema, ballet.

Dance has made great advances as traditional national choreography, especially that of the ethnic minorities, has been given a new value ; dance has also adopted a new outlook with important success. All forms of theatre (cheo, tuong, cai luong, spoken theatre) have been able to develop,

giving an honoured position to the themes and techniques of the past while incorporating at the same time modern themes and techniques.

Notwithstanding all the material and technical difficulties, cinema is one of the branches which had the most rapid development after 1954 and above all since 1965. Feature films, short and long, documentaries, cartoons, — every type of film has been represented and some have been awarded prizes at international festivals.

The literary movement has closely followed the revolutionary movement, setting itself revolutionary tasks; during the hostilities the directive was to "drown the din of bombs with song" while contributing to fire the masses with revolutionary heroism. This mission, assigned to Vietnamese arts and letters, has been fulfilled.

IX — THE COLLAPSE OF THE NEO-COLONIAL REGIME

(1973 — 1975)

A War Which Remains an American One.

The signing of the January 1973 Paris Agreement compelled the United States to recognize the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Viet Nam, and the existence of the PRG with its armed forces and liberated areas. On 29 March 1973 all American troops were withdrawn. For the first time since 1858 no foreign troops remained on Vietnamese soil.

But this did not mean that Washington had renounced its former designs to annihilate the patriotic and revolutionary South Vietnamese forces and maintain a neo-colonial regime indefinitely in power in Saigon. In the eyes of the men in Washington, this was perfectly feasible. The massive intervention of US forces from 1965 to 1973 had been but an emergency operation to ward off an imminent disaster. The basic neo-colonialist policy remained that of setting up a puppet military and police machine capable of repressing the patriotic and revolutionary forces.

That military and police machine, carefully put together in 1954, had been considerably reinforced since 1969 in anticipation of the GIs' withdrawal. Under the protection of half a million American troops and thousands of American aircraft, the Saigon army, police and administration had seen their numbers more than doubled since 1965. They had been fully re-equipped and trained

in new methods. Dozens of billions of dollars had been spent to that effect and the best experts from the American police, advisers with extensive experience in colonial wars such as the Briton Robert Thompson, all the resources of American science and technology including the social sciences – ethnology, sociology, psychology – had been used to set up the archetype of neo-colonial regimes in South Viet Nam.

On the other hand, in the same period, Washington had tried its best to weaken the Vietnamese patriotic and revolutionary movement. Since 1968, the American high command, which had refused to grant Westmoreland 200,000 reinforcements, had given up trying to reconquer regions liberated by the NFL. Those classical military operations, in which enormous quantities of war material and troops were hurled at an elusive enemy who benefited from the support of the entire people, had proved too much of a drain on the American forces.

The USA could wage another kind of war by relying on its technology. Against general popular resistance it could oppose total warfare by making life impossible over vast areas, by simply destroying all life in the regions under NFL and PRG control. For years, thousands of aircraft, helicopters and heavy guns had poured millions of tons of bombs and shells on the free areas of South Viet Nam. Anything that moved was shot at : toxic chemicals were sprayed wherever food crops were grown. Villages and hamlets were razed, and even places where no traces of habitation could be found were strafed as soon as a thread of smoke was detected.

NFL-controlled zones had thus been made uninhabitable, turned into deserted areas dotted with millions of bomb craters in which water would stagnate and which would soon be teeming with mosquito larvae. It was impossible to find there the least bit of wood, the least brick to build a cottage : impossible to till a plot of ricefield or orchard. In this way millions of rural people in South Viet Nam were "urbanized". The struggle would end because of the lack of combatants, for the NFL would find

no reserve from which to replenish its militants and armed forces. The American command aimed to kill two birds with one stone : those people who lived in the free areas and fought under the banner of the NFL were driven into the towns and concentration camps and, deprived of all livelihood, had to enlist in Thieu's army and police in order to survive. Thus Thieu's army and police had been reinforced as the GIs left, their numbers reaching more than one million for the army and 150,000 for the police.

Washington had taken care to sow destruction also in North Viet Nam, the great rear area of the Vietnamese revolution. Bombing raids, from 1965 to 1968, then again in 1972, destroyed almost all industrial installations in North Viet Nam, many towns and cities, thousands of villages, all bridges, many dams, hundreds of schools, colleges and hospitals. In late 1972, while B.52s savagely attacked North Vietnamese cities, a last effort was made to massively introduce armaments into South Viet Nam for Thieu, who was eventually in possession of nearly 2,000 aircraft – the third air force in the world, topping those of France, Great Britain, Japan and West Germany – and the most up-to-date war equipment.

In the urban and rural areas under American control, already subjected to the most bloody repression, repeated "pacification" drives had ended in the murder of tens of thousands of people suspected of being NFL militants or sympathizers and in the arrest of hundreds of thousands of others. By blood and iron, Washington had tried to impose the Thieu regime on the population of South Viet Nam.

Thus, facing a PRG supposedly weakened by considerable destruction and the forced departure of millions of inhabitants, no longer able to get much aid from a North Viet Nam completely ruined by intensive bombings, stood a Saigon administration with a powerfully-equipped army and police, trained for years by qualified US experts. In

the eyes of Washington, the situation looked more favourable than in 1954, after the signing of the Geneva Agreements, when the Ngo Dinh Diem regime was still in its beginning and had but a small army and police, when the American hold on South Viet Nam was still incomplete and when the Saigon cadres and functionaries had but little experience.

Since 1954, tens of thousands of officers had been trained and indoctrinated by the Americans. Most of them were adventurers and outcasts thirsty for dollars who had built their fortunes and power thanks to American "aid" and the war. These officers gradually came to hold important political posts – president of the republic, vice president, provincial governors. They amassed considerable wealth through plunder in the course of military operations, and through trafficking in goods, arms and drugs. They placed their parents and relatives in the most profitable business: import – export, hotels, prostitution. It was to this military caste, bureaucratized and trafficking, that Washington entrusted the direction of the Saigon neo-colonial State and society.

As to the agents for doing the dirty work – torture, massacre, arson, murder – they were recruited by American services among the desperadoes and hooligans of the towns. American experts taught them the latest methods of interrogation as well as physical and psychological torture. In addition, a huge machine for propaganda, for ideological and cultural poisoning, flooded the South Vietnamese population for years with slogans, films and pictures aimed at erasing in people's minds all traces of national, or even simply human, sentiment and creating conditions for turning them into mercenaries ready to execute any orders.

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To all appearances, the machine looked well put together and well run in. Now that the GIs had left, it would be enough to feed it with weapons, dollars and supply it with advisers. With much less expenditure than the American forces, it would carry out Washington's policy.

Richard Nixon, then Gerald Ford, devoted their efforts to getting the few billion dollars each year necessary for its operation. What did two or three billion dollars mean for the American budget, for the American nation! American public opinion was convinced that after the GIs' retreat the USA was no longer involved in the Indochinese quagmire. To draw a few billions on the quiet without alerting either public opinion or Congress should not prove too difficult for the pros of the White House and the Pentagon.

On 20 February 1974, USAID gave Congresswoman Bella Abzug the following figures concerning military aid to Thieu:

1972	2,382,600,000 dollars
1973	2,270,500,000 -

Thus in 1973, in spite of the Paris Agreement, military aid had not decreased compared with 1972, the peak war year. The armaments supplied clearly surpassed in quantity and also in quality those which could be sent to replace used equipment on a one-for-one basis. Thus ultramodern F.5-E aircraft were given to Thieu to "replace" used F.5A's.

Various tricks were resorted to in order to intensify those arms shipments: stated prices were much lower than real prices; arms were sent under the cloak of other budgetary chapters. On one occasion the discovery of an "accounting error" made available an "unused" sum of several dozen million dollars which was immediately made available to Saigon.

The salaries of Thieu's soldiers, officers and police were paid through American "economic" aid. The American ambassador in Saigon, Graham Martin, made every effort to ensure an average sum of 700 million dollars for Thieu for the years 1974-75, the same amount as that received by Saigon when half a million GIs were still in South Viet Nam and the war was raging. Although all arms and equipment were freely supplied by the USA, military expenditures still accounted for 60% of Thieu's budget.

Speaking before the Asia and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives, Fred Branfman said :

" In fact, however, only 4% of the Indochina Aid that President Nixon proposed for FY 1974 was actually designated for 'reconstruction and rehabilitation', or 'development' (121.4 million out of 2.9 billion dollars). And only another 4% was even termed 'humanitarian' (107.4 million out of 2.9 billion dollars).

"Ninety-two percent of the Administration-requested funds for FY 1974 were meant to continue the war – both military funds, which were 72% of the total, and 'economic' and 'food for Peace' funds, which were indirectly war-related."

Congressional Record, proceedings
and debates of the 93rd Congress,
second session.

Misappropriation of "food for peace" destined for other countries, loans amounting to more than 100 million dollars, so-called multilateral aid through international bodies, were used to prop up the Saigon budget. The Saigon office of USAID confirmed that 83.6% of this budget was financed by American aid.

USAID, which managed this aid, kept its personnel numbering several hundred unchanged in Saigon, while American militarymen and technicians in civilian clothes took care of the maintenance, repair and operation of machines in Thieu's army (aircraft in particular) and took note of its needs as operations were undertaken. The so-called American diplomatic staff in Saigon was strengthened by several hundred agents who were distributed between the four consulates-general set up in the four military regions of South Viet Nam and numerous "consular offices" scattered throughout the country. The American ambassador had 145 assistants following military operations while the Defence Attaché Office (DAO) was staffed by at least 50 officers. All that "diplomatic" personnel was but a camouflaged military staff which directed

and commanded the Saigon armed forces, worked out operations plans, decided on strategy. Thieu's officers only carried out the plans and obeyed the directives of the American advisers. Nothing had changed with regard to both the nature and the conduct of the war. Before and after the Paris Agreement, the so-called Viet Nam war had been and remained an American war.

The Paris Agreement stipulates national concord, the recognition of the existence of a third force, and of two administrations each with its own territory. Yet, well supplied with weapons and dollars and benefiting from Washington's unconditional support, Thieu reaffirmed his policy of the "four noes" : no to communism, no to neutralism, no to an understanding with the Communists, no to a division of the territory. Evidently, while the first three noes were affirmations of principles the fourth did not depend on the will of Thieu, nor even on that of Nixon and Kissinger. The reality of the PRG, of the territory under its control, of its armed forces, was expressed by facts and not only in the text of the Agreement signed. It could not be erased by a stroke of the pen or by a speech

Even though the US-Saigon command had dotted the country with 250 military sub-sectors and 10,000 posts there remained innumerable localities where the PRG hold control and which – especially in the plains of Trung Bo and the Mekong delta, rich and populous regions – formed large patches on a map of the country, a veritable leopard's skin which prevented Thieu and his American masters from sleeping in peace.

This permanent presence of the PRG, its armed forces, its militants, its social and cultural organizations close to areas still under Thieu's control, was a mortal danger for the Saigon regime.

Immediately after the signing of the Paris Agreement, on 28 January 1973, Thieu declared : "The cease-fire does not at all mean the cessation of the war". And he started hurling his infantry, armour and aircraft at the liberated zones. As early as 29 January 1973 *US News and World*

Report stressed that the Saigon forces were "to move into contested areas – even Communist-controlled regions – and reduce the number of people and territory dominated by Reds."

If the American forces were no longer there to give support to the Saigon troops, American air forces stationed in Thailand and the Pacific area (140,000 men) could always serve as a "deterrent", all the more so as American officials did not fail from time to time to threaten the Vietnamese people with renewed action by the American air force (declaration by Schlesinger, US Defence Secretary, on 18 June 1973).

After the signing of the Agreement, not only did Thieu refuse to announce this event to his troops, he also ordered numerous operations against the free areas. On 28 January, his troops attacked the port of Cua Viet and the districts of Hai Lang and Trieu Phong in Quang Tri province near the 17th parallel. Southwest of Hue, Saigon troops tried to recapture Highway 72 linking A Sau to the old capital. In the first quarter of 1973, Thieu troops attacked various regions in Quang Nam province, the port of Sa Huynh, in Quang Ngai province (February 1973), along Highway 4, in My Tho province, and in the early days of March, the area of Tong Le Chan, Rach Bap, in Thu Dau Mot province.

Those sudden attacks launched with considerable mechanized means in the weeks following the cease-fire allowed the Saigon army to recapture a few localities here and there. In a joint communiqué published in April 1973, Nixon and Thieu expressed gratification with the "proficiency" of Saigon armed forces and noted their "effective and courageous performances".

Those initial results encouraged Thieu to enlarge the scope of his operations which came to involve one division and more in a single operation. From June to September 1973, 70 battalions attacked Chuong Thien province; from May to November two divisions were in action in Ben Cat (Thu Dau Mot province) and one division southwest

of Phu Bai (Thua Thien province). Those operations – large scale encroachments or local nibbling actions – were accompanied by "pacification" operations in regions more or less controlled by Saigon, especially populous ones. "Pacification", the major element of neo-colonialist strategy since the "Vietnamization" of the war, was intensified after the signing of the Paris Agreement in order to consolidate the rear of the Saigon army and the bases of the regime.

All localities, including the newly-reconquered ones, were immediately put in the vice of a coercive system which includes :

- A network of posts and military sectors with regular garrisons ;
- local security forces, civil guards ;
- regular and special police forces ;
- a puppet administration ;
- police informers ;
- reactionary political organizations ;

not mentioning a whole series of "humanitarian", "cultural" religious", "mutual aid" and other organizations which enmeshed every inhabitant. Twenty years of experience and the mobilization of many experts made it possible for American neo-colonialism to improve its methods of coercion. After assassinating and putting in jail militants and sympathizers of the patriotic movement, or even more suspects, after cataloguing, putting in police files and terrorizing the people, the Thieu administration sought to forcibly enrol a great part of the population in para-military formations, and so-called civilian self-defence, which they used against the patriotic forces. For the Saigon army, this served as a shield during its operations and a reserve from which to draw recruits.

