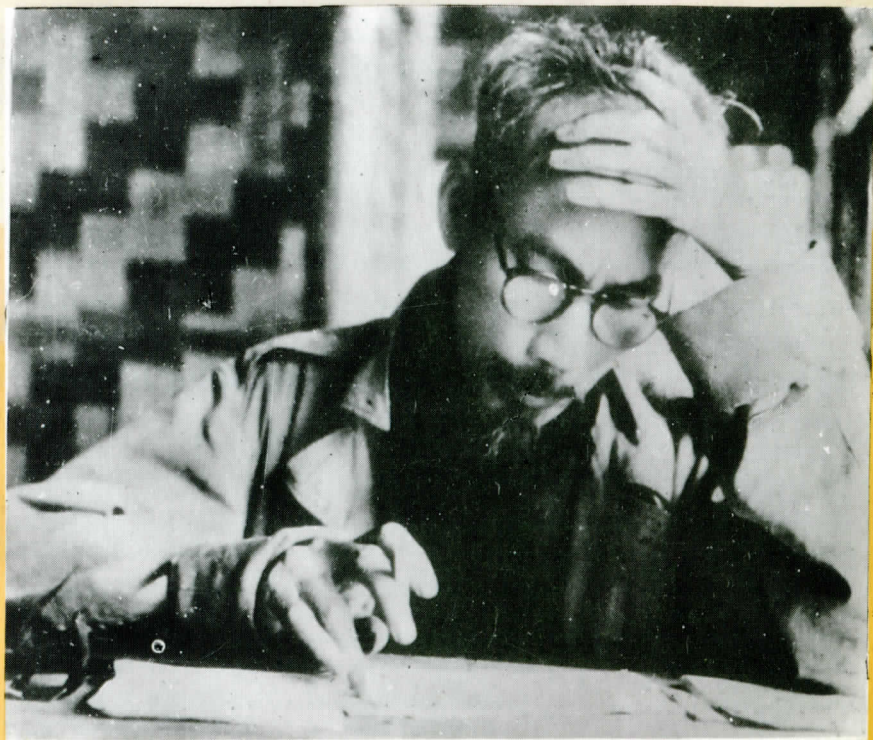


21.000Đ

TRAN DAN TIEN

HO CHI MINH

the Founder
of Independent Vietnam



THẾ GIỚI PUBLISHERS
HANOI - 1997

HO CHI MINH
the Founder
of Independent Vietnam

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46 Trần Hưng Đạo Street. Hanoi, Vietnam

Front cover: President Ho Chi Minh working at the Viet Bac military rear-base.

Back cover: House-on-stilts – working and residing place of President Ho Chi Minh in the complex of vestiges in Hanoi in commemoration of Ho Chi Minh.

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Portrait of President Ho Chi Minh
(by late painter Nguyen Do Cung)

NGUYEN AI QUOC

President Ho Chi Minh was born in 1890 at the village of Kim Lien in the district of Nam Dan of Nghe An province (Central Vietnam). His father was the second laureate of the competitive examination for the doctorat degree. However, he was from a peasant family.

The young Ho Chi Minh understood and suffered a lot because of the misery of his compatriots. He worked secretly assuming the task of liaison.

When he was twenty, the young man decided to go abroad and learn how to organize revolutionary activities. Mai, a former sailor of the French shipyard "Chargeurs Réunis" has told the following story:

By the middle of the year 1912 or 1913, I can't remember exactly, I was working in the officers' dinning room of a ship which called at the port of Saigon for goods and passengers. One afternoon, a young man came abroad, and after some hesitation, he asked me and my fellows for a job.

We told him that was not available and that if there was any at all we were not entitled to engage him. We laughed because our young man had the appearance of a student rather than a working man. We whispered to each other, "How could such a person do any work on board?"

However I took pity on him and said, "Come along with me. I'll take you to the captain of the ship. Perhaps he can help you."

The captain asked, "What can you do?"

"Anything, sir," he said.

"Good, I'll take you as a cook's help. Come and start tomorrow morning."

The young man's name was Ba. Soon he became friendly with me and I got on well with him for he was gentle. I helped him as much as I could because he could not do anything at all. Fortunately he was courageous and patient. As a cook's help he had to work very hard: at 4 a.m. he cleaned the big kitchen, then lit the boiler in the hold, brought the coal in, fetched vegetables, meat, fish, ice, etc., very hot in the kitchen and very cold in the hold. It was particularly arduous when the ship was tossing in a rough sea and he had to climb up the gangway with a heavy bag on his shoulders. Next, he had to lay the table for the French cooks, then peel potatoes, clean the kitchen utensils and light the boiler again.

There were from seven to eight hundred people to be fed including the crew and the passengers. The cauldrons were so big and heavy that Ba had to drag them along on the floor and to climb on to a stool to clean them all. We kept hearing such calls:

"Ba, bring me some water!"

"Ba, get the cauldrons ready!"

Steam and sweat wetted him all through and he got very dirty. He had to use all his wits and strength to his work because he was not accustomed to it. I had to show him how to peel carrots and potatoes. I remember once he had to peel asparagus. It was the first time he had seen it and when I came he had peeled it off altogether. I took all the peeled asparagus and threw it into the sea and taught him how to do it. Luckily, nothing happened!

Ba finished his work at 9 p.m. When we slept or played cards, he read or wrote until 11 p.m. or later. In rank, Ba was lower than us, since we were all graded, whereas he was only a cook's help. However, Ba was cultured and usually helped my illiterate friends to write home. He never used a vulgar word, so we all liked them.

...

Once he was nearly drowned in a storm when the waves rose mountain high. Nearly everybody was sea-sick but as usual Ba had to go up and down from the kitchen to the hold. It was impossible to carry the bags of vegetables on his shoulders, so Ba had to tie them up and drag them with a rope. In his second time a great wave suddenly dashed over the ship and swept everything off the deck including the bags of vegetables. Ba was thrown into the middle of the ship near a sail amongst the chains and was thus saved.

...

At Marseilles, we got out wages. Each Vietnamese received 100 to 200 plus tips. Ba got 10 francs.

Though his wages were paltry he had learnt a lot of new things. As he considered me one of his closest friends, he told me everything he had seen and thought about.

"Oh! There are poor people in France like in our country!" Seeing some prostitutes on board he said to me:

"Why don't the French civilize their compatriots before doing it to us? Why is it, brother Mai?"

...

Trams were strange things to Ba. It was the first time he had seen such running houses. He was interested in everything, for it was new to him.

The daily work over, I lent him to some clothes and we went to café in Cannebière. Needless to say, it was the first time he had entered a café and it was also the first time he had been addressed as "Sir" by a Frenchman.

After the first few days in Marseilles Ba remarked, "The French in France are better and more polite than those in Indochina".

...

The ship left Le Harve, stopped in Spain, Portugal, Algeria, Tunisia and called at the East African ports up to the Congo. Ba was observant of everything. Every time the boat called at a port, he did his utmost to visit the town. When he came back, his pocket was full of photos and match boxes, for he fancied collecting things.

At Dakar, there was a great storm. The ship could not enter the port and the life boats could not be lowered onto the sea. In order to contact the ship the French ashore let some African swim to the

ship. One... two... three... then four jumped into the sea. One after another they were all drowned under the waves.

It was a usual sight for everyone on board, but Ba was deeply moved. He cried. I was surprised and I asked him why. Sadly, he said:

"The French in France are all good. But the French colonialists are very cruel and inhuman. It is the same everywhere. At home I witnessed such happenings in Phan Rang. The French burst out laughing while our compatriots drowned for their sake. To the colonialists, the life of an Asian or African is nothing."

Our ship carried good Bordeaux and Algerian wines to other colonies. Everyone on board consumed these wines because there were plentiful. Some sailors were drunk all the way. It was only necessary to make a hole in the barrel, connect one end of a rubber tube to it, and suck strongly from the other end to fill bottles. In this way they drank to their hearts' content. But Ba never drank wine and advised me not to follow the example of the others.

Ba was good to everybody and never quarrelled with anyone. However, he was a bit strange. Everyday, he got up early to see the sun rise and during the nights when there was moonlight, it seemed that he did not sleep. He went to and fro on the deck, contemplating the sky and the sea. We stopped at Tanannarive one morning. The sea was calm, the island looked like a lampshade on the sea shining above and with a soft blue colour below. There was nothing more. But Ba was amazed. he kept on saying to me: "Look! How beautiful, how great!"

In 1917, Ba went to England. Here is a story told by a Vietnamese who at that time was a cook in a big hotel in London.

One year before the First World War, I met a young Asian in the silver room. I did not pay any attention to him as I thought he was Chinese. On the third day, he came and spoke to me in Vietnamese. Naturally, I was happy to meet a compatriot. From that day, we became good friends.

"What brought you here, to England?" I asked Ba.

"I came here on my own to learn English."

"Very good. But English is difficult to learn. I've been here for two years but know nothing except 'Yes' and 'No'."

"My first job was to sweep snow at a school. What a hard job! I sweated all over and yet my hands and feet were freezing. And it was not easy to break up the icy snow for it was slippery. After eight hours' work I was completely exhausted and hungry too. I had to give it up. The headmaster was a good man. He paid me six pence and said, smiling, "Indeed this job is too heavy for you."

