

**THE HUMAN COST OF COMMUNISM
IN VIETNAM**

A COMPENDIUM

PREPARED FOR THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE
ADMINISTRATION OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY
ACT AND OTHER INTERNAL SECURITY LAWS**

OF THE

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UNITED STATES SENATE**



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RESOLUTION

Resolved, by the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, that the attached study captioned, "The Human Cost of Communism in Vietnam: A Compendium Prepared for the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary" shall be printed for the use of the Subcommittee.

JAMES O. EASTLAND, *Chairman*.

Approved: February 17, 1972.

Paul Snyder
JULY 72
LOS ANGELES

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THE HUMAN COST OF COMMUNISM IN VIETNAM

I. INTRODUCTION

BY

SENATOR JAMES O. EASTLAND,

Chairman, Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security

This is the third in a series of studies on the human cost of communism published by the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security.

The first study, "The Human Cost of Soviet Communism," was prepared by the renowned British Sovietologist, Robert Conquest.

The second study, "The Human Cost of Communism in China," was written for the Subcommittee by Professor Richard L. Walker, Director of the Institute of International Studies at the University of South Carolina and one of this country's foremost China scholars.

In attempting to assess the human cost of communism in Vietnam and to come up with some kind of estimate of the human cost of a Communist victory, it was our conviction that a reasonable assessment could best be achieved through a compendium of excerpts from the most authoritative writings on the subject.

The American ground combat role in Vietnam is now rapidly drawing to a close. No one can say at this juncture whether the Communists will continue to spurn the very generous terms that have been offered to them and to reject any settlement that offers them less than total victory. But, in any case, the era of unlimited American assistance is already ended. The scale of future assistance, in addition to being very much reduced, is bound to be determined within relatively narrow limits.

The assertion that a Communist victory in South Vietnam would result in a ruthless massacre of those the Communists regard as their enemies has been challenged by certain critics of American policy—especially by those critics who believe that the situation is hopeless, that we should cut our losses, terminate our aid program, accept the terms offered by the Communists, and reconcile ourselves to a Communist takeover of all Indochina. For understandable reasons, such critics want desperately to believe that the course they advocate is not attended by the danger of a major bloodbath.

There are others who believe that there is a fighting chance that the Communists may yet come to terms or be held in check, and that it would be politically and morally wrong to withdraw all aid, fold our hands, and accept a Communist victory as foreordained. They

see scope for hope in the remarkable successes achieved by the Vietnamization program, the grave disorganization of the Chinese Communist armies in the wake of the Lin Piao purge, and the massive social and political stresses that have become apparent in North Vietnam.

But whatever one believes, the record set forth in this study is something that every honest man will want to keep in mind in assessing the future of our Indochina policy.

It is, of course, impossible to provide mathematical proof for the proposition that a Communist victory in South Vietnam would result in a bloodbath. But there are documents and historical indices that permit one to make an intelligent assessment of what is likely to happen if a Communist regime ever should come to power in Saigon. And an examination of the totality of these documents and historical indices point to the almost certain probability that a Communist victory would be followed by a bloodletting that would rival the worst bloodlettings that have taken place in Communist countries to date.

The documentation that follows presents a wide range of estimates of what might be expected in the wake of a Communist takeover in South Vietnam.

The lowest estimate was that made by Stephen Hosmer in his superbly researched study of terror as an instrument of Communist policy. Always exceedingly careful never to overstate himself, Hosmer considers the possibility that the Communists may decide to limit the bloodletting under certain circumstances—but then goes on to state that, should a Communist regime decide to deal severely with members of the groups listed for repression, he finds it difficult to believe that the number of victims would be much less than 100,000, and that the total might well be very much higher than this.

Professor P. J. Honey of London, widely recognized as one of the foremost authorities on North Vietnam in the free world, predicts that “on the basis of past Communist deeds, and given the size of South Vietnam’s population, the minimum number of those to be butchered will exceed one million and could rise to several times that figure.”

Colonel Tran Van Dac, a North Vietnamese officer who defected after 24 years in the Communist movement, informed the press that the Communists, if they win, will slaughter up to 3,000,000 South Vietnamese who have resisted them so bitterly for so many years.

Another North Vietnamese colonel, Le Xuan Chuyen, who defected after 21 years membership in the Communist Party, asserted that 5,000,000 people in South Vietnam are on the Communists’ “blood debt” lists; that 10 to 15 per cent of these would pay with their lives; that another 40 per cent would be imprisoned; and that the rest would have to undergo “thought reform.”

Douglas Pike, author of the definitive work “The Viet Cong,” who made an in-depth study of the organized mass killings carried out by the Communists during their brief occupation of a portion of Hue, concludes his study with these ominous words:

The meaning of the Hue Massacre seems clear. If the Communists win decisively in South Vietnam (and the key word is decisively), what is the prospect? First, all foreigners would be cleared out of the South, especially the hundreds

of foreign newsmen who are in and out of Saigon. A curtain of ignorance would descend. Then would begin a night of long knives. There would be a new order to build. The war was long and so are memories of old scores to be settled. All political opposition, actual or potential, would be systematically eliminated. Stalin versus kulak, Mao versus landlord, Hanoi Communist versus Southern Catholic, the pattern would be the same: eliminate not the individual, for who cares about the individual, but the latent danger to the dream, the representative of the blocs, the symbol of the force, that might someday, even inside the regime, dilute the system. Beyond this would come Communist justice meted out to the "tyrants and lackeys." Personal revenge would be a small wheel turning within the larger wheel of Party retribution.

But little of this would be known abroad. The Communists in Vietnam would create a silence.

The world would call it peace.

Given the 15 broad categories of political opponents whom the Communists have included in their "blood debt" list, Pike indicates that the estimate of several million victims, if the communists win, may not be excessive.

That there would be a massive bloodletting is something that is taken for granted by virtually every serious student of Vietnamese affairs. And the probability is that the final toll would lie somewhere in the range indicated by Professor Honey, Douglas Pike, and the two North Vietnamese colonel-defectors.

What are some of the indices that point to this probability?

First, there is the merciless body of Communist doctrine—from Lenin to Stalin to Mao Tse-tung to Ho Chi Minh—which justifies and insists on the imperative need for mass terror.

Second, there is the historical record of Communist bloodlettings—in the Soviet Union, in Red China, in North Vietnam, and wherever they have come to power.

Third, there is the record of the Communist terror in South Vietnam during the entire period of the so-called insurgency, including the merciless massacres of men, women and children at Dak Son, Duc Duc and other places.

Fourth, there was the Hue massacre with its systematic killing, which exacted a toll of 5,700 civilian victims, who, according to captured Communist documents were considered "wicked tyrants" or "counter-revolutionaries", who owed "blood debts" to the people.

Fifth, there is the considerable body of evidence of Communist intentions contained in captured documents and in the testimony of defectors.

Let us examine some of the precedents and some of the testimony.

THE SOVIET PRECEDENT

V. I. Lenin told his followers that "not a single revolutionary government can dispense with the death penalty for exploiters (i.e., for landlords and capitalists)." And when the Leningrad Party in June 1918 sought to restrain elements who were engaging in indiscriminate

inate mass terror, Lenin rebuked the Leningrad Party in these words: "This is unheard of. The energy and mass nature of the terror must be encouraged."

Lenin's directives on the need for mass terror were honored to the hilt both in his lifetime and after his death. In his monumental work, "The Great Terror," and in the study which he subsequently prepared for the Subcommittee on Internal Security, Robert Conquest came up with the staggering finding that well over 20,000,000 human beings were executed or killed in other ways by the Soviet authorities in successive waves of terror, in the decades after the Bolshevik Revolution. He made the further point that this was a conservative computation, and that the real figure might be closer to 30,000,000. If the casualty roll was extended to include the victims of the civil war and the famine and typhus which followed it, then the aggregate figure for the human cost of Soviet communism would be somewhere between 35,000,000 and 45,000,000 human lives.

There was a time, during the 30's and 40's, when it was fashionable among intellectuals to disbelieve or challenge the accounts of mass terror that were brought out by refugees and defectors and critical observers. So determined were they to defend the nebulous belief that Soviet communism represented some kind of brave new world, that they swallowed uncritically Moscow's tortured justification of the purge trials of the 30's—at the same time as they damned as "reactionaries" and "extremists" all those who sought to set forth the facts about a mass terror that had already cost many millions of human lives.

