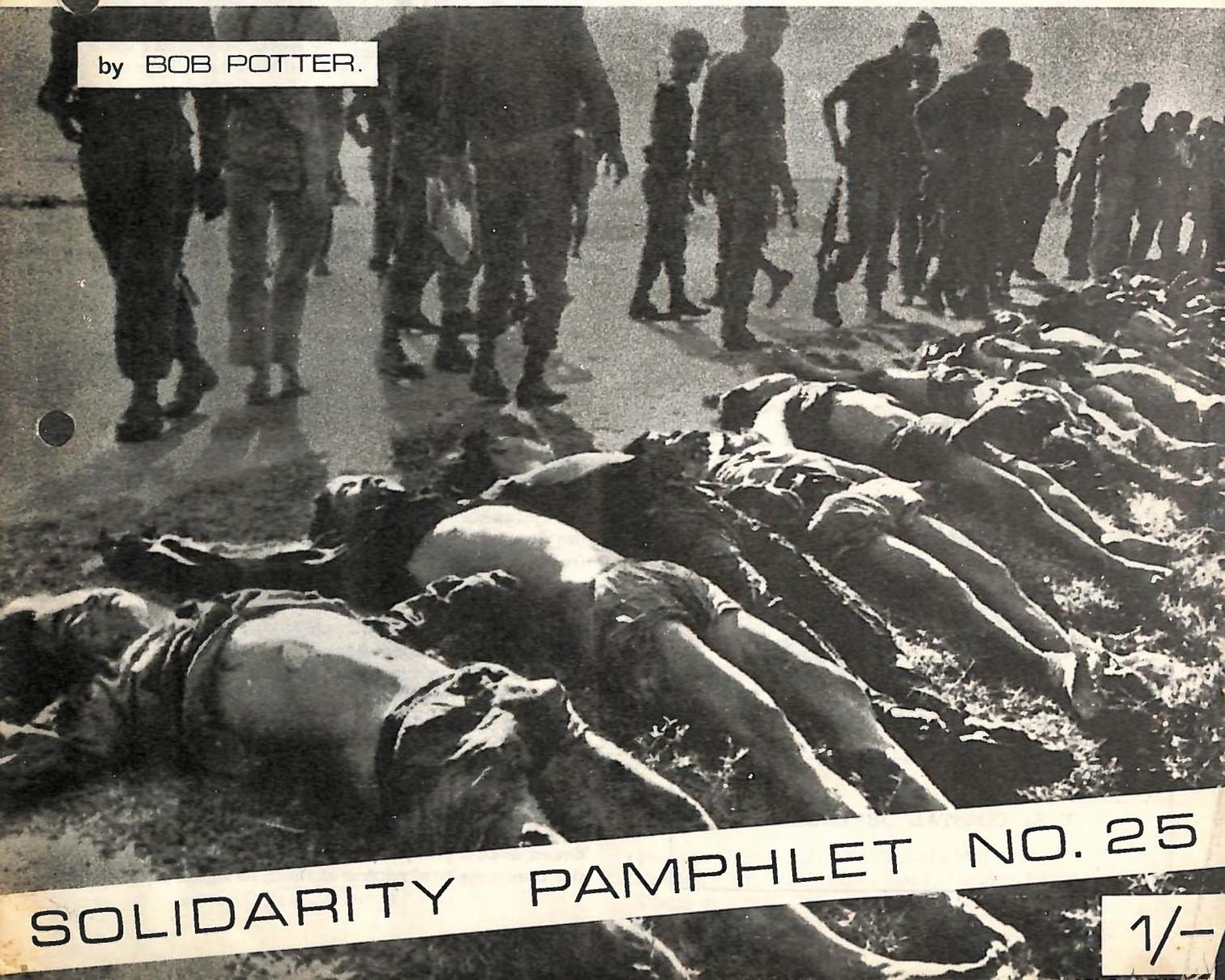


the rape of VIETNAM

by BOB POTTER.



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1/-

PREFACE

It has been no surprise to us that the first two editions (over 3000 copies) of our pamphlet VIETNAM were sold so rapidly, thus necessitating this third, enlarged edition. Every step taken by the American ruling class in escalating the Vietnam war, each lick by Harold Wilson of LBJ's arse, makes the need for a dispassionate analysis of the origins and background of the war more urgent. Yet what has the traditional revolutionary movement produced on Vietnam? Virtually nothing.

Walk into Colletts in Charing Cross Road, as I did before preparing this pamphlet, and see for yourself. In the periodical rack nearest the entrance, one pamphlet 'Fleet Street to Hanoi' tells you about the Red Cross mission that carried medical supplies to the Northern capital. It's 4 pages long. Then proceed to the back of the shop. There, mingled with paper back editions of Stalin and Mao, you will find Ivor Montague's 'Vietnam', the official Communist Party pamphlet, which tells us all about U Thant's proposals for peace. There is also 'Vietnam, the Dirty War' by Robert Guillain (are some wars 'clean'?). We read here how Saigon women have renounced their old costumes and 'turned to jeans to please the visiting GIs', and how prostitution now blooms.

Finally one can get 'US War of Aggression in Vietnam'. This is published in Hanoi and reads like the old 'For a lasting Peace, etc...', apart from the last few pages of quotes from Lord Russell, de Gaulle and Wayne Morse!

And that's it! That's the best that the combined forces of 'the left' can offer. Not a single pamphlet that traces the history of American expansion into South East Asia, that tells the story of the Communist Party of Indochina, that deals with the struggle between the major power blocs for the domination of mineral-rich Vietnam. And not a single sentence anywhere that looks for the victory of the social revolution in Vietnam. Without exception these piddling little pamphlets are for the defence of the status quo, preferably to be imposed by the United Nations or some other alignment of capitalist states.

As readers of our pamphlet will appreciate, this document has not been prepared simply to cash in on the mass movement that has developed against the Vietnam war. We are presenting the reader with basic facts, without which a meaningful appraisal of the war cannot be made. In a spirit of complete opposition to the ruling classes of each side we are recording all the dirt we can, on all the participants in the struggle for Vietnam. The fact that no other organization of the left has produced such a pamphlet is yet further evidence of the complete bankruptcy of their thought.



U.S. COASTAL DEFENCES

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to understand the situation in Vietnam today without seeing it in the context of the world situation - a world where the giant economic powers, the USA on the one hand, the USSR and China on the other, are struggling for supremacy.

The two power blocs have met face to face in Vietnam, and the thousands of Vietnamese who are being killed and mutilated daily are the unconscious pawns in this world-wide struggle.

More than 95% of Vietnam's population are peasants. As far as they are concerned they are engaged in a peasant war. The greatest differentiations in land ownership exist, and have always existed in the South and it is here that the struggle is sharpest.

The vast majority of the peasants support the Vietcong which they see as representing freedom from foreign domination, and the ending of the feudal system still prevalent in the south of the country. It suits Chinese foreign policy to support the movement for liberation at this stage, and American foreign policy to oppose the same movement at this stage. This fact dominates the total situation more than any actions of the Vietnamese themselves.

The American aggression in Vietnam has already created a world-wide movement of opposition. We support this movement wholeheartedly. But our support is not based on any starry-eyed illusions about the Vietcong. We recognize that the Vietcong has the mass support of the peasantry. We also recognize that it is a 'Popular Front' controlled by the Communists, whose objective is to set up a bureaucratic type of class society in South Vietnam similar to that existing in the North. We also recognize that the Vietcong has some pretty murky political ancestors and that its hands are bespattered with working class blood.