In places where this forcible enlistment could not be done, the population was penned up in concentration camps or sectors. More than 1.5 million people were thus concentrated in 1973-74. Bombing and commando raids were

launched against PRG-controlled areas. Washington's neo-colonial policy could be imposed only through war; the Thieu regime could only be maintained through war. The strict implementation of the Paris Agreement would ruin that policy and toll the death knell of the regime.

Ruin and Decay

The Thieu regime and American neo-colonial policy faced not only a PRG solidly entrenched in the free areas but also growing popular opposition in the urban and rural areas more or less under Saigon control. The signing of the Paris Agreement, the withdrawal of American forces, the policy of national concord clearly defined by the PRG, the official recognition of the third force by the Agreement, all those factors gave a new impetus to the great movement for peace, independence, democratic freedoms and the protection of national culture and good morals, which had long existed among the urban masses.

Thieu and his American masters had anticipated all that. In the months preceding the armistice, Thieu had taken a series of measures to reinforce the coercive system already weighing heavily on the population. Successive decrees kept reducing the bits of freedom still surviving in the regime.

In August 1972 a decree abolished the election of village and hamlet chiefs who were now appointed by the administration. Seven thousand army officers were named to those posts and 10,000 others took over security in the villages. Also in August 1972 press decree 007 imposed such draconian conditions that only 18 out of 40 existing journals were able to continue in existence, most of them being in fact financed and controlled by the administration. In September 1972, newspaper editors were ordered to deposit 20 million piastres each as security money to pay for eventual fines, and any action that displeased the authorities, especially the publication of any piece of

information unfavourable to the regime – there was no dearth of that – was punishable by five years' imprisonment and a fine of five million piastres. This was tantamount to ordering the closure of all journals of some honesty. Frequent seizures put press publications in a situation in which they could no longer cover their expenditures unless they resorted to government subsidies.

A decree on local security banned all strikes and demonstrations and authorized the police to open fire on all rallies; decree 090 authorized it to arrest all suspects. Barely a month before the signing of the Agreement, a decree imposed such conditions on the political parties that only four out of 28 survived.

The strict implementation of the Paris Agreement, which stipulated the putting into effect of democratic liberties, would have been deadly for the regime. As early as 28 January 1973, Thieu declared in a televised broadcast: "The ceasefire in place means that the status quo will be maintained. Wherever our administration, army and people are, we are kings. Everything depends on us. We will maintain our laws and administration. Everything will go on as before. Nothing is changed." Neither reconciliation nor national concord; neither understanding with the Communists nor with the neutralists. The "constitution", with anticommunism as its basic principle, and all fascist legislation would remain in force. Washington took care to increase financial and technical aid to beef up the police force from 120,000 to 150,000. The *Washington Post* of 1 March 1973 observed that the regime had grown even more rigorous since the signing of the Agreement. David Shieler, in the *New York Times* of 19 August 1974 remarked: "...It's much better to release nine or ten suspects instead of condemning once innocent man. But that's the opposite of the present policy." He added that the military courts and the national police were but two sides of the same coin, two elements of the same war effort.

The Paris Agreement stipulated explicitly that all political prisoners should be freed. The first measure taken by Thieu was to kill a number of them before the cease-fire, then to turn the others into common offenders so as to affirm cynically that there were no political prisoners in his jails. In spite of the evidence coming from all quarters – American journalists and representatives, religious people of all nationalities, eminent personalities in the world – which pointed to the existence of about 200,000 political prisoners in Saigon jails and camps, Thieu continued to deny the fact with the support of Washington.

Worse still, he continued to order arrests and tortures not only against PRG partisans but also more and more against the third force. Students, intellectuals, priests and bonzes were savagely clubbed in the streets, arrested in large numbers, deported, tortured. To all comers Thieu declared bluntly: "Anyone with enough tough courage to proclaim himself a neutralist or pro-communist will not survive five minutes." (12 October 1973).

To serve his purposes, Thieu took new measures to concentrate all power in his hands. As early as 1971, he had done everything to eliminate his only competitor to the presidential elections, Nguyen Cao Ky, the then vice-president who bitterly complained to an American journalist: "The only voice one can hear in South Viet Nam is that of Nguyen Van Thieu."

The elections to the Saigon "Senate" of August 1973 were the occasion for Thieu to eliminate his opponents there and to put one of his own men, Tran Van Lam, at the top of a double ticket presented by the "Democratic Party", the "party of the President". The introduction of his agents into both houses of "parliament" made it possible for Thieu to propose amendments to the "constitution" which allowed him to:

- run for president in 1975 for a term of office of five, instead of four years;
- appoint the justices of the Supreme Court (the parliament could only propose names); and
- appoint chiefs of provinces, cities and districts.

In face of that manoeuvre, on 19 January 1974, Nguyen Van Huyen, president of the Senate, declared: "This constitutional amendment kills all hopes for a truly democratic regime. So I formally resign from the Senate to become an ordinary citizen." He was replaced by Tran Van Lam.

In October 1974, Thieu reshuffled his government, created a series of "commissions" under the presidency and a "directorate" presided over by himself. That directorate and those commissions, placed above the Cabinet ministers and even the prime minister who became the puppet's puppets, decided all important matters in both internal and external policies. "Prime Minister" Tran Thien Khiem could not hide his bitterness. A series of demotions (affecting in particular 17 generals) and promotions (39 officers became generals) allowed Thieu to eliminate all those suspected of opposing his policy and to appoint his most faithful agents to senior posts in the army, the police and the administration. The partisan of Nguyen Cao Ky, and all those who had more or less come under French influence, were cast aside and replaced by men wholly trained in the United States.

Besides military aid, the men in Washington strove to support Thieu with substantial economic aid so that he could play his role. The question was to provide him with a sum equivalent to what he had received during the war years including the revenues coming from the spending of the US expeditionary forces in South Viet Nam. It is estimated that 250,000 jobs had been created as a result of the stationing of the US troops whose expenditures provided the Thieu regime with about half of its foreign-exchange revenues (*UPI*, 27 January 1974). On an average 700-800 million dollars had to be given to the Thieu administration each year, according to the estimate of US ambassador Graham Martin, who tried hard to win the US congress over to his views.

In order to get those aid projects accepted, Washington and Saigon had made a lot of noise about fanciful reconstruction plans. Martin recalled the Marshall Plan which

had made it possible for Europe to recover from the ruins of the Second World War and achieve an economic take-off. For his part Thieu put forward a plan for reconstruction and restoration in six months, then went to Washington to beg for the dollars. Upon his return to Saigon in May 1973, he advertised a plan for post-war reconstruction and economic development in seven years (1973-1980) with three major aims: reconstruction and settlement of displaced persons; intensive exploitation of natural resources, in particular the restoration of agriculture; investment in industries and services, for which especially advantageous conditions would attract foreign capital.

On 26 March 1973, on the occasion of "Peasants' Day" Thieu called for the implementation of a five-year agricultural plan, which aimed in particular at putting under cultivation half a million hectares of land left idle because of the war, supplying three million cubic metres of timber for internal consumption and export, and catching a million tons of fish, i.e. double the figure of 1973. The development of agriculture, forestry and fishing would, in his view, provide annual exports to the amount of 400 million dollars, which would cover all the foreign-exchange needs of the country.

Thieu also held out the possibility of convening an international conference which would work out modalities of aid to Saigon for economic development. In the first weeks following the signing of the Paris Agreement, a large number of businessmen - American, British, French, Japanese - visited Saigon. It is true that South Viet Nam's natural resources are many and varied (rice, rubber, fishing products, prospect of oil), that abundant and skilled manpower was available, which, besides, was twice as cheap as in Hong Kong or Singapore - a great attraction for foreign capital. The docility of the Saigon regime was also a good guarantee. The infrastructure - roads, ports and docks - was adequate.

One could easily imagine the economic development that would take place in a South Viet Nam to which

more economic aid was coming than to any other place in the world. Yet right in the first months of 1973 there were growing signs of economic deterioration. On 21 August 1973 Thieu himself admitted that "it is difficult to find a solution to the economic and social problem."

Many symptoms pointed to economic decline:

- a drop in industrial and agricultural production;
- rapidly rising prices and runaway inflation;
- worsening unemployment;
- shortage of rice, fuel and goods.

Up to that time Saigon industry had stagnated, stifled by imported foreign goods, especially American and Japanese. Industrial production accounted for only 10% of total production and many enterprises turned out semi-finished products from imported raw materials. Many of these industries were in French or Taiwanese hands. As early as the first quarter of 1973, the textile mills showed a drop in output of 2,000 tons compared with the same period in the previous years. The same situation prevailed in other sectors: sugar, cigarettes, soft drinks... Local industries, crushed by the rise in the prices of fuel and imported raw materials and hamstrung by the drop in purchasing power, saw many enterprises driven out of business. By April 1974, about 50% of the enterprises had closed down.

With devaluation adding to the price rises the situation worsened from month to month. In 1973, the Saigon piastre was devalued ten times: from an exchange rate of 35 to the dollar in 1955, it sank to 560 to the dollar by 5 January 1974. In 1973, prices rose by 100-200% often more for necessities. On 5 August 1973, the Saigon administration decreed a simultaneous rise for three essential products: 55% for rice, 60% for sugar, and 76% for petrol. On 20 November, the petrol price was hiked another 50%. On 23 November the Saigon paper *Doc Lap* wrote: "So as not to lag behind the price of petrol those of other goods, particularly those of primary necessities have skyrocketed. That of rice, now rare and

expensive and the major worry for Saigon folk, is shooting up fast. Close on the heels of petrol, rice now sees its price hiked to 34,000 piastres a quintal (7,600 piastres in late 1972). Price rises affect 900 other items."

The budget was blown up to fantastic figures, the deficit of 116 billion for 1973 having increased by another 78 billion by the end of the financial year. For 1974, revenues amounted to 453 billion and expenditures to 630, resulting in a deficit of 177 billion. The volume of money in circulation, 51,000 million in January 1966, reached more than 202,800 million in January 1973 while foreign exchange reserves, from about 200 million dollars in 1972 dropped to 100 million in 1973. The official rate of inflation, 65⁰/₁₀₀ for the whole of 1973, was already 16⁰/₁₀₀ by the end of February 1974. It must have risen to 96⁰/₁₀₀ by the end of that year. The official exchange rate was 685 piastres to the dollar in 1974 much more on the black market.

Thieu left no stone unturned in order to extract the greatest possible amount of dollars from Washington. But Nixon enmeshed in the Watergate affair and in American economic difficulties, was able to extract only 322 million dollars from Congress in the fiscal year 1973-74, as against 500 million in 1972. Thieu made a tour of the Western capitals but to no avail. He sought to sell off the country's resources by offering most advantageous conditions to oil and other companies. From American, French, Japanese and Canadian oil companies he got a mere 51 million dollars and but a few million for other investments.

In order to get revenues, Thieu resorted to taxes. The Saigon paper *Tin Sang* of 21 April 1973 wrote: "Since early 1973, all taxes have increased: licences for stalls and shops and income taxes have trebled. Taxes on transport have increased fifteen times; others have doubled or quadrupled like those on printing offices". On 1 July 1973, Thieu decreed a new tax, VAT (value-added tax) which hit all products. According to the Saigon

press, within a mere 40 days, 5.2 billion piastres were squeezed from the population. Vehement protests by people of all walks of life compelled the Saigon administration to give up collecting that tax in certain sectors. On 22 November 1973, Thieu increased the equalizing tax on more than 200 imported products. In early 1973, a litre of petrol cost 40 piastres with a special tax of 20 piastres. A year later the price rose to 240 piastres and the tax to 100 piastres. Sugar, with a 10⁰/₁₀₀ tax, cost 200 piastres a kilogram in early 1973, 600 piastres a year later. The same escalation happened with tobacco, beer, cigarettes. Land tax increased by 20⁰/₁₀₀; that on small traders doubled. For 1974 Thieu planned to collect more from the rural regions which until then had supplied but 10% of the budget.

Severe measures were enacted against any delay in payment or any failure to register. An intelligence service and commando squads for tax-collecting purposes were created which launched veritable "military-fiscal" operations and large-scale house to house searches, in which tax collectors were given a free rein to extort money from firms and individuals. Popular protests were recorded in the Saigon press. The *Dien Tin* of 24 June 1974 wrote, "From time to time a new tax is conjured up by the State. Whatever he does, wherever he goes, the citizen runs into the tax-collector. The latter will call on you even if you shut yourself up at home. Ordinary folk work hard from morning to night without earning enough to feed their children, while idle bigwigs in air-conditioned rooms with a cigar between their lips rack their brains to invent new taxes."

It is easy to understand the nefarious consequences of such an economic situation on the life of the people. By late 1974 official figures showed 2.5 million unemployed - 3.5 million according to other estimates. In Trung Bo - Da Nang, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Quy Nhon - about 50⁰/₁₀₀ of the working population were out of jobs. Hundreds of thousands of waifs and strays roamed the towns where beggary, prostitution and drug-addiction were more

than ever on the rampage. More and more people committed suicide, often by whole families. Saigon society was in full decay.

No great insight was needed to grasp the cause of that ruin and decay. The GIs' withdrawal created a big gap in the regime's revenues, but the pursuit of the war had been and remained the main cause of economic and social deterioration, of the general crisis shaking Saigon society. In South Viet Nam, which formerly had had such abundant reserves of rice, one saw, for the first time, people starving to death. How could one put half a million hectares of land under cultivation, expand forestry, attract foreign investment, develop local industry if Thieu, at the instigation of Nixon-Kissinger-Ford, persisted in operation, aimed at encroachment, "pacification" and concentration of the population? The war was as always American but the burden, both human and financial, now that it had been "Vietnamezed", was weighing ever more on the South Vietnamese population.