But then at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev made his famous speech on the crimes of the Stalin era—and suddenly it became clear that the charges of mass terror made by the so-called "extremists" and "reactionaries", were, if anything, understatements. Today the mountain of evidence that has become available makes it impossible—even for the most determined sympathizer—to challenge the basic facts about the Soviet terror, or the general parameters of the computation made by Robert Conquest.

About the human cost of Soviet communism, therefore, we need not argue. The facts are in. The record is unchallenged.

THE CHINESE PRECEDENT

An ardent Leninist and Stalinist, Mao Tse-tung added some refinements of his own—like public mass executions—to the pioneering terrorism of his Soviet antecedents. In one of his earliest published works, in March 1927, Mao wrote that a revolution cannot be . . . "kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous." He said that for the revolution to succeed, "To put it bluntly, it is necessary to create terror for a while in every rural area."

In the case of China, the documentation on the Communist terror, while not nearly so voluminous as it is in the case of the Soviet Union, is nevertheless extensive enough to permit estimates within wider margins. In the study which he prepared for the Subcommittee, it was Professor Walker's estimate, after having studied all the evidence, that communism in China, from the time of the first civil war

(1927-1936) until today, has cost a minimum of 34 million lives, and that the total might run as high as 64 million lives.

THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PRECEDENT

A dedicated disciple of Lenin, Ho Chi Minh gave early proof that he understood the importance of liquidating all political opposition. His most formidable rival in the early 20's was Phan Boi Chau, a greatly respected nationalist leader, considered by many to be the Sun Yat Sen of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh—at that time Nguyen Ai Quoc—eliminated Phan Boi Chau as a rival by arranging to deliver him to the French Security Service for a reward of 100,000 piastres. He subsequently justified his action with the explanation that he needed the money to finance party activities. (See p. 103.)

During the final days of World War II, with Japan teetering on the brink of collapse, Ho Chi Minh and the Indo-Chinese Communist Party staged a coup which gave them control of most of North Vietnam. Ostensibly the "Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam" was a coalition nationalist government, including representatives of other nationalist parties as well as the Communists. With unerring Machiavellianism, Ho Chi Minh played off one nationalist group against the other, and played off the nationalists against the returning French and the French against the nationalists. Meanwhile the assassins and the execution squads were busy. Ngo Ton Dat, the son of a leading Vietnamese Nationalist, has estimated that during a two-month period in the Fall of 1945, some 10,000 people were killed in Hanoi and its immediate environs. The myth of the "coalition government" survived into 1946, while the killing continued unabated. When the charade had played itself out, Ho Chi Minh had achieved the physical elimination of all potential political rivals, including the influential Vietnamese Trotskyist movement. So thorough was his political purge, that by 1947 there was virtually no political personality left alive in Vietnam to challenge his influence. (See pages 11-13.)

At a later date, the North Vietnamese Communists openly bragged about their cleverness in exploiting the "united front" tactic to divide their opponents and ultimately to destroy them, both in the events leading up to the coalition government of 1945-46, and currently in South Vietnam. An article in "Hoc Tap" (Hanoi), the Party's theoretical organ, in September 1966, put the matter this way:

On the basis of keeping firm in strategy, our Party cleverly applied its tactics: On the one hand, it cleverly took advantage of the regional and temporary contradictions of the enemy to sow division among him. On the other hand, it united with anyone who could be united, won over anyone who could be won over, neutralized anyone who should be neutralized, completely isolated the imperialists and their most dangerous lackeys, and concentrated the spearheads of the attacks on them to overthrow them.

The policy of founding the Indo-Chinese Democratic Front between 1936 and 1939, the Viet Minh Front between 1941 and 1951 and the Lien Viet Front after the August Revolution; the decision of signing the 6 March 1946 Pre-

liminary Accord (on French troop entry into North Viet-Nam) the present NFLSV policy of upholding the mottoes of independence, democracy, peace and neutrality, and so forth are the typical examples of the clever application of the following instruction of Lenin:

"It is possible to defeat a stronger enemy only through displaying great effort and under the necessary condition of taking advantage very minutely, very attentively, very carefully and very cleverly to any rift among the enemy, even the smallest contradiction among the interests of various bourgeois groups and factions in each country . . ."

The word "neutralize" is, of course, a communist euphemism for "destroy." Summarizing the purges which took place after the August 1945 revolution, Bernard Fall wrote:

In a series of swift stabs, he [Giap] destroyed the back-country strongholds of the nationalist parties; executed hundreds of Vietnamese nationalists and even such old comrades in arms as the Trotskyite leader Ta-Thu-Thau, a personal friend of Ho Chi Minh. Finally, on July 11, 1946, Giap launched a country-wide purge of nationalist leaders and closed down Viet-nam, the last opposition newspaper.¹

. . . The coalition government in the National Assembly was similarly decimated. By the end of 1946, the non-Communist representatives had been reduced from 70 seats to 20 in attendance and of the 20 all but two voted with the Communists. Of the two, one was arrested and the other went into hiding.²

Looking back upon this period, the leaders of the Vietnamese Communist movement concluded that they had killed—not too many people—but too few people. Truong Chinh, at present the No. 2 man in Hanoi and the recognized theoretical leader of the Party, put it this way:

We admit that because of the extremely intricate situation in our country and the relatively limited strength of the Vietnamese revolution, it was not possible to carry out a systematic elimination of the counterrevolutionary elements on Jacobean or Bolshevik lines. . . . However, it is to be regretted that energetic, timely and necessary measures to counteract all possible dangers in the future were not taken immediately upon the seizing of power and before any foreign intervention, at a time when the reactionaries in the country were still at a loss, and had not had time to reorganize themselves. . . . We regret only that the repression of the reactionaries during the August period was not carried out more fully, within the framework of the possibilities. . . . For a newborn revolutionary power to be lenient with counterrevolutionaries is tantamount to committing suicide.³

¹ "Profile of Giap" by Bernard Fall in Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (New York: Praeger, 1965) p. xxxvi.

² *Ibid.*

³ Truong Chinh, *The August Revolution*, 2nd edition (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962) pp. 41-43.

If they failed to kill enough people in the wake of the August 1945 revolution, the Vietnamese Communists more than made up for this failure when the Geneva agreement of 1954 established them in undisputed control of North Vietnam. The body of evidence about the mass terror in North Vietnam suffers from major gaps because the North Vietnamese Communists did not publicize their killings, while the handful of foreigners who were there, with few exceptions, had their movements severely restricted. Though the Communists killed in every village, the people in one village generally remained ignorant of the killings in neighboring villages. For this reason, the range of estimates is even wider than it is in the case of China. Bernard Fall placed the human cost of the Agrarian Reform campaign alone at a minimum of 50,000 executed and 100,000 imprisoned. Hoang Van Chi, a leading nationalist who held important posts under Ho Chi Minh, placed the post-Geneva toll at 500,000. This estimate generally coincides with the estimate of Gérard Tongas, a Frenchman who was originally sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh, but who was revolted by what he saw in North Vietnam in the post-Geneva period and put his observations into a book captioned "I Lived in the Communist Hell."⁴

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRECEDENT

About the Vietcong record of terror in South Vietnam there can also be little dispute, because the facts are too well established. Since 1960, when the insurgency was first getting under way, Communist terrorists have killed over 36,000 South Vietnamese civilians (more than 16,000 were killed in the three-year period 1969-1971); they have kidnapped 54,000 (18,000 kidnappings occurred from 1969-1971); and they have, in addition, wounded several scores of thousands. (For a complete tabulation, see table on p. 77.)

As Stephen Hosmer points out, these official figures are, if anything, underestimates because many incidents go unreported.

The terror is not savagery for savagery's sake. Neither is it the work of undisciplined soldiers, operating without instruction or in violation of existing instructions (as a unit of American soldiers did at My Lai). On the contrary, it is a deliberate policy, conceived at the highest level and communicated in detailed directives to Vietcong units at all levels.

What is the purpose of this terror? As Stephen Hosmer puts it:

The primary object of repression is the disruption and demoralization of the GVN's civilian and military bureaucracies, and is achieved, in the first instance, through the physical removal (by assassination, execution after capture, or incarceration) of substantial numbers of military and civilian officials, cadres, and intelligence personnel who perform important services for the GVN and who are not easily replaced. Another, broader purpose is to demoralize, neutralize, and paralyze those other government officials and cadres who may themselves escape repression for a time but who are fully

⁴ The estimates vary, in part, because some of them refer only to the victims of the Agrarian Reform period, whereas others include the victims of the post-Geneva terror and those of the continuing terror after the Agrarian Reform bloodletting had terminated.

aware of the fate of their less fortunate colleagues. Thus, by assassinating a selected number of hamlet officials in a given district, the Vietcong hope to frighten other officials enough to force them to resign their positions; or to flee to the district town for protection (go into 'exile'); or to become so security-conscious that they no longer carry out their prescribed duties effectively.