It is not the first time in the history of communism that oppressive bureaucracies have been founded on the sacrifices of millions of dedicated revolutionaries. The ruling circles in Moscow, Peking and Hanoi are using the genuine hatred of the peasants for the foreign invader and their genuine hunger for land as cynically today as they ever have in the past.(1)

FRENCH COLONY

Indochina (2) became a French colony around the 1870's. It was never a particularly efficient or profitable colony - indeed in the 1890's French legislators frequently complained that France spent 80 million Francs in order to earn 95 million each

(1) Needless to say, both Moscow and Peking have their own particular 'line'. China's 'People's Daily' accuses Russia of not supplying adequate material help to Hanoi. Pavlov, First Secretary of the Komsomol replies that the USSR wishes to give more military aid, but is hindered by China's refusal to allow transit. Russia reopens disarmament talks with the West at a time of increasing American air attacks, while China's Chief of the General Staff belliciously says: 'We welcome the presence of more US forces for it will enable us to wipe out the root cause of the war' (quoted in the 'Daily Worker', 2.8.65). North Vietnam has, ever since its foundation, remained strictly neutral in the Peking-Moscow dispute.

(2) Indochina comprised Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. For the West, Vietnam has always been the most important of these three countries. Vietnam is inhabited by Annamese, who constitute 3/4 of the population of Indochina. The administrative regions of Vietnam were Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina.

year. (3) The colossal expenditure went to maintain an enormous civil service bureaucracy, equal numerically to the British administration in India. (Population of Indochina: 30 million; of India: 325 million).

To increase a national revenue always in the red, the French encouraged opium sales and made alcohol consumption compulsory. (Both distilleries and poppy fields were government monopolies.) On September 8, 1934, the semi-government paper 'Aurore d'Indochine' wrote:

'The administration has decided from today that all inhabitants must consume 7 litres of alcohol annually.... the sum due for all alcohol delivered (i. e. to villages) whether sold or not, will be paid in full. The consumption of alcohol is obligatory in Tonkin and Annam and will soon be enforced in Cochinchina...'

Industrial production was negligible. 96.5% of all exports consisted of raw materials. Raw latex was hardly worked on but exported as such, at very low cost, by the Michelin Rubber Trust. Although Indochina's soil was rich in coal and various metals, there was only one smelting furnace in the whole country. Two-thirds of the coal was exported. Even rice was exported. French imperialism saw in the non-industrialisation of its colonies a guarantee of stability. It sought by all possible means to prevent the development of a numerous, concentrated and educated working class.

(3) During the 1900's Indochina bought, on average, 100 million francs of French products, out of a French trade total of 20 billion francs. Ironically the economic ties between the two countries reached their maximum after the signing of the 1954 Geneva agreement. In 1957, when North Vietnam had been eradicating French influence for 3 years and South Vietnam was free from direct political control from Paris, Vietnam as a whole was more dependent than ever on France's willingness to buy her overpriced (15% above average world market prices) goods.

Year	Exports to France	Imports from France	Exports to USA	Imports from USA
1939	32.2%	55.7%	12%	4.2%
1957	50.8%	29.3%	13.7%	22.7%

(See 'The Malayan Economic Review', April 1961, pp. 55-80.)

The pattern of land ownership was also very backward. Some 700 European settlers owned 20% of the cultivable land, of which only half was worked upon. The vast mass of poor peasants owned less than 5 acres and in the North often less than one acre. Irrigation was very primitive. Indochinese rice fields produced less than half the yield per acre being obtained in Japan. Even phosphate fertilisers were being exported.(4)

The average wage of workers in the Tonkin coal mines was under one half-piastre per day. Many of those working on rice plantations were paid in rice alone. Unemployment was rampant, and thousands of workers were employed only six months of the year. Tenant farmers paid at least 40% of the rice crop to the landlord as rent.

Virtually all authorities are agreed that the living standards of the Indochinese people declined during the period of French rule - according to the 'Syndicate of French Exporters' between 1900 and 1937 the population increased by 80%, while total domestic rice consumption increased by only 23%.

The best that almost a century of French rule could offer as evidence of the 'humanitarian mission' of colonialism was 1 doctor for every 38,500 inhabitants (compared with 1 for every 250 people in France). The Annuaire Statistique for Indochina (1941-42) showed that for a population the size of Spain there were but four secondary schools and that for every 100,000 inhabitants there were 25 children at primary school and 5 at secondary school.

The Popular Front government of Leon Blum introduced an 8-hour day legislation in 1937 (5). Trade unions had been banned by the same government, but French employers were forced to recognize and negotiate with the powerful rank-and-file workers' organizations mainly led by Trotskyist representatives.

(4) See 'Mouvements Nationaux et Lutte de Classes au Vietnam' by Ahn Van and Jacqueline Roussel.

(5) 1936 and 1937 were notable years for widespread strikes and peasant demonstrations which the 'Popular Front' hoped to appease. In the same years 'independent' Japan had no work limit for men, and women and youths were limited to 11 hours a day. Indian workers had a 12-hour day, while in China and Thailand there were no restrictions at all.

VANGUARDS ARRIVE

The Indochina Communist Party was founded in 1929. At first its activities were essentially peasant ones, in spite of its 'proletarian' jargon. In the towns the ICP worked in close alliance with the influential Trotskyist Party. (6) In 1933 the two parties presented a joint slate of candidates for the Colonial Council elections. Candidates of both parties were elected, demonstrating the intelligent recognition by the French authorities of the essentially parliamentary and bureaucratic character of both parties. (7)

The early '30s were years of numerous mutinies, peasant demonstrations and industrial strikes, which the vanguard parties sought to cash in on. Together the ICP and the Trotskyists enrolled thousands of supporters. Then, in August 1935, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern took place and with it a switch in the Moscow line. Collaboration with the Western 'democracies' and the 'progressive capitalists' became the order of the day. Obediently the ICP Central Committee dropped the slogan 'Down with French Imperialism' from its programme. The campaign against Indochina's feudal rulers, and even the demand for national independence were dropped. At the same time an intensified struggle against 'Trotskyism' was launched. This was no accident. The opting out of the class struggle by the ICP left the field wide open for the Trotskyists led by Ta Thu Thau. Their membership grew to 5000. The period of the late '30s was one of frequent strikes and demonstrations which rocked the state and the economy. In local Saigon elections the Trotskyists at times commanded up to 80% of the votes. But the ICP line was that of their 'comrades' elsewhere in the world, and Ho Chi Minh proudly reported to the Comintern in

(6) The ICP stood for the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. The Trotskyist Party for the 'dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry'.

(7) Even as late as 1938 a Trotskyist candidate for President of Saigon Taxi Drivers' Union won the election hands down.

July 1939: 'As regards the Trotskyists - no alliances and no concessions. They must be unmasked as the stooges of the fascists, which they are'.

The Popular Front days came to an end. In September 1939 France banned the Communist Party at home and abroad. The Stalinist honeymoon with the French colonialists thereby also came to an end. In a statement issued on November 13, 1939, the ICP tried to reconcile the irreconcilable. It denounced France's 'imperialist' war against Nazi Germany, but at the same time asked its supporters to struggle against Japan (which at that time threatened Russian positions in the Far East):

'Our Party finds it to be a matter of life and death ... to struggle against the imperialist war and policy of thievery and massacre of French imperialism ... while at the same time struggling against the aggressive aims of Japanese fascism.'

COLONIAL ASIA

The French exploitation of Indochina was only a small part of the whole sweep of colonialism in South East Asia. At that time India, China, Burma, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaya and Indonesia were all under direct Western domination.

Japan, being the first Asian power to industrialize, was to provide the first challenge to the old imperialisms. As late as 1870 all technical innovations (save those dealing with the theatre!) were banned in Japan. A mere 35 years later a modern Japanese army and navy were decisively to maul Czarist Russia in 1905. One of the victors in World War I, the only Asian nation to be a party to the Washington Naval Conference, Japan had entered the big leagues as a major capitalist power. The origins of the Second World War (in the Pacific) lie in the dependence of Japan on uninterrupted imports of oil, iron ore and coal (Japan being poor in natural raw materials), in her need to seek colonial markets and in her need to expand and consolidate her spheres of interest.

Japan's expansionist drive coincided with the determined push of American imperialism into the Pacific area. Like Japan, America had arrived late on the scene. Her first conquest came in 1898 when under cover of the 'Maine' incident and the resultant Spanish-American war, US forces overran the Philippine Islands. At the Treaty of Paris the McKinley government took over the islands in return for a \$20 million payment to Spain. For the next 4 years some 60,000 US troops were busy crushing a native movement for independence.