The Beginning of the End

Cease-fire, liberation of the political prisoners, freedom to circulate between the two zones, democratic liberties, national reconciliation and concord, recognition of the third force, and of course recognition of the existence of the PRG and the liberated areas - none of these was admitted by Thieu. As for Nixon, on the very day following the signing of the Paris Agreement, he clamoured that he recognized the Thieu administration as the "only legitimate government of South Viet Nam". With an interval of more than twenty years, these words by Nixon echoed in a sinister fashion similar ones uttered by Eisenhower following the signing of the Geneva Agreements on Indochina in 1954.

For Nixon, Ford, Kissinger, the only acceptable solution was that the PRG should be crushed, or at least stifled, and a neo-colonial regime subservient to the US perpetuated in Saigon. One might have been tempted to

believe that after the Paris Agreement of 1973 things would move the same way as after the Geneva Conference of 1954. But history does not repeat itself. It is true that, in twenty years, Washington had had time to set up a colossal military and police machine in South Viet Nam, but the American leaders were grossly mistaken when they calculated that the destruction, ravages and mourning they had sown on Viet Nam had so exhausted and weakened the Vietnamese people as to render them totally powerless.

In 1954, the Vietnamese resistance had had to evacuate South Viet Nam entirely and regroup its armed forces and cadres in the North, leaving a population without any arms and cadres to confront the imperialist enemy. In 1973, the PRG was there with its own territory and armed forces. The difference with 1954 was a fundamental one. The people in South Viet Nam, as in North Viet Nam, had become battle-hardened. The threat of American weapons and troops no longer intimidated anybody.

In the months that followed the signing of the Agreement, Saigon troops equipped with modern weapons were able to launch a few surprise attacks and reap some successes which gave rise to illusions. But it was evident that the PRG, the liberation armed forces and the South Vietnamese population would not sit with folded arms in face of those repeated violations of the Paris Agreement which seriously threatened the peace and security of all.

The police control and fascist measures that became worse and worse after January 1973 could not prevent the people in the areas under Thieu's control from waging a political and social struggle whose strength and scope surpassed those of previous movements. The signing of the Paris Agreement, the withdrawal of the GIs, the presence of the PRG and its armed forces, the policy of national reconciliation and concord - these were so many factors which speeded up the struggle of the urban population who had terribly suffered from the state of war and Thieu's fascist dictatorship. The sad state of the

economy sharpened the combativeness of the masses, who were vigorously stimulated by the defeats sustained by Thieu troops. In defiance of arrests and tortures, demonstrations and strikes succeeded one another, in which all social strata participated. Thieu's functionaries and militarymen often joined in those actions or showed open sympathy with his opponents.

Immediately after the signing of the Agreement and in spite of efforts by the Americans and Thieu to hinder the diffusion of the text of the accord, a vast movement was launched to demand the release of political prisoners. Who in South Viet Nam had not a relative, a friend, a brother kept in one of the numerous prisons built in all provinces? While the struggle was essentially waged by the working people under the guidance of the NFL, gradually all other social strata, especially the students, intellectual, believers and priests of various religions, whose political consciousness and combativeness had grown with the events, participated more and more actively in the fight. The scope of US military, economic, and ideological intervention over the years had caused various elements to fall away temporarily from the national bloc and take refuge in abstentionism, but little by little those people had grown conscious of the need to fight in order to save the nation, its traditions, its good morals, the whole society, from total destruction. The "third force", thus came into being and manifested itself more and more frequently. Its militants went to prison together with those of the revolutionary movement, a most favourable soil for the policy of national concord. The same thing happened among Vietnamese residents abroad - especially in France where PRG partisans and other groups, including openly pro-American ones, joined forces to demand a strict implementation of the Paris Agreement and condemn the machination of Washington and Saigon.

The growing opposition of the masses forced Thieu to reshuffle his Cabinet on several occasions and to stop imposing VAT on many goods. In June 1974 he had to forbid members of his administration, army and police

to join political groups. The opposition even spread to the "Lower House of Parliament". In July, 58 of its members signed a motion demanding explanation from the "government" on the execution of the Paris Agreement, corruption, smuggling, and other social evils. Committees and organizations were set up to demand the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the release of political prisoners.

In July, 300 Catholic priests held a meeting in Can Tho to condemn the corruption prevalent in the Thieu administration. The movement against corruption grew in scope while Buddhist leaders stigmatized the administration's persecution of Buddhists on the pattern of the policy pursued by the late Ngo Dinh Diem and issued a call for the safeguarding of peace and the Paris Agreement. A Catholic-led popular committee against corruption held big rallies in Hue, other cities - Saigon, Bien Hoa, Can Tho - followed suit. In September in Hue, 30,000 people took to the streets to demand that Thieu renounce the use of force as a system of government and answer the corruption charges brought against his wife and himself.

It is significant that the Church, which had always extended vigorous support to Ngo Dinh Diem then Nguyen Van Thieu, should now keep its distance from the latter. The mass of the Catholic faithful had gradually awakened under the impact of events and no longer blindly obeyed the hierarchy. Young priests openly stood for national independence and social progress and went to prison together with revolutionary militants.

Boycotting of news diffused by the administration, marches by journalists, a declaration of opposition by barristers, a demonstration in the outskirts of Saigon by 5,000 Catholics, a protest meeting in Quang Ngai town by 17,000 people, an appeal issued by 45 "deputies" castigating the repression of Buddhist monks - the anger of the masses was rising. Washington was worried. While Thieu clung to his personal power and sought to eliminate one by one those who failed to agree with him, the American leaders were set on gathering together as many of the

reactionary forces as possible behind Thieu. Pressure was put on Thieu to dismiss those of his agents with the worst reputation. Under the twofold pressure of popular opposition and the American services, Thieu had to dismiss in October four of his closest ministers, among them Hoang Duc Nha, his nephew and Minister of Information, hated by the press. Public opinion was far from being placated. In later 1974, the trial of three newspapers charged with having published the indictment of Thieu for corruption gave the alarm to the whole population. In order to prevent the holding of demonstrations the day of the trial - which was in fact to be postponed - 40,000 police were mobilized and a state of siege decreed. In a demonstration staged by tens of thousands of people against the trial, violent clashes took place with the police and many well-known personalities were wounded. In spite of seizures and interdictions, newspapers continued to publish accusations against members of the government. At Christmas students demonstrated against the government's cultural policy and in January they again took to the streets to demand an end to repression and pressganging. For their part, the trade unions held an extraordinary conference against dismissals and for the right to strike, and put forward economic demands which had become extremely urgent because of runaway inflation and unemployment.

Two years after the Paris Agreement, Thieu was more isolated politically than ever. The movement for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, peace, and national concord was irresistible. The watchword: "Overthrow Thieu; set up a Saigon government ready for a scrupulous implementation of the Paris agreement" was adopted by almost all social strata and political and religious tendencies. More than ever, the policy pursued by Washington and its agents was going counter to and clashing with the deepest aspirations of the Vietnamese people.

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The strict implementation of the Agreement would lead to a political confrontation between a coalition of the various national forces and the pro-American forces. This was what Nixon - Kissinger, then Ford, as well as Thieu and the caste of war profiteers in Saigon sought to avoid at all costs. They chose to carry on with the military confrontation, still believing that the technical and financial power of the US would compensate for political and ideological weaknesses. The moderation shown by the PRG during the first months might have given them illusions, being interpreted by Washington and Thieu as a sign of feebleness.

For its part, the PRG had carried out a wide diffusion of the text of the Agreement among the population, hoping that its adversary, drawing the necessary lessons from the past, would adopt a policy of peace and national reconciliation. PRG negotiators on several occasions advanced concrete proposals aimed at bringing about a cease-fire, the release of the political prisoners, the putting into effect of democratic liberties, the setting up of a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord made up of three segments, a solution to the problem of general elections and the demobilization of the armed forces of the two parties.

At Washington's instigation, Thieu had always turned a deaf ear, while continuing the encroachment operations against PRG-controlled areas. The Le Duc Tho - Kissinger meeting in Paris in May 1973 and the signing of a joint communiqué in which both parties pledged to take concrete measures for a complete execution of the Agreement brought no change in the aggressiveness of the Saigon forces and the American leaders. On June 18, US Defense Secretary Schlesinger considered the possibility of resuming bombing operations against North Viet Nam.

In July 1973, while reaffirming its determination to strictly implement the Paris Agreement the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) command at Kontum had to give a warning: if the Saigon troops were to use

aircraft, artillery and large infantry units against liberated areas, they would meet with appropriate counter-blows. Thieu went on with encroachment operations in Chuong Thien province, in eastern Nam Bo and multiplied raids and "pacification" operations in areas under his control. US reconnaissance aircraft flew over North Viet Nam.

In Tay Ninh province, in the Central Highlands, in the Mekong delta and in the plains of Trung Bo, Thieu launched divisions-size operations while his aircraft bombed many localities in the liberated areas. Washington even sent an aircraft-carrier to cruise off North Vietnamese shores. Also during that period, the American command intensified its bombing raids on the free areas of Cambodia.

In face of this stubborn continuation of the war by the other side, on 14 October 1973, the PLAF command issued an order to its troops and to the population: hit back vigorously at every war act of the Saigon forces in order to safeguard the lives and property of the population and guarantee the execution of the Paris Agreement. It was made clear that the liberation forces would not merely fight back wherever the enemy attacked but would pick the targets of their counter-blows.

Thieu by no means stopped his operations. He sent his bombers deep into the liberated areas and took advantage of the typhoons to intensify "pacification" operations. On November 6, PLAF artillery gave a severe warning by pounding the Bien Hoa airfield from which those bombers were taking off. Also in November seven Saigon aircraft were shot down in Quang Duc province. In December, while Saigon bombing raids over the free areas were stepped up, the liberation forces did not remain inactive. They set afire fuel depots in Saigon itself and destroyed ammunition depots near Pleiku.

The year 1974 began with warlike declarations by Thieu and Schlesinger. While the Pentagon sent Thieu ultra-modern F-5E aircraft Nixon asked the US Congress to give Thieu twice as much military aid. Saigon planes

even strafed seats of the International Control Commission and localities chosen for the return of captured personnel. But the liberation forces and the population delivered ever more vigorous counter-blows.

In February the patriotic forces attacked Quang Ngai airfield. In March they inflicted very serious losses (half its numbers) on the 62nd Rangers Battalion in Kontum province. In April the Tong Le Chan base, the springboard of many encroachment operations, was besieged and heavily shelled, and was later abandoned by its garrison. Thieu sent his bombers to attack Loc Ninh and other localities for several days and broke off *sine die* the negotiations at La Celle Saint Cloud. Nixon and Kissinger were pressing the US Congress for a substantial increase in military and economic aid to Thieu, arguing that the US had a "moral" commitment to the Saigon puppets. Since the Paris Agreement this commitment had manifested itself in the shipment of a million tons of bombs and shells, 1,100 tanks and armoured cars, 800 heavy guns, 700 aircraft, 200 naval and river vessels: American dollars and equipment had made it possible for Thieu to launch, within the space of a little more than a year, hundreds of thousands of encroachment operations, artillery poundings, and air bombings.

In May a vast operation was under way in Ben Cat with three divisions supported by American-manned F-5E aircraft. But in three months from May to July, PLAF counter-blows cost Saigon 8,000 soldiers, 182 tanks and armoured cars and 34 aircraft. To a *Newsweek* correspondent a Saigon officer declared that the troops' low morale was the greatest obstacle for the command, not any lack of material (13 May 1974). By the end of the first half of 1974, Saigon had lost 175,000 men, killed, wounded or run away. Desertions were increasing. In such conditions, the more Thieu persisted in hurling his troops at the liberated areas, the more defeats they suffered, and the more rapidly they disintegrated. Even a massive influx of dollars and armaments could not

reverse the situation. In July and August, in the coastal plains of Trung Bo, Saigon forces lost 160 posts and military positions from which attacks had been launched against the liberated areas. Da Nang and Bien Hoa airfields were pounded. The people of 16 villages, two districts, and 16 concentration sectors rose up and liberated themselves. The situation grew worse and worse for the Saigon forces everywhere, in the Central Highlands, in Trung Bo, in the Mekong delta. One by one the posts illegally set up by Thieu forces in the months following the Paris Agreement were eliminated.

The American general John Murray, who headed DAO in Saigon, confessed that the losses suffered by Saigon in 1973, as well as 1974, surpassed the 100,000 mark, while Thieu himself admitted that he had lost "many villages and districts and even a town" (AP, 29 January 1975). The figure given by the PRG for those losses suffered by the Saigon side was 255,000 men killed, wounded or deserted. While Ford and Kissinger were striving to get more aid for Thieu from the US Congress, the *Times* reported on 17 January 1975 that according to Western military sources, the morale of the Saigon army, more than any shortage of military equipment, was to be the decisive factor in the months to come.

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Instead of implementing the Paris Agreement, Nixon, Ford, Kissinger and Thieu had chosen to use force, to take the military path. Who sows the wind... It was on the military plane that they were to suffer the worst setbacks. The defeats Thieu sustained in 1974 had not blunted his aggressiveness but the PLAF, fired by their successes, started to attack in late 1974 and especially from early 1975 the military sectors and posts from which encroachment and pacification operations were launched.

In December, the liberation forces began offensives in several provinces, especially in Phuoc Long (capital:

Phuoc Binh) northwest of Saigon, along the road to the Highlands, in the western part of the Mekong delta, in Rach Gia, Can Tho and Binh Tuy. (The reader is advised to find the names of provinces on the map, page 225 before getting into the detail of military operations in the pages that follow). Their regular forces using powerful means did away with the posts and fortifications while the guerillas took on the administrative and para-military organizations. On 6 January the capital of Phuoc Long province was liberated, 3,000 Saigon troops put out of action and 650 others taken prisoner, 12 heavy guns captured and 10 aircraft brought down. For the first time a whole province with its capital was liberated. This had repercussions in public opinion at home and abroad, which Thieu and Washington sought to exploit through a noisy propaganda, but to no avail.