Organized terror—of a ruthlessness and on a scale that defies civilized comprehension—has been a cardinal aspect of Communist policy from the very first day of the Vietcong insurgency. By and large, the Western world knows only of a few of the more massive and gruesome terrorist incidents—like the massacre which took place in the Montagnard Village of Dak Son in December 1967, when the Vietcong, attacking with flame-throwers, moved from hut to hut, incinerating alive more than 250 villagers, two-thirds of them women and children. In addition, 200 Dak Son villagers were kidnaped, never to be heard of again. But the thousands of small incidents of terror—equally merciless, equally gruesome, and which account for far more victims than the big incidents—with exceedingly rare exceptions, go unreported.

It did not make the press, for example, when on October 27, 1969, the Communists booby-trapped the body of a People's Self-Defense Force member whom they had killed—so that when relatives came to retrieve the body, four of them were killed in the explosion. Nor did it make the press in May 1967, when Dr. Tran Van Lu-y told the World Health Organization in Geneva that over the previous 10 years Communist terrorists had destroyed 174 dispensaries, maternity homes and hospitals; had mined or machine-gunned 40 ambulances; and had killed or kidnaped 211 members of his staff.

If the Free World knew little or nothing of this day-to-day terror despite the presence of hundreds of correspondents in South Vietnam, what chance is there that the Free World would know anything at all about the bloodletting that would inevitably take place in South Vietnam if the Communists came to power, expelled the Western press corps, and then proceeded to deal with their enemies?

THE PRECEDENT OF HUE

During the Tet offensive of 1968, the communists occupied a portion of the city of Hue for 26 days. When they were driven out on February 24, some thousands of civilians were missing. In 1969, a series of mass graves containing the bodies of missing civilians were discovered. Some of the victims had been shot, some had been clubbed to death, some had been buried alive. As more and more graves were discovered, the confirmed toll ultimately rose to 2,750. Counting those still missing—who must be presumed abducted or executed—the estimated civilian toll, according to Douglas Pike, comes to 5,700.

It was established that the killings were in no sense random, but were carried out on the basis of explicit directives and from prepared lists of names, the Communists moving through the streets methodically with their clip boards and pulling the victims from their houses.

A Vietcong after-action report captured in April 1968, boasted:

We eliminated 1,892 administrative personnel, 38 policemen, 790 tyrants, 6 captains, 20 second lieutenants and many non-commissioned officers.

Hanoi Radio on April 27, 1969, made this revealing comment on the discovery of the mass graves:

. . . in order to cover up their cruel acts, the puppet administration in Hue recently played the farce of setting up a so-called committee for the search for burial of the hooligan lackeys who had owed blood debts to the Tri-Thien Hue compatriots and who were annihilated by the Southern armed forces and people in early May Than spring (Tet).

" . . . What happened in Hue," says Douglas Pike, "should give pause to every remaining civilized person on this planet. It should be inscribed, so as not to be forgotten, along with the record of other terrible visitations of man's inhumanity to man which stud the history of the human race. Hue is another demonstration of what man can bring himself to do when he fixes no limits on political action and pursues uncautiously the dream of social perfectibility."

If the massive and systematic killings which the Communists perpetrated in Hue over a brief 4-week period are any indication of their intentions if they succeed in imposing their rule on South Vietnam, then clearly the estimates that they may kill from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 South Vietnamese are in no way exaggerated. And in the years that followed this initial bloodletting—if the precedents established in the Soviet Union, Red China, and North Vietnam have any application—there would come further waves of terror and mass killings that might add many hundreds of thousands more to the final toll of victims.

While the focus of this compendium is on Vietnam, it is not unreasonable to assume that a communist victory in Indochina would have roughly the same consequences for the peoples of Cambodia and Laos as it would for the people of South Vietnam.

THE LISTS OF NAMES

That Hue may indeed be considered a pattern for the future, is apparent from Stephen Hosmer's section dealing with the Communist "blacklists." "For some years," Hosmer points out, "the Communists have assiduously compiled blacklists of large numbers of persons in both urban and rural areas whom they choose to classify as 'tyrants,' 'reactionaries,' 'counterrevolutionaries,' spies, or simply opponents of their movement." Hosmer quotes a top-secret Communist directive from Region II:

Have the enemy situation in hand to serve the common activities of eliminating traitors in cities; carefully keep the names and records of counterrevolutionary individuals; classify these elements and suggest an examination to be able

to take the initiative to eliminate them in every situation and prepare the coming counterrevolution repression.

The facts are in, the record is clear, the auguries of things that may come to pass are delineated with frightening clarity. The only question is whether the free world will pay heed to this record and to these auguries.

* * * * *

I wish to express my gratitude to the subcommittee staff, in particular to Mr. David Martin who served as editor for the project, for putting together this remarkable broad and impressive compendium of excerpts and items dealing with the record of Communist terror in North and South Vietnam. I also wish to thank Mr. Max Friedman for his volunteer assistance on the project.

I wish to thank Praeger and Co. for their permission to reproduce excerpts from "The Two Vietnams" by Bernard Fall; from "From Colonialism to Communism" by Hoang Van Chi; from "Vietnam: The Dragon Embattled" by Joseph Buttinger. I also wish to thank the Rand Corporation for permission to reproduce excerpts from "Viet Cong Repression and Its Implications for the Future" by Stephen T. Hosmer and the text of "On the Question of Communist Reprisals in Vietnam" by Anita Lauve Nutt. Finally, I wish to thank "Southeast Asia Perspectives," (published by The American Friends of Vietnam) for permission to reproduce excerpts from "Vietnam: If the Communists Won" by P. J. Honey.

II. THE COMMUNIST TERROR IN NORTH VIETNAM

THE ELIMINATION OF THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION AFTER THE AUGUST 1945 REVOLUTION

Excerpted from

"VIETNAM: THE DRAGON EMBATTLED"

By Joseph Buttinger

(Praeger)

Joseph Buttinger, a leading Austrian Social Democrat in the pre-Hitler days, is the author of "The Smaller Dragon," a general history of Vietnam, and of the two volume work "Vietnam: The Dragon Embattled."

The elimination of their opponents was one of the most common means the Communists used to establish Vietminh control over the entire nationalist movement. Against people whose interests or political convictions made them incorrigible enemies of the Vietminh, the Communists practiced a policy of physical extermination from the very beginning of the revolution. One of their first victims was Bui Quang Chieu, the founder of the Constitutional Party. Another Southern leader of conservative nationalism killed by the Communists was Vo Van Nga, head of the Party for Independence and a member of the United National Front. He was arrested by the Vietminh and executed after a group of prominent nationalists pleaded in vain with Tran Van Giau to release him. Later, the Communists also assassinated the former Imperial Delegate to Cochinchina, Nguyen Van Sam. At Hue, the most prominent victims of the Vietminh were Bao Bai's former adviser, the brilliant conservative writer Pham Quynh, and the court official Ngo Dinh Khoi, older brother of Ngo Dinh Diem. Both were executed on orders of the local Committee of Liberation as early as August 23, 1945.

During the first few weeks of the revolution, scores of nationalists whom the Communists regarded as dangerous competitors for leadership were simply murdered. Others were tried by "people's courts," formally condemned as traitors or collaborators, and executed. Even a pro-Communist Vietnamese writer like Le Thanh Khoi is forced to admit the "mass liquidations" of opponents. "Whatever represented political opposition," he writes, "was eliminated without mercy." The pro-Communist French author Jean Chesneau explains that this was necessary in the interest of independence and of "democracy in the broadest sense."

But these political murders were not confined to the first chaotic weeks of the revolution, and they were not restricted to old enemies, collaborators, and "reactionaries." Anyone who achieved popularity outside the Vietminh was in danger of being eliminated. To be a young and vigorous revolutionary with an independent political mind was more dangerous in 1946 than being a "reactionary" had been in August, 1945. Among the nationalists and revolutionaries who were killed because they refused to accept the dictates of the Vietminh were such men as the Hoa Hao leader Huynh Phu So and the head of the Trotskyist Struggle Group, Ta Thu Thau. Another one was the leader of the Dai Viet, Truong Tu Anh, who was arrested in the course of the Vietminh action against the pro-Chinese parties in the summer of 1946. He was never heard of again. Just before the National Assembly was convened on October 28, the former editor of the VNQDD paper *Viet-Nam* was murdered.