As US domination spread into Samoa and Hawaii, the Japanese were busy gobbling up Korea and Manchuria. The Washington Conference of 1921-1922 was the last serious attempt to reach a modus vivendi. In effect America made a deal with Japan whereby Japanese hegemony over Manchuria would be recognized in return for an agreement not to invade China. (Along with Britain, France, and the other European powers, the USA was happily sharing the loot derived from the intensive exploitation of China.

In September 1931 the Japanese launched an attack on Northern China, and later landed 70,000 troops at Shanghai, leaving the Kuo Min Tang government no alternative but to surrender Manchuria. In 1934 the Japanese claimed all China to be part of their sphere of influence. In 1936 the Japanese demanded joint Japanese-Kuo Min Tang military attacks on Maoist-controlled areas. They also demanded that the 5 Northern Chinese provinces be granted 'autonomy' as Japanese puppet regimes. The rejection of these demands by the Kuo Min Tang made the Sino-Japanese war of 1937 inevitable.

A major clash between Japan and the US was equally inevitable. American economic expansion in the Pacific area had steadily increased after the mid 1920s. Between 1931 and 1937 Asia took the following shares of American exports:

Machinery	15%
Copper	26%
Iron and Steel	33%
Paper	40%

More specifically, between 1932 and 1938 the US consistently held first place in China's foreign trade. (In 1935, for example, America's share amounted to \$102 million while Japan's was only \$80 million).

THE PACIFIC WAR

The image of a good-natured, peace-seeking US State Department being caught unawares at Pearl Harbour by a cunning conspiracy of Japanese war lords is the stuff of propaganda. It has not the remotest relationship to the facts. By 1940 the US President and his closest advisers had decided that the Japanese must be pushed back, even if it meant going to war. They had also decided that following the defeat of Japan, the USA was to become 'the' Asian power, at the expense of the older imperialisms in general, and of France in particular. Indochina was a particularly juicy plum waiting to be picked!

At Teheran and Yalta Roosevelt openly proposed that France's rule in Indochina should be replaced by some sort of international trusteeship. Stalin agreed with the suggestion, which was vetoed by Churchill.

The first effects of this new American policy had appeared in June 1940, when the French Governor, Admiral Decoux, urgently attempted to acquire aircraft and equipment from the USA for use against the impending Japanese attack. The equipment had already been paid for, but Washington stepped in and refused delivery. Decoux was virtually forced to accept Japanese demands for 'facilities' in the Bay of Tonkin.

In August 1941 Roosevelt and Churchill met aboard the cruiser 'Augusta' for the Atlantic Conference. There they issued the Atlantic Charter, pledging themselves to peaceful aims, no territorial aggrandizement, fair labour laws, the right of all peoples to choose their own government, and other items of high-sounding double-talk. What they didn't declare was their deal for a joint war against Japan. Winston Churchill, never one for subtleties, let slip to the House of Commons six months later that after meeting FDR he was reassured that 'the United States, even if not herself attacked, would come into the war in the Far East'. Indochina was to be the scene of Japan's last move before the holocaust began.

In July 1941 the Japanese occupied air bases in South Vietnam. The Americans replied with an embargo on petroleum shipped to Japan, and a freezing of all Japanese assets in the USA. At the eleventh hour, only a few days before Pearl Harbour, Roosevelt offered Japan a non-aggression guarantee in exchange for a Japanese evacuation of Indochina.

Between 1942 and 1945 the struggle between American and Japanese imperialism was ferociously fought out throughout the whole Pacific area. In this pamphlet however we can only deal with these events inasmuch as they involved the struggle for the control of Indochina.

Throughout the period of the European war, the French troops in Indochina had been 'recognized as the legal authority' by the Japanese government. The Nazi defeat in France in 1944 and 1945 inspired these French troops in Indochina to drive the Japanese from the colony. The Japanese struck back. In March 1945 they launched a full-scale offensive against the French garrisons. The American Air Force was operating in the area, and urgent appeals were sent to it by the French for help - appeals pointedly ignored by the American command. The reason is best told in the words of US General Chennault, commander of the 14th US Air Force:

'... orders arrived from theatre headquarters stating that no arms and ammunition would be provided to French troops under any circumstances. I was allowed to proceed with "normal" action against the Japanese in Indochina provided it did not involve supplying French troops... General Wedemeyer's orders not to aid the French came directly from the War Department. Apparently it was American policy then that French Indochina would not be returned to the French. The American government was interested in seeing the French forcibly ejected from Indochina so the problem of post-war separation from their colony would be easier... While American transports in China avoided Indochina, the British flew aerial supply missions for the French all the way from Calcutta, dropping tommy guns, grenades and mortars.' (8)

British planes had flown 1500 miles in attempts to assist. US planes, 150 miles distant, ignored the plight of their fellow imperialists. The French garrisons were annihilated. On March 10, 1945, the Japanese declared Indochina 'independent' and installed Bao Dai as Emperor. (9)

THE CONQUEST OF POWER

With the outbreak of war the leadership of the ICP had left Indochina for the safety of the neighbouring Chinese provinces. They went along with the new 'National Unity' line, (10) especially as the South China war lords were prepared to back Ho Chi Minh and his well-disciplined communists. The Chinese had ambitions in the mineral-rich Tonkin area, and felt they could use Ho to achieve their ends.

Ho had other ideas though. The official 'Party History' declares:

'The ICP advocated an extremely clear policy: to lead the masses in insurrection in order to disarm the Japanese before the arrival of the Allied forces in Indochina; to wrest power from the Japanese and their puppet stooges, and finally, as the people's power, to welcome the Allied forces.'

(8) General Claire L. Chennault 'Way of a Fighter', p. 342. Chennault was later dismissed for minor interventions on behalf of the French. By way of corroboration, General Wedemeyer himself tells how he visited Roosevelt in March 1945: '... He evinced considerable interest in French Indochina and stated he was going to do everything possible to give the people in that area their independence. ... He admonished me not to give any supplies to the French forces operating in the area.' ('Wedemeyer Reports', p. 340).

(9) 10 days after the Japanese capitulation, later that year, Bao Dai was to abdicate. No one held the puppet strings any longer. But as will be seen both the Vietminh and the French were to pick them up, in succession, a little later. Such was the dearth of supple-spined politicians at that time!

(10) The 'Viet Minh', a broad alliance in which even the French were asked to participate, was controlled by the ICP. It was formed in May 1941. As the war progressed it became an effective guerrilla force against the Japanese (and French) and maintained close liaison with and rendered considerable assistance to the American military forces.

In August 1945, Ho entered Hanoi and without a shot being fired, the city was his. 152,000 Chinese troops moved into the Northern areas of Vietnam, and Ho set about organizing elections, to be held in January 1946. He promised the Kuo Min Tang generals that the Vietnamese non-communist parties would be given 70 seats in the first legislature provided that they did not compete in the elections. Not surprisingly, in January 1946, the Viet Minh single list of candidates was overwhelmingly elected! 90% of the population went to the polls, 80% of them voting for the 'Fatherland Front'.

Two months later, in March, the elected Assembly of 444 held its first meeting. A second meeting took place in October 1946, but only 291 members were present. Questioned about the absence of so many legislators, a Viet Minh minister announced they had been arrested for 'common law crimes'. By the time of the third meeting (November 8, 1946) the 'people's legislature' had shrunk to 242 members! The Assembly was to meet once more (in March 1955!) to approve a resolution which said it was the 'sole representative of the people'. The next election (after 1946) was to be in 1960!

Parallel with the Chinese occupation of the North, American and British troops arrived in the South. The country was in a state of chaos, and in these first months the Viet Minh's organized assassinations reached their peak: opposition party leaders, religious sects and Trotskyists were systematically murdered.

