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*Some friends from the Medisch Netherlands-Vietnam Committee who were visiting Hanoi came to ask me for information about the current situation in Vietnam. Later they invited me to Holland in order to continue these discussions. As, unfortunately, I am otherwise occupied and cannot accept the invitation, I have taken up again and enlarged the conversations we had in the following text, which I dedicate with the most friendly greetings to the Medisch Committee.*

NGUYEN KHAC VIEN

## I. PROBLEMS OF HOME POLICY

**Question:** *Could you please summarise for us the essential characteristics of the situation in Vietnam at the start of 1980?*

**Answer:** If you ask any Vietnamese, from the Prime Minister to the man in the street, he will answer:

— in home affairs, and especially the economy, we are beset by a thousand and one difficulties, which we are making the greatest efforts to overcome.

— in foreign affairs, we are ready to repulse any new Chinese attacks.

In short, we have to build socialism on a nationwide scale — both north and south — while having at the same time to spend considerable energy on national defence.

**Question:** *Countless difficulties and yet the certainty of defeating any eventual Chinese aggression, when China has 20 times Vietnam's population. Isn't there a contradiction here?*

**Answer:** It is not the first time we have faced a similar state of affairs: internal difficulties while

confronting a powerful aggressor. Remember that in 1945 Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai-shek) troops were occupying the North of our country, while under their protection the Nationalist Party was plotting to overthrow our government. The South was occupied by British troops opening up the way for the French expeditionary corps. Famine had killed two million of our citizens. Our government, set up on 2 September 1945, had at its disposal only 1 million piastres, a tiny armed force and a very rudimentary administrative set-up. Our people had as yet no experience of armed struggle; 90 per cent of the population was illiterate. We were geographically isolated, totally encircled by the imperialist and Jiang Jieshi forces. Nine years later came Dien Bien Phu.

Remember also 1965. Massive American forces were being landed in the South and the US was pouring bombs on the North, too. An American expeditionary corps of 540,000 ended up stationed in the South, supported by 100,000 soldiers of their satellite countries and nearly a million puppet troops. The American bombs — the equivalent of 700 times the bomb dropped on Hiroshima — were wiping out our towns and villages. In numbers, in firepower, in speed of movement, the enemy held absolute supremacy. The North of our country, hit hard by the bombing, had to put in the main effort: to defend itself, to help the South and also to help the Lao and Kampuchean patriots. We lacked food and we had to spend a good part of our time in underground shelters. I remember that between 1965 and 1970 when we met foreign friends, we

could tell that they had great sympathy and even compassion for us, but that they considered the cause was lost. After that came the great victory of 1975.

*Question : So there is a way, a "secret" to resolve this contradiction: confronting a very powerful enemy when the internal situation is difficult.*

*Answer :* The word "secret" (*bi quyet* in Vietnamese) doesn't mean at all that we are working like the old secret societies. On the contrary. The Vietnamese Communist Party gets its force from the fact that its actions are based on "secret" resources, that is to say, on the bases of the evolution of our country and our epoch. Since 1859, when the French conquered Saigon, the Vietnamese people had tirelessly pursued two basic aims: to win back national independence and to renew completely the socio-economic structures which had been bogged down for centuries in an outdated feudalism. From 1859 to 1930, when the Communist Party was founded, there was no lack of patriots who sacrificed their lives to save the nation, but 19th century scholars as well as the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois groups of the early 20th century all succumbed before the powerful colonial and imperialist machine. The Communist Party, led by Ho Chi Minh, opened up a completely new road for the nationalist movement. National independence was to lead on to the building of socialism, with the Vietnamese revolution as an integral part of the world revolutionary movement. To lead the revolution, the Party had

thoroughly to assimilate Marxism-Leninism, so that it would be able to define the best line in each stage, and the necessary means. The line that the Vietnamese Communist Party laid down was based on three principles:

- in internal affairs, to mobilise the national forces not with the sole objective of independence, but for a double aim: national independence and socialism.

- in international questions, not to float with the tide of events, but to stand firmly at the side of the world revolutionary and progressive movement.

- in ideological matters, not to be taken in by the allure of theories and ideas alien to Marxism-Leninism, but persistently and patiently to find out how the universal truths of Marxism should be applied to the real conditions of Vietnam.

Those are the secrets that made up our main resource in our fight in the past and which continue to inspire our action.