Of these assassinations, that of Ta Thu Thau was most noteworthy for what it revealed of Communist political fears, and that of Huynh Phu So for its political consequences. Ta Thu Thau, who had loyally cooperated with the Committee for the South, was twice arrested by the Vietminh in January, 1946, after returning from a visit to Ho Chi Minh, with whom he was said to have been always on good terms. Both times he had to face a people's court on the way from Hanoi to Saigon, and both times he was acquitted. This, more than anything he had done to anger the Communists, made it necessary in the eyes of the Stalinist leaders in the South that he be eliminated. Tran Van Giau, who then still headed the Vietminh guerrillas in the South, had him ambushed and killed. With Ta Thu Thau, the revolution lost one of its most gifted and devoted leaders; and if it is true, as some believe, that after 1946 only the Communists had outstanding leaders, the murder of men like Ta Thu Thau certainly helps to explain the political weakness of the enemies of Vietnamese Stalinism: The Stalinists saw to it that those whose brilliance might have dimmed their own luster were buried in good time.

Tran Van Giau, a Stalinist of the purest water, was convinced that a unified command for the war in the South could be brought about only through the physical elimination of all nationalists who refused to follow blindly where the Vietminh led. Next to the Trotskyists, whom he gradually liquidated, he feared most the well-organized religious-political sects. Both he and his successor at the head of the Vietminh in the South, Nguyen Binh, made repeated attempts to force the sect leaders into line by capturing them and threatening their lives, even while the sect troops were still fighting in a united front with the Vietminh. Giau was in fact called to Hanoi and replaced by Nguyen Binh at the end of January, 1946, because of the hatred he had aroused among most other nationalists who fought the French. The Binh Xuyen leader Le Van Vien, upon learning that the Vietminh were after his life, had actually put a price on Giau's head. But Nguyen Binh, an old Communist and former sailor, was equally ruthless and more successful than Giau only because his methods were subtler and his murderous disposition not so apparent. He succeeded in temporarily uniting the badly split resistance movement in the South. But the sects soon fought again among themselves, and sometimes against

both the French and the Vietminh, before Communist terror gradually drove them into the French camp.

In the Hoa Hao, this shift, of such consequence for the future, took place only in May, 1947, after a year and a half of uneasy relations with the Vietminh, during which time cooperation alternated with open warfare between these bitterly contentious allies. When Nguyen Binh had convinced himself that the Hoa Hao leader Huynh Phu So would never subordinate his own ambitions to the aims of the Vietminh, he led him into a trap, in April, 1947, and soon afterward ordered his execution. The body of the prophet was chopped up and scattered, lest it become an object of veneration and his grave a shrine for his fanatical followers.

The struggle between the Vietminh and the sects, one of the saddest and most gruesome chapters in the history of the anticolonial movement, goes back to the time when the sects were formed, and, except for brief periods of concerted action against the French following the August revolution, it continued throughout the entire Indochina War. This was true not only of the Hoa Hao but also of the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen, although their leaders had not succumbed to the deadly embrace of their Communist allies. Communist terror, however, was not the only reason for the defection of the sects. They might have ended up by making peace with the French even without being pushed by the Vietminh, simply because they were bound together by interests which the nation as a whole did not share, and worked for aims that could be achieved without national liberation. Nevertheless, from a national point of view, the Communist policy toward the sects was no less a political crime than their assassinations of opponents for the sake of a Vietminh monopoly of the national movement.

COMMUNIST TERROR IN NORTH VIETNAM

Excerpted from

"FROM COLONIALISM TO COMMUNISM"

By Hoang Van Chi

(Praeger)

Hoang Van Chi, a Vietnamese scholar and a prominent nationalist, served under Ho Chi Minh in the Vietminh regime, and also for a period of time after the Geneva Agreement. In 1948 he was the recipient of a national award from Ho Chi Minh in recognition of his services in directing the construction of a hydro-electric plant. His book, "From Colonialism to Communism," is a sweeping and carefully documented indictment of the regime of terror which the Communists installed in North Vietnam after the Geneva Agreement.

THE FIRST WAVE OF TERROR

Peasants and tradesmen were still struggling for economic survival after the effects of the Agricultural and Trade Taxes when, one evening in February 1953, the communist authorities launched a well organised, but quite unexpected, wave of terror throughout the whole of communist-controlled North Vietnam. Because it was entirely political in character, this campaign was later referred to as the "Political Struggle" by those who had suffered under it.

At that time, to avoid bombing attacks by French aircraft, all meetings in the Resistance zone were held during the hours of darkness, and on this particular evening meetings were held in every village to discuss the Agricultural and Trade Taxes. There was only one question on the agenda: why were so many people failing to pay their taxes, or to pay them in full? The only answer was that, after three years of taxation of this type, rich and poor alike were unable to find any way of raising the required amount of rice. Such an obvious answer, however, did not satisfy the communists who in reality were using the question of tax-payment to conceal a calculated and sinister plan.

The cadres came to these meetings armed with sticks and ropes. Tax-debtors were arrested, tortured and asked why they had not paid their taxes, and who had advised them not to pay. From the method of questioning it was quite apparent that tax-evasion was not the main issue. The interrogator, when asking who had advised non-payment, mentioned specific names. 'Was it Giap or Binh?' he would ask. The beating continued until the victim, reached the limit of his endurance, nodded his head in assent. If he persisted in his refusal to implicate the said Giap or Binh, the beating might continue all night, and might even end in death.

Once the unfortunate victim had given the answer required of him, the Giap or Binh concerned would be immediately arrested. Before embarking on this terror, the communists had compiled lists of the names of those they wished arrested. The tax-debtor's part in this gruesome farce was merely to provide them with an excuse to carry out the

arrests. The interrogators, having selected a name from their lists, sought to compel the unfortunate debtors, by torture if necessary, to make the required accusation. Once this was made, they were of no further use to the communists.

After being subjected to terrible tortures, the denounced person was required to sign a confession. In this he had to state: first that he was a member of some entirely fictitious organisation—giving it any name that came into his head; and secondly, that others belonged to the same organisation. The names of these others, however, were not fictitious, but were taken from those on the lists already mentioned.

One after another, those listed as reactionaries or suspicious characters were arrested in this way and tortured. They were not necessarily landlords, rich peasants, or even reactionaries. Many of them could be fairly described as following a middle-of-the-road course. The following verses written by Xuan Dieu, the poet laureate of the Vietminh, clearly shows that such people might expect to receive the same treatment as true reactionaries.

Hello, Comrades. Let us unite our forces,
 Destroy our mortal foes without remorse.
 Landlords, notabilities and opposition groups
 We must reduce to ash;
 Middle-of-the-roaders and reactionaries,
 Their bones we must smash.

When he wrote these lines the bard was not indulging in flights of poetic fancy, for owing to the severity of the tortures, large numbers of people did have their bones crushed. Some typical tortures were:

The victim was compelled to kneel down, supporting on his head a basket filled with heavy stones.

He was forced to hang by his thumbs or feet from a rope thrown over a rafter. In this position he could be either beaten or, by pulling on the rope, jerked violently up and down.

His thumbs were wrapped in a cloth soaked in oil which was then ignited.

Since these tortures were widely used throughout the whole country, it is reasonable to assume that they had been carefully devised and sanctioned by the leadership of the party. It was the opinion of some people that such measures had already been employed in China two years earlier and imported into Vietnam by Chinese advisers.

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This wave of terror lasted for a fortnight, during which every village reported scenes of horror and death. The campaign began a week before *Tet* (New Year in the lunar calendar), a time when the whole population is busy with the preparation of food, cakes and delicacies to welcome in the New Year. At this feast the people worship the spirits of their departed ancestors who, they believe, are present at the family altar on that day. But on this occasion all traditional ceremonies were abandoned. Silence reigned in every village, and at night no house dared to show a light.

During the first days of the campaign, everything went according to the party's plan. Victims whose names appeared on its black lists were denounced and tortured. However, as the movement gathered

momentum, the party cadres became intoxicated by the great power they were wielding over their helpless compatriots. Lists were forgotten, and the denunciations snowballed until nobody was safe. This phenomenon was widespread; the campaign got completely out of control. The limits set for the campaign at the outset by its organisers were everywhere exceeded. Terror, violence and death spread unchecked throughout the whole country.

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The situation rapidly degenerated into anarchy. Being the people they were, the hooligans' principal concern was to protect themselves from denunciation by others, and to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity to enhance their prestige in the eyes of the party. They resorted to extreme brutality and tortured indiscriminately all those unfortunate enough to come under their authority. Everyone who was denounced was tortured; to these political illiterates, for whom 'capitalism' and 'imperialism' meant very little, all honest citizens appeared equally reactionary.