American policy at this stage was to support the Viet Minh. Like the Chinese war lords, they believed they could use Ho as a stick with which to beat the French. The Frenchman Paul Mus tells in his book 'Vietnam - Sociologie d'une Guerre' of the visit of an American officer to a Viet Minh prison camp. When a young French officer cried out to the American to liberate them, the American replied: 'Those fellows must have some reason for putting you in there. So why don't you stay where you are?'. The name of the French officer was Jean Ramadier. Two years later his father was Premier of France.

When the official surrender of the Japanese forces in Tonkin took place on September 27, 1945, no French flag was flown (although Soviet and Viet Minh flags were) and the only French general present was offered seat no. 115 at the ceremony, behind the Viet Minh leaders and a bevy of junior Chinese officers.

French reinforcements were ferried into South Vietnam by the British Labour Government in

October 1945. The French renounced all rights in China as the price of the Chinese withdrawal from Indochina, and in an agreement signed on March 6, 1946, France recognized 'the Republic of Vietnam as a Free State having its own government, parliament, army and treasury, and belonging to the Indochinese Federation and the French Union.' 15,000 French troops were to be stationed north of the 16th parallel to be relieved progressively, within 5 years, by Vietnamese troops.

THE FRENCH COUNTER - ATTACK

The Viet Minh, at this stage, was a good Stalinist organization. Stalin believed in implementing the Yalta and Teheran agreements. The Viet Minh therefore advocated nothing more radical than 'independence within the framework of the French Union'. This explains the Viet Minh's readiness to sign with France the disastrous agreement of March 6, 1946.

It also explains, on the internal front, the liquidation by the Viet Minh of the self-governing organs of popular control and administration that had been thrown up in the course of struggle against the Japanese and the systematic assassination of revolutionary militants, including the legendary figure of the Trotskyist leader Ta Tu Thau, a few weeks before the signing of the rotten compromise with the French. (11) It explains the dissolution of the Communist Party into the Viet Minh and the Viet Minh's nomination of the traitor Bao Dai as a 'councillor of the Republic' and their description of him as 'a symbol of our will to remain within the framework of the French Union'.

(11) Before the Second World War, Ta Tu Thau had spent many years in the French concentration camp on the island of Pulo-Condor. From gaol he had been repeatedly elected to the Saigon Municipal Council. In August 1945 Ta called for the setting up of workers and peasants councils in place of Viet Minh rule. He was arrested, 'tried' before 'peoples' committees' and three times declared innocent. There seemed little point in arranging for a fourth trial, so he was shot a few days after his third acquittal.

On the external front it explains Ho Chi Minh's repeated efforts to compromise with France, efforts which were only to provide breathing space for the French Army to build up its strength.

This is the real significance of the agreement of March 6, 1946. General Leclerc's forces were in a blind alley. With the help of British troops (the Labour Government again!) they had captured Saigon on September 23, 1945 but hadn't the strength to cope with the Vietnamese partisans in Cochinchina or in the Northern provinces where Chiang Kai Chek's troops were still stationed. Unable to win militarily, French imperialism sought to win through 'diplomacy'.

In exchange for vague promises of a 'free state ... belonging to the French Union', Ho Chi Minh allowed the French Expeditionary Corps to occupy the main towns and the key highways of the country. He called on the population to welcome the French back. Ho Chi Minh then went to France, to the Fontainebleau Conference, which the French succeeded in dragging out from early March to late September, when they signed a 'modus vivendi' with Ho Chi Minh. They, of course, used these precious months to reinforce their expeditionary corps and to set up, at Dalat, their first puppet government, that of Dr. Thin. (12)

By November 20, 1946, the French Expeditionary Corps felt strong enough to resume hostilities. On November 24 the French Navy captured Haiphong after a bombardment that killed over 6,000 civilians. The French were now ready to reconquer their former colony. All Ho Chi Minh's efforts had been in vain.

The French recognition of Indochinese 'sovereignty' had been a tactical manoeuvre. While the French politicians spoke of 'sovereignty', French forces had been steadily built up for colonial reconquest.

(12) The popular basis of Dr. Thin's government was very thin indeed: of its 11 ministers, 7 were French colons. Dr. Thin committed suicide a few months later. His 'government' was followed by that of General Xuan (who happened to be an officer of the French Army!). In April 1949 Bao Dai (yes, that man again) was installed in power... by the French this time. What with their recent experience of military rule in Saigon (even the 'Daily Telegraph' now refers to the South Vietnam government as 'a committee of paid generals') the people of South Vietnam must have had a belly-ful of 'representative institutions' of the Western type.

During this period (1945-1946) in France itself, the Communist Party could have taken power. This probably explains why the USSR never openly supported Viet Minh ambitions for independence. Indeed the French Communist Party cell in Saigon warned the Viet Minh than trying to resist the French occupation of Saigon (September 1945) that 'any premature adventures' towards independence might 'not be in line with Soviet perspectives'. (See Harold Isaacs 'No Peace in Asia', p. 173) This explains why the French Communist leaders in Parliament (Maurice Thorez was Vice-Premier at the time) did nothing to oppose the war credits or any of the emergency measures connected with the first phase of the war. (13)

(13) Communist Party members today will often deny that the French Party ever voted the war credits for the Indochina war. Sometimes they will even imply that the fighting in Indochina only started in 1947, after the Communist Party had been turfed out of the French government. Here is the chapter and verse to nail this lie.

- In September 1945, the French government, in which the Communists held several ministries, demanded 193 milliard francs of military credits, of which 100 milliard were specifically designated to set up the Expeditionary Corps. The Party voted FOR this measure.

- In January 1946, on the occasion of the annual budget vote, the socialist deputies asked for a 20% reduction of military credits. Charles Tillon, Communist Minister for Armaments, opposed the demand, and the Communist deputies ensured that it was rejected.

- On July 26, 1946 a budget of 189 milliard francs was approved by the Communist deputies. On the same day the Assembly adopted with their support a constitutional definition of the 'French Union'.

- On October 3, 1946 the Communist deputies voted to approve the final 1946 budget which included the military budget.

- On December 20, 1946, a whole month after the murderous bombardment of Haiphong, the 182 Communist deputies voted unanimously, together with the rest of the Chamber, to send congratulations to General Leclerc and to his Expeditionary Corps!

- On December 23, 1946 the Communist deputies voted the provisional 1947 budget, which included 70 milliards in military credits required 'because of the resumption of hostilities in Indochina'.

No wonder then that French right-wing politicians rose in the National Assembly during the Appropriations Debate of March 14 to 18, 1947, to thank their own Communist colleagues and the Soviet Union for leaving France to fight its war in Indochina without outside disturbance. In the same debate Premier Ramadier emphasized 'in the Indochina question, we have always noted to this day the correct attitude of the Soviet government'.

Between November 1946 and the summer of 1954 the French colonialists fought a protracted war against the Viet Minh forces, eventually suffering complete defeat at Dien Bien Phu on May 8, 1954. Two months later the war was over. (14) France had lost 172,000 casualties (30,000 Frenchmen dead, forgetting colonial troops!). Her hold on Vietnam had ended for ever. In April 1956 French forces left the country.

During these years a change in American policy had taken place. Mao Tse Tung had come to power in China and had recognized the Ho Chi Minh regime on January 20, 1950. Eleven days later the USSR had followed suit. (15) The USA then gradually began to change its attitude to the puppet Bao Dai and to the French military operation. The 'New York Herald-Tribune' expressed all the doubts and misgivings in the minds of America's rulers: 'We are in a difficult position. Bao Dai's regime cannot be considered truly independent as long as French troops remain in Vietnam ... But if French troops were to leave Indochina the whole country would be overrun by Ho Chi Minh's forces'.

(14) The first US 'Military Assistance Advisory Group' had arrived in Vietnam in July 1950, but at this stage its funds were limited at \$23.5 million. The imminent defeat of the French forces in 1954 led Dulles and those around him to demand a massive stepping up of involvement in the war, including the use of nuclear weapons, to extricate the French forces in Dien Bien Phu. But at this stage the majority of the American ruling class still regarded the events in Indochina as a French colonial war.