In early March, the attacks were mostly aimed at Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands) and the northern provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Quang Duc. From 5 to 9 March the PLAF cut the strategic highways leading to the major towns of Tay Nguyen: Highway 14, the north-south artery; Highway 19, the major transversal road linking Quy Nhon with Pleiku; Highway 21 running from Ninh Hoa to Buon Me Thuot. The military sub-sectors and important posts controlling the access to Buon Me Thuot were eliminated.

On 10 March, after a violent artillery barrage, the liberation forces made a direct thrust into the central part of the town where the command posts were, not even caring to attack the outer defences. The radio and command posts were quickly neutralized and the defence thus paralyzed. The capture of the airfield and the ammunition depot completed the demoralization of the Saigon troops, who disbanded. On 11 March, the town was liberated: 2,000 men had been captured and 25 heavy guns and 200 vehicles seized. Helicopters had come from Saigon to take away the American advisers

but two of the latter had been captured. The Saigon general Le Trung Tuong had been wounded ; his deputy, Colonel Vu The Quang, killed. The 23rd Infantry Division had been liquidated. The Saigon air forces had shown themselves completely powerless. A counter-offensive was attempted by Saigon troops assembled at Phuoc An, north-east of Buon Me Thuot, but this locality was quickly taken by the liberation forces. With Buon Me Thuot, the whole province of Darlac was liberated. The routed Saigon troops had not had time to destroy the immense ammunition depot (1.5 kilometres long, nearly one kilometre wide), which proved that they had by no means run short of armaments.

The rapid fall of Buon Me Thuot was a painful surprise for Thieu and his American masters. The best Saigon units had quickly disbanded, leaving behind their equipment. The population of many villages had risen up, resulting in the provincial capitals being completely isolated, and complete freedom left to the liberation forces to launch direct attacks on the major centres.

It had now been proved that the liberation forces were capable of attacking the important centres of the Tay Nguyen highlands, now isolated. The only solution left to Saigon was to order a general retreat of its forces stationed in Kontum, Pleiku, Hau Bon (Cheo Reo). This retreat was carried out in an atmosphere of panic in the direction of Tuy Hoa, over Highway 7, by a jumble of regular forces, armoured forces, administrative services, para-military forces and members of their families. Saigon soldiers and police forced part of the population to follow them in their withdrawal, destroyed their houses and even their cooking utensils, and spread the rumour that the "Viet Cong" would massacre those remaining behind. The civilian people thus forced to join the exodus would serve as a shield to the Saigon armed forces for the Saigon command knew that the PLAF would never fire on the population. Seven thousand soldiers were captured by the patriotic forces together with 700 vehicles and 91 artillery pieces.

By 19 March, the whole of Tay Nguyen could be considered liberated. The posts of Kien Duc and An Khe on the periphery were to be seized on 22 and 23 March. In less than three weeks Saigon had lost an area of 48,000 sq. kilometres with 800,000 inhabitants belonging to 30 different nationalities and important natural resources. The Tay Nguyen highlands stretched without an interruption over 800 kilometres, from the 17 parallel to about 100 kilometres north of Saigon, and border the liberated regions of Cambodia, as well as Lower Laos. This is a strategic region of the utmost importance not only for South Viet Nam but also for the whole of Indochina. Ever since 1954 Washington had always hoped to turn it into a strategic base, a political bastion (by sowing discord among the various ethnic groups) and an economic base of great importance.

In Quang Tri province, guerilla actions combined with uprisings by the populations of the villages started on 8 March, and ended in the rapid liquidation of many military posts, the liberation of many villages and the isolation of the provincial capital, which was liberated on 19 March. Six hundred and fifty Saigon troops were put out of action while many functionaries and members of the Thieu army and police surrendered and offered their services to the PRG.

In the same period, the people of Thua Thien province, together with the regular liberation forces, freed the six districts surrounding the ancient capital, Hue, which was now isolated, for the road southward to Da Nang had been cut, especially at the Hai Van pass (Pass of the Clouds). On 19 March, the PLAF attacked the HQ of the First Infantry Division which defended the capital, and the military sector of Mang Ca and the Tay Loc airfield inside the Hue citadel. On the 22 and 23, the posts on the periphery of the city came under attack ; on the 24 the Phu Bai airfield was violently pounded. On the 25, the PLAF penetrated into the city, and the Saigon forces made a precipitate withdrawal to the sandy stretch

along the coast near the Thuan An estuary. The PRG flag fluttered on Hue, the old capital of the Nguyen kings. On the 26 the city was completely liberated: the houses, public services and monuments were almost intact. In their hasty withdrawal the men of Saigon, who met with resistance from the population and part of their own soldiers and functionaries, had been unable to carry out the planned destruction. On the 27 and 28, the Saigon forces regrouped at the seashore were unable to get on board their ships which were fired at by PLAF artillery. Exhausted, many of them surrendered.

The battle of Thua Thien and Hue cost the Saigon administration its First Infantry Division: 15,000 men were taken prisoner, among them about a hundred senior officers, 1,000 vehicles and 300 artillery pieces.

Thua Thien province, with an area of 5,670 square kilometres and 600,000 inhabitants, together with its capital Hue, a political, cultural and historical centre of major importance, and Quang Tri hold a key strategic position. During the first Indochina war, the Hue - Da Nang sector had always been firmly held by the French. The Americans had transformed Hue into a military bastion and an important political and cultural centre because of its proximity to the North. In 1968, the population and the patriotic forces had liberated the city but the Americans had done their utmost to retake it. In 1972 the American command had also spared no effort to defend it.

Meanwhile the liberation forces in other provinces had not remained inactive. On 20 March, An Loc, 70 kilometres northwest of Saigon, was liberated. The whole of Binh Long province, which includes An Loc, came under PRG control, and Tay Ninh province as well as its capital was seriously threatened. On the 24, Tam Ky, capital of Quang Tin province, was liberated. On the 25, the whole of Quang Ngai province and its capital came under PRG control. On the 26, the town of Tam Quan in Binh Dinh province was freed. On the 27, the notorious base of Chu

Lai, one of the largest military bases set up by the Americans in South Viet Nam, fell into the hands of the liberation forces. In the provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, that is all along the coast of Trung Bo, everywhere the rural population, in concert with the patriotic regular forces, rose up and posed a grave risk to the Saigon administration and army. On the 28, Bao Loc was liberated, which left Dalat city completely isolated.

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The fall of Hue in the north, that of Quang Ngai in the south, and the liberation of the surrounding rural areas completely isolated Da Nang, a particularly important city and port for the whole of South Viet Nam from both the military and political angles. It was in Da Nang that the Americans landed their first Marines; it was there that they set up port and military installations which commanded and supplied the northern provinces of South Viet Nam and an important part of the Tay Nguyen Highlands. It was to Da Nang that the retreating Saigon troops withdrew in the hope of either holding out there or being taken by ship to Saigon. They had forced part of the population of the countryside and of Hue city to follow them to Da Nang. In the last days of March, Da Nang was a beleaguered city where the most complete disorder reigned. Saigon units refused to obey orders; soldiers looted shops and private homes; those seeking to get away assailed the airfields. An American aircraft-carrier, the Hancock, was sent to some distance off the coast of Da Nang while Philippine and Taiwanese vessels berthed to take refugees.

On 25 March, liberation forces pounded the military positions of Da Nang. On the 28, they penetrated into

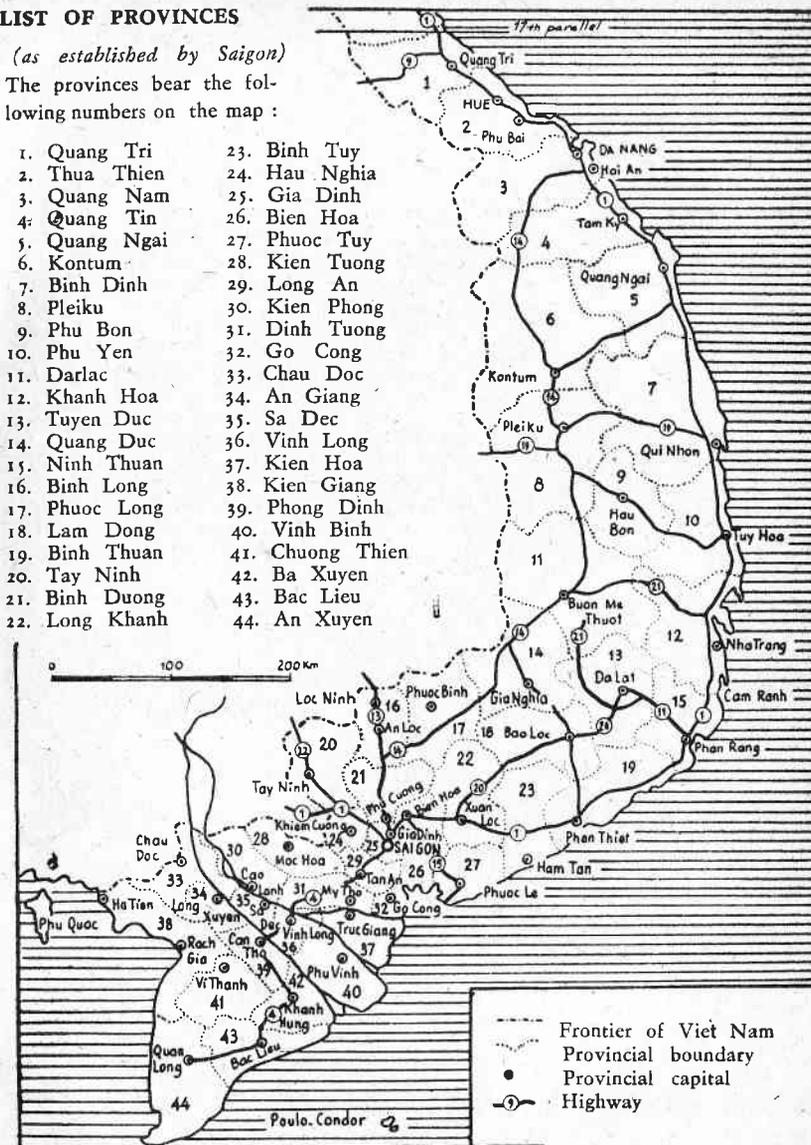
the city and on the 29 occupied the airfield. Saigon units mutinied, crossed over to the PLAF's side. The people rose up, defended their quarter against Saigon soldiers and hunted down Thieu agents. The Saigon command and the puppet administration were unable to cope with the situation which was moving too fast for them. At 15,30 hours on the 29, the People's Revolutionary Committee set up headquarters at the City Hall. By the 30, the city, the port as well as the whole province of Quang Nam were liberated. Within a matter of hours, the city, which had been the scene of the most complete chaos, recovered calm and order. The whole population joined in the enthusiastic effort to reorganize life on a new basis.

LIST OF PROVINCES

(as established by Saigon)

The provinces bear the following numbers on the map :

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Quang Tri | 23. Binh Tuy |
| 2. Thua Thien | 24. Hau Nghia |
| 3. Quang Nam | 25. Gia Dinh |
| 4. Quang Tin | 26. Bien Hoa |
| 5. Quang Ngai | 27. Phuoc Tuy |
| 6. Kontum | 28. Kien Tuong |
| 7. Binh Dinh | 29. Long An |
| 8. Pleiku | 30. Kien Phong |
| 9. Phu Bon | 31. Dinh Tuong |
| 10. Phu Yen | 32. Go Cong |
| 11. Darlac | 33. Chau Doc |
| 12. Khanh Hoa | 34. An Giang |
| 13. Tuyen Duc | 35. Sa Dec |
| 14. Quang Duc | 36. Vinh Long |
| 15. Ninh Thuan | 37. Kien Hoa |
| 16. Binh Long | 38. Kien Giang |
| 17. Phuoc Long | 39. Phong Dinh |
| 18. Lam Dong | 40. Vinh Binh |
| 19. Binh Thuan | 41. Chuong Thien |
| 20. Tay Ninh | 42. Ba Xuyen |
| 21. Binh Duong | 43. Bac Lieu |
| 22. Long Khanh | 44. An Xuyen |



APPENDIX

**A CIRCULAR LETTER SENT OUT
BY NGHE TINH PATRIOTS**

24th year of the reign of Tu Duc (1817)

The following is a text of the Scholars' Movement.

Note :

- The regional character of the appeal (there was no national leadership) ;
- National pride,, the evocation of an age-old fatherland, the resolve to fight ;
- Attacks on Catholics, the scholars being unable to define a policy of broad national union ;
- The programme of restoration of an enlightened monarchy.

Our scholars, our people, standing under the Southern heavens, look towards the North Star.¹

For many decades, like a beneficent rain, the favours of Nghieu have been bestowed on us ;²

Under four reigns, we have not been subjected to the fire and water of Kiet.³

Thanks to education by Emperor Thanh To, we have rejected the evil doctrine of the West ;⁴

In the land of Viet Nam, civilization is more resplendent than ever and the State displays its legitimate continuity.

The Imperial Gate of the Ha and the Court of the Thuong, the founders of the Empire in the eyes of all, still fill everyone with gratitude ;

Those of Phan Duong as well as of Ha Phon, in their heart of hearts, continue to harbour boundless loyalty.

The people remain attached to the Nguyen dynasty and ignore the men of the West ;

The latter, with their barbarian customs, have shown their dog-and-pig-like faces.

Once already they had dared to display their ratlike visages at our gates, bent on carrying out their perfidious intentions ; ⁵

Now, they have bared their fangs and are exhibiting their arrogance right in our palaces.

From within and without, they keep nibbling at our country, like silkworms at mulberry leaves ;

Churches and conversions ; there lies the danger, the ground is giving way under our feet.

Alas, that is the state of affairs, do you know it ?

Those who benefited from the Emperor's favours now deceive him ;

Those responsible for the destiny of the Fatherland now plan a sell-out.