"Two days later I found another job. This time I had to heat the boiler. From five o'clock, another friend and myself had to go to the hull to light the fire. All day long we had to put coal into the boiler. It was terrifying. I never knew what the people

were doing on the deck because I'd never been up there. My work mate was a quiet man, probably he was dumb. Throughout the working day he said nothing. He smoked while working. When he needed me he made a sign but never said a word. It was terribly hot in the hull and terribly cold outside. I did not have enough warm clothes and therefore caught cold. I had to have two weeks' rest. With my savings I paid for my rent, bread and butter and six English lessons. I had six shillings and six pence left and went round to Soho to look for a job, and was sent here."

The working hours were from 8 a.m. to noon and 5 to 10 p.m. Everyday early in the morning and in the afternoon, Ba sat in Hyde Park with a book and a pencil in his hands. On his free days he had English lessons under an Italian teacher. Ba advised me to study as he did, but somehow I was too lazy. Now I regret it.

Each of us had to take turns in the clearing up. The waiters, after attending customers had to clear all the plates and send them by means of an electric lift to the kitchen. Then our job was to separate chinaware and silverware for cleaning. When it came to Ba's turn he was very careful. Instead of throwing out all the bits left over which were often a quarter of a chicken or a huge piece of steak. Ba kept them clean and sent them back to the kitchen. Noticing this, Chef Escoffier asked Ba, "Why didn't you throw these remains into the rubbish tin as the others did?"

"These things shouldn't be thrown away. You could give them to the poor."

"My young boy, listen to me!" Chef Escoffier seemed to be pleased and said, smiling, "Leave your revolutionary ideas aside

for a moment, and I will teach you the art of cooking which will bring you a lot of money. Agreed?"

And Chef Escoffier did not let Ba at the job of washing dishes but took him to the cake section where he got higher wages.

It was indeed a great event in the kitchen for it was the first time the "kitchen king" had done that sort of thing.

Ba was very sentimental. One day saw him with a newspaper in his hands and with his eyes full of tears. I asked why he was so sad. He showed the newspaper to me and explained, "Look, this is the news about the Mayor of Corsica, a great Irish patriot, who was arrested and imprisoned by the English. He went on strike. He did not eat or drink, he did not speak or even move. He lay on one side and kept still for sixty-nine days. He died for his country. How courageous! How heroic! A nation which has such citizens will never surrender."

At the end of World War I, Ba, now Nguyen Ai Quoc, returned to France where he continued studying and engaged in the fight against colonialist oppression.

Germany was defeated. The war was over. The German king fled to Norway to take up a new job: wood cutting. The Russian had a revolution. Representatives from the victorious and vanquished powers met at a peace conference at Versailles. Besides the official delegations there were others representing

the oppressed nations. They got there because they had heard of President Wilson's 14 points. There were Irish, Indians, Koreans, Arabs, etc., all of them came to ask for independence and freedom. Among them was Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Nguyen was in touch with the Korean, Irish and other delegations. He organized an association of Vietnamese patriots in Paris and in other French cities. On this occasion he put forwards his list of claims to the Versailles Conference.

This list had eight points, the most important being:

- Vietnam's autonomy;
- Freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of movement, amnesty to political prisoners;
- Equal rights between French and Vietnamese;
- Abolition of forced consumption of alcohol and opium. Abolition of forced labour and salt taxes.

This list was sent to all Allied delegations and to all deputies of the French National Assembly.

It is interesting however to recall the fact that the idea of the claims was Nguyen's but the wording was done by Phan Van Truong, a lawyer, as Nguyen could not write in French.

As the Versailles Conference progressed. President Wilson's 14 points gradually disappeared and the Chinese people were bitterly disappointed. To 'thank' Chinese for having cooperated during the war, the Western power divided China and offered Singtao to Japan. Chinese youth revolted against this bitter injustice. The Chinese delegation to the Conference was ordered to return, and an anti-imperialist movement led by the

intelligentsia spread all over China, a national liberation movement which was at the same time a cultural revolution. It was the 4th May (1919) Movement.

Steeled himself by those truths, Nguyen understood that declarations about freedom made by politicians during wartime were catchwords, used to make believe. If peoples want to be liberated, they must rely on themselves, on their own strength.

Nguyen's claim like those of other delegates went unnoticed.

Nevertheless, there was no denying that they had no effect, as the Conference marked a turning-point in the national liberation movements.

With very limited means Nguyen lived in dire poverty in order to be able to print those claims in the form of leaflets to distribute at the meetings, and as a result, many French understood Vietnam better.

Nguyen distributed them to all Vietnamese nationals and Vietnamese who were in the French army in France. Therefore, police investigations in the army camps followed and indirectly awoke the Vietnamese workers and soldiers who were hitherto indifferent to politics.

Nguyen even sent his documents to Indochina, but only those bearing the address of French people reached their destinations. The French colonialists printed the claims in their newspapers to make fun of them and carry out repressions at the same time. Thanks to those newspapers the Vietnamese people were aware of the fulltext of the claims and from then onwards the Vietnamese revolutionary movement gained wider support every day.

At that time, in Paris, Nguyen was a patriot determined to give everything to the cause of the homeland; but he certainly was not a politician simply because he did not know much about politics. He could not tell a trade-union organization from a political party.

Among the French newspapers the only one that printed the Vietnamese list of claims was the socialist *Le Peuple*. Nguyen went to see its editorial office. He was received by the editor, Charles Longuet, who was Karl Marx's nephew and a member of the French Parliament. Nguyen was surprised for he had never been received so warmly. Longuet address him a 'dear comrade' and expressed all his sympathy for the Vietnamese people. He encouraged him to write articles for the paper in order to enlighten the French people about the injustices in Vietnam. We could say that the meeting opened the door to his political understanding. It also helped him to know the French people better.

However his knowledge of French was not enough for writing articles. He had made repeated requests until Phan Van Truong agreed to write. Truong was good at writing but he did not want to sign his name, so Nguyen had to put down his signature on it.

Nguyen felt particularly awkward about his intellectual weakness, especially Truong did not write all Nguyen wanted to say. For this reason, he started to learn journalism. In his frequent visits to the newspaper office, he made new acquaintances including the editor of *La vie ouvrière*.

This editor was a sympathetic as Longuet. He asked Nguyen to write for his paper. Realizing that he could not always rely on Truong, Nguyen confessed that his French was not good

enough. The editor replied, "Don't worry about that, just write as you feel, I'll correct your articles before printing them. You need not write long, five or six line will do". Nguyen started to write with great difficulty; he first wrote five or six line. He did not need news about Vietnam to write, he only needed French to put it into words. He was very happy when he saw his first article on the paper. Always keeping a second copy of his articles he compared them with the printed ones and correcting the mistakes. He went on doing this patiently. When there was fewer mistakes in his writing the editor suggested to him: "Now write a bit longer, about seven or eight lines."

Gradually he was able to write the whole column and sometimes even more. Then his good friend, the editor, said to him, "Now make it shorter. Only so many lines. Don't make it longer."

Nguyen realized that to shorten an article was as difficult as to lengthen it. However, he did his best and succeeded, thereafter, joining the journalists' circle.

He liked reading Shakespeare and Dickens in English, Lu Hsun in Chinese, Hugo and Zola in French. But it was Anatole France and Lev Tolstoi that had a decisive influence on his literary career.

He enjoyed the simplicity of A. France and L. Tolstoi. He said himself, "One only needs to write what one sees and feels, by grasping the colours and the movements of things. Then it is not so difficult to write."

His first short story was printed in two parts by the newspaper *l'Humanité*. He described the worker's life in Paris which was also his own life at that time. They paid him a hundred francs.

It was a great sum those days and it was a double success for him, literary and financial. This first success encouraged him to write more. Apart from describing worker's life in Paris, he often wrote about the colonies, and particularly about Vietnam, for he never forgot that his country was overrun and his compatriots oppressed. He wrote a book entitled *French Colonialism on Trial*. In this book there were anti-colonialist documents and extracts from French books from the National Library.

Full of enthusiasm he now wrote the play *The Bamboo Dragon*. The main idea of the play was: there is a species of bamboo tree which has a twisted body. Those who love antiques shape it into a dragon-like form and made a toy of it. But although it has been made into a dragon, in reality it is bamboo, which should be put to more useful purposes. Shaped as a dragon, it is a queer and useless thing.

He wrote his play during the visit of Emperor Khai Dinh to France on the occasion of a colonial exhibition. The play was banned by the French Government but clubs in the suburbs of Paris performed it. Literary critics appreciated it.

During his stay in Paris, Nguyen had a hard time. He took up photography to make a living. It was Phan Chu Trinh who taught him this trade. He also worked on the painting of eastern antiques. Unfortunately this was a seasonal trade and needed work for only a few months a year.

Nguyen's political activities earned him the deep sympathy of his compatriots. It was natural because it was the first time in Vietnamese history that there had been a Vietnamese declaring before the world his stand for the independence of his people. For the first time in history a Vietnamese had laid bare

in Paris the crimes of the French colonialists; that was why he was hated by the colonialists.

They spied on him, slandered, boycotted and threatened him. They told shop-keepers not to employ him. They tried to bribe him, and when that failed they threatened him again. Albert Sarraut, Minister of the Colonies and Pierre Pasquier, Governor General of Indochina invited Nguyen to a private talk and the Director of the Police took away his passport.

During Khai Dinh's stay in France Nguyen was closely watched by two detectives. However, he did not care and despite the hard life and the troubles with the French authorities, his resolution was not shaken.