Not unnaturally, the thought uppermost in everyone's mind was: 'If I am denounced tonight, whom I shall denounce when, or if possible before, I am tortured?' Some reasoned that, if they denounced relatives of party cadres, or the influential party members themselves, they would force the party to call a halt to the terror. The denounced party members were arrested and brutally beaten in exactly the same way as any 'reactionary'. Local communist cells were helpless to intervene, for the campaign slogan was: 'Give the masses a free hand to fight reactionaries', and the orders they had earlier received from a higher authority stated categorically that no individual and no organisation of the party would be permitted to interfere. They were victims of a demagogy which had careened wildly out of control. Hell was let loose, and 'the devil was stronger than the sorcerer', as a Vietnamese saying has it.

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The death-roll during the days of terror averaged between three to five in every village, and among the victims were many party members, including even one government minister, Dang Van Huong. He was spending a holiday in his native village, where not unnaturally his fellow villagers regarded him more as the man whom they all knew than as a minister of government. No man is a hero in his own country, but even so it must have been a severe shock to him to find himself denounced and beaten as a reactionary, while his colleagues in the central government did nothing to intervene. Both he and his wife committed suicide after the incident. This fate befell them in spite of the fact that their son, Colonel Dang Van Viet, known as the 'Hero of Road No. 4', had been victor of the Cao Bang—Lang Son battle a few years previously.

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Generally speaking, it took the villagers about seven days to discover that a prompt confession to their supposed crimes was the only way to escape torture and beatings. But to the better educated and more resourceful town-dwellers, this means of escape became appar-

ent more quickly. Thus it was a common sight to see the accused meekly kneel down and 'confess' in a loud voice before anyone laid a hand on him. Moreover, since the people accused each other of only very minor crimes, only very few reactionaries were discovered. The shortage of traitors and reactionaries in the towns made it difficult for the authorities to sustain the terror for the full fifteen days. Consequently the urban campaign speedily degenerated into one directed against the consumers of imported goods. A well groomed appearance, even the use of brilliantine, became a crime. Indeed, hard-core elements were posted at every street corner for the sole purpose of apprehending the users of brilliantine and compelling them to wash off the offending cosmetic in greasy dishwater stored close by for that purpose. Many people were astute enough to volunteer to wash their own hair as soon as they realised what was happening. Well dressed people and those who indulged their taste for refined cooking were also singled out for ill-treatment and humiliation.

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At the end of the wave of terror, President Ho Chi Minh addressed a message to all the villagers. In it he apologised for failing in his leadership, thus forcing the masses to take the law into their hands even to the point of ignoring the humanitarian principles of the party and the government. It was reported by the cadres that, when issuing the statement, the President was so overcome that he burst into tears. The report was probably accurate, for Ho is known to be a consummate actor, weeping and kissing being two of his favourite effects. He uses them readily at the appropriate moment. (Ho was nicknamed by an Indonesian paper 'The Kissing President' on the occasion of his official visit to Djakarta in 1959.)

He next ordered that all village committees should submit a full report of these excesses to the higher authorities. At the same time, they were to draw up lists of all those who had been clear-sighted enough to recognise the wrongs which were being committed and who made some attempt to stop them.

Many citizens, most of them party members, had refused to participate in the campaign, and some had even tried to intervene on behalf of relatives. Their names were now carefully listed and forwarded to provincial committees, which at once invited them to come forward and be congratulated. After receiving their commendations, they were promptly dispatched to "re-education camps" for three years, to employ their time in manual labour and in studying in more detail the unfailing principles of Marxism-Leninism. They were released in 1956, thanks to the Rectification of Errors campaign which concluded the Land Reform program. This is a typical example of the cunning way in which the party eliminated those of its own members who, although faithful to communist doctrine, did not approve of the terrorist policy.

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After the wave of terror, however, there was a complete reversal of the situation. Far from refusing to participate in "citizen-labour", thousands volunteered for it, and taxes were collected in a matter of a few hours.

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THE LIST OF TRAITORS

Such victims of the "Political Struggle" as had escaped execution and had by some miracle survived the most barbarous tortures, were sent to jail pending further investigations. An interval of a few weeks elapsed, and then the results of these "investigations" were made public. It was officially proclaimed that many of those arrested were members of a dangerous clandestine organisation working for the French imperialists.

Two years earlier, in 1951, heavy bombing by the French had annihilated the entire irrigation network in the communist-controlled zone. The party now saw in this military disaster a possible solution to its present problem. Its leaders revealed that the idea of destroying the irrigation system had been suggested to the French by these very traitors whom the angry masses had denounced. It was even said that they had provided the French with accurate maps giving the location of dams and lock-gates. The absurdity of this accusation was immediately apparent to all but the blindest followers of the party, since every Vietnamese knew perfectly well that it was the French who had built the dams, and that all the ordnance maps of Vietnam and of Indochina had been compiled by the French. To suppose that they had forgotten the whereabouts of these gigantic constructions, and needed map references from local spies to locate them again, was patently ridiculous. But communists, in their propaganda, have never considered absurdity to be a serious obstacle to mass persuasion. It was their habit when dealing with peasants constantly to repeat simple statements, and their propagandists knew from past experience that the villagers would believe without question any story, however fanciful, about the French and the Americans; many of them had probably never met a Frenchman or an American in the whole course of their lives. One communist officer, who had valiantly fought at Dien Bien Phu, was heard to enquire whether or not Americans had red skins. Obviously he had confused Americans with American Indians, the Redskins—a name introduced into the Vietnamese language by its French equivalent, *Pearau Rouges*. Clearly, an ignorant man; all the same, he typifies the abysmal ignorance which was so widespread. Thus, the simpler the argument, the more suited it was to the peasants' understanding.

Public trials were accordingly arranged in every province, long lists of traitors being drawn up and sent to the central committee of the party for approval. These lists included the names of the following types of people living in each province: the richest landlord; the most senior Buddhist monk; the Catholic bishop; the most influential Confucianist (*i.e.* the scholar having the highest degree under the former system of education, based on the study of canonical texts, and who thus enjoyed greater prestige as a moralist); and the highest mandarin who had served under the previous monarchist régime in the days of the French Protectorate.

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The problem of finding capitalists was not insoluble, since the term "capitalist", like that of "landlord", is capable of elastic extension in the communist dictionary. The authorities could always find some one who might be termed "capitalist" on the grounds that he enjoyed a higher-than-average standard of living. Such a man could be held

up to the masses as apparently possessing a certain amount of capital. But to find someone who was involved in foreign trade was far more difficult, and the Chinese advisers, by insisting on this, were making a great mistake. They probably imagined that this type of capitalist was as readily discoverable in Vietnam as in Kuomintang China; but while there were many businessmen who traded in the Shanghai region under the Chiang Kai-shek régime, there were none in Vietnam, where foreign trade had, for almost a century, remained the monopoly of a few French firms.

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After the list had been approved, a special war tribunal was formed. Moving from one province to another, it brought to trial the various groups of traitors in each region. The presiding judge was a well known lawyer, who had previously been a professor of Hanoi University, while the assessors and public prosecutors were faithful party members. There were no barristers, only "defenders". These were people from every walk of life—in one instance, a teacher from a private school and a midwife—who were appointed by the tribunal to defend the "interests of the people" rather than the rights of the prisoner at the bar. They pleaded indulgence for a few "confederates" who had been arrested only in order that they might denounce the leaders of the "gangs", but demanded severe punishment for these alleged ringleaders.

The trials were public, which meant that they were attended by two delegations of party members, one from the villagers and the other from workers' organisations. The delegates were granted at least two weeks to study the case and to memorise all the slogans they would be required to shout at appropriate moments.

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RECTIFICATION OF ERRORS

As soon as Land Reform was completed (by 1956) and the so-called peasants' authority well established in the villages, the party quite unexpectedly admitted to having made many serious mistakes during the two previous campaigns when the 'masses' had been 'given a free hand'. Accordingly, the communists promised to correct all these mistakes which, in their own words, had had a devastating effect on the party's prestige and the well-being of the people. So a 'Rectification of Errors' campaign was launched, beginning with the resignation of both Truong Chinh, secretary-general of the party, and Ho Viet Thang, vice-minister in charge of Land Reform.