With the face of a Tu Dao and the heart of a Tan Coi⁶, they form a chain of traitors and shrink from no deceptions to carry through their treason.

They hide the truth to the Emperor, whose lucidity cannot see through the ruses of a Hoan Dau⁷, and, renewing Truong Luong's pretence, simulate loyal ardour.

The true doctrine is in the books of our Saints and Sages : "To attack evil doctrines" - this teaching remains inscribed in our universe ; "To forbid all heresies" - this strict rule has existed since time immemorial.

To know and to act are but one thing : why should one divorce one's services to the country from one's own destiny ?

Like Thuong Son and Thi Trung, we must live in worthy fashion and shed our blood for the Empire ;

The flesh of Van Dat and the bones of Cao Dong⁸, after their deaths, can proudly face our mountains and rivers.

Like heroes, we shall advance with burning hearts ;

We seek no honours, but only to do our duty.

We shall not drift with the stream, we shall not let the wind blow without trying to stop it ; once Western ships are driven away, the Perfume River shall again be at peace⁹.

Let rich people donate their wealth, let robust people lend the strength of their arms, and we shall exterminate the Western barbarians ; we shall be soldiers when military operations call for it ; between two operations, we shall put aside our coats of mail and again be ordinary people ; we shall not blame Heaven for our trials ; everywhere our people and our scholars are at one : all of us are enduring hardships for the sake of our native land and we shall reinstate our Fatherland in its former boundaries.

In this Southern land, the right doctrine shall be restored and its limpid stream shall sparkle under the autumn moon ;

The imperial power of the Nguyen shall stand as firm as Mount Thai.

This call to arms is addressed to all men of good will.

A poem follows :

*Ever since that day when in their citadels,
Our leaders, deceived by the enemy, implored peace,
War has been discussed throughout the land :
Here are three dignitaries who try to sell out the
country !*

*And there's that general, who treats with the enemy !
For centuries, Vo Muc swallowed his anger,
And for millenniums, Di Ngo quivered with rage. ¹⁰
Scholars and commoners, unite your efforts,
Let fidelity and loyalty be engraved in your hearts.*

This circular letter is addressed to all fellow doctors, licentiates, bachelors and scholars of Hanoi, Bac Ninh, and Son Tay provinces.

NOTES

1. The Southern heavens : Viet Nam's location was stated in relation to China.
The North Star : The Emperor.
2. Nghieu : a mythical Chinese emperor, renowned for his virtues.
3. Kiet : a notoriously cruel Chinese emperor.
4. Catholicism.
5. An allusion to the French attacks on Tourane, then on Hanoi.
6. Tan Coi : a defeatist official in Chinese history.
7. Hoan Dau, Truong Luong : personages of Chinese history.
8. Names of patriots.
9. River crossing Hue, the capital city.
10. Two generals of ancient Chinese history who opposed treason by the Court.

Note the abundant allusions to Chinese history, as usually happens in the scholars' writings. With the exception of Van Dat and Cao Dong, two Vietnamese patriots killed in the struggle against the French conquerors, all other proper names were taken from Chinese history.

POLITICAL THESES OF THE INDOCHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (OCTOBER 1930)

Excerpts

This important historic document of the Indochinese Communist Party was drafted by Tran Phu and approved at the First Meeting of the Party's Central Committee (October 1930). The Theses applied the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of our country. It analysed the characteristics and laid down the tasks of the revolution, and defined its main motive forces. It charted the Party's general line in the national democratic revolution.

We publish below the first six points ;

I

THE WORLD SITUATION AND THE INDOCHINESE REVOLUTION

1. Since the end of the imperialist war (1914-1918), the world situation may be viewed as having gone through three periods :

a) During the first period (1918-1923), as a result of the war, the capitalist economy suffered depression and crisis, and in many places in Europe the proletariat rose up and

fought for power. Eventually, on the one hand, the Russian proletariat defeated the imperialists who attacked the country from the outside and the counter-revolutionaries who carried out sabotage inside, and set up a firm dictatorship of the proletariat ; on the other hand, however, the West European proletariat met with failure (for instance the German proletariat in 1923).

b) During the second period (1923-1928), availing themselves of the recent setbacks suffered by the European proletariat, the various imperialisms acted on the offensive, exploited the proletariat and the colonial peoples to the utmost, and brought temporary stability to the imperialist economy. On account of its previous failure, the proletariat in the imperialist countries acted only on the defensive. The revolution broke out in the colonial countries. Economic consolidation in the Soviet Union helped Communist influence spread all over the world.

c) The third period, the present one, presents the following characteristics : Capitalism has not been able to maintain its temporary stability and has slid back into crisis ; the various imperialisms again have to engage in a sharp competition for markets, making a new imperialist war inevitable.

The Soviet economy has surpassed the pre-imperialist war level ; successful socialist construction has exasperated the various imperialisms, which seek to overthrow the Soviet Union, the citadel of world revolution.

In the imperialist countries, the proletariat has put up a fierce struggle (large-scale strikes in Germany, France, Poland, etc.) ; the colonies (especially China and India) are in a revolutionary effervescence. This is due to increasingly harsh exploitation of the masses by capitalism, which is undergoing a crisis ; in the world the number of unemployed totals scores of millions and the workers and peasants suffer untold misery. In this third period, proletarian revolution and colonial revolution have reached a very high level ; in some places the revolutionaries are ready to seize power.

At present, Indochina has contributed its revolutionary forces to the seething struggle going on in the world, thus broadening the worker-peasant front against imperialism. On the other hand, the intense revolutionary movement in the world (especially in China and India) exerts a strong influence on the struggle in Indochina and gives it an even more vigorous impetus. And so the world revolution and the Indochinese revolution are closely connected.

II

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA

2. Indochina (Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos) is a colony of French imperialism. So, its economy is dependent upon that of French imperialism. The following are the two outstanding features of the development of Indochina :

a) Indochina must develop independently, but it cannot do so because of its colonial status.

b) Class contradiction has grown ever fiercer between the workers, peasants and other toiling people on the one hand, and the feudal landowners, capitalists and imperialists on the other.

3. Economic contradictions :

a) Though the bulk of agricultural products is exported by the imperialists, the economy has remained feudal in character. Most plantations (rubber, cotton, coffee, etc.) belong to French capitalists. The greater part of the land is owned by native landlords, who exploit it in the feudal way, i.e. rent it in small plots to poor tenants for a very high rent. Rice yields are, besides, lower in Indochina than in other countries (per hectare paddy output in Malaya : 2,150 kilograms ; in Siam, 1,870 kilograms ; in

Europe, 4,570 kilograms ; in Indochina, only 1,210 kilograms). More rice is exported every year, but this is not due to the development of rice-growing, only to increased plundering of the people's rice by the capitalists.

b) The oppressive regime imposed by French imperialism hampers the development of productive forces in Indochina. The imperialists have not built any heavy industries (like iron works, machine building, etc.) for this would harm the monopoly of French industry. They only develop those industries which serve their administration and trade, for instance railway lines, small shipyards, etc.

The aim of French imperialism is to make Indochina an economic dependency of France, and so it promotes only those industries which it finds more profitable to develop in Indochina than in France itself. Raw materials exploitation is meant not to help Indochina's economy develop independently, but to prevent French industry's dependence on other imperialisms.

c) As exportation is in the hands of French capitalists, internal trade and production is dependent upon the export requirements of the French imperialists. The more exports increase, the more the country is drained of its natural resources by imperialism. Another special feature : French banks (Banque de l'Indochine, Crédit foncier, etc.) collect capital from the native people to aid French exporters.

In short : Indochina's economy remains an agricultural one, with predominantly feudal features. All this interferes with its independent development.

4. Class contradictions :

French imperialism, in alliance with native landlords, traders and usurers, ruthlessly exploits the peasants. It rakes up the country's farm produce for export, imports French goods for sale within the country, imposes high taxation, drives the peasantry to misery and craftsmen to unemployment.

Land is more and more concentrated in the hands of the imperialists and landlords ; the existence of numerous intermediaries causes the rent that has to be paid by poor tenants to be all the higher. The latter have to pay such high interest rates to usurers that they are often compelled to give them their lands or even their children in payment of their debts.

The imperialists pay no attention to keeping the dykes in good repair for protection against floods. Irrigation facilities are in the hands of the capitalists, who exact a high price for their use : no money, no water. And so more and more crop failures occur because of flood and drought. Not only are the peasants prevented from developing their economy, but they also grow increasingly dependent upon capitalists and fare worse and worse : unemployment and starvation afflict more and more people.

The old economy is falling to pieces very fast, yet the new industry is developing at a very slow rate ; factories, workshops, etc., cannot hire all the poor and unemployed and many starve in the countryside where the situation is truly tragic.

In the factories, plantations and mines, the capitalists cruelly exploit and oppress the workers. Their wages, which are at starvation level, are cut by all kinds of fines. They work eleven, twelve hours a day on an average. Abuse and blows are rained on them. When they fall sick, far from getting any medical attention, they are dismissed. There is no social insurance. In plantations and mines, the owners pen their workers up in camps and forbid them to wander out. They use a system of contracts to recruit labourers and move them to places where they can impose their own law on the workers and even inflict penalties on them. Due to such harsh working conditions, large numbers of workers in Indochina suffer from serious diseases (tuberculosis, trachoma, malaria, etc.) and more of them die at a very young age.

The Indochinese proletariat is not yet numerous, but the number of workers, especially plantation workers, is on

the increase. They fight ever more vigorously. The peasants have also awakened and fiercely opposed the imperialists and feudalists. Strikes in 1928, 1929 and the violent outbursts of struggle by workers and peasants this year (1930) clearly prove that class struggle in Indochina is gaining momentum. The most outstanding and most important feature in the revolutionary movement in Indochina is that the struggle of the worker-peasant masses has taken on a very clearly independent character and is no longer influenced by nationalism as it used to be.

III

CHARACTERISTICS AND TASK OF THE INDOCHINESE REVOLUTION

5. The above-mentioned contradictions account for the fact that the revolutionary movement in Indochina is growing day by day. In its initial period, the Indochinese revolution will be a bourgeois democratic revolution, for it cannot yet directly tackle the organizational problems of socialism: the country is still very weak economically, many feudal vestiges still linger on, the relation of class forces is not yet tipped in favour of the proletariat; besides, imperialism still holds oppressive sway. For these reasons, in the present period, the revolution will only have an agrarian and anti-imperialist character.

The bourgeois democratic revolution is a preparatory period leading to socialist revolution. Once it has won victory, and a worker-peasant government has been established, industry within the country will develop, proletarian organizations will be reinforced, the leadership of the proletariat will be consolidated, and the relation of class forces will be altered to the advantage of the proletariat. Then the struggle will develop both in depth and in breadth and the bourgeois democratic revolution will

advance towards the proletarian revolution. The present period is one of proletarian revolution in the world and socialist building in the Soviet Union; thanks to help from the proletariat exercising dictatorship in various countries, Indochina will bypass the capitalist stage and advance direct to socialism.

In the bourgeois democratic revolution, the proletariat and the peasantry are the two main motive forces, but only if leadership is in the hands of the proletariat can the revolution triumph.

6. The essential aim of the bourgeois democratic revolution is on the one hand to do away with the feudal vestiges and the mode of pre-capitalist exploitation and to carry out a thorough agrarian revolution; on the other hand, to overthrow French imperialism and achieve complete independence for Indochina. The two faces of the struggle are closely connected, for only by toppling imperialism can we eliminate the landlord class and carry out a successful agrarian revolution; conversely, only by abolishing the feudal regime can we knock down imperialism.

In order to reach these essential goals, we must set up worker-peasant Soviet power. Worker-peasant Soviet power alone is the very powerful instrument which will make it possible to overthrow imperialism, feudalism and landlordism, give land to the tillers, and legal protection to the interests of the proletariat.

The essential tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution are the following:

1 - To overthrow French imperialism, feudalism, and landlordism.

2 - To set up a worker-peasant government.

3 - To confiscate all lands belonging to foreign and native landlords and to religious organizations, and hand them over to middle and poor peasants, the right of ownership of the land being in the hands of the worker-peasant government.

4 - To nationalize all big undertakings of the foreign capitalists.

5 - To abolish all current taxes and corvées and institute a progressive tax.

6 - To decree an 8-hour workday and improve the living standards of the workers and toiling people.

7 - Indochina to be completely independent ; national self-determination to be recognized.

8 - To organize a worker-peasant army.

9 - Equality between man and woman.

10 - Support to the Soviet Union, alliance with the world proletariat and with the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semi-colonies.

APPEAL FOR NATION-WIDE RESISTANCE

(December 20, 1946)

Compatriots all over the country,

As we desire peace we have made concessions. But the more concessions we make, the more the French colonialists press on, for they are bent on reconquering our country.

No ! We would rather sacrifice all than lose our country. Never shall we be enslaved !

Compatriots ! Stand up !

Men and women, old and young, regardless of religious creed, political affiliation and nationality, all Vietnamese must stand up to fight the French colonialists and save the Fatherland. Those who have rifles will use their rifles ; those who have swords will use their swords ; those who have no swords will use spades, hoes or sticks. Everyone must endeavour to oppose the colonialists and save his country !

Members of the army, the self-defence corps and the militia,

The hour for national salvation has struck ! We must shed even our last drop of blood to safeguard our country.

Even if we must endure the greatest hardships in our war of resistance, with our determination to face all sacrifices, we are bound to win.

Long live independent and unified Viet Nam !

Long live the victorious Resistance !

**PROGRAM OF THE SOUTH VIET NAM
NATIONAL FRONT FOR LIBERATION**

(December 1960)

(Excerpts)

Since the French colonialists invaded our country, our people have unremittingly struggled for national independence and freedom. In 1945, our compatriots throughout the country rose up, overthrew the Japanese and French and seized power, and afterwards heroically carried out a resistance war for nine years, defeated the French aggressors and the US interventionists, and brought our people's valiant resistance war to a glorious victory.