Every morning, he cooked rice with salted fish or some meat in a little saucepan on a small oil stove. He ate half of it and left the rest for the evening. Sometimes a little bread with a bit of cheese was for the whole day. He had a tiny room in a cheap hotel in the working-class quarter of Paris. There was scarcely room for anything but a small iron bed, a small table and a chair.

In winter, everyday before going to work, Nguyen put a brick in the fire in the hotel kitchen. He took it out in the evening, wrapped it in old newspapers and warmed his bed with it.

Usually he only worked half a day, earning some money in the morning and going to library in the afternoon or attending political conferences. In the evening he attended the meetings which in Paris were fairly numerous. There he made acquaintance with such people as Leon Blum, Bracke, Vaillant Couturier, Professor Marcel Cachin, Deputy Mac Saugnier, novelist Colette, etc.

He demanded to speak at nearly every meeting. The audience liked to listen to him for he was the only foreigner there and more particularly because of his attractive personality. He cleverly guided every subject to the colonial question and especially to the Vietnamese problems. For example, one day De Coué gave a talk on hypnotism. Many people spoke afterwards, some agreed, some disagreed with the method of curing illness by hypnotism for this reason: "The French have hypnotised our people in order to oppress and exploit us."

Another time the meeting discussed the Irish and Korean questions. All the French speakers severely criticized the English and Japanese policy and defended the Irish and Korean peoples. Nguyen said, "Being a citizen of an oppressed country I wholeheartedly sympathize with our Irish and Korean friends, and support the meeting in accusing the English and Japanese colonialists. However, I wish to ask you all whether we ought to accuse other colonialists? Should we defend other oppressed people? Should we or should we not? Everybody answered in the affirmative, thus enabling him to present the Vietnamese problem.

In these meetings in Paris a variety of subjects was discussed, from astrology, politics and literature to the method of planting water-cress or rearing snails. There were also all kinds of people there: scholars, ex-ministers, deputies, writers, workers, businessmen, elderly people and young people. It was a friendly and democratic atmosphere similar to the Jacobin club in the period of the French Revolution. One could learn many things.

Despite his poverty, Nguyen was always cheerful. During the discussions, and even when accusing the colonialists, Nguyen was always calm and cautious. He never lost his temper and

never used a strong language. He strove to study in order to understand every subject and took part in the *Arts and Science* and *The Friends of Arts' Associations* which paid visits to museums, factories, laboratories, art groups, theatres, etc., every week. There were experts to explain these subjects.

He also took part in the 'travel' association which planned package tours around France or to the neighbouring countries. Thanks to this Nguyen knew many sites in France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany as well.

He came to this conclusion, "All are human beings. Everywhere, we meet good and bad people, honest and dishonest people. If we are good people, we will meet good people everywhere."

Apart from those visits, Nguyen had other amusements. It was not for the pure love of travelling that Nguyen saved every penny he had, but more important was his desire to know foreign countries, their organization and their administration.

He started to organize, or more exactly, to study the way to organize things. At the meetings held during his travels, he met various revolutionary leaders from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Madagascar, etc. Together with them he organized the Intercolloial Union in Paris. The aim of this association was the liberation of the colonial peoples. Its activities consisted of diffusing propaganda, organizing meetings attended by the colonial peoples and the French who sympathized with them. Usually the sympathizers were in greater number than the colonial people. The latter, the majority of whom were civil servants or workers, were threatened by the French authorities with deportation from France if they continued to attend those meetings.

The French sympathizers were very enthusiastic and were deeply concerned with what was happening in the colonies: alcohol, opium, bribery, oppression, etc. They often shouted: "Shame! Oh this is inconceivable! The crimes of the colonialist are immeasurable!"

He and his comrades issued a newspaper called *Le Paria* in order to intensify their activities. He assumed the editorship and the directorship at the same time.

The Madagascan, Algerian, Tunisian, and Martinican patriots were lawyers, doctors, businessmen and students. They were busy with their own affairs and could not devote much time to the paper. Each could only contribute an article and a small sum every week. He was elected to run the newspaper, and so he had to be at the same time director, writer, editor, sub-editor, treasurer, publisher and liaison officer.

Le Paria was sold at first in the small shops and did not sell well because there were too many newspapers in Paris. Therefore he went to popular meetings, distributed the paper, and said from the platform, "Friends, *Le Paria* is free of charge. However I would greatly appreciate it if you would kindly make a small contribution to it. One cent, one franc, anything, every cent helps."

The French, particularly those of the middle-class and poor class were generous, and as a rule he collected enough money to pay all the expenses.

The publication of *Le Paria* was a great blow to the colonialists, and it was immediately banned in the colonies. But Nguyen did not give up: there were sailor sympathizers who

took care of its circulation in the colonies and there were also secret methods.

Vietnamese living in Paris or in the provinces also secretly sent money to the paper although a great number of them were illiterate.

The majority of the Vietnamese students in Paris were scared of *Le Paria* and of Nguyen, who was a 'wild animal' to them. They did not dislike him or the paper and many of them secretly read it but the real cause of their attitude was the fear of being involved. Since the proclamation on the Intercolonial Union and the publication of *Le Paria*, colonial students were more severely checked up on by the police.

One day Bui Quang Chieu's son* went to the office of *Le Paria*, put five francs on the table, saying, "For the paper", and ran away as if chased by a ghost.

In the colonies, especially in Indochina, those who read it were arrested. Despite these difficulties, the paper continued to develop. It was a new current of fresh air to the oppressed countries.

...

Nguyen became a member of the Socialist Party. He was the first Vietnamese to join a French political party.

Asked the reasons for his adherence to the Socialist Party he said, "This is the only organization in France which defends my

* Bui Quang Chieu was very well-known figure in Vietnam who supported the French.

country, the only organization pursuing the noble ideology of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity".

At that time every member of the Socialist Party was discussing the question of remaining in the Second International or adhering to the Third International or organizing a Second-and-a-half International.

There were heated discussions every evening, before, during and after the meeting. Some entire families attended the meeting and took part in the discussion: women were as enthusiastic as men. Often fathers did not agree with sons, or husbands with wives.

He listened carefully but did not understand very much as there was often a repetition of words such as capitalism, proletariat, socialism, exploitation, utopianism, Saint Simon, Fourier, Marx, anarchism, reformism, production, theses and anti-theses, liberation, collectivism, communism, objectivity, subjectivity, etc.

Opinions varied. Socialist newspapers were full of different opinions. Professor Marcel Cachin, Vallant Couturier and many others expressed in *l'Humanité* their approval of joining the Third International.

Opinions concerning the setting up of a Second-and-a-half International were published in a '*Friend of the People*'.

Leon Blum's and Paul Faure's opinion were written in *Le Peuple*, the organ of the Second International.

There were many other explanations and discussions which gave headaches to him because it was really too difficult for him to understand.

One day he said, "Dear friends! You are all socialists, it's very good! You all want to liberate the working class, don't you? Good. In that case, the Second, Second-and-a-half or Third International are all the same. Aren't they fighting for socialism? You all adhere to the one or the other but you must unite. Why do you discuss so much? While you are discussing here our compatriots are suffering in Vietnam..."

Everybody smiled, but nobody laughed at him because of his innocence.

A charming young girl militant, a dressmaker by trade named Rose, said to him, "Comrade Nguyen, it's difficult to explain to you because you're new. But I'm sure that you'll understand later on why we've discussed so much. It's very important for the future of the working class".

There is an end to everything and this is also applied to those discussions. Nguyen was supported by many people because he was the only representative from the colonies and also because it was the first time in history that a Vietnamese militant had taken part in a congress of a French political party. A newspaperman printed his photo in the *Morning Post*. The next day, secret police wanted to arrest him. Socialist deputies intervened and did not allow the police to enter the congress room, thus he attended the meeting peacefully.

The Congress lasted for many days. Sub-committees were formed. Great orators like Leon Blum, Paul Faure, Frossard, Cachin, Marceau Pivert, Zyronsky, Vaillant, Couturier, Bracke, A. Andre Berton, Charles Lussy, etc., took the floor. Of course Nguyen seized every opportunity to present the colonial question especially that of Vietnam.

Finally came the vote: to join the Third International or stay in the Second International (the Second-and-a-half was rejected).

The minority, led by Leon Blum, voted for the Second International. The majority led by Cachin approved the Third International. Nguyen also voted for the Third International.

Surprisedly, Rose, the Secretary of the Congress asked Nguyen: "Comrade! Now you do understand why we've discussed that question so much in Paris, don't you?"

"No, not quite!"

"Then why did you vote for the 'Third International'?"

"Very simple. I did not understand what strategy, proletarian technique or other points you were talking about. But I understood one thing: the Third International paid special attention to the colonial question. The Third International promised to help the oppressed people to regain their freedom and independence while the Second International never mentioned anything about the fate of the colonies. That's why I gave my vote to the Third International. Freedom for my compatriots, independence for my country, that's all I want: this is what I understood. You agree with me, don't you?"

Rose agreed and said, smiling, "Comrade, you've made some progress."

After that historic date, the Socialist Party split. The majority formed the French Communist Party and joined the Third International. The minority remained with the name Socialist Party and adhered to the Second International.

After that, the French colonialists in Indochina acquired a new word: they called all Vietnamese patriots "local Nguyen Ai Quoc".

The 'Tours Congress' ended, Nguyen went back to his old trade, photography, to the library, to the meetings and to *Le Paria*.