Vo Nguyen Giap, as the party's spokesman, read a long list of errors to the 10th Congress of the Party Central Committee. This ran:

(a) While carrying out their anti-feudal task, our cadres have underestimated or, worse still, have denied all anti-imperialist achievements, and have separated the Land Reform and the Revolution. Worst of all, in some areas they have even made the two mutually exclusive.

(b) We have failed to realise the necessity of uniting with the middle-level peasants, and we should have concluded some form of alliance with the rich peasants, whom we treated in the same manner as the landlords.

(c) We attacked the landowning families indiscriminately, according no consideration to those who had served the Revolution and to those families with sons in the army. We showed no indulgence towards landlords who participated in the Resistance, treating their children in the same way as we treated the children of other landlords.

(d) We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread.

(e) Whilst carrying out our Land Reform program we failed to respect the principles of freedom of faith and worship in many areas.

(f) In regions inhabited by minority tribes we have attacked tribal chiefs too strongly, thus injuring, instead of respecting, local customs and manners.

(g) When reorganising the party, we paid too much importance to the notion of social class instead of adhering firmly to political qualifications alone. Instead of recognising education to be the first essential, we resorted exclusively to organisational measures such as disciplinary punishments, expulsion from the party, executions, dissolution of party branches and cells. Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganisation.¹

This confession, together with the spectacular removal of those responsible for the movement, has led many outside observers to believe that the confessed errors were genuine mistakes, and that there was a sincere effort on the part of the North Vietnamese leaders to correct them. A few even have gone so far as to conclude that the whole process had been a complete failure. This was far from true, for the so-called Rectification of Errors campaign was only another bluff to be added to an already long list.

Rectification of Errors was indeed an integral part of the well planned process of Land Reform and, as such, it had been conceived long before as a necessary conclusion to Land Reform. The reader will recall that, right from the very beginning, in 1953, the party had engaged in the so-called Political Struggle (described as *First Wave of Terror* in Chapter Seven) to pave the way for Land Reform, i.e., to move step by step from a normal situation to that of terror. This time the process was reversed. After three years of sustained violence, the party wished to return to a normal situation as smoothly as possible. They did this by resorting to the Rectification of Errors campaign. It was inevitable that the party should suffer a certain loss of prestige but it was prepared to accept this small sacrifice.

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* * * The true purpose behind Land Reform was this:

1. Confiscation and redistribution were only transitional stages before the ultimate aim—collectivisation of the land. In order to compel the entire peasantry to accept without rancour the collective pattern of life, communist leaders felt it necessary to 'kill the spirit of ownership' which had existed in the mind of every peasant for centuries. To achieve this aim, they applied an ancient Chinese maxim which says:

¹ *Nhan Dan*, No. 970 (October 31, 1956).

'Kill just one and frighten ten thousand others.' In the circumstances, it might have read: 'Kill a few landlords in every village and frighten the whole population.' This explains why a minimum 'quota' of death sentences was fixed for every village even in those villages in which all the land was communal. 'Fright' was achieved rapidly, and the people of North Vietnam coined a new maxim, which was on everyone's lips: 'Take your water from the river, buy your rice from the market, go to hospital in case of illness and be buried in a public cemetery after death.' (This expression is much more epigrammatic in the Vietnamese language.) It meant that the wise man would take care never to possess anything of his own throughout his whole life.

2. In forcing them to denounce and kill landlords, the party wanted to make the peasants share in the blood-guilt. Thus, those who had directly or indirectly participated in the massacre, being morally and politically compromised, were forced to side with the party through fear of retaliation. Unable to side with their former masters in a revolt against the new masters, they had to accept whatever fate the party had in store for them. The guilt-complex which haunted the peasants' minds after the massacre of about 5 percent of the total population has been euphemistically described in official communist literature as 'the peasant's consciousness of being master of his own fate'.

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* * * To quote Nguyen Manh Tuong, the sacred principle applied to Land Reform was: "It is better to kill ten innocent people than to let one enemy escape."²

Thus the party recommended an excess of violence and turned a blind eye to all the abuses they knew to be the inescapable consequences of the "free hand" policy. Hundreds and thousands of people were unjustly killed, jailed or starved to death without the all-powerful party raising a finger to help any of them. According to the law, anyone sentenced to death had the right to appeal to the President of the Republic for clemency, but the stark truth is that Ho Chi Minh did not pardon one single person, not even loyal party members who, at the moment of their execution by firing squads, still shouted: "Long live Ho Chi Minh." In March 1956, Ho did, however, order the temporary postponement of all capital punishment, but this was a consequence of the far-reaching de-Stalinisation campaign started in Moscow on the occasion of the Soviet Party's Twentieth Congress. Those fortunate people whose executions were postponed, and who were later released from jail, owed their lives, indirectly, to Nikita Khrushchev—not at all to Ho Chi Minh.

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[The Communist organ *Nhan Dan* described the poignant scene when Tan, a middle level peasant who had been unjustly imprisoned and sentenced to death, was released and returned to his village and family]:

During the evening people came in groups to talk about the mistakes that had been made during Land Reform. They recalled how the villagers had been compelled to denounce and torture one another, to sever all family ties and to suppress all human feelings. There was sorrow in every heart.

(*Nhan Dan*, November 14, 1956.)

² Nguyen Manh Tuong: "Concerning Mistakes Committed in Land Reform."

REVOLTS AND REPRESSIONS

THE PEASANTS

Not unnaturally, the "new" party members were far from pleased at the release of the "old" members from prison and at their subsequent rehabilitation. They foresaw that the probable result would be the loss of their own prestige and the collapse of their authority. The party's official paper described their distress in the following terms.

Generally speaking, our "new" comrades are afraid that, once the "old" party members are released from jail, they will unite and fight against the "new" party members. They predict retaliation by the "old" members since there can be no love lost between the two groups. This attitude is entirely wrong and can do no good. In meetings called to discuss "how best to welcome old comrades", their talk is of how to oppose them.
(*Nhan Dan*, November 21, 1956.)

All this was true, and in many areas "old" party members were simply killed by the "new" as soon as they returned to their own villages. * * *

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The following passage is quoted from *Hoc Tap*, the organ for ideological indoctrination of party members.

When referring to mistakes made during Land Reform, many of our comrades blamed other comrades who were responsible for the carrying out of the Land Reform program. They have even accused the party; and always these accusations have been made in a public place such as theatre, train or public garden . . . they have discussed these mistakes in a completely irresponsible manner. There are many comrades who took an active part in Land Reform, either as team-chiefs or group-committee members, who have openly declared before the public that they acted under pressure from higher authorities. Their only crime, they persisted, lay in the fact that, although they had been aware that the whole policy was wrong, they had lacked the courage to protest.

(*Hoc Tap*, Hanoi, No. 10, October 1956).

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In some areas public anger, aggravated by bitter despair, led to open revolt. There were reports from several areas (Bac-Ninh, Nam-Dinh, for example) of peasant uprisings, but according to the official sources "serious trouble was avoided by the tact of soldiers and cadres". This simply meant that, in troubled areas, three soldiers were permanently billeted in every peasant house. In November 1956, however, the official press admitted that there had been an armed revolt in the Quynh-Luu district of Nghe-An province. The whole story was told later to press correspondents by a group of defeated rebels who managed to escape by boat into South Vietnam. They reported that twenty thousand peasants, armed only with sticks and other crude weapons, had fought against a whole division of regular troops.

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LAND REFORM AND TERROR IN NORTH VIETNAM

Excerpted from

THE TWO VIETNAMS

by Bernard Fall

(Praeger)

Bernard Fall, a French national who spent many years in Vietnam, is the author of "The Vietminh Regime," "The Two Vietnams," "Street Without Joy," and other writings on Vietnam which command recognition as standard reference works.

With the extreme narrow-mindedness that seems to be the hallmark of the Viet-Minh low-level cadre (*can-bo*), the decree was applied throughout the D.R.V.N. with utmost ferocity. Local Party officials began to "deliver" veritable quotas of landlords and rich peasants even in areas where the difference between the largest and the smallest village plots was a quarter-acre. Special "People's Agricultural Reform Tribunals" ("Toa-An Nhan-Dan Dac-Biet") began to mete out death sentences to individuals who in any case were not landlords, and who in many cases had loyally served in the war against France or had even been members of the Lao-Dong. By the summer of 1956, the Lao-Dong was for the first time confronted with a severe internal crisis: A menace to life and property from whose arbitrariness no one any longer felt safe produced a wave of disobedience and outright hatred for the Party cadres throughout the country. While it is obviously impossible to give precise figures, the best-educated guesses on the subject are that probably close to 50,000 North Vietnamese were executed in connection with the land reform and that at least twice as many were arrested and sent to forced labor camps.