(15) Between 1945 and 1947 a Russian 'recognition' might have helped the Vietnam Republic. Material help would have enabled the Viet Minh partisans to throw out the foreign invaders. The Viet Minh's position was then so strong that the French had had to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh. But Stalin was at the helm, rigorously applying the Yalta decisions. It was only after the consolidation of the new regime in China that Russia officially recognized Ho Chi Minh.

The erstwhile 'allies' (France and the USA), for a while estranged, were obliged to overcome their mutual suspicions in the interest of higher things. But the US rulers remained determined that they alone would have the pickings. As 'US News and World Report' wrote on 16.4.54: 'One of the world's richest areas is open to the winner in Indochina. That's behind the growing US concern ... Tin, rubber, rice, key strategic raw materials are what the war is really about. The US sees it as a place to hold at any cost ... Actually much more than Indochina is involved. The real target in this war is the same vital area the Japanese gambled their empire for in the Second World War ... Today South East Asia's raw materials are still necessary to American industry'.

GENEVA AGREEMENTS

The Geneva Conference began its discussions on Indochina on May 8, 1954 (the day Dien Bien Phu fell). The participants were Britain, France, the USA, the USSR, Communist China, Cambodia, Laos, South Vietnam and North Vietnam. The agreements were reached on July 20th and 21st.

They provided for a provisional military line at the 17th parallel. They prohibited the introduction into Vietnam of war material or of 'any troop reinforcements and additional military personal.' They prohibited the establishment of 'new military bases' and emphasized strict non-adherence to 'any military alliance'. They further provided for general elections to be held in July 1956, at the latest, under the supervision of an International Commission comprised of delegates from Poland, India and Canada.

It is ironical to note that the two states represented at the Geneva Conference who refused to sign the final declaration were South Vietnam and the United States. Ironical, because their major objection was to the partition of the country - today it is their main justification for their war against the North.

In effect the Agreements paved the way for the consolidation of two bureaucratic states. The two Vietnams are theoretically complementary. In the North: rich mineral deposits, and some industrialization (although 80% of the population are peasants), In the South: agriculture. Both sides rely on outside aid.

BUREAUCRACY IN THE NORTH

The Northern regime inherited an area twice ravaged in less than a decade, plundered by Japanese and Chinese, bombed by the US Air Force, ploughed under by French tanks. In addition the sudden exodus of 860,000 refugees (16) to the South created a serious crisis of food production. Only a Russian 'crash' programme of Burmese rice staved off a serious famine.

Immediate state plans were drafted in all fields of food and industrial production. Invariably, these first draftings proved to be over-ambitious, but in general North Vietnamese achievements were considerable.

One of the most difficult problems of the consolidation period (1955-1958) was that of land reform. The first measures had actually been drafted in 1953 (and applied where possible). They contained sets of rules for determining 'social class' which were quite comical - for example a piglet was equated to so many quarts of rice, etc.

(16) 600,000 of these refugees were Catholics. Cardinal Spellman had succeeded in getting the US government to sponsor Catholic Action against the communists. Very successful psychological warfare leaflets were dropped: 'Christ has gone to the South' and 'Virgin Mary has departed from the North'. Bishops and priests left, in many cases taking their whole congregations with them. Over 99% of the non-Catholics remained in North Vietnam.

By the use of dogmatic formulae the whole population was subdivided into five categories ranging from 'landlord' to 'agricultural worker'. (Similar classifications were devised to categorize town dwellers). Added to these classifications were rules whereby daughters of landowners who married into a 'low' class must first have spent one year in the new class before being considered part of it, but a poor farmer's daughter who 'married up' could remain married for three years before being reclassified into the new (less desirable) social category.

On November 2, 1956, at exactly the same time as Soviet tanks were rumbling through the streets of Budapest, the Ho Chi Minh government faced its most important uprising of dissatisfied peasants.

By coincidence Canadian members of the International Control Commission were in Nghe-An province when the outbreak took place. Within a matter of hours the uprising had spread to neighbouring villages. Troops sent to restore order were driven from the village. Hanoi acted as any colonial power would have done. They sent their 325th Division to crush the rebels. Close to 6,000 farmers were deported or executed.

Ho reacted to the rebellion with eminently practical measures. The land reform tribunals were abolished, as of November 8, 1956. The Minister of Agriculture was sacked. The problems of Northern land reform were largely problems created by political dogma like those quoted above, for, as contrasted to the South, 98.2% of all land in the North comprised properties of 5 hectares (12 acres) or less, and the land was owned by those who tilled it. The exodus of 860,000 richer peasants to the South also provided plenty of surplus land to be parcelled out to the landless peasants that remained.

I have already pointed out that both North and South Vietnam are dependent on outside aid. According to official Hanoi statistics, communist bloc grants and loans between 1955 and 1961 totalled more than \$1 billion, of which the USSR provided \$365 million and China \$662 million. This works out at over \$70 per person, which is roughly what the Saigon regime received from the United States in the same period.

How much of this aid actually reached the people is, of course, a matter for conjecture. Bureaucrats are the same the whole world over. For instance late in 1955 the official Party organ 'Nhan-Dan' admitted that the National Trade Service of Ho Chi Minh's native province had embezzled 700 million piastres (\$1 million), a drug making factory had embezzled 37 million

piastres, and the Public Works division of Nam-Dinh had diverted 16 million piastres, originally allocated to the building of houses to its own officials, etc. A subsequent investigation revealed that 20.4 million piastres had been misappropriated, another 578 million 'wasted' along with 35,000 labour days and 444 tons of rice.

BUREAUCRACY IN THE SOUTH

As early as the spring of 1952, General Gruenther (NATO Chief of Staff) had told the American Congress: 'From a strategic and economic point of view, retention of Indochina is considered more important than Korea.' (Daily Telegraph, 7.5.52). Not surprisingly, as the French moved out of South Vietnam, the Americans moved in.

They quickly installed their own puppet Premier, the unsavoury Diem whom even a laudatory 'Time' profile of April 4, 1955 described as capable of 'exploding into tantrums if interrupted' and who will, if a personal enemy is mentioned 'spit across the room and snarl "dirty type".'

Diem's father had been mandarin first class in charge of eunuchs of the royal harem. Diem had served as a provincial governor under the French, then as Minister of the Interior, where he had served the Japanese. On their defeat he switched his allegiance to America. He had spent the post-war years travelling about the United States winning support for his fanatically anti-communist, pro-catholic ideas. He was particularly favoured by John F. Kennedy and Francis Cardinal Spellman, the voices of Catholic America.

Diem quite openly assumed dictatorial powers. A year after his accession he 'organized' a referendum to have Bao Dai ousted in favour of a republic. Not to be outdone by Ho's electoral returns, Diem managed to secure a 98.2% vote in favour of the republic.

The widespread corruption of the Diem regime, the absurd 'morality laws' which forbade dancing and the singing of sentimental songs, the widespread persecution of all non-catholic elements are common knowledge. They are openly admitted by the Americans and I don't intend to elaborate on them here.

The predominant issue in South Vietnam is the land-starvation of the peasants. Out of a total of 250,000 land owners, 6,300 (most of them absentee landlords) own 1,035,000 hectares of rice land, (45% of the total) while 183,000 small holders own 345,000 hectares (15% of the total). In other words less than 3% of the landowners own 45% of the land. (17) And this in spite of three so-called Land Reform acts (Agrarian Laws). Total food production in South Vietnam before the recent intensification of the war was only $\frac{2}{3}$ of the 1938 total.

The latest stooge installed in Saigon is Air Marshal Ky. Just before his appointment Ky was interviewed by the Western press. The interview was published in the Sunday Mirror on 4.7.65. Ky said: 'People ask me who my heroes are. I have only one - Hitler. We need four or five Hitlers in Vietnam. I admire Hitler because he pulled his country together when it was in a terrible state in the early '30s.'