The colonialists wanted very much to imprison or to deport him as his activities annoyed them so much. But they were afraid of public opinion. Nguyen knew nearly all the deputies and lawyers of the Socialist Party, who were ready to defend him. Moreover he did nothing wrong. To defend his country and denounce the colonialists' crimes was not unlawful in France, even if in Indochina it was a capital punishment.

Many Vietnamese patriots were beheaded for having carried out far less important activities than Nguyen's.

Though it was dangerous, he wanted to go back to Vietnam now that he understood a little about organization and propaganda. It seems that day and night he thought and dreamt of nothing else except his country.

Usually on Saturday afternoon, Senegalese, Moroccan, Algerian and Madagascan comrades went to the office of *Le Paria* to discuss the articles for next week's issue. One Saturday the office was closed. They rang. Nobody answered. Surprised, they said:

"Perhaps he is ill?"

"No, if he were, he would warn us."

"Or was he arrested?"

"Impossible. They do not dare to do such thing in Paris."

"Perhaps he had to attend to some other business?"

"In that case he would have left a message. He has always done so."

"Let's wait a little while."

"It's unnecessary. Let's go to B. We'll get back here late."

Mr B. was a lawyer from the Antilles. Nguyen used to go to see him, his wife received Nguyen as her own brother. Nguyen loved their two children very much, a girl of eight and a boy of four and they also were very much attached to him.

The above-mentioned comrades met Mr. B and his family in their sitting-room. B. and his wife looked sad, and their children were crying.

"What is the matter?" they asked B.

Mrs B. wiped her tears away, pointed to a note on the table and said:

"Read it and you'll see."

They rushed to the table. A Moroccan doctor seized the letter and said, "Nguyen's letter! I know his writing!" and he read aloud while others listened attentively:

"Dear friends,

We have been working together for a long time. Though we are peoples of different races, different countries, different religions, we are attached to each other as brothers and sisters of the same family.

Together we endure the same misfortune: the atrocities of colonialism. We are fighting for a common ideal: the liberation of our peoples and the regaining of the independence of our homelands.

We are not alone in our struggle because we have the support of our entire peoples, of the French democrats, the true Frenchmen who stand by us.

Our common work *Intercolonial Union* and *Le Paria* have got on well. Thanks to them, France, the true France, understands clearly what is happening in the colonies. France is now aware of the fact that the 'shark colonialists' abuse the name and the honour of France to commit inconceivable crimes. Our work has awakened our people. At the same time, our people also realize that there is a France, a free, equal and fraternal France. However, we should do better.

What should we do?

We can't put that question too automatically. It depends on the particular situation of each country.

As for me, the answer is clear: to go back home, work with the masses, enlighten them, organize them, unite them, train them, to help them struggle for their freedom and independence.

Perhaps some of you should and could do the same. Others should carry on our present work to consolidate the *Intercolonial Union* and develop our paper.

Dear friends,

I bid farewell to you, I'll be away from you but my heart will be always with you.

Please excuse me for not bidding you goodbye. You know that I've been closely watched.



The house where President Ho Chi Minh lived his childhood, in his native land (Nghe An Province, Central Vietnam).



Nguyen Ai Quoc (another name of Ho Chi Minh when young) taking floor at the Tours Congress for establishing the French Communist Party (1920).



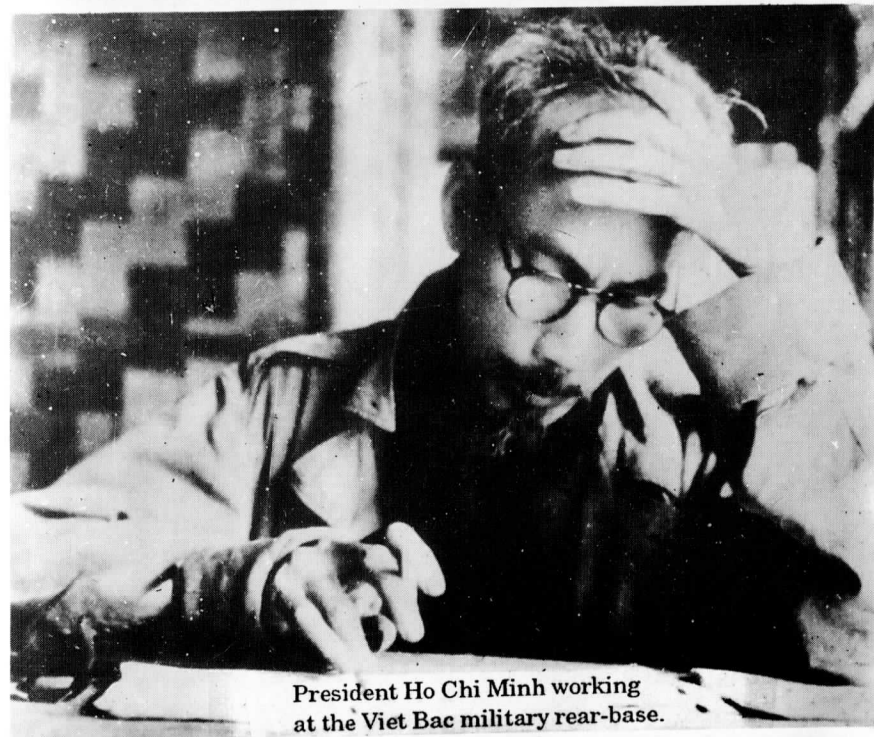
Portrait of Ho Chi Minh
(in 1923)



President Ho Chi Minh making an observation of a battlefield on the Dong Khe front (Cao Bang Province, Vietnam - China Borderline).



Ho Chi Minh on the way to the Border Campaign
(Vietnam - China Borderline, 1950).

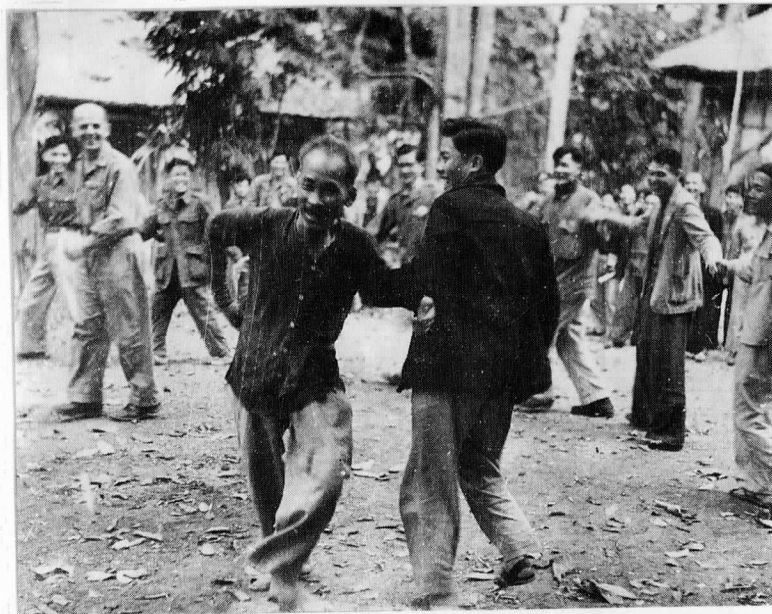


President Ho Chi Minh working
at the Viet Bac military rear-base.

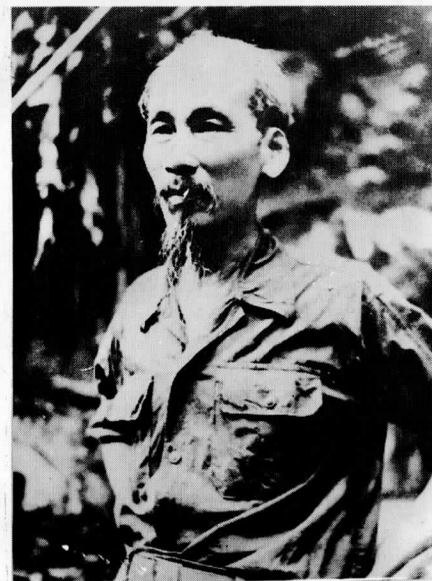


President Ho Chi Minh participating in production activity during the anti-French resistance.

The leisure of fishing after working time at the Viet Bac military rear-base.



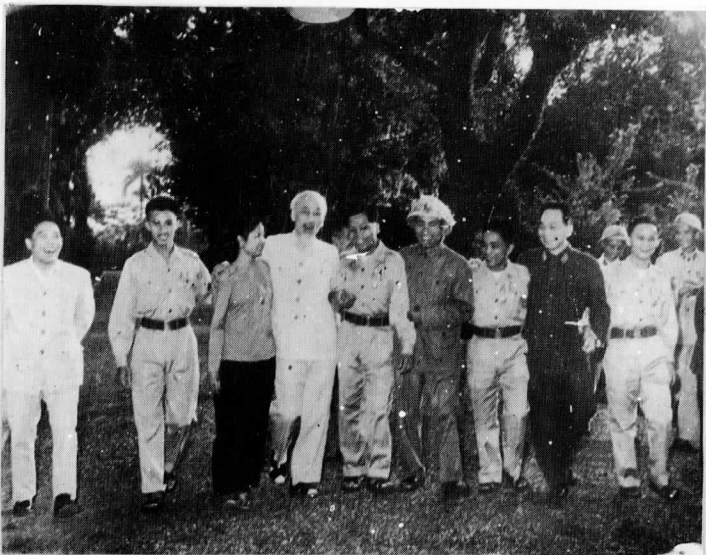
At the art festival among other delegates of the II nationwide Congress of the Worker's Party of Vietnam (1951).