At the Geneva Conference the French imperialists had, in July 1954, to undertake to withdraw their troops from Viet Nam. The participating countries to the Conference solemnly declared their recognition of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Viet Nam.

Since then we should have been able to enjoy peace, and joint the people throughout the country in building an independent, democratic, unified, prosperous and strong Viet Nam.

However, the American imperialists, who had in the past helped the French colonialists to massacre our people, have now plotted to partition our country permanently, enslave its southern part through a disguised colonial regime and turn it into a military base in preparation for

aggressive war in Southeast Asia. They have brought the Ngo Dinh Diem clique - their stooges - to power, under the signboard of a fake independent state, and use their "aid" policy and advisers' machine to control all the military, economic, political and cultural branches in South Viet Nam.

The aggressors and traitors have set up the most dictatorial and cruel rule in Viet Nam's history. They repress and persecute all democratic and patriotic movements, abolish all human liberties. They monopolize all branches of economy, strangle industry, agriculture and trade, ruthlessly exploit all popular strata. They use every device of mind poisoning, obscurantism and depravation in an attempt to quell the patriotism of our people. They feverishly increase their military forces, build military bases, use the army as an instrument for repressing the people and for war preparations in accordance with the US imperialists' policy.

For more than six years, countless crimes have been perpetrated by the US-Diem dictatorial and cruel rule: terrorizing gun shots have never ceased to resound throughout South Viet Nam; tens of thousands of patriots have been shot, beheaded, disembowelled with liver plucked out; hundreds of thousands of people have been tortured and thrown into jail where they died of a slow death; countless people have been victims of arson, house removal and usurpation of land, and drafted for forced labour or pressganged into the army; innumerable families are in distress or torn away as a result of the policy of concentrating people in "prosperity zones" and "resettlement centres", of exacting rents and taxes, terror, arrest, plunder, ransom, widespread unemployment and poverty, which are seriously threatening the life of all popular strata.

There must be *peace!* There must be *independence!*
There must be *democracy!* There must be *enough food and clothing!* There must be *peaceful reunification of the fatherland!*

That is our most earnest and pressing aspiration. It has become an iron will, and a prodigious strength urging our people to unite and resolutely rise up so as to overthrow the cruel rule of the US imperialists and their stooges, and to save our homes and our country.

In view of the supreme interests of the fatherland, with the firmness to struggle to the end for the people's legitimate aspirations and in accordance with the progressive trend in the world, the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation comes into being.

The South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation undertakes to unite people from all walks of life, social classes, nationalities, political parties, organizations, religious communities, and patriotic personalities in South Viet Nam, without distinction of political tendencies, in order to struggle for the overthrow of the rule of the US imperialists and their henchmen and for the realization of *independence, democracy, improvement of the living conditions, peace and neutrality* in South Viet Nam pending *peaceful reunification of the fatherland*.

**STATEMENT
OF THE SOUTH VIET NAM NFL CENTRAL
COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE INTENSIFI-
CATION AND EXPANSION OF THE US
IMPERIALISTS' AGGRESSIVE WAR IN SOUTH
VIET NAM**

(March 22, 1965)

(Excerpts)

For more than ten years now, the US imperialists have continuously interfered in South Viet Nam and committed aggression against it. Of late, they brought into South Viet Nam many more US combat units, composed of missile and marine units and B.57 strategic bombers, as well as mercenary troops from South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, Malaya, etc. They even ordered their air force and that of their henchmen to conduct repeated bombings against North Viet Nam and Laos. At present, they are not only stubbornly prosecuting their criminal aggressive war in South Viet Nam but also attempting to fan the flames of war throughout Indochina and Southeast Asia.

Clearly, the puppet administration in South Viet Nam, close upon the Americans' heels, is daily committing more monstrous crimes against the fatherland. These impudent traitors are bending their knees before the aggressors and "bringing in snakes to kill chickens of the home coop",

inviting troops of the United State and many of its satellites into South Viet Nam to massacre their own compatriots, occupy and trample upon our sacred territory and most harshly oppress and exploit our people.

The Vietnamese people, the peoples of Indochina and Southeast Asia, and peace-and justice-loving people all over the world are highly indignant at, and strongly protesting against, the criminal acts of the US imperialists.

Facing this situation of utmost gravity, the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation deems it necessary to reaffirm once again its firm and unswerving stand to carry out the war of resistance against the US imperialists for national salvation.

The Heroic People of South Viet Nam are Resolved to Drive Out the US imperialists in order to Liberate themselves and Achieve an Independent, Democratic, Peaceful and Neutral South Viet Nam, Pending National Reunification

Though deeply attached to peace, the South Vietnamese people are determined not to sit back with folded arms and let the US aggressors and their henchmen trample upon their homeland. Rather to die than live in slavery, the fourteen million valiant South Vietnamese have stood up like one man in an undaunted struggle to defeat the US aggressors and the native traitors so as to liberate their territory and achieve independence, democracy, peace and neutrality in South Viet Nam, in contribution to the maintenance of peace in Indochina and Southeast Asia. Their war of liberation fully conforms to the most elementary and basic principles of international law concerning the people's rights to self-determination and their right to wage a patriotic war against foreign aggression. In this sacred war of liberation they have used all kinds of weapons to fight against their enemy. The chief and biggest

arms purveyor of their forces is none other than the US imperialists themselves, who have sustained heavy and repeated setbacks over the past years.

With bare hands at the beginning, the South Vietnamese people have achieved a great work and recorded glorious feats of arms. They are firmly convinced that with their own strength and the wholehearted support of the people throughout the world, they will certainly win complete victory. The US imperialists and their lackeys find themselves in a desperate blind alley. They are being knocked down in the powerful storm of the South Vietnamese people's revolution and are madly writhing before reconciling themselves to their defeat. To retrieve this serious situation, the US imperialists are plunging headlong into extremely dangerous military adventures.

The fact that they have dispatched to South Viet Nam more weapons and combat troops of the US Navy, Army and Air Force, more mercenary troops from South Korea and other US satellites, and undertaken air strikes against the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and the Kingdom of Laos, etc., is no indication of their strength; these are but frenzied acts of a truculent enemy who has lost his senses and thus can intimidate nobody.

The intensification and expansion by the US imperialists of their aggressive war is in itself one of their pitiful failures, and proves that the colonialist and aggressive policy carried out in South Viet Nam over the past eleven years and their so-called "special war" have gone bankrupt. Boggled down so seriously in their "special war" they will have their hands fastened still more tightly in a "limited war". And if they are rash enough to extend the war to North Viet Nam, to the whole of Indochina or farther, they will surely meet with still more shameful and quicker defeat.

The National Front for Liberation once again reasserts that Washington's scheme to send to South Viet Nam more combat units of the naval, ground and air forces of the United States and its satellites to conduct air strikes against

North Viet Nam and the Kingdom of Laos in an attempt to gain a "position of strength" and compel the Front and the South Vietnamese people to sell out their fatherland in some kind of negotiations with the USA is only a day-dream of crazy politicians and military adventurists. The South Vietnamese people warn the US imperialists and their agents : "At present, the only way for you is to get out of South Viet Nam. If you stubbornly continue plunging headlong into the war you will sustain the biggest and most shameful failures". On behalf of its fourteen million valiant compatriots the South Viet Nam NFL solemnly declares : "The South Vietnamese people and their armed forces are resolved never to loose hold of their arms so long as they have not attained their goals : independence, democracy, peace and neutrality. They are determined to continue dealing thunder blows at the US aggressors and their lackeys, and they will surely win final victory. All negotiations with the US imperialists at this moment are entirely useless if the latter refuse to withdraw from South Viet Nam all their troops, war means and material and those of their satellites, if they do not abolish all their military bases in South Viet Nam, if the traitors still surrender the South Vietnamese people's sacred right to independence and democracy to the US imperialists, and if the South Viet Nam NFL - the only genuine representative of the fourteen million South Vietnamese people - does not have its decisive say.

The Valiant People and Liberation Armed Forces of South Viet Nam are Resolved to Fulfil their Sacred Duty to Drive Out the US Imperialists so as to Liberate South Viet Nam and Defend North Viet Nam

Viet Nam is one country, the Vietnamese people are one nation. North and South Viet Nam are of the same family. This sentiment is loftier than mountains and

deeper than the sea. This truth is shining like the rising sun, nothing can tarnish it. In this boiling situation and in this life-and-death struggle against the US imperialists and their lackeys, our heart cannot but suffer when our hands are cut. That the people in North Viet Nam are resolved to accomplish their duty toward their kith and kin in the South fully conforms to sentiment and reason.

On behalf of the fourteen million South-Vietnamese people, the NFL conveys to their seventeen million blood-sealed compatriots in the North their unshakable confidence and unswerving commitment : "The South Vietnamese people and their heroic Liberation Armed Forces are determined to fulfil their sacred duty to drive out the US imperialists, liberate the South, defend the North and proceed toward the reunification of their fatherland."

Recently, to save their critical situation and their inevitable collapse in South Viet Nam, the US imperialists and their flunkys recklessly sent aircraft and warships to bomb, strafe and shell North Viet Nam, but they have received due punishment. Over 50 American jet planes have been shot down. The South Vietnamese Armed Forces and people greatly rejoice at, and warmly hail, those brilliant military exploits of the North Vietnamese army and people.

The heart suffers when the hands are cut ! To defend the beloved North, the armed forces and people of the South have given vent to their flames of anger at the US aggressors and their agents. If the US imperialists strike at the North of our fatherland they will resolutely deal them blows twice or three times harder. In February 1965, when the aggressors and traitors attacked the North, in the South the Liberation Armed Forces launched stormy attacks on many of their important military bases and main forces, putting out of action 20,706 troops (among them nearly 600 US aggressors killed, wounded or captured), seizing 4,144 guns of all calibers and shooting down, damaging or destroying 111 aircraft of various types.

The South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation warns the US imperialists and the Vietnamese traitors: "Having been incapable of vanquishing the fourteen million South Vietnamese, don't nurture the hope of defeating the thirty million people of Viet Nam. Your military adventure and your efforts to expand the war will in no way help you out of the quagmire; instead, they cannot but lead you quickly to suicide."

Also to extricate themselves from the impasse in South Viet Nam, the US imperialists and their lackeys have repeatedly undertaken air strikes against the liberated areas in Laos, repeatedly violated the border and territory of Cambodia, sprayed toxic chemicals, and dropped bombs to massacre the Cambodian people. But they have received well-deserved counter-blows from the armed forces and peoples of Laos and Cambodia. The South Vietnamese people warmly hail the indomitable fighting spirit of the people of the two fraternal neighbouring countries. They are resolved to stand firmly by their side in the struggle against the common enemy - US imperialism and its flunkies. The people and the Liberation Armed Forces of South Viet Nam are determined to defeat the US aggressors and their agents in South Viet Nam - the starting point from which the latter undertake their acts of war and piracy against the Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia.

The South Vietnamese people once again greet the brilliant successes of the recent Indochinese People's Conference for Solidarity, against the American aggressors.

The National Front for Liberation and the people of South Viet Nam warn the US imperialists and their lackeys that should they dare expand their predatory war to the whole of Viet Nam and fan the flames of war to the whole of Indochina, the invincible strength of the

thirty million people of Viet Nam and the strength, capable of displacing mountains and filling up seas, of hundreds of millions of people in Indochina and Asia will overrun and bury them.

The Entire People with Arms in Hand Continue to March Forward Heroically, Resolved to Fight and Defeat the US Aggressors and the Vietnamese Traitors

The armed struggle waged by the South Vietnamese people against the US aggressors and their henchmen has won very great victories.

In appearance, the US imperialists and their lackeys are formidable, but in reality they have been greatly weakened; confusion prevails in their ranks, and their isolation has reached unprecedented dimensions. The South Vietnamese people, bearing in mind their vow "rather to die than live in slavery", will certainly smash the cruel and savage enemy.

The South Viet Nam NFL and people are not only strong with the justice of their cause; their material and organizational strength are rapidly increasing. They have been and are the glorious victors. The more they fight, the more ardent they become and the more victories they win; and the more they win, the stronger they grow and the greater their victories. Worthy heirs to the traditions of the Dien Bien Phu fighters and of the Vietnamese people who possess a 4,000-year history of heroic struggle against foreign invasion, we have developed these traditions to a high degree. Moreover, the NFL and the people of South Viet Nam are conducting their valiant fight in extremely favourable conditions afforded by the present time when the oppressed nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America have risen up like tidal waves. The socialist countries and the forces of democracy and peace around the world are an important factor stimulating the

advance of mankind, overwhelming and smashing imperialism and colonialism under whatever disguise. If the US imperialists and their henchmen are rash enough to fan the flames of war all over Indochina, the people of this area and Southeast Asia as a whole will resolutely stand up like one man and drive them out into the ocean.

The South Vietnamese people and their sole authentic representative – the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation – will surely win final victory.

The Central Committee of the National Front for Liberation calls on the fourteen million heroic South Vietnamese and the people's armed forces who are determined to fight and win on all battlefronts, to hold their guns more firmly than ever, to enhance their indomitable fighting spirit, and to resolutely fulfil the following tasks :

- Let the entire people unite in a monolithic bloc.
- Let the people arm themselves and stand up like one man to drive out the American aggressors and the Vietnamese traitors.

- Let the Liberation troops and all the people's armed forces courageously march forward, fight continuously and vigorously, and strike accurately at the US aggressors and their lackeys, giving them no respite, and wiping out as many enemy forces as possible.

- Let the people in rural areas continue to rise up and destroy the remaining "strategic hamlets", shatter all of the enemy's grip, widen the liberated areas to link up the liberated hamlets, villages and districts ; let them transform the liberated areas into solid strongholds, fight the enemy whenever they come and register success each time, firmly resolved to hold to and defend their native places, their fields and their gardens.