Dictators of South Vietnam have changed constantly in recent years, but the colonial economic status of the country remains unchanged. The US rulers more and more openly admit that it is 'their' war, and that they intend staying in Vietnam even if the impossible should happen and they should be asked to leave by one of their puppet Saigon governments. (18)

Prior to 1954, while the battles were being fought in the Northern provinces, the Saigon governments were dominated by Southern landowners and representatives of the old feudal nobility. Since 1955, ironically enough, they have been dominated by Central Vietnamese and Northern Catholics ... at a time when the burden of the struggle has been in the South!

(17) See 'The Two Vietnams' by Bernard B. Fall, p. 153.

(18) This was stated quite bluntly by Henry Cabot Lodge, US Ambassador in Saigon, to a Senate Committee on August 9, 1965. President Johnson said five days later that the remarks had not been intended for publication ... but he did not deny that they had been made.

The only consistent feature of the various Saigon governments has been the hatred they have managed to inspire in the masses of the Vietnamese people - a fact tacitly admitted by Eisenhower in his memoirs:

'I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80% of the population would have voted for the communist Ho Chi Minh.' ('Mandate for Change: The White House Years 1953-1956', p. 372).

No wonder the Americans weren't prepared to allow the 1956 elections agreed by the Geneva Conference! After all, what price 'democracy' when the other chap looks like winning? In fact John Foster Dulles stated it just as bluntly as that! Asked at a press conference why the US supported the refusal of the Saigon government to allow the elections for national unification, Dulles said it could only happen when 'there are conditions of really free elections'. Asked to elaborate he said that this meant 'a guarantee that there is not a serious risk that the Communists would win.'

AMERICAN WAR

The civil war that followed the American-inspired frustration of the Geneva Agreements has increasingly become an open imperialist war of the 'old type'. At first thousands of American military personnel arrived, disguised as 'advisers'. Direct military participation and escalation began fairly modestly. In 1960 there were less than 800 'advisers'. By the end of 1964 they had gradually grown to 21,000 men, most of whom were now openly listed as fighting soldiers. There are now more than 400,000 American troops in Vietnam - not counting the US Seventh Fleet, the personnel manning the air bases in Guam and Thailand and the 700,000 Saigon government troops, Australians and so on. And still the generals call for more!

What better evidence of the opposition to and failure of American policy!

North Vietnamese territory was attacked for the first time in August 1964 after Hanoi torpedo

boats had fired a few shells at American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin. Regular bombing of targets north of the 17th parallel began in February 1965. The Americans have recently invaded the 'demilitarized zone' between North and South Vietnam, established at the Geneva Conference.

It has been noted by all visitors to North Vietnam that the Americans are using anti-personnel bombs to an increasing extent. The fighting is becoming increasingly bloody. A characteristic fact is that this is the first war in history where 'body count' and 'kill ratio' define a victory. Every day, without exception, we are told the exact number of combatants killed. American operations are named 'Search and destroy' and are described much as hunting expeditions. Probably thousands of innocent bystanders are described by US statistics as 'dead VC'.

Here is a typical press report. It is from the 'Sunday Mirror' (4. 4. 65):

'In a Viet Cong-controlled area every young man of military age is assumed to be a Viet Cong soldier who has thrown away his weapon just before capture. Most areas of South Vietnam (three-quarters of the country) are now Viet Cong-controlled. (19) Therefore most men in the countryside by that yardstick should be presumed to be Viet Cong soldiers or sympathisers. That is correct.'

'Vietnamese troops always beat up or torture prisoners. They think nothing of it. It is normal procedure... 'American advisers have nothing to do with dunking men head first into water tanks or slicing them up with knives. When this starts the Americans turn their backs and walk away. It is none of my business, one American told me as his troops were working over a captured Viet Cong in black pyjamas - the normal Viet Cong uniform.'

'Inevitably innocent peasants are kneed in the groin, drowned in vats of water, or die of loss of blood after "interrogation"; but you cannot identify Viet Cong from peasants unless they admit it - and Viet Cong don't help by talking... Most men don't talk under torture. Women never do.'

It is hardly surprising that the American campaign to 'win the hearts' of the peasants is showing little result.

(19) One basic if unpleasant fact should be made clear. 90% of the people of South Vietnam live on 1/5 of the land. Thus the statement that the Viet Cong control 3/4 (or sometimes 4/5) of the country is meaningless. About 4/5 of the countryside is almost uninhabitable with less than 20 persons per square kilometre.

A few years ago Lyndon B. Johnson was dead set 'against sending American GIs into the mud and muck of Indochina as a blood-letting spree to perpetuate colonialism and white men's exploitation in Asia' ('Congressional Record', April 1954). As late as August 1964, Johnson was running for the Presidency against war maniac Barry Goldwater (who was threatening to defoliate the trees of Vietnam!). The electorate chose Johnson as the man of peace. On August 29, 1964, Johnson said: 'I have had advice to load our planes with bombs and to drop them on certain areas that I think would enlarge the war and result in committing a good many American boys to fighting a war that I think ought to be fought by the boys of Asia, to help protect their own land. And for that reason I haven't chosen to enlarge the war'. In his campaign speeches he consistently opposed escalation, the bombing of North Vietnam and so on.

As firmly as he was opposed to the Vietnam war, Johnson was allegedly dedicated to the war against poverty. He was going to be the man who would lay the foundation stones of the 'Great Society'. It is interesting to compare a few statistics on Johnson's two wars:

- * The population of South Vietnam is 16 million.
- * The estimated number of Americans assessed as being 'below the poverty line is 34 million.
- * American military costs in Vietnam are \$2 billion per month.
- * It costs \$400,000 (£142,900) to kill a single enemy (each corpse is the consequence of 75 bombs and 150 shells!).
- * In addition the US has handed out \$3 billion in 'aid' to Saigon.
- * In 26 months the 'war on poverty' has been allotted \$4 billion. That's \$100 for each person in need.

Of course all the military expenditure doesn't go on bombs. \$25 million went to build a Pentagon in Vietnam for the use of 68 American generals. \$18 million went to construct two dairies for supplying milk cheese and ice cream to the troops. \$40 million went for a year's stock of chemicals to defoliate trees.

BUSINESS AS USUAL - PEKING STYLE

One of the most effective weapons in the arsenal of revolutionary anti-war propaganda has always been the exposure of the high profits being reaped by those who do well out of getting ordinary people to butcher one another. While the workers died on the field of battle, shares leaped ahead on the Stock Exchange. It goes without saying that the Vietnam war has been an extremely profitable one for American big business.

What came as a staggering revelation to the starry-eyed Stalinists, Trotskyists and Maoists, however, was the exposure by Dennis Bloodworth ('Observer', December 18, 1966) of recent trafficking in steel between China and the US through Singapore. Earlier that year the peak transactions were reached when China sold the US some £357,000 worth of round and flat steel for use in the construction of new air and army bases in South Vietnam. The Chinese were paid through banks in Hong Kong.

This was a vital transaction for the US, as only Peking had been able to meet the specifications, the quantities and the six-week delivery dates demanded by the military purchasing officers. Once the immediate crisis had passed (and the Japanese and Belgian suppliers had caught up with mounting American demands) US officials returned to tighter controls - which do not allow trading with 'Red China'!

It was further suggested that cement manufactured in Haiphong, North Vietnam's main port under frequent American bombardment, may also be reaching construction bases in South Vietnam. Certainly during 1966 big deliveries of cement from Haiphong reached Singapore, coinciding with big bulk sales of cement from Singapore to Saigon.

That the consignments were the same was never conclusively established. In terms of marketing this isn't really relevant. It doesn't matter whether one specific bag or another finished up in Saigon. The general directions of the traffic are however very revealing. Morality can never be a factor in the functioning of the world capitalist economy.

Russian accusations that the Chinese are trading with America on a grand scale are not just propaganda. 'Izvestia' pointed out in November 1966 that Hong Kong imported £145 million worth of goods from China, and exported £187 million worth to America during 1965.