President Ho Chi Minh at the time after the victorious resistance against the French aggressors (in 1954).



In the garden of the President's Palace (1960).



Receiving the delegation of heroes and outstanding fighters of the People's armed forces of South Vietnam on their visit to the North during the Anti-american resistance (1965).



Scooping water against drought with peasants of Ha Tay Province (North Vietnam) in 1958.

Taking care of the star-apple tree presented by people from the South.



President Ho Chi Minh visiting a battlefield of the Capital's air-defence force during the anti-American resistance (1966).



House on stilts - working and residing place of President Ho Chi Minh in the complex of vestiges in Hanoi in commemoration of Ho Chi Minh .

When this letter reaches you, your Nguyen will have left France at least twenty-four hours.

My compatriot Dai will give back to B. the key of the newspaper office, various papers and documents of our League and of our paper, as well as its funds. I have paid the rent of the office up the end of the year. The printing costs are paid for. We owe money to no one. The library book is in the drawer on the right. All lending books are in, except those lent to members on holiday.

In a word, everything is in good order before I go.

I'll write to you but I can't promise since it is difficult to correspond when you work underground. But whether I write to you or not, be sure that I'm always very much attached to you. Please shake hands with our French friends for me.

Now a few words to my niece and nephew.

You love me very much, and I also love you very much. It is true, isn't it? I will tell our young friends in Vietnam that you are good. I will shake their hands for you. Perhaps, for a long time you will not see uncle Nguyen, you cannot climb on my legs or my back as you used to do, and it will take me a long time to see my Alice and Paul again. When we meet, I'll probably be old and you'll be as big as your mummy and daddy. That is not important. I'll always remember you, you'll always be my dear little Alice and my dear little Paul.

Behave yourselves well. Learn your lessons well. Be obedient to your mummy and daddy. Don't beat your little dog Marius. When you have grown up you'll fight for your country like your parents, like uncle Nguyen and others.

My little niece and nephew, I kiss you both most affectionately. Kiss your mother for me.

Uncle Nguyen

Doctor R. stopped reading.

They all looked at each other without a word. Little Paul broke the silence:

"Where has uncle Nguyen gone, Mummy?"

"When will he be back, Mummy?" asked Alice.

"He'll be back when his country is independent", answered Mrs B. holding her children tightly.

Nguyen had decided to return to his country "to work with the masses, organize and train them" for the struggle for national liberation. He first went to South China (1925) where he organized and trained Vietnamese revolutionaries.

Now in China, Nguyen started to sell cigarettes and newspapers for his living. When he first arrived, he still heard the repercussions of an affair that had happened in Canton. A few days before, a young Vietnamese revolutionary, Pham Hong Thai, tossed a bomb at Merline, Governor General of Indochina, when he visited the international concession Shameen in Canton.

Merlin escaped death, but Pham Hong Thai had to drown himself in the Pearl River.

It was only an incident but it heralded the beginning of the period of Vietnamese national struggle like a swallow announcing the spring.

After the First World War, the French colonialists intensified their exploitation in Indochina. The programme of exploitation was very carefully planned in a book by Albert Sarraut on the *colonial exploitations*. Taxes went up. The land of many villages was appropriated by French landlords. The French government applied the policy of the native going hungry to impoverish them. The Vietnamese capitalist and bourgeois classes were "strangled" by the heavy oppression of the colonial capitalists. A new working class appeared. From 1862 the rifles of the Court army began to encounter French guns and that struggle had never ceased. In 1883 it was continued under the leadership of Phan Dinh Phung, in 1893 of Hoang Hoa Tham, in 1915 of Luong Ngoc Quyen and many other revolutionaries. It was a bit quiet after the First World War, but now Pham Hong Thai's bomb rekindled that fire of struggle.

China was divided by various warlords who were helped by the imperialists, but the patriotism of the Chinese people had been awakened. The call of Dr Sun Yat-sen began to spread, and an immense popular movement started. At first, it was the fight against the Japanese, which mustered up all classes in China. Next came the boycott of the English promoted by the workers in Shanghai. Then the punitive expeditionary army to the North fought against the Japanese to unite China. It was led by Dr Sun Yat-sen and his comrades.

Dr Sun Yat-sen's three principles were:

- National independence;
- Democratic rights;
- People livelihood.

While study and earning his living at the same time, Nguyen continued to try to work for his country. He began to organize Vietnamese nationals living in China and set up the *Revolutionary Vietnamese Youth*.

He also issued the newspaper *Youth* for propaganda purposes.

With the help of Lieu Trong Khai, he organized the *League of the Oppressed Peoples in Asia* in which there were Vietnamese, Koreans, Indonesians, etc. This League bore some resemblance to the *Intercolonial Union* that he had set up in Paris.

With the cooperation of the Chinese Communist Party, the revolutionary army of Sun Yat-sen scored success after success, and the militarists were gradually defeated. In a short period, the Kuomintang power spread over more than half of China.

The activities of the *Revolutionary Vietnamese Youth* reached Vietnam. The French colonialists helped a great deal indirectly. Why?

When Nguyen's documents and newspapers secretly infiltrated into Indochina, the colonialists made great noise about them and called for their suppression. It was a good occasion for Nguyen's work, for it drew the attention of the people and whetted their appetite for listening to revolutionary writings.

Furthermore, the French make a mistake in arresting the old patriot Phan Boi Chau, who was in China at that time, and

wanted to sentence him to death. The entire Vietnamese people rose up against this verdict and demanded his release. There had never been such a big broad, popular movement and it provided good opportunity for Nguyen to spread patriotism.

In order to lull and to dissuade the Vietnamese people, the French colonialists appointed the socialist Alexandre Varenne as Governor General of Indochina. At first the Vietnamese people particularly the youth, were very enthusiastic.

But from the very beginning Varenne applied an extremely reactionary policy. The Vietnamese people soon realized it and were ready to respond to Nguyen's call, "Rely on your own strength to liberate yourselves."

• The old patriot Phan Boi Chau came back from France and died the next year. From North to South people organized a huge funeral. The French authorities intervened, forbade all commemorative ceremonies and arrested the youth and students who were active in organizing them. These measures, once again revived the fire of patriotism and promoted Nguyen's and the Revolutionary Youth's spreading of patriotism.

Nguyen opened courses for training cadres in Canton. The majority of Vietnamese youth were students who secretly left the country to attend these classes to study revolutionary theories and secret activities. After their training, they returned home and spread the theories of national liberation and popular organization.

By 1927, the Kuomintang authorities started their counter-revolutionary activities, they wanted to arrest Nguyen. He left for Siam.

In the centre of Siam near the Menam River there was a hamlet of Vietnamese nationals. They were peasants and small seasonal traders. Some cultivated rice and sweet potatoes; other sold matches, clothes, medicines, etc.

A school was set up to teach Siamese and Vietnamese to their children. In the classroom there was a picture of the Siamese on the wall in front of the children, and below it there was a picture of Pham Hong Thai. These Vietnamese nationals were patriots. They respected the young Vietnamese revolutionary who had sacrificed himself for his homeland.

Everyday after work they gathered in the school yard. Men, women and children sat around in a circle and a thin cadre explained to them in a clear and slow voice an article from a newspaper or a few pages from a book. Everybody listened in silence. After the reading, the cadre asked whether they had understood and explained the points which were not yet clear to them.

After the meeting, they sang patriotic songs and the old people told stories about the guerrilla warfare. They were partisans who fought against the French under the leadership of

Phan Dinh Phung or Hoang Hoa Tham and had run away to Siam to avoid persecution from the French authorities.

Afterwards the cadre who read newspapers and books to them went away with a small bag on his shoulder like a travelling trader. He went to those places where Vietnamese nationals lived to spread revolutionary consciousness and to organize them.

The Siamese were very pious and virtuous. At a certain age boys had to go and meditate for a few months in a certain pagoda. Hence there were thousands of monks in Siam, all respected and fed by the people. They ate only once a day at 11 a.m. Women carried rice to pagodas and the monks ate it without bothering to thank anyone. Those who brought the rice there were happy to have an opportunity to do so since they believe that the more you give away to the people the more virtues you acquire.

Thanks to this practice Nguyen, the above-mentioned cadre, and his friends were able to become monks and travel without having to pay for his food. Apart from ploughing land and acting as itinerant dealer, Nguyen had to carry out his work and to organize his compatriots. The 'Vietnam Association of Mutual Assistance' was set up. A weekly paper called '*Humanity*' was issued. Before that when in China, Nguyen had brought revolutionary ideas from the North into his country, now in Siam he did it eastward.

His activities could not go unnoticed. Wherever there were Vietnamese, he organized schools for the children. Wherever there were schools there were parents gathering to listen to the news and to discuss various subjects. Playing cards for money

and quarrelling were clearly decreasing. The people helped each other in their work and the children behaved better. Illiteracy slowly disappeared. In short, there was a great change among the Vietnamese in Siam.

At first the French authorities suspected and later on they knew that Nguyen must have been somewhat in this region, but not exactly where. They sent secret agents to find out, but a good man among them warned him to the danger.

Often narrowly chased by the secret police, he hid himself in a pagoda, cut his hair short in order to disguise himself and carry on his political activities.