- Let the people of Saigon, Hue, Da Nang and the other cities of South Viet Nam urgently develop their revolutionary organizations ; let them keep on taking to the streets and stepping up their struggle in all fields, energetically demand that the US imperialists and their lackeys stop their aggressive war in South Viet Nam and

unmask the traitors who are lending a hand to the aggressors, selling out the interests of our fatherland and people.

- Let all our compatriots, cadres and fighters march courageously forward under the liberation banner, determined to drive out the US aggressors and their valets to save our country and our homes.

Even if we are to carry out the struggle for ten, twenty years or longer, and to suffer great difficulties and hardships, we are prepared to fight up until not a single American aggressor is seen on our soil.

We Vietnamese have a history of several thousand years. That is the history of a heroic people. In the past ten years of their resistance to the US imperialist aggressors and their henchmen, the people and liberation Armed Forces of South Viet Nam have written in golden letters a new page in their glorious history. We have been winning, the US imperialists and their agents have been losing. This proves the invincibility of our strength and their weakening.

Having got the better of the US aggressors in the past ten years, we now have still more favourable conditions to defeat them. They, who have lost during this time, will further weaken and incur still more shameful defeats, especially if they venture to extend the war to the North. We are absolutely confident that victory will be ours. We are determined to fight, strike vigorously and accurately at the US aggressors and their lackeys. We are determined to liberate the South, defend the North and reunify our fatherland.

APPEAL TO COMPATRIOTS AND FIGHTERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

(July 17, 1966)

The barbarous US imperialists have unleashed a war of aggression in an attempt to conquer our country, but they are sustaining heavy defeats.

They have rushed an expeditionary force of nearly 300,000 men into the South of our country. They have fostered a puppet administration and puppet troops as instruments of their aggressive policy. They have resorted to extremely savage means of warfare – toxic chemicals, napalm bombs, etc. – and applied a “burn all, kill all and destroy all” policy. By committing such crimes, they hope to subdue our Southern compatriots.

But under the resolute and skilful leadership of the National Front for Liberation, the South Vietnamese armed forces and people, closely united and fighting heroically, have scored splendid victories, and are determined to fight on until complete victory in order to liberate the South, defend the North, and proceed towards national reunification.

The US aggressors have cynically launched air attacks on the North of our country in the hope of getting out of their disastrous situation in the South and compelling us to “negotiate” on their terms.

However, North Viet Nam has not flinched in the least. Our army and people have eagerly emulated one another

in production and fighting. So far, we have downed over 1,200 enemy aircraft. We are determined to frustrate the enemy's war of destruction and at the same time extend all-out support to our kinsfolk in the South.

Of late, the frenzied US aggressors have taken a very serious step in their escalation by starting air strikes on the suburbs of Hanoi and Haiphong. That is a desperate act, the death throes of a mortally wounded wild beast.

Johnson and his clique should realize this: they may bring in half a million, a million or even more troops to step up their war of aggression in South Viet Nam. They may use thousands of aircraft for intensified attacks against North Viet Nam. But never will they be able to break the iron will of the heroic Vietnamese people, their determination to fight against American aggression, for national salvation. The more truculent they grow, the more serious their crimes. The war may last five, ten, twenty or more years; Hanoi, Haiphong and other cities and enterprises may be destroyed; but the Vietnamese people will not be intimidated! *Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.* Once victory is won, our people will rebuild their country and make it even more prosperous and beautiful.

It is common knowledge that each time they are about to step up their criminal war, the US aggressors will resort to their “peace talks” humbug in an attempt to fool world opinion and lay the blame on Viet Nam for unwillingness to engage in “peace negotiations”.

President Johnson, answer these questions publicly, before the American people and the peoples of the world. Who has sabotaged the Geneva Agreements which guarantee the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Viet Nam? Have Vietnamese troops invaded the United States and massacred Americans? Or isn't it the US government which on the contrary, has sent US troops to invade Viet Nam and massacre the Vietnamese people?

Let the United States end its war of aggression in Viet Nam, withdraw all American and satellite troops from this country and peace will be restored immediately. The stand taken by Viet Nam is clear : it is the four points¹ of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and the five points² of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation. There is no other alternative.

The Vietnamese people cherish peace, genuine peace, peace in independence and freedom, not sham peace, not "American peace".

To safeguard the independence of our fatherland, to fulfil our duties to all peoples struggling against US imperialism, our people and army, united as one man and fearless of sacrifices and hardships, will resolutely fight on until they gain complete victory. In the past we defeated the Japanese fascists and the French colonialists in much more difficult circumstances. Now that conditions at home and abroad are more favourable, our people's struggle

(1) Four-point position of the DRVN government :

1. Recognition of the fundamental national rights of the Vietnamese people : peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. According to the Geneva Agreements, the US government must withdraw from South Viet Nam all US troops, military personnel and weapons of all kinds, dismantle all US military bases there, cancel its "military alliance" with Saigon. It must end its policy of intervention and aggression in South Viet Nam. According to the Geneva Agreements, the US government must end its war acts against the North, definitively end all encroachments on the territory and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

2. Pending the peaceful reunification of Viet Nam, while Viet Nam is still temporarily divided into two zones, the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Viet Nam must be strictly respected : the two zones must refrain from joining any military alliance with foreign countries and there must be no foreign military bases, troops, and military personnel on their respective territories.

3. The affairs of South Viet Nam are to be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the programme of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation, without any foreign interference.

4. The peaceful reunification of Viet Nam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.

against US aggression, for national salvation, will all the more certainly end in complete victory.

Dear compatriots and fighters,

Our cause is just ; our people are united from North to South ; we have a tradition of undaunted struggle and the great sympathy and support of the fraternal socialist countries and progressive people all over the world. We shall win !

At this new juncture, we are one in our determination to go through all hardships and sacrifices to accomplish the glorious historic task of our people : to defeat the US aggressors.

On behalf of the Vietnamese people, I take this opportunity to express heartfelt thanks to the peoples of the socialist countries and progressive people in the world, including the American people, for their wholehearted support and assistance. In face of the US imperialists' new criminal scheme I am firmly confident that the peoples

(2) Five-point position of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation.

1. The US imperialists are the saboteurs of the Geneva Agreements, the most brazen warmongers and aggressors, and the sworn enemy of the Vietnamese people.

2. The heroic South Vietnamese people are resolved to drive out the US imperialists in order to liberate South Viet Nam, build an independent, democratic, peaceful and neutral South Viet Nam and ultimately achieve national reunification.

3. The valiant South Vietnamese people and the South Viet Nam Liberation Army are resolved to fulfil their sacred duty, which is to drive out the US imperialists so as to liberate the South and defend the North.

4. The South Vietnamese people express their profound gratitude to the peace- and justice-loving people all over the world for their wholehearted support and declare their readiness to receive all assistance, including weapons and all other war materials, from their friends in the five continents.

5. Let our entire people unite, take up arms, continue to march forward heroically, and be resolved to fight and defeat the US aggressors and Vietnamese traitors.

and governments of the fraternal socialist countries and of peace- and justice-loving countries in the world will support and help the Vietnamese people still more vigorously until they win complete victory in their struggle against US aggression, for national salvation.

The Vietnamese people will surely win !

The US aggressors will surely be defeated !

Long live a peaceful, re-unified, independent, democratic, and prosperous Viet Nam !

Compatriots and fighters throughout the country, march valiantly forward !

TESTAMENT OF PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH

Even though our people's struggle against US aggression, for national salvation, may have to go through more hardships and sacrifices, we are bound to win total victory.

This is a certainty.

I intend, when that comes, to tour both South and North to congratulate our heroic fellow-countrymen, cadres and combatants, and visit old people and our beloved youth and children.

Then, on behalf of our people, I will go to the fraternal countries of the socialist camp and friendly countries in the whole world and thank them for their wholehearted support and assistance to our people's patriotic struggle against US aggression.

*

Tu Fu, the famous poet of the Tang period in China, wrote : "In all times, few are those who reach the age of seventy."

This year, being seventy-nine, I can already count myself among those "few" ; still, my mind has remained perfectly lucid, though my health has somewhat declined in comparison with the last few years. When one has seen more than seventy Springs, health deteriorates with one's growing age. This is no wonder.

But who can say how much longer I shall be able to serve the revolution, the Fatherland and the people ?

I therefore leave these few lines in anticipation of the day when I shall go and join Karl Marx, Lenin and other revolutionary elders ; this way, our people throughout the country, our comrades in the Party, and our friends in the world will not be taken by surprise.

First about the Party : Thanks to its close unity and total dedication to the working class, the people and the Fatherland, our Party has been able, since its founding, to unite, organize and lead our people from success to success in a resolute struggle.

Unity is an extremely precious tradition of our Party and people. All comrades, from the Central Committee down to the cell, must preserve the unity and oneness of mind in the Party like the apple of their eye.

Within the Party, to establish broad democracy and to practise *self-criticism and criticism* regularly and seriously is the best way to consolidate and develop solidarity and unity. Comradely affection should prevail.

Ours is a Party in power. Each Party member, each cadre must be deeply imbued with *revolutionary morality*, and show industry, thrift, integrity, uprightness, total dedication to the public interest and complete selflessness. Our Party should preserve absolute purity and prove worthy of its role as the leader and very loyal servant of the people.

The Working Youth Union members and our young people in general are good ; they are always ready to come forward, fearless of difficulties, and eager for progress. The Party must foster their *revolutionary virtues* and train them to be our successors, both "red" and "expert," in the building of socialism.

The training and education of future revolutionary generations is of great importance and necessity.

Our labouring people, in the plains as in the mountains, have for generation after generation endured hardships, feudal and colonial oppression and exploitation ; they have in addition experienced many years of war.

Yet, our people have shown great heroism, courage, enthusiasm, and industriousness. They have always followed the Party since it came into being, with unqualified loyalty.

The Party must work out effective *plans* for economic and cultural development so as constantly to *improve the life of our people*.

The war of resistance against US aggression may drag on. Our people may have to face new sacrifices of life and property. Whatever happens, we must keep firm our resolve to fight the US aggressors till total victory.

Our mountains will always be, our rivers will always be, our people will always be ;

The American invaders defeated, we will rebuild our land ten times more beautiful.

No matter what difficulties and hardships lie ahead, our people are sure of total victory. The US imperialists will certainly have to quit. Our Fatherland will certainly be reunified. Our fellow-countrymen in the South and in the North will certainly be re-united under the same roof. We, a small nation, will have earned the signal honour of defeating, through heroic struggle, two big imperialisms – the French and the American – and of making a worthy contribution to the world national liberation movement.

About the world communist movement : Being a man who has devoted his whole life to the revolution, the more proud I am of the growth of the international communist and workers' movement, the more pained I am by the current discord among the fraternal parties.

I hope that our Party will do its best to contribute effectively to the restoration of unity among the fraternal parties on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, in a way which conforms to both reason and sentiment.

I am firmly confident that the fraternal parties and countries will have to unite again.

About personal matters : All my life, I have served the Fatherland, the revolution and the people with all my heart and strength. If I should now depart from this world, I would have nothing to regret, except not being able to serve longer and more.

When I am gone, a grand funeral should be avoided in order not to waste the people's time and money.

*

Finally, to the whole people, the whole Party, the whole army, to my nephews and nieces, the youth and children, I leave my boundless love.

I also convey my cordial greetings to our comrades and friends, and to the youth and children throughout the world.

My ultimate wish is that our entire Party and people, closely joining their efforts, will build a peaceful, reunified, independent, democratic and prosperous Viet Nam, and make a worthy contribution to the world revolution.

Hanoi, May 10, 1969

HO CHI MINH

FORWARD TO THE FUTURE *

Today, with boundless joy, throughout the country our 45 million people are jubilantly celebrating the great victory we have won in the general offensive and uprising this Spring of 1975, in completely defeating the war of aggression and the neo-colonialist rule of US imperialism, liberating the whole of the southern half of our country so dear to our hearts, and gloriously ending the longest, most difficult and greatest patriotic war ever waged in the history of our people's struggle against foreign aggression.

We hail our glorious Fatherland from now on definitively rid of the slavery of foreign domination and the scourge of partition. We hail the beautiful land of Viet Nam from Lang Son to the Cape of Ca Mau, from now on completely independent and free, and independent and free forever.

We hail the new era in our nation's 4,000-year history – an era of brilliant prospects for the development of a peaceful, independent, reunified, democratic, prosperous and strong Viet Nam, an era in which the labouring people have become the complete masters of their destiny and will pool their physical and mental efforts to build a plentiful and happy life for themselves and for thousands of generations to come.

* Speech by Le Duan, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Workers' Party, at the meeting held in Hanoi to celebrate victory, 15 May 1975. (Our title. Ed.)

This glory belongs to our great President Ho Chi Minh, the outstanding national hero who brought fame to our land, the first Vietnamese Communist who founded and trained our Party, who steered the ship of the Vietnamese revolution through many a storm to enable it to reach the shore of glory today. In this stirring atmosphere of total victory, our hearts are filled with great emotion at the memory of our beloved Uncle Ho, and we seem to hear again his teaching :

"No matter what difficulties and hardships lie ahead, our people are sure of total victory. The US imperialists will certainly have to quit. Our Fatherland will certainly be reunified. Our fellow-countrymen in the South and in the North will certainly be reunited under one roof. We, a small nation, will have earned the signal honour of defeating through heroic struggle, two big imperialisms – the French and the American – and of making a worthy contribution to the world national liberation movement." We are very proud to have thoroughly carried out these recommendations of President Ho Chi Minh in his sacred Testament.

This glory belongs to our heroes, martyrs, compatriots and comrades who have sacrificed their lives for the independence and freedom of the country, for the happiness of the people, for our sacred duty to the nation and our noble internationalist obligation. The Fatherland and the people will forever remember the services of those martyrs, the loyal sons and daughters of the people whose example of courage will shine eternally !