As the war progresses Hanoi becomes ever more dependent on Russian technical aid that China could not herself provide. At the same time the Chinese accusations against Russia as America's secret ally become increasingly vitriolic. In fact Russia supplies North Vietnam with the minimum required to prevent the collapse of the Ho regime. Russia has to save face as the 'leader of the anti-imperialist camp'. The Vietnam war is an obvious embarrassment to a Kremlin trying harder than ever before to reach friendly relations with the USA.

The invectives hurled by one 'communist' power at the other is a simple case of the 'pot calling the kettle black'. Meanwhile the Hanoi government carefully remains neutral. It dreads the day when it might be forced to accept 'volunteers' from abroad, thus finally surrendering control of its own state.

BRITAIN & VIETNAM

To say that successive British governments have arse-crawled behind American policy, in Vietnam and elsewhere, is to make no great revelation. Indeed within the framework of the capitalist world it couldn't be otherwise. (20)

British support for America's war is more than just 'moral' support. The 'Sunday Times' (16.10.66) blew the gaff on the British Jungle Warfare School in Johore, South Malaya, where South Vietnamese learn how to kill their countrymen at the expense of

the British Foreign Office and the British taxpayer. The School boasts that it has helped train some of Saigon's really 'top brass'. Some of the pupils are American servicemen - all eager to learn from the British experience in hunting down 'communists' in the Malayan jungles.

The Labour government builds and guards airfields in Siam which are used as US bases and RAF 'observers' fly on combat missions (remember the US forces in Vietnam were once also just 'observers').

This country manufactures and sells napalm to the USA (remember how British napalm suddenly appeared on the scene to deal with the 'Torrey Canyon'?). It also manufactures poison gas which has been used by the American forces to 'flush out' Vietcong fighters from their bunkers in South Vietnam. The Labour government has sanctioned large consignments of military equipment to Ky. The Ford Company alone has sent a thousand engines to Vietnam.

There must be dozens of other examples. If you hear of them, please write to us and make sure they are well publicized.

HOBSON'S CHOICE

To choose sides in Vietnam is to place oneself in the tutelage of one or another bureaucratic system. As things stand at the moment the Vietnamese peasant who revolts against his feudal and foreign masters has no alternative but to support the National Liberation Front (NLF) which is

(20) This is a fundamental yet elementary fact. Tory, Labour, Liberal or even Communist governments can exist only as the 'personification' of the capitalist state, and can only continue to exist by remaining as such, with all that this implies in relation to other capitalist powers. There are only two ways in which the British rulers could break from America: a) by a re-alignment of capitalist forces, for example by complete integration in the European Economic Community, or b) by a revolutionary change within Britain.

controlled by the Communist Party and Hanoi. (21) He identifies his struggle with that of a party seeking power. In seeking to free himself, his actions support the accession to power of another class: the bureaucracy.

This is not to say he should do nothing. At this stage, revolutionaries in Vietnam probably have little alternative but to be involved with the NLF and participate in the military struggle against the American forces. One can't be 'neutral' while aircraft are flying over one's home, dropping bombs.

The revolutionaries' attitude would be not unlike that of Tito's partisans during the Second World War - active resistance to the aggressor on a class basis, defence (against all attempts at dismembering them) of whatever autonomous class organizations may have been created in the course of the struggle, possibly a tactical verbal silence in relation to the theories propounded by the 'communist' leaders. All this with a perspective, once victory has been won, of the break with Moscow (or in this case Hanoi) and of an autonomous, independent 'road to socialism'. It would be a mistake however to take the parallel too literally. Indochina is not Yugoslavia. And the break with Moscow didn't prevent Tito keeping Djilas in gaol for over a decade, or Yugoslavia from remaining a class society!

For us, in Britain, the situation is quite different. We are not militarily involved in the struggle. There is no necessity whatsoever for us to align ourselves with any bureaucracy. We do a positive disservice to the cause of socialism if we participate in the general mystification concerning the class nature of the Russian, Chinese or North Vietnamese regimes. Revolutionary socialists should clearly and constantly propagate their conception that socialism means the political, organizational and ideological autonomy of the working class. They should retain their vision of the type of society they seek to build. They should repeat often and loudly that the new society will never be achieved through bureaucratic manoeuvres but only through the activity of those who understand and want it.

(21) Let's not get lost among the various organizations that have sprung into being over the years. Technically the Indochina Communist Party was dissolved in 1945 (in favour of the 'broad alliance') and was replaced by the Association for Marxist Studies. In early 1951 the Vietnamese Workers Party (Lao Dong) was formed. The same man, Truong Chinh, was successively Secretary-general of the ICP, Chairman of the Marxist Study Group, and Secretary-general of the Lao Dong Party.

This is not a utopian position. History shows a number of examples of the vindication of revolutionaries who refused to align themselves with one or other alien power or hostile class. In September 1915, at Zimmerwald in Switzerland, three dozen revolutionaries from 11 countries, belligerent and neutral, assembled and denounced the imperialist nature of the war, calling on working people 'to put an end to the slaughter'. This must have sounded 'utopian' and 'absurd' to the hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of 'aligned' socialists of that time.

Europe at that time was in the grip of mass chauvinism and war hysteria of a kind rarely seen before in history. Yet, a mere two years later, in October 1917, it was precisely the Zimmerwald position that was to triumph. The Russian workers and peasants aimed their guns at their own oppressors, and began to lay what might have been the foundations of a new society.

Those who seek a new social order in Vietnam should look neither East nor West, neither to Saigon nor to Hanoi, but, like our Zimmerwald comrades, to the autonomous action of the masses themselves.

THE BROADER BACKGROUND

From our documentation of the history of Vietnam, one fact emerges to supersede all others - that what happens in Vietnam is mostly determined in Moscow and Washington: in Moscow in that in spite of Hanoi's independent position, Ho is dependent on Russian military aid (aid that, as the war intensifies, Peking just couldn't provide); in Washington in that the successive puppet governments installed in Saigon wouldn't last a day without the armed American presence.

Another point we must note is the basic similarity in the social structure of these two great powers, dominating the historical development within Vietnam. With the passing of time, they grow more and more alike. Both are class societies, in both there is the class that manages, and the class that obeys. Both systems are based on the accumulation of capital. In both the worker is a wage labourer, producing a surplus, which is converted to capital. In strictly marxist terminology, both are capitalist.

In the West, the state controls and 'owns' an increasing proportion of the national economy; the role of the private capitalist is gradually lessening in significance. (22) In the East, meanwhile, production is increasingly geared to the demands of the market. (23)

The basic identity of the two systems is recognized by the more advanced sections of the ruling class in both states - it is unfortunately only the 'revolutionaries' who still manage to delude themselves into seeing the communist world as in some way connected with workers' power.

Although the two major world powers are fundamentally capitalist, capitalism has altered, and is constantly altering. One of these changes is the new relation of imperialism to the colonial world.

In the days before the disintegration of the British Empire, it used to be argued by orthodox Marxist-leninists that the relatively high living standards of the British working class were possible only because of the super-exploitation of the colonial peoples. The old imperialisms needed their empires to dump their surplus commodities, to obtain cheap raw materials, or to export their surplus capital to. This exploitation was very real, but subsequent events have shown that capitalism CAN exist and in fact expand quite happily without colonies of this particular type. The examples of Britain, France, Holland and Belgium are there to show it.

(22) This development was clearly foreseen by Marx himself in vol. III of 'Capital'. He anticipated the state taking over the role of 'capitalist'. Anyway, 'the capitalist is only capital personified' he pointed out.

(23) 'The most important point to emerge from Mr Kosygin's speech was the speed and determination with which the new profit-linked system of economic management is being introduced into industry. The Premier repeatedly emphasised that introduction of the new system is a pre-condition of success in reaching the 1966-70 five year plan targets. He announced that 1,000,000 workers will be working under the new system by the middle of this year. By the end of the year, one third of the workers in the engineering and textile industries will also be governed by it.' 'Financial Times', April 13, 1966. From article entitled: 'The Soviet Congress: New Light on Economic Development.'