On the right bank of the Mekong there were many Vietnamese. The French authorities watched them carefully and sent lots of secret police to spy on their activities, and when they spotted Vietnamese patriots they asked the Siamese authorities to arrest them.

The Siamese were good to the Vietnamese, but sometimes to avoid troubles they were forced to act against their will.

These arrests, however, bore few results thanks to the help of the Siamese people. One day, pursued by the secret police, a man rushed into a Vietnamese national's house. Nobody was in except a child of 9. Soon the police came. Immediately, the child gave him an old hat and a cord and reproached him in a most natural way: "It is late and you haven't gone to find the buffaloes yet. Mum will be angry!"

Thus he put on the hat, took the cord, and out with a raincoat on his shoulder under the very noses of the police who were busy searching the house.

Afterwards the child was asked,

"Did you know that man?"

"No, I didn't, but he looked like the uncle who often comes here to teach me how to sing."

"Why did you send him out to look for the buffaloes?"

"I didn't know. I was afraid that he might be arrested if he stayed in the kitchen."

In general the Vietnamese in Siam always united with the Siamese and respected their laws. That was why the Siamese liked them.

In 1930, Nguyen went to Hongkong where he held a meeting of various Vietnamese political parties. There they decided to unite in the common struggle against French colonialism. He was arrested by the Hongkong authorities.

Chinese newspapers were banned to carry the story of his arrest. Nguyen was shut up in a special cell guarded by special policemen.

Twice a day, he was given rice of bad quality and rotten fish.

Twice a week he received good rice and beef which was a real feast for him.

Every day, he was allowed to go out with his fellow-prisoners for a 15 minutes' walk in a small yard surrounded by high walls. He had the impression of walking at the bottom of a well. But anyhow it was better than being in a cell because for such a little while he could hear human voices, see human faces and a portion of the sky. After the 15 minutes' walk, he was again shut up for the whole day in darkness. Eating, sleeping, washing and relieving the bowels, all were done in the cell. The thick wall was pierced with a small hole. From time to time, the Indian guard would look through the hole to see if the prisoner in the cell were still there or had escaped or committed suicide.

Nguyen spent his time in meditating, recalling past deeds and criticizing himself, and when he was tired of doing these things he just took to counting the bricks with which the floor was paved and the tiles used to make up the roof. In the cell, the roof was the relatively light spot as there was on the wall, near the roof, one small crescent shaped window with heavy iron bars. A dim light shimmered on the window made it look like an agonized man's eye.

Hunting for bugs was the only sport. The cell swarmed with fleas. On the first day, he left their bites, but afterwards he ceased to pay attention to them. Bug hunting was merrily to while away the time, not to kill them.

The days when he was taken out for interrogations had the most pleasant moments of rest during his captivity.

First because he could leave the stifling, dark and fetid cell for a moment.

Secondly, he was most often questioned by top secret police agents who offered him English cigarettes. Smoking, his only temptation was forbidden in prison.

Thirdly, he wanted to learn about the tricks used by the secret police agent in questioning detainee, and to see what they had known, what they did not know and what they fabricated.

The British secret police agents were provided with all necessary documents by the French secret police agents in Indochina: they had also been supplied with a pile of documents genuine or faked.

As a rule, the Chinese nationals who were suspected or had been arrested in a colony and sent here were extradited after a pretence of questioning and prosecution. Upon extradition from Hongkong, they fell into the hands of Kuomintang agents. To leave Hongkong they had to take a ship and as they boarded it they were arrested by Chinese secret police agents.

But luckily for him, he got the assistance of a British lawyer, Mr Loseby, who was very good to him.

The authorities of Hongkong sought to divide Nguyen and Mr Loseby, but the latter held fast to his stand. He told Nguyen: "Dr Sun Yat-sen was saved by an Englishman. I will likewise endeavour to save you. Just tell me what. I must know to defend you. I don't want you to say more than is needed because every revolutionary has his own secret."

And Mr Loseby defended Nguyen's case at the Supreme Court.

That was the first time a political case had been brought before the Supreme Court and so the trial had a special character.

The first session of the Court was an opportunity for Nguyen to leave his cell for a few hours.

According to him, when in prison one felt much better if the door was left ajar.

The trial was public, but a state of emergency had been declared for fear that he would have escaped. Few people were admitted into the court-room. High above were the judges and a number of officers. In the middle of the room there was a large desk where the prosecutor and his subordinates sat on one side and on the other side were the lawyers who defended him.

The judge and the attorneys were all wearing black gowns and wigs. The accused stood at the bar which he reached after walking up four steps. The bar was lower than the judges' chairs and higher than the attorneys' desks. All around were iron bars and policemen. On both sides of the court there were civilian and military authorities, and British press correspondents, who had come to attend the session. In front of them were the public.

The judge and the attorneys had on their desks high piles of books which they opened from time to time for reference.

Only four of them had the right to speak: the judge, the deputy-judge, the government representative and one of the lawyers defending Nguyen. The others, including Mr Loseby, the principal lawyer in charge of Nguyen's defence were like Nguyen himself not allowed to speak during this session or the following ones. They could communicate with one another only by writing.

The two people who spoke most often and loudest were his prosecutor and the lawyer defending Nguyen. They sometimes

had heated arguments. The first court session was rather a long one and an intermission was necessary. During the time, Nguyen was taken to the basement of the Court building to be given something to eat.

When these sessions lasted over a month, the judge declared null and void all the prosecution against Nguyen, but ordered that he be taken out of Hongkong on a French ship.

This was merely a scheme by the Court to avoid arousing public opinion against an unjust judgement and at the same time to hand Nguyen over to the French colonialists.

Mr Loseby opposed the Court's order and lodged an appeal to the High Court in London. He handed the case over to lawyer Stafford Cripps (Socialist Party member who afterwards became British Foreign Minister).

While waiting for London's decision, Nguyen fell ill, and Mr Loseby arranged for him to be sent to hospital.

Nguyen's arrival brought about a great change to the hospital. The doors of his room were provided with more locks to prevent his escape. Everything hanging on the wall was taken away lest he should take his own life. The room was surrounded by wire netting. Standing in front of the door were two tall, sturdy policemen. In the room two Chinese secret agents were keeping watch day and night. Among the patients were murderers, notorious gangsters and pirates.

Thanks to Mr Stafford Cripps's efforts, after one day's discussion, the High Court in London decided that Nguyen must be released, as he was guilty of any crime. First, there

was no evidence whatsoever that he was a Soviet agent. Secondly, it could not be proved that he had plotted against the Hongkong authorities. Thirdly, the fact he was a communist or a nationalist did not continue a violation of English law.

Thus Nguyen had won the case.

But where would he go now? Every move of his was closely watched by the French and Chiang Kai-shek secret agents. The French agents had failed to secure his extradition, and they were only waiting for his departure from Hongkong to lure him into another trap.

Nguyen applied for a visa to Great Britain and the letter of application was sent to London by Lawyer Loseby.

Without waiting for the British Government's reply, Nguyen secretly boarded a ship for England.

At Singapore, he was arrested again and sent back to Hongkong. On the pretext that he had entered a colony without a visa, the Hongkong secret agents arrested him once more.

Lawyer Loseby again defended Nguyen, saved him from prison and with the assistance of his wife and his friends secretly prepared for his leave.

It was well arranged. The French secret agents who were roaming about the prison, the central police station and Mr Loseby's house, were not aware of anything.

Disguised as a wealthy Chinese businessman, he left Hongkong and went to live in the house of one of Mr Loseby's close friends in another town. There he led an idle life of a rich man on holiday. He strolled in the forest and visited pagodas.

He made acquaintance with writers and artists. He wrote for local newspapers in English and in Chinese and signed his articles with different names. To recover his strength, he regularly did physical exercises.

Later on, when describing his experiences in Hongkong, Nguyen told his friends that he was deeply grateful to Mr Loseby and his family. But for the good-hearted lawyers, Nguyen would have been dead. All through his captivity, Mr Loseby and his family had done everything to alleviate his physical and moral sufferings, and after his trial Mr Loseby had done his best to save him.

When the Popular Front Government came to power in France, there was some relaxation in the colonialist oppression in Indochina. But when World War II broke out the French colonialists became as ruthless as ever. During the war, Nguyen organized the Vietnam League for Independence and led the resistance against both French colonialists and Japanese fascists.

The Vietnamese people had started a new movement called "The Indochina Conference". Everywhere, committees for action, lectures and meetings were organized to collect the people's views which were to be subsequently reported to the inspection delegations. The main points on the conference agenda were:

- a. To organize a democratic front;
- b. To raise the people's standard of living;
- c. To obtain the people's right to elect the local councils.

For three years, the activities of the democratic movement were carried out openly. The movement leaders from time to time received suggestion, advice or criticism from unknown people. Many said that they must have come from Nguyen. When asked about this, Nguyen just smiled without replying.

The movement had some results.

But now World War II broke out, and democratic rights were again stifled, and the democratic movement activists persecuted. Newspapers had their publishing licenses withdrawn. All organizations were disbanded.

The political prisoners who had been released were arrested again and colonialists also apprehended a number of people who had been engaged in political activities.

The prisons and concentration camps were full of detainee. Terrorism was rampant.

An appeal then echoed throughout Vietnam:

"Let the Vietnamese people stand by the Allies' side!

Fight against fascism!

Drive out the French colonialists!

Fight for national independence!

Vietnamese, let us unite!"

It was the appeal of the Vietnam League for Independence (*Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh*) or Viet Minh.