This glory belongs to the heroic people of Viet Nam, in whose veins flows the blood of the Trung sisters, of Lady Trieu, of Ly Thuong Kiet and Tran Hung Dao, of Le Loi, Quang Trung and Phan Dinh Phung, of Hoang

Hoa Tham and Truong Cong Dinh¹ and who today, under the banner of the Party and of our great President Ho Chi Minh, have upheld their matchless revolutionary heroism and braved untold difficulties and dangers. From the days of blood and fire of the Nghe Tinh Soviets and the Nam Ky Uprising they marched forward to the glorious victory of the August Revolution. From the resounding victory at Dien Bien Phu, which dealt a mortal blow to old colonialism they went on to win repeated victories over the successive strategies of neo-colonialism, and finally achieved total victory in their marvellous general offensive and uprising in the Spring of 1975.

Today, the day of triumph of the nation, from this historic land of Thang Long, the heart of the country, we send our boundless love and our warmest congratulations to our compatriots and comrades in the South who, battling against waves and wind for 30 years on end, have struggled unflinchingly and indomitably for the great cause under the banner of the National Front for Liberation of South Viet Nam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam and courageously raised the great storm that has finally swept away the enemy, thus adding still greater renown to the glorious tradition of the "Bronze Citadel" of the Fatherland. We offer our warmest congratulations to our compatriots in the heroic North who over the past decades have been

(1) The Trung Sisters : leaders of the national uprising in the years 40-43 against northern invaders.

- Lady Trieu : leader of another uprising against northern invaders in the year 248.

- Ly Thuong Kiet : 11th-century general.

- Tran Hung Dao : 13th-century general.

- Le Loi : a general of the 15th century, later King Le Thai To.

- Quang Trung : leader of the Tay Son peasant insurgents, later King Quang Trung (18th century).

- Phan Dinh Phung, Hoang Hoa Tham, Truong Cong Dinh : patriots who led resistance movements in the early days of the French conquest.

building socialism with industry and thrift, fearing no difficulty and sparing no sacrifice, who have sent tens of thousands of their sons to the frontline to kill the aggressors, and defeated the war of destruction of the US aggressors while firmly defending the North, the powerful base of the revolution in the whole country.

This glory belongs to the heroic Viet Nam people's armed forces, the revolutionary army of the people, completely "loyal to the country and the people and able to fulfil any task, overcome any hardship, and defeat any enemy". Armed at the beginning with mere wooden spears and flintlocks, it has grown up at a stupendous speed, like Phu Dong¹, into powerful units which have won all the hundreds of battles fought across the land of Viet Nam. We send our deepest love and the expression of our boundless pride to all the officers and men of the Viet Nam People's Army. We send our warmest congratulations to the officers and men of all three categories of armed forces and of all arms and services who, during the 55 recent historic days, fought with peerless valour, great resourcefulness and tremendous power and speed, smashing the enemy and winning resounding victories to give a still brighter hue to their traditional "Determined to Fight and Win" banner.

This glory belongs to our Party, the experienced and staunch vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, faithful representative of the vital interests and legitimate aspirations of the people and the entire nation of Viet Nam, the leader and organizer of all the victories of the Vietnamese revolution. Our Party has skilfully and successfully combined the revolutionary science of Marxism-Leninism - the culmination of the intelligence of mankind - with the extraordinary revolutionary energy and the inexhaustible creativeness of our people, with the tradition and quintessential qualities of our nation in order to work out a correct, creative, independent and sovereign line, mobilize,

¹. Phu Dong, legendary hero who routed an invading army, riding on his fire-breathing iron horse.

foster and bring into play the whole potential of the country and all forces of the nation and to combine these with the strength of our times into a tremendous aggregate force, able to defeat all enemies. The Vietnamese Communists, with their tradition of solidarity and unity, with their iron determination, their courage before all trials, have always marched in the van of the great struggle of the people, and have proved equal to the glorious tasks assigned them by history and the nation.

Our victory is the victory of the unbreakable solidarity of the three Indochinese peoples thoroughly vested in the flames of struggle against the common enemy. In this day of great joy, we hail the great victories of the fraternal peoples of Laos and Cambodia, and express to those comrades-in-arms who have been fighting in the same trench as we have our boundless gratitude and our unshakable solidarity.

Our victory is also the victory of the forces of socialism, national independence, democracy and peace throughout the world, who have supported us in the struggle against aggressive US imperialism. On behalf of the Viet Nam Workers' Party and the entire people of Viet Nam, we express our most profound gratitude to the Soviet Union, China and the other fraternal socialist countries, and to all communist and workers' parties, for the very great and precious support and assistance they have given out of their noble internationalist attachment to us. We sincerely thank the working class of all countries in the world, the nationalist countries, the various international democratic organizations, and the whole of progressive mankind for having provided vigorous encouragement and support to our war of resistance for national salvation. To progressive people in the United States who out of their love for peace and justice have given their sympathy and support to our people's just struggle we send our friendly greetings.

The victory of our war of resistance against the US aggressors and for national salvation is the victory of the

banner of *national independence*, the victory of a patriotism forged by thousands of years of glorious effort to build and defend our nation and now raised to a new height by the Party of the working class. « Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom ». This truth has served as the clarion-call urging our people, generation after generation, to rush forward and chase out all invaders and traitors. From it our people have drawn the irresistible strength to break the fetters of old colonialism and the yoke of neo-colonialism.

This victory is the victory of *socialism*, the highest ideal of mankind and the most profound aspiration of the labouring people, which has become a reality over half of our country as well as for one-third of mankind, a system in which the people have become the real masters, free from the exploitation of man by man, a system in which everyone lives in independence and freedom, has enough food and clothing, receives proper education and enjoys a rich and healthy moral life. Such a system is indeed the source of the inexhaustible strength of the people in the North, and a great stimulus to our compatriots in the South.

There can be no genuine independence and freedom for the nation unless the labouring people are freed from oppression and exploitation. Likewise, the labouring people cannot be freed from the yoke of oppression and exploitation so long as national independence and freedom have not been achieved. For the Vietnamese people, the bright road to independence, freedom and socialism was opened up by the triumph of the August Revolution and then by the historic victory of Dien Bien Phu. However, US imperialism, the international gendarme, alarmed by the mounting might of socialism and the national liberation movement throughout the world, ousted the French colonialists and invaded the southern part of our country, turning it into a US neo-colony and military base. The scheme of US imperialism was to deprive our people of the gains of national independence and socialism and,

by so doing, to contain and eventually put down the national liberation movement, contain and push back socialism in this part of the world. As the US aggressors themselves have admitted, Viet Nam became the testing ground for the power and prestige of US imperialism. Viet Nam became the area of the fiercest historical confrontation between the most warlike, the most stubborn aggressive imperialism with the most powerful economic and military potential on one side, and the forces of national independence, democracy and socialism, of which the Vietnamese people are the spearhead in this region, on the other. The victory of Viet Nam, therefore, is not only a victory of national independence and socialism in Viet Nam, but has also a great international significance and an epoch-making character. It has upset the global strategy of US imperialism. It has proved that the three revolutionary torrents of our times are on the offensive, repulsing imperialism step by step and overthrowing it part by part. Today, imperialism, even US imperialism, cannot grab a single square inch of any socialist country; neither can it push back the movement for national independence in the world, nor hinder the advance of various countries towards socialism. In this context, the victory of Viet Nam has opened a new stage of development, extremely favourable for the world revolutionary movement. Together with the great victories of the fraternal Lao and Cambodian peoples, our victory has made a positive contribution to strengthening the forces of world socialism and created new favourable conditions for the safeguarding of peace and national independence in Indochina and Southeast Asia.

Our victory is the victory of a correct and creative revolutionary line and method, and of the correct and creative line of revolutionary war of our Party. This revolutionary line and method consisted in holding high the two banners of national democratic revolution and socialist revolution, combining the strength of national independence and socialism, mobilizing the strength of

our entire people, and combining our nation's might with that of our era, the strength existing in our country with that existing in the world, in order to create a great aggregate strength to fight and defeat US imperialism. The line of our revolutionary war in the stage of our struggle against the US aggressors and for national salvation consisted in constantly applying the strategy of offensive, and also in knowing how to defeat the enemy step by step, forcing him to de-escalate from one rung to another and finally defeating him. It consisted in combining military actions with political struggles, attacks by the armed forces with mass uprisings, seizing control with wiping out the enemy, and wiping out the enemy with seizing control. It consisted in fighting the enemy on three fronts (political struggles, military actions and agitation work among enemy soldiers) and in all three strategic areas, namely the mountain areas, the rural areas and the urban areas... This line has encouraged and organized millions of people to rush to the front to destroy the enemy and save the country, thus forming an invincible battle-array for the revolutionary war in South Viet Nam exactly as described in the book *Binh Thu Yeu Luoc*¹ "One man fights a battle, thousands fight a battle, thousands like one man in battle."

This line is the creative application of the revolutionary military science of Marxism-Leninism to the realities of the revolutionary war in our country; it is the result of inheriting and developing the military art of our ancestors, learning from and improving upon the lessons of the August Revolution and the anti-French resistance, and summing up and enhancing the inexhaustible creative experiences of our people. In the light of this line the anti-US struggle for national salvation of the people throughout our country has become the greatest epic of revolutionary war in Viet Nam, radiant with so many glorious and outstanding exploits: the concerted uprisings in 1960 which developed into revolutionary war to defeat

1. "Essentials of Military Art" by Tran Hung Dao.

the «special war» strategy; the general offensive and uprising at Tet of the year Mau Than (1968) to defeat the «limited war» strategy, the 1972 strategic offensive in the South and the great triumph over the strategic air blitz in 1972 which forced the US to quit, and the general offensive and uprising in Spring 1975 which toppled the puppet regime. In 55 days and nights of lightning offensives and stormy uprisings we have smashed the one-million-odd army of the enemy, giving him no time to organize any significant resistance. This is the highest and most marvellous expression of the allround revolutionary war strategy in South Viet Nam.

With the victory of the anti-US war of resistance for national salvation an extremely brilliant chapter of our country's history has begun.

A new, tremendous and very inspiring task is awaiting our 45 million people. This task is to thoroughly act upon the Testament of our great Uncle Ho: «Our entire Party and people closely joining their efforts will build a peaceful, reunified, independent, democratic, prosperous and strong Viet Nam, and make a worthy contribution to the world revolution.» Let us engage in construction and creative labour in order to bring about progress and prosperity to our Viet Nam, happiness and well-being to our people.

Our people have made countless sacrifices and overcome untold hardships and difficulties to recover our country. This country belongs to our people. Let us prove ourselves worthy of the great Fatherland, of our heroic people, of so many martyrs who have laid down their lives, of the great sacrifices of our people. Let us strive to be worthy of Uncle Ho's «boundless love.» Let us prove ourselves worthy of being the real masters of the country. Let our compatriots in the North step up socialist construction. Let our compatriots in the South unite and strive to build there a fine national democratic

regime, a prosperous national and democratic economy, a progressive and healthy national and democratic culture. In the spirit of national reconciliation and concord our people have shown leniency to all those who have strayed from the right path and who are now returning to the people, no matter what their past was. Provided they sincerely mend their ways and sincerely devote their abilities to the service of the homeland, their place among the people will be guaranteed and all the shame put on them by the criminal US imperialists will be washed away.

After so many years of war our people have today fully won the right to build their country in peace, in the South as well as in the North. Let our compatriots in the whole country start a stirring movement of labour. By our creative labour we will rapidly heal the wounds of war, restore and develop the economy, improve our living conditions. By our creative labour we will shake off all vestiges of the parasitic life and the sham prosperity generated in South Viet Nam by our wicked enemy. By our creative labour we will transform the abundant resources of our land into inexhaustible sources of riches for our people, into modern agriculture, modern industry and advanced culture and science. Creative labour will not only embellish our homeland and bring to our people a happy and ever happier life, but will also transform the Vietnamese into new men and women, the masters of nature and society, the masters of their own lives.

As a people who have made tremendous sacrifices to win peace, national independence, democracy and social progress, the Vietnamese people are determined to stand shoulder to shoulder with the other peoples throughout the world to safeguard peace, to struggle tirelessly for national independence, democracy and social progress, and develop friendly relations with all countries on the basis of equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

We will do our best to strengthen solidarity and increase mutual support and assistance with the fraternal socialist countries and the international communist and workers' movement in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, in order to win ever more splendid successes for the lofty ideal of Marxism-Leninism.

We pledge to strengthen the unshakable militant friendship between the Vietnamese people and the people in our two fraternal neighbour countries - Laos and Cambodia - on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, for the sake of the security, growth and prosperity of each people, and for a lasting and stable peace in this part of the world.

We will persist in our policy of strengthening solidarity and friendship with our neighbours on Southeast Asia and the countries of the Third World in the struggle to regain and maintain national independence, consolidate sovereignty and oppose all schemes and manoeuvres of imperialism and old and new colonialism.

In the four thousand years of our nation's history, the last hundred years were the hardest and fiercest period of struggle against foreign aggression, but they were at the same time the period of our most glorious victories. Our people have overthrown the domination of the Japanese fascists, defeated the old colonialism of France and have now completely defeated the neo-colonialism of the United States. By those splendid exploits, our nation has joined the ranks of the vanguard nations of the world and has won the affection and esteem of the whole of progressive mankind. A nation which has recorded such splendid exploits deserves to enjoy peace, freedom and happiness. Such a nation surely has enough determination and energy, strength and talent to overcome all difficulties and reach the great heights of our times, to turn a poor and backward country heavily devastated by war, in which US imperialism has perpetrated so many crimes, into a civilized,

prosperous and powerful country, an impregnable bastion of national independence, democracy and socialism in Indochina and Southeast Asia.

With boundless pride, with complete confidence in our success, let our entire Party; our entire people and our entire army march forward! A splendid future is awaiting us!

Long live a peaceful, independent, reunified, democratic, prosperous and strong Viet Nam!

Long live the Viet Nam Workers' Party!

President Ho Chi Minh will live forever in our cause!