On August 17, 1956, Ho Chi Minh himself openly came out in favor of putting a brake on the runaway land-reform program. In a letter addressed "To the Compatriots in the Country," he stated:

Errors have been committed in the implementation of unity in the countryside. . . . The Party and the Government have taken up seriously the subject of those lacks and errors and have determined a plan for their correction:

Those who have been wrongly classified as landlords and rich peasants will be correctly reclassified.

Those members of the Party, the cadres, and the population who have been the subject of an erroneous judgment will be re-established in their rights and prerogatives and their honorable character will be recognized. . . .

After this public acknowledgment of the problem, the other Party organs fell into line. On August 24, the authoritative *Nhan-Dan*

openly admitted that loyal Party members, including UBKC chairmen, had been executed and besmirched: "Brothers from the same family no longer dare visit each other, and people do not dare to greet each other when they meet in the street." The remaining Catholics, who had been badly hit both as farmers and as Catholics, were promised the return of some of their confiscated churches and imprisoned priests.

All this came too late, however, to prevent a popular explosion on November 2, 1956—at the very time when, at the other end of the Communist bloc, Soviet tanks began to crush the Hungarians who had rebelled under precisely the same conditions. What made the Vietnamese uprising particularly humiliating for Hanoi was that it took place in the middle of the Viet-Minh bastion of Interzone IV and in Ho Chi Minh's own native province, in fact, only a few miles from his birthplace. Since, by sheer accident, Canadian members of the International Control Commission were present when the outbreak took place, its completely fortuitous and popular origin can be well substantiated: It apparently started when villagers surrounded a Commission jeep with petitions asking that they be allowed to go south of the 17th parallel. A Viet-Minh soldier or militia member tried to disperse the villagers with his rifle butt, but the enraged farmers beat him and took his rifle. Thereupon the VPA soldier found it expedient to withdraw, only to return with a squad of troops; they met a fate similar to his, and shots were exchanged. By nightfall, the movement had swept over the whole *huyện* (district), and danger mounted that the farmers, like those of the first Nghé-An Soviet of 1930, would march on the provincial capital of Vinh, just as they had marched twenty-six years earlier in protest against the colonial power. Hanoi no longer had any choice; it responded in exactly the same way as the colonial power had, sending the whole 325th Division to crush the rebels. It did so with typical VPA thoroughness; allegedly, close to 6,000 farmers were deported or executed. With headlines pre-empted by the news from Suez and Hungary, the world press had little space left for the farmers of Nghé-An. And no U.N. member—neither of the always touchy Bandung bloc so concerned about the fate of its brothers in colonial shackles, nor of the habitually anti-Communist nations—mustered sufficient courage (or marshaled sufficient facts) to present the Nghé-An case to the conscience of the world.

Ho reacted to the rebellion with eminently practical measures. The land-reform tribunals were abolished as of November 8; the unpopular Party hack Truong Chinh was removed from the secretary generalship of the Party, with Ho himself assuming it until 1961; and the Minister of Agriculture was likewise dismissed. At the same time, the regime launched a vast "Campaign for the Rectification of Errors," in which thousands of prison and concentration-camp inmates were returned to their villages. In fact, on November 22, 1956, *Nhan-Dan* printed an article titled "Our Attitude When We Return to Our Villages," which contained a sort of code of behavior for the ex-political prisoner. But the enraged prisoners had no intention of simply letting bygones be bygones. In many cases, they refused to work with the Party cadres who had sent them to prison; in many others, they dragged the cadres off to their own sessions of self-criticism and denunciation before the

People's Courts. As H. C. Taussig, an otherwise not unsympathetic British eyewitness, observed later, a veritable "orgy of self-criticism" (also with quotas and statistics of "corrected errors") swept the D.R.V.N. at the end of 1956 and the beginning of 1957, with Ho himself—his own reputation surprisingly untarnished by the affair—taking to the radio and newspapers time and again to exhort his countrymen to forgiveness. But, as he himself said: "One cannot wake the dead." And there were now many dead between the regime and its people.

CONCERNING MISTAKES COMMITTED IN LAND REFORM

by Nguyen Manh Tuong

Excerpted from

THE NEW CLASS

by Hoang Van Chi

(Saigon)

Nguyen Manh Tuong is the son of a modest public servant in Hanoi. He studied at the Lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi and afterwards in Montpellier, France, where he received a doctorate in Arts and another in Law. He joined the Resistance in 1946, but was considered by the Communists as being resistant to Marxist indoctrination. They called him a pachyderm. However, he was sent in 1953 to Vienna to attend a congress of the World Peace League, and Radio Moscow used this opportunity to ask him to deliver a speech on the radio. In his speech, Nguyen Manh Tuong appealed to all the intellectuals in the world to support the Resistance in Vietnam. From that time on, his prestige rose with the Communist authorities, who appointed him professor at the Pre-University School in Thanh Hoa and, later, professor at the Pedagogic School in Hanoi. He was among the five professors at the Hanoi University who attacked the Party policy in the opposition papers.

He made the following speech on behalf of a group of lawyers who were delegates to the National Congress of the Fatherland Front held in Hanoi on October 30, 1956. This speech fell into the hands of a Vietnamese correspondent in Rangoon, who sent it to Saigon where it was published in full in many papers.

What follows is an analysis of the mistakes committed by the Communists in their Land Reform programme, but it can also be considered an indictment of the New Class and of the regime it established in North Vietnam.

[*Editors note: The Speech by Nguyen Manh Tuong is reproduced here as a document which is almost certainly authentic. Statements as blunt as this were briefly tolerated in North Vietnam during the so-called "Hundred Flowers" period, which paralleled Mao Tse-tung's "Hundred Flowers" period in China. Apart from the fact that it has the unmistakable ring of authenticity to those who are familiar with the period, Vietnamese who knew Tuong personally had no doubt at all that the manner and style were distinctly Tuong's.*]

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The present Congress has been held to study the mistakes committed during the Land Reform and the ways of correcting these mistakes.

Today I have the honour to summarize before the entire Congress all the ideas expressed during the past ten days in our group.¹ I will speak with all the seriousness of an intellectual who does not forget his responsibility towards his country and its history.

When Mr. Truong Chinh read before the present Congress the self-criticism made by the Lao-Dong Party, I was very enthusiastic. Nothing could impress me more than these sincere words from the Party which led the country towards the Revolution and which achieved so many successes, and which now examines its past activities, confessing the shortcomings and mistakes it has committed. I may well say that the Lao-Dong Party does not disappoint the hopes and confidence of our whole people. I have never seen the Party as close to the people as it is at the present moment; and I understand now, better than before, the real meaning of the slogan: *The Party is ours; it belongs to our whole people.*

Nevertheless, I have to confess today that my enthusiasm is greatly reduced every time the disastrous effects of the mistakes committed in the Land Reform come to my mind.

I ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for permission to bow before the memory of all the innocent people killed, *not by the enemy, but by our own hands.* During our heroic War of Resistance, many of our compatriots sacrificed themselves but with a feeling of contentment, because they knew that they died for the emancipation of their country from the claws of the enemy. They sacrificed their lives for us, and they were killed by the enemy. Their death was a positive, glorious and heroic one which the Fatherland shall glorify to eternity.

On the other hand, the innocent people who died during the fulfilment of the Land Reform programme suffered terribly when they breathed their last, because they bore a shameful epithet when they died. We have rubbed out that shameful epithet, but what can we do to eliminate the sorrow in the hearts of their descendants? The greatest pain striking our hearts is the realization that we have now no means of consoling the dead.

* * * * *

As I am a man of the masses much affected by the death of so many innocent people and deeply impressed by the self-criticism of the Lao-Dong Party, I ask your permission to express some constructive ideas. I wish to express my opinion about the mistakes in the Land Reform programme and then I will go back to their causes. In my opinion these mistakes are in fact most typical and painful effects of shortcomings in leadership. Therefore I should like to express some constructive ideas about the Lao-Dong Party's conception of leadership.

Why do I think this way? It is because the same mistakes have not only been committed in Land Reform, but in many other fields also. In these various fields similar mistakes have caused the death of innumerable people. Therefore in localising the importance of our mis-

¹ Probably the Jurists' Group.

takes we are not able to profit much from the lesson of them; for we would betray the confidence of the members of the Lao-Dong Party and the hopes of all our people.

* * * * *

Now, what is the objective reality of the present situation?