The Viet Minh programme was simple and clear. All Vietnamese understood, accepted and supported it, and that was the reason why the Viet Minh developed rapidly, in spite of fierce terrorism.

The movement was led by Nguyen.

War broke out between the Siamese and the French in Indochina. Vietnamese soldiers were taken to the front by the French colonialists, but they refused to fight against the Siamese.

By the end of 1940, three successive uprisings had taken place at Bac Son (North Vietnam), Do Luong (Central Vietnam) and in South Vietnam.

Repression by the French was extremely cruel. Several villages were burnt down, thousands of people were massacred. Hundred of old people, women, children were tied up, linked together with a wire piercing through their hands or the calves of the legs and thrown into the sea. At other places, the French ordered people to take off their clothes and to dig the graves which they were to be buried alive in.

In Europe, the Maginot line was broken by the Germans and France was defeated. Two million French soldiers and 150 French generals were taken prisoners by Hitler's forces. The French Government fled from Paris to Tours then from Tours to Bordeaux. The Reynauld Cabinet was overthrown. Petain and Laval signed the agreement of surrender to the Germans and set up a government in their pay in the small town of Vichy.

The Japanese quickly seized the opportunity to invade Indochina.

The French colonialists in Indochina surrendered to the Japanese as their compatriots did to the Germans. After minor engagements at Lang Son on the Vietnam - Chinese border, Vietnam's "protectors" submissively opened Vietnam's door to welcome new masters.

At once Nguyen and the Viet Minh comrades declared, "From now on our number-one enemy is the Japanese fascists".

Many times, they opposed that some of the more progressive Frenchmen should have cooperated with them in the struggle against the common enemy, the Japanese fascists, but in answer to this proposition, the French collaborated with the Japanese to fight against the Vietnamese revolutionaries, offering prizes for their heads. The French and Japanese fascist troops terrorized innocent people, but they could not prevent the Viet Minh from developing a guerrilla warfare against them.

While the Allies were meeting with difficulties, the Germans and the Japanese had their own way.

But Nguyen predicted with certitude:

The Allies would win victory,

France would recover from her defeat,

The Japanese and the French in Indochina sooner or later would fight against one another.

Vietnam would recover her independence.

While on a mission to China to contact Allied forces, Nguyen now called Ho Chi Minh was arrested and imprisoned by the Kuomintang authorities.

The Allies, nearest and most closely related to the resistance against the Japanese in Indochina were the Chinese and so it was necessary for the Vietnamese to contact them.

Among the Vietnamese revolutionaries, Nguyen was the man who knew China and her people the best. For this reason, he was commissioned to leave for China. Going on foot to Chucking was no easy matter. But he accepted it.

In order to divert the secret agents, Nguyen took the name of Ho Chi Minh.

Walking ten consecutive nights and five days, he reached a Chinese town, but hardly had he arrived and taken some rest when he was arrested again the very same evening.

A new period of torture for him began.

The Kuomintang had Ho interned in prison for two weeks, with a cangue round his neck in the daytime and fetters at night. Ho knew the District Chief whom he had previously met in Kweilin. But this man refused to see him, and the telegrams Ho sent to high-ranking officials remained unanswered.

One month and a half later, he was taken out of prison to an unknown place.

With his arms tied at the elbows, and escorted by six soldiers with rifles, Ho Chi Minh went on walking day after day without knowing where he was going. He walked in the rain, and under the scorching sun, and across mountains and swamps.

Every day, as soon as the cock crowed, he was ordered to get up. In the evening when birds flew back their nests, they stopped at some place, and he was shut up in a cell with a dirty mass of hay, and there he slept with his arms unbound.

Despite so many sufferings, he was always in good humour. He was happy to see the landscape changing. He recite poems while he was walking, now and then, composing verses. When arriving at the capital of a district he was shut up in a prison for a week or a fortnight. It was then that he suffered most.

There was not enough food, not enough air and the cell was dirty and full of opium smokers and people with venereal disease. At night he had to sit on the toilet in the cell. But even there he was not undisturbed. From time to time he had to get up to make room for an inmate.

Because he was the last to come to the prison. Every morning, he had to clean the toilet and to sweep the floor of the cell.

One morning when he woke up, he found the man sitting back to back with him dead. He and another inmate took the corpse to the yard. In prison nobody cared whether his neighbour was dead or alive.

What made him suffer most was lice. His whole body was itchy. There were not one but two kinds of itches. There was no means to exterminate lice. They were everywhere: in his clothes, in the bedding, and in the cracks of the board he slept

on. Lice and bugs competed to harass the prisoners who at night met with another terrible enemy: mosquitoes. In prison a flea was called an armoured car, a louse, a tank and a mosquito an aeroplane.

He got as thin as lath. His hair soon turned white and fell away. His sight diminished. He suffered most from inactivity. While he was dragged sick and exhausted from one jail to another, many great events might be taking place in Vietnam and in the world. Who was to speed up the organization? Maybe the Allies had landed in Indochina? Maybe the French and Japanese were at variance. Maybe Viet Minh members were asking one another with great pain what had happened to him.

His mind was in great turmoil. He could do nothing while the people were in dire need of him and time was passing.

He went on walking, his arms tied and his legs chained as before, for eighty days. He had been interned in nearly thirty village and district jails. At last he reached Kweilin.

Again he was imprisoned for one month and a half. When asked by a friend about his experiences in Kweilin prison, he laughed and said. "It's an old story. Let's talk about other things."

From Kweilin he was brought to Liaochow where he was put into a military prison.

Here he enjoyed the status of a "political prisoner". He had enough food and was allowed to leave his cell under escort to relieve himself. No more cangues and chains. Now and then he was allowed to read a newspaper or a book.

One day the chief of the political department came to the guard's room to have his hair cut. He ordered the guard to let him out and walk for half an hour in the small yard, to give him a hair cut and a hot bath.

Good gracious! A few days later half the itch had gone;

In this prison he learnt that in Liaochow there was an organization of the Vietnam Revolutionary League (*Viet Nam Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi*). What was more, he found out that he was being kept in prison that long because he was suspected of having come to China to destroy that organization.

After fourteen months of imprisonment he was released, but was still kept under police surveillance.

Leaving prison he found that his sight had diminished and his legs were so weak that he could hardly walk. He said to himself, "What can a combatant do if he suffers from rheumatism?"

He tried to practise mountain climbing, and looking into the darkness, determined to cure his leg and eye diseases.

A few months later, he asked for permission to return to this country with some members of the Vietnam Revolutionary League he had selected. General Chiang Fa-kwai agreed but the League fiercely opposed the idea.

Back in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh again led the struggle national liberation which culminated in a successful general uprising followed by the Declaration of Independence on September 2, 1945.

Finally Ho Chi Minh was back in Vietnam, after two years' absence. He again led the Viet Minh which had become a powerful organization with its nationwide influence.

The Viet Minh Nationwide Congress was attended by delegates from all parts of the country, some of whom walked several months to get to it.

The main items in the Congress agenda were:

- To cooperate with the Allies when they landed;
- To increase activities for rescuing and helping members of the Allied Forces;
- To prepare for the general uprising;
- To seize power.

Discussions began. But on the evening of that day, an important news item turned the Congress plans upside down: Japan had surrendered to the Allies.

The following day, the Congress discussed two questions: uprising and seizing power.

The plan for uprising had been prepared long before and there remained only to submit it to the delegates from various regions for reconsideration and improvement, and to appoint the leaders for each region.

A central committee assuming the role of a provisional Government was set up. Ho Chi Minh was unanimously elected president by the Congress.

Work was over by 7 p.m.

Immediately the central committee held its first meeting.

At midnight the delegates went home with enthusiasm, carrying with them the order for the uprising.

On July 16, 1945, the Viet Minh guerrilla groups left their base to go into action. Before leaving, they attended a flag-saluting ceremony at which Vo Nguyen Giap, Chairman of the Military Committee, read a statement.

Ho Chi Minh, who had a fever, could not attend the ceremony.

Signing, the guerrilla groups left their base, cheered by the inhabitants. The young leader of the groups, Quang Trung, was proudly marching under the red flag with the golden star.

Everywhere from the city to the country, people rose up and joined the liberation movement.

Viet Minh slogans appeared at every corner side by side with gold-star red flags.

"Down with the Japanese fascists!"

"Long live Vietnam's independence!"

"Let the whole people join in an armed uprising!"

Everywhere guerrilla groups came into being. They openly got their arms ready: flint-lock rifles, bows, scimitars, lances, etc. Women showed no less eagerness than men. More guerrillas were recruited.

The guerrilla groups began attacking Japanese military posts, the Japanese forces began disintegrating, while the Tran Trong Kim Government was going from bad to worse.

The uprising spread from North to South.

Red flags with golden stars could be seen everywhere - on big buildings and on bamboo huts, in the city and in the country.

Bao Dai abdicated. In his abdication statement, he said, "I'd rather be a free citizen than a slave king."

People were longing for the coming of Ho Chi Minh.

Though still sick, Ho Chi Minh decided to join the people in the Capital, but only when Thai Nguyen had been liberated did he go to Hanoi.

But despite these facts, the French colonialists spread the rumour that Ho Chi Minh was helped by the Japanese and that he was a Japanese agent.