Modern capitalism isn't based on 'oppressed' nations. As it develops now, it is more total and all-embracing, drawing the ex-colonial countries into its own giant hierarchical structure, expanding its dominion over the world, including everyone, at every level, in every nation, manipulating each and all as worker and consumer alike. The relationship of modern France to modern Algeria is far more typical of modern capitalism than, say, the relationship of Portugal to Angola (or of the USA to Vietnam).

American policy in South East Asia is, in this respect, out of step. It is in the tradition of the old imperialism. Indochina has been a sphere of US interest since the 1940's although today the political considerations have largely replaced the economic ones. Vietnam is seen as a major base against the advance of 'Red China' and of various local movements of national liberation. A few years ago, Eisenhower argued quite bluntly that 'Indochinese tin and tungsten are essential to the American economy'. Today this is one of the less important preoccupations of America's rulers.

The major point in relation to Vietnam is that present American policy is not basic but rather contrary to the newly developing form of capitalism. The bureaucrats in Moscow and Washington both know this. In fact, both would welcome an immediate peace in Vietnam based on a Korea-type carve-up.

The histories of Ho Chi Minh and of the Indochina Communist Party follow a pattern very familiar to students of communist parties in backward countries. The 'revolution' was carried out through manipulation of 'popular fronts' and the 'liquidation' of elements hostile to the creation of a strongly centralized totalitarian state.

The state bureaucrats in Hanoi control the Viet Cong (or 'National Liberation Front' for those who get excited over names), whose tactics remain the same (murder of any opposition). The Viet Cong increasingly depends on North Vietnamese aid. Victory for the Viet Cong would mean the setting up of a regime modelled on the North. Only the most naive can doubt this. There is no likelihood of a scattered peasantry - and even less of a scarcely existing proletariat - exhausted by years of civil war, being able to impose an independent socialist solution.

In one sense the victory of the Viet Cong would represent progress. The Americans have given their support to the status quo, i. e. to the old feudal landlord class as opposed to the land-hungry peasants. The Ho regime is anti-landlord, for land reform, and for industrialization. Ironically,

the Ho regime is therefore the more capitalist of the two. And as everyone know capitalism is 'progressive' in relation to feudalism. (24) Support for the Viet Cong is support for national state capitalism. It is progressive insofar as there can be no working class power without the prior creating of a working class.

Revolutionary socialists must support the struggle of the South Vietnamese against the old feudal regime. But they must also support the North Vietnamese against the Ho regime. The American presence serves to strengthen the ruling class in both South and North Vietnam. The intensified American attack - which at the moment falls short of all-out invasion of North Vietnam - drives the Vietnamese people closer and closer to the Ho bureaucracy. Because of this the defeat of the American intervention is the pre-requisite for the victory of the social revolution in both North and South Vietnam.

WHAT CAN BE DONE NOW

In England there is an enormous amount to be done. There can never be too many demonstrations. There can never be enough time spent in explaining and educating people about the real causes of the Vietnam conflict, about the class nature of the contending regimes, about the complicity of 'our own' government, and about how this conflict affects everyone of us in our everyday lives.

(24) Vietnam is not an isolated case. The most significant development in the emerging colonial countries is that they are 'skipping' private capitalism and leaping straight into state capitalism often under the auspices of a national 'communist' party. In these countries the imperialist domination preceding independence precluded the development of a national bourgeoisie. Recent history is full of examples of bureaucratic regimes claiming to represent the 'national aspirations' of the colonial people. Their leaders have generally enjoyed the fullest support of the traditional 'revolutionaries'. (To name a few: Kenyatta, Kaunda, Nkrumah, Castro, Ben Bella) In the past we refused to support these people - today we refuse to support Ho Chi Minh (with even greater factual evidence behind us!). But some people never learn!

The most useful and effective action will always be the one that is not just a 'protest' or an 'appeal'. Our rulers can never act in our interests, let alone in the interests of the Vietnam peasant. To argue that it is possible to win peace by appealing to their humanity or reason is as sensible as praying to God for sunshine. All that this achieves is to mislead people into believing they can get others to act on their behalf.

We must break with the old formulas, the peace marches and the vigils that have become so sterile, fruitless and demoralising. The Peace Movement is now almost like a club whose members wear the same uniform and badges and who go through the same old rituals, each Easter.

More important, the traditional demonstrations are politically sterile. They limit the vision of the participants. They don't show the Vietnam war and British policy towards it as part of an international struggle, a struggle in which different social classes with different interests are contending. The derailing of one area of struggle from the total struggle stops the movement developing. It transforms it into a sect, whose 'raison d'etre' disappears with the 'solving' of each individual issue.

The only meaningful struggle for peace is the revolutionary struggle. We are not pacifists. We are not 'peace in Vietnam' at any price. We are not for a 'peace' which would keep the people enslaved both North and South. We are for the social revolution and we know that no ruling class in history has ever resigned its privileges 'peacefully'. The unconditional demand for 'peace' is a demand that the Vietnamese workers and peasants resign themselves to the rule of the bureaucrats - a utopian and reactionary demand.

We need original ideas like those which inspired the 'March of Shame'. What needs to be exposed is the whole nexus of power in our society, the true character of the British state and its royal ponces, and the links between the British ruling class and the Vietnam war.

In this respect some demonstrations are more meaningful than others. When 40 or so young people stood up in Dorset Gardens Methodist Church, Brighton, and told Wilson and Brown that they were liars, murderers and hypocrites - and when eight of them subsequently stood trial before Brighton magistrates - they succeeded in:

- 1) making an effective demonstration against the Vietnam war and the arse-crawling of the Labour government. Their action was front-page news in every national newspaper.

- 2) providing a first-class illustration to the rest of the congregation (many of whom were delegates to the Labour Party Conference) of just how wonderful our policemen are - unaligned witnesses turned up to testify about the unjustified police violence.
- 3) undoubtedly caused many sincere Christians to pause and think a little as to whether they had a moral attitude to some of the real issues in the world of today.
- 4) exposing the tie-up between the state, the Church, the local Courts, and the police.
- 5) demonstrating - to those who followed the court proceedings- the pathetically low level of intelligence of Brighton's magistrates, their incompetence, and the farce of the judicial system, where two people can be convicted on the basis of the evidence of one policeman, a self-confessed liar.

One demonstration of this kind, and the consequences that follow, does more to educate people in the ideas of revolutionary socialism than a thousand marches or political 'study groups'.

The opportunities that arise from the presence of American forces stationed in this country are numerous. Every man in US uniform is a potential murderer. He should be made aware, in no uncertain terms, that this is how we feel about him. But we must also make it clear a) that we feel that way about any uniform. It's just that at this moment it's men in US uniforms who are dropping the napalm; and b) that once the American serviceman gets rid of his butcher's suit, he could be just a fellow worker. He must be appealed to on a class basis.

Put it another way. It is our duty as revolutionary socialists to do everything in our power by word and deed to encourage US military personnel to refuse to fight in Vietnam. Every leaflet that goes into a US base is a blow against Johnson and his war. We say this in the full realisation that any persons acting to undermine the morale of the US Armed Forces might suffer penalties. Johnson's lackeys in Britain will show no mercy, when such activities begin to show results. (So don't get caught!) (25)

But our main job is here, in Britain. Our main struggle is against the British ruling class. Not because they are any better or worse than the American ruling class - but simply because we live in Britain and not in America. This is our contribution to the world socialist revolution - to end the world-wide system that allows the Wilsons and Browns to speak in our name on Vietnam and other issues.

We are not interested in 'bringing pressure to bear' on Wilson. Nor are we interested in replacing him with someone 'more left' or 'more honest'. We want to destroy the whole apparatus which enables one class to rule over others, which divides the world's population into those who take the decisions, on the one hand, and those who have to carry them out, on the other.

We are for the classless society, the society where people themselves take the fundamental decisions which really concern them, where every cook really participates in the management of society.

It is not possible to separate ends and means. The everyday activity which gets people thinking and acting for themselves is the revolutionary movement. It is the new revolutionary society in construction.

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