Casting a glance at the countryside, we see lack of unity everywhere. *Ever since the policy of Land Reform was wrongly carried out, the peasants in different strata have been opposed to each other; the former cadres are opposed to the new ones; and the former party-branches are opposed to those recently established. While destroying the landowner class, we simultaneously condemned to dreadful death numberless old people and children. In order to know the exact state of the countryside at the present moment, one has simply to read articles in Nhan Dan under the heading: Education in the Countryside.*

What is the situation in factories and working camps? *Nhan Dan* also reveals that the Government recently sent delegations to visit and console the workers and to enforce the labor regulations which had long been in force. What does all this mean? *It means that the working class has been toiling for two years without being adequately remunerated.*

Hundreds and thousands of former public servants and their families who were living on their pensions have starved one after another because they have not been paid for two years. *Some of them committed suicide by jumping into rivers; one person poisoned himself twice.*

And what of the cadres? I ask you to look at their faces, at their clothes. Please inquire about the number of cadres lying in the hospital; have a glance at their meals so that you get an idea of their misfortune.

How can I neglect to mention these Southern compatriots brought North, when I think of their fate and the fate reserved for their children now concentrated in Hanoi and Haiphong? They suffer so much, and particularly so because they have not their families with them to console them in their distress.

Do you believe what I say? If you do not, I simply ask you to read *Nhan Dan*, to look at the files stocked in the office of the Fatherland Front in Hanoi during the Third Congress; I ask you to listen to the complaints raised by the masses and that will enable you to imagine what the real situation is.

Mr. Truong Chinh was right when he said that the Government and the Party have lost a great part of the prestige they used to have. Is that what we want? Certainly not. Our regime is beautiful, our policy is right, our humanism is good. But why are we so unhappy?

* * * * *

When we see so many innocent people killed or jailed during the Land Reform programme, some of whom contributed so much to the victory of the Revolution; when we see in the countryside so many people still being tortured and ill-treated; when we cannot carry out the policy of broad alliance among our compatriots—then we must

realize that the mistakes committed in the Land Reform are simply the consequence of the mistakes we committed in a more important field, in the leadership of the Lao-Dong Party.

* * * * *

3. *We despise expertise.* The politicians despise the law but if they were wise enough to consult the technicians—I mean the jurists—and give the technicians the right to express their opinion, the latter would have advised them to pay attention to the law and to use the law in the service of the Revolution.

Unfortunately, during the past ten years we have been in a strange situation. Politics obsesses us so much that the word *platform* disturbs us night and day. If I may use an *idealist* analogy *I would describe the platform as a wandering soul which incessantly haunts the one who murdered the body it formerly inhabited.*

One thing is however surprising: comrade peasants and workers never talk about platforms. It is only cadres and party members from the petty bourgeoisie who are always afraid of *losing their platform*.²

* * * * *

There happened in our country an event so strange that we shall never forget it; it will make our descendants laugh for centuries. *When we want to engage a chauffeur, in Hanoi, we do not ask him if he had a driving license or for how long he had been driving. We only ask him: Do you have a "good platform"?* The result has been that in the past two years, in Hanoi only, hundreds of accidents have occurred because of drivers who had a solid *platform* but no skill in driving motor cars.

A patient entered a hospital for urgent treatment. The first problem debated was: To what class did the patient belong? Because one would lose one's platform if one gave treatment to a landowner. To let him die, on the other hand, would mean that one had kept one's platform. (The above phenomenon has been reported by Doctor Nguyen xuan Nguyen.)

* * * * *

If the National Assembly is the highest organization of the people, which represents the people we must objectively recognize that, due to the infinitely weak role played by the National Assembly, *the people have in fact no democratic right at all.*

* * * * *

What does it mean "to lack democracy"? It means to stand far from the masses, to imprison oneself in the jail of subjectivity. How can a revolutionary government commit such serious mistakes?

Until today we could not answer the above question . . .³ Many of

² That is making doctrinal deviation.

³ Some sentences are probably missing at this point.

the revolutionaries were amazed when they saw people "go in search of freedoms", leaving the revolutionary ranks and joining the capitalists.

* * * * *

Now, after the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, after successive revolts in Berlin, in Poznan, in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary, we understand the problem a little better; we know how to solve it . . . Many people were in fact running away from the Revolution although it was beautiful, and it brought happiness to the nation, and this because the Revolution had the weakness of being separated from the masses; the Revolution lacked democracy and therefore it became daily more mandarin-like, more authoritative, more narrow-minded. It became totalitarian, even sometimes dictatorial. We adopted a "one-way" attitude. We did not permit anybody to say anything that was contrary to our conceptions and our presumptions. We were proud of ourselves; we believed that we had a monopoly of Truth. Such then was the evil pride, the self-adulation of the revolutionary personality. We were flying back and forth in the "blue sky of mirages"; we had confidence in ourselves only; we did not despise the masses in theory, *but we did so in fact*. An objective observer might clearly have seen that we trampled the masses underfoot. The worse thing was that, when someone amongst the masses said that we were wrong, that we had better do something in this way or that way, we immediately shouted that this voice came from the enemy. We still had this vague conception of *friends and enemies*: we saw enemies everywhere because we were too proud of ourselves; we practiced self-adulation excessively.

We are now aware that Stalin was responsible for the widespread growth of this evil among the ranks of the Revolution. Because of his pride, his self-adulation, Stalin did not allow anybody to behave democratically towards himself, and everywhere he saw enemies. The result is known: Beria was able to profit by Stalin's slogan "Be Vigilant" to commit crimes without number. Without the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, without the serious mistakes we committed in Land Reform, blood would continue to flow in streams and many people would continue to quit the rank of the Revolution, in spite of the sympathy they had for it. We have paid a high price, but we know now the cause of the evil which has made us suffer: *We lack democracy*.

* * * * *

After World War II, the Charter of the United Nations consolidated the achievements of the fight for democracy throughout history by giving to civilized nations the responsibility of carrying out and safeguarding democracy. We are not at all surprised when we see capitalist countries committing mistakes in the realization of democracy; *but we have the right to be astonished when we see that the same shortcomings occur in countries where socialist or popular democratic revolutions have been achieved*. The Sixth Congress of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers held in Brussels last May deplored the fact that the principles of democracy were still trampled under foot in capitalist countries as well as in socialist ones,

and this in spite of the fact that on both sides there are democratic constitutions in which it is solemnly stated that Government will respect, realize, and guarantee democracy. This explains why the masses on both sides, throughout the world today, are in such a turmoil.

As for our country, we have solemnly announced in our Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution that our government is built on a democratic foundation. Nevertheless the people have found that we actually lack democracy. The present movement for the enlargement of democracy carried out by the Government is proof, and this lack of democracy has in fact been recognized by the Third People's Congress of the Lao-Dong Party.

Because of this lack of democracy, serious mistakes have been committed in Land Reform. Now the origin of these mistakes can be found. Our minds were never at rest, for we were always afraid that some cadres might abuse their power. And all these troubles derived from a lack of legality. The rights and duties of the citizen were not clearly defined. Practically no one had a right to express his opinion; there were no means to present it to the authorities. He was not allowed to participate in the elaboration of the Government programme. In such a situation, the leaders were permitted to commit serious mistakes, to effect a great loss of people's lives and energy, and to damage the prestige of the Party and the Government.

Therefore, if we want now to correct our past mistakes we must establish a regime of true legality and true democracy.

1. A REGIME OF TRUE LEGALITY

This is neither the moment nor the place for me to discuss the problem of legality. I may have a better opportunity to do it. Here, I would like to present to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, a few remarks only.

The Lao-Dong Party has recognized during the correction of mistakes committed in Land Reform that it is necessary to *improve* our regime as regards legality. But I am afraid that our leaders do not yet have a clear and complete understanding of the problem of legality. Politics still considers justice a *poor relative*. The use of the verb *to improve* would constitute proof of that fact. Although there exists in our country a Ministry of Justice as well as many tribunals, laws and regulations, a policy of legality seems to be totally non-existent. I will discuss carefully this point when I have an opportunity to express my conception about the policy of legality, a true one, I mean. Now in my opinion, the problem at the present moment is to *establish*, not to *improve*, a policy of legality.

Another proof is that, even now, *in the campaign of correction of mistakes*, politics still infringes upon legality. To begin with, I must state that Mr. Ho Viet Thang's letter, in which he apologized and asked to resign, was only a political solution. In the conversations I have had with all the delegates who have come to this Congress, I noticed that none of them was satisfied with Mr. Ho Viet Thang's act and attitude. For my own part, as a lawyer, I confess that I am not yet

* Vice-minister of Agriculture, in charge of the Land Reform.