In the central region, he suffered a great deal from the sight of the havoc wrought by floods. All around was an immense expanse of water. Courtyards and gardens were damaged. The vast ricefields now looked like a sea. Flood meant starvation. The calamity took place after the plunder of rice by the French and the Japanese in 1944 - 1945 which had caused a catastrophic famine in the spring of 1945 with a toll of over two

million Vietnamese in North Vietnam and the Northern part of Central Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh's first words were "We must do everything to save the people from poverty and starvation."

The Provisional Government (formerly the Viet Minh Central Committee) held a session during which Ho Chi Minh proposed the carrying out of a broad policy of union to set up a single government for the whole country comprising the representatives of all patriotic parties, and well-known non-party personalities.

His proposition was unanimously approved, and several Viet Minh member of the Provisional Government voluntarily withdrew to make place for new members who were not Viet Minh.

The first Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam came into being. Half of the ministers were not Viet Minh members, as for example Nguyen Manh Ha, a catholic; Nguyen Van To, a scholar; Vu Trong Khanh, a lawyer, etc.

Ho Chi Minh was unanimously elected president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and was charged with drafting Vietnam's Declaration of Independence.

After reading the draft resolution to his close collaborators and asking them their opinions - a constant practice of his whereby he could obtain criticism of his work - his happiness was great. He said that he had written a lot in his life but never before had he known the joy of writing such a document.

The Declaration of Independence was an offspring of the Versailles Congress in 1919 and of the Viet Minh programme he wrote in 1940. Moreover, it was the offspring of the

statements made by illustrious predecessors such as Nguyen Huu Huan, Phan Dinh Phung, Hoang Hoa Tham, Phan Boi Chau and many others, over a period of more than 80 years.

It was the outcome of much bloodshed and many sacrifices of lives by Vietnam's brave sons and daughters in the prisons and concentration camps, in remote detention islands, under the guillotine and on the battlefields.

It was the outcome of long years of the hope, endeavor and faith of over 20 million Vietnamese.

It was a glorious page in Vietnam's history. It put an end to the autocratic monarchist regime and the oppressive colonial rule. It opened a new phase of the nascent democratic republic.

Then came the 2nd of September 1945.

That day the Ho Chi Minh's Government was to present itself in front of the people. When President Ho was preparing to go to the ceremony, he found that he had no suitable clothes. Incidentally two stories about his clothes are worth telling here.

Upon Ho Chi Minh's arrival in the Capital from the forests in the North he met a foreign officer wearing khaki trousers and a coat made of parachute cloth. The man confessed that he had no other clothes, whereupon President Ho took off his coat and presented it to him. Seeing that the officer was moved, embarrassed and unwilling to accept the gift, the President smiled, saying "We're old acquaintances and should not stand on ceremony. Take it, I've got another one." And the officer left with a complete suit of clothes, while the President for the whole day contented himself without a coat.

Another story tells how a few years before World War II broke out, the captain of a foreign ship came to pay homage to the mayor of an American port. He was received by the mayor in pyjamas. This incident impaired the friendly relations between the two countries.

These facts, though ordinary, show the different feelings existing between different sorts of people.

In the forests, President Ho, like the guerrillas, was accustomed to wearing only shorts and leaving the torso bare. When he arrived in the capital, he had very few clothes, so several people visited the shops to find a suit of clothes for him. At last they bought him a khaki suit and a pair of rubber sandals. It was in this attire that the President appeared before the public.

And there he was, the man who had changed his name hundreds of times, engaged in dozens of professions and trades, who had been in prison many times and once sentenced to death, the man who had once been reported as dead; there he was, the first president of the newly established Democratic Republic of Vietnam, an illustrious president, indeed.

A journalist who attended the meeting described his impressions as follows:

"The 19th of August was the day when our people in the whole country rose up to seize power.

"The 2nd of September was the day when we told the world that our power had been firmly established."

For the Vietnamese people, September 2 was a solemn, glorious and happy day.

Most privileged were the people of Hanoi, for the 2nd of September was not only the glorious Independence Day, but also the day when they could see with their own eyes Vietnam's best and dearest son.

The inhabitants of Hanoi and of the towns and villages in the vicinity poured into Ba Dinh Square in an endless stream, filling the surrounding streets. Altogether there were about half a million people. Never before in the history of Vietnam had there been such a great meeting.

A new national flag, a new anthem, a new army, a new people, a new government, a new order. Over twenty million hearts were beating with the same rhythm.

In the bright autumn sunshine, with the background of a clear blue sky, red flags with golden stars were fluttering proudly in the breeze.

But emotion reached its climax on the arrival of President Ho Chi Minh, the beloved and respected leader whom the people could see for the first time. The people's feelings towards Ho Chi Minh were so high that of those present at the meeting, two thirds had come just to see him.

It was magnificent scene! A high imposing tribune, brave combatants, an impressive guard of honour, a forest of flags, a long line of cars! A spectacle worthy of the inauguration day of the People's Democratic Power! And the people told themselves that all these things were theirs.

Coming to attend the grand ceremony, everyone expected to see a president, a leader, like those they had seen before. People

of course knew they would not see a man attired like a king of yore in a royal yellow gown and a belt adorned with pearls, but the figure they would see must surely be attired like a national leader in an impeccable dress, with a distinguished gait and an ornate speech - in a word, a personality with many mannerisms.

They soon realized that they had been misled by their imagination. When President Ho Chi Minh came, they found him simple and cordial, like a father among his children.

President Ho Chi Minh could be seen from a distance. He was wearing a faded khaki cap, a pair of rubber sandals and a khaki suit.

When the President began reading the Declaration of Independence, his loud, clear voice reminded one of the remote forests and guerilla warfare. Enthusiastic applause and cheers exploded when he had finished reading one paragraph and asked:

"Fellow-countrymen, can you hear me well enough?"

The simple question dispelled what might still separate him from his people, and created a strong tie uniting the leader to the masses.

The strange question was quite unexpected. The President of the Republic had forsaken all ceremonial and formalities, he had become the Vietnamese people's 'Father Ho'.

"Fellow-countrymen, can you hear me well enough?" Everyone was deeply moved by the love of President Ho Chi Minh for his people, that of a father for his children. Everyone felt that the President was just a man like himself, that he was

close to the people and friendly to them, that he belonged to the people, and was a man whose love for the people was boundless.

In answer to the President's question, half a million voices thundered, 'Yes'. And for me as well as for others this was the best, the most cherished memory of that historic Independence Day...

Spring 1948

APPENDIX

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

"All the men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement appeared in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, it means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live and to be happy and free.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, made at the time of the French Revolution, in 1791, also states: "All men are born free and with equal rights".

Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our

fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

Politically, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

They have enforced inhuman laws, they have set up three different political regimes in the North, the Centre and the South of Vietnam in order to wreck our country's oneness and prevent our people from being united.

They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly massacred our patriots. They have drowned our uprisings in seas of blood.

They have fettered public opinion and practiced obscurantism.

They have weakened our race with opium and alcohol.

In the field of economics, they have sucked us dry, driven our people to destitution and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our ricefields, our mines, our forests and our natural resources. They have monopolized the issue of bank-notes and the import and export trade.

They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to dire poverty.

They have made it impossible for our national bourgeoisie to prosper, they have mercilessly exploited our workers.

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists invaded Indochina to establish new bases against the Allies, the French colonialists went down on banded knees and opened the doors of our country to welcome the Japanese in.

Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that towards the end of last year and the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri province to the North, more than two million of our fellow-countrymen died from starvation.

On the 9th of March this year, the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered, showing that not only were they incapable of "protecting" us, but that, in a period of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

Before the 9th of March, how often the Viet Minh had urged the French to ally themselves with it against the Japanese! But instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists only intensified their terrorist activities against the Viet Minh. After their defeat and before fleeing, they massacred the political prisoners detained at Yen Bai and Cao Bang.

In spite of all this, our fellow-countrymen have always manifested a lenient and humane attitude towards the French. After the Japanese putsch of March 9, 1945, the Viet Minh helped many Frenchmen to cross the frontier, rescued others from Japanese jails and protected French lives and property. In fact, since the autumn of 1940, our country had ceased to be a French colony and become a Japanese possession.

When the Japanese surrendered to the Allies, our entire people rose to gain power and founded the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese, not from the French.

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which have fettered them for nearly a century, and have won independence for Vietnam. At the same time they have overthrown the centuries-old monarchic regime and established a democratic republic.

We, the Provisional Government of the new Vietnam, representing the entire Vietnamese people, hereby declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France, cancel all the treaties signed by the France in our country.

The entire Vietnamese people are of one mind in their determination to oppose all wicked schemes by the French colonialists.

We are convinced that the Allies, which at the Teheran and San Francisco Conferences upheld the principle of equality among the nations, cannot fail to recognize the right of Vietnamese people to independence.

A people who have courageously opposed French enslavement for more than eighty years, a people who have resolutely sided with the Allies against the fascists during these last years, such a people must be free, such a people must be independent.

For these reasons, we, the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, solemnly make this declaration to the world:

Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and in fact has become a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence.

**CHỊU TRÁCH NHIỆM XUẤT BẢN
MAI LÝ QUẢNG**

BIÊN TẬP : KIM HẢI
TRÌNH BÀY BÌA : NGUYỄN THANH SƠN
SỬA BẢN IN : CHU HỒNG THẮNG

In 1000 cuốn khổ 13x19cm tại Xưởng in NXB Thế Giới. GPXB: 349/1-CXB,
cấp ngày 17/5/1997. In xong và nộp lưu chiểu tháng 6, 1997.