**Question:** *Isn't there some political opposition these days, as some Western journalists who have visited your country say?*

**Answer:** Political opposition exists when there is a party, a group or a personality in a country who can address the government and say "move over and let us in, we can do better than you", and when a sizeable part of the population is ready to follow that party or group. The French Left is in that category, for example. In Vietnam there is nothing of the sort. Many questions may give rise

to dissatisfaction, but no group or personality can sincerely claim to be able to do better than the Communist Party or the present government. People want change, ask for change, in this or that field, over this or that policy, but not a change of regime. They are well aware that many of the difficulties result from the long wars — since 1940 — that our country has gone through. People are confident that the Party and government can set things right again when there have been mistakes, and, most importantly, they know that the only party that can lead the country forward and can lead the fight against the Chinese and imperialist aggression is the Communist Party. Fifty years of our history have proved it: the Party is deeply rooted in the heart of our nation. For fifty years communists have been the most resolute and effective patriots. The Party has opened the way forward not only by theoretical analyses, but by the blood of its militants. No-one denies the leading role of the Party in the national struggle. To sum up, the internal situation can be described thus: a national consensus on the basic choices the regime has made, with many questions under discussion to do with the complex problems that crop up during the building of new social and economic structures.

**Question:** *Aren't there some people who are outside this national community?*

**Answer:** Yes, two categories. There are those involved with the networks of subversion maintained from abroad, by Washington and Beijing. Then

there are those who prefer to go abroad and seek an easier life than the one they find in a Vietnam ravaged by war and threatened by China.

To look at the first category, let us take the case of Nguyen Thanh Tan and Nguyen Van Duc. These former officers of the Thieu army set up after liberation an armed group which committed various crimes. They assassinated the actress Thanh Nga and her husband: she had played parts of patriotic women. They kidnapped the son of Kim Cuong, another actress who had appeared in roles of women revolutionaries. These crimes were an attempt to terrorise cinema and theatre actors and dissuade them from playing in revolutionary productions. Please note that Nguyen Thanh Tan spent some time in a re-education camp, but once released he started his subversive activities again. His case is not an exception. Right now in South Vietnam networks of agents maintained by Washington and Beijing are operating, assassinating cadres, sabotaging factories, hiding arms, forging money, carrying out psychological warfare, and engaging in economic sabotage. The security forces have their hands full. And it shouldn't be forgotten that the Americans had set up an army of over one million with at least 50,000 officers, a police force of 120,000, and a body of "pacification agents" specifically charged with assassinating revolutionary militants and numbering at least 30,000. To all that should be added the civil servants, and activists of various counter-revolutionary parties and organizations. All the conditions

were ripe for civil war, especially as on our northern and southern borders the Pol Pot and Chinese armies began their provocations straight away.

**Question :** *How was this civil war, the "bloodbath", avoided?*

**Answer :** More than a million common soldiers and policemen were released without delay. We had to trust these men who had mostly been forced to take up arms against their compatriots. We were right to trust them, as we have since seen that very few of them have tried to re-form the subversive groups created by officers and political activists of the old regime. Security measures were only taken towards hardened officers and political activists, those who were responsible for military operations, for mopping-up operations, who had ordered massacres or tortures or who had been exceptionally faithful and zealous servants of the Americans. If these people had been left in freedom, they would certainly have conspired in counter-revolutionary schemes, in co-ordination with Washington and Beijing's attacks from outside. None of these men has been executed for his past crimes, they have all been detained in re-education camps, as long as they are still judged dangerous.

**Question :** *Why have they not been brought to public trial?*

**Answer :** If they were judged for their previous offences, most of them would have to be condemned to death or to life imprisonment. We are wiping

the slate clean and freeing them one by one as soon as we estimate that each is no longer dangerous. Many already have their liberty, for the others it depends on their attitude and on the general situation. Clearly, the war threats hung over our heads by Washington and Beijing are slowing down the freeing of these men. Obviously for these men and their families, the chance of eventual freedom is preferable to the death penalty or life imprisonment. There may be errors of judgement in certain individual cases, but we think this is the most humane policy possible towards men who, it should be remembered, are certainly all guilty of treason and of complicity with an aggressive foreign power. These officers were educated by the French and the Americans to betray their country. So those really responsible for their present detention are to be found in Paris and Washington: ironically it is these very people who are shouting loudest about violations of human rights.

**Question:** *The Western mass media are making a lot of fuss about the people who are leaving Vietnam, the "boat people". What attitude should we take towards them?*

**Answer:** There are two main reasons for these departures: the economy and the war. South Vietnam used to receive an estimated yearly average of two thousand million dollars worth of American military and economic aid. Certain people got accustomed to a life of luxury, thanks to this aid. After liberation, the aid was cut off, and so was Chinese

aid to the North. Just afterwards came serious floods. Still the vast majority of those who used to live off American aid did make the effort to get back to hard work; they became peasants, factory workers, craftsmen, etc. Others preferred to go and earn their living in richer countries. The wars started by Pol Pot and by China worsened the economic conditions and fed the exodus.

For people of Chinese origin — the Hoa — both reasons operated. Many were traders who could no longer practice their trade (or traffic) and all of them were put in a difficult position by Beijing's aggression towards Vietnam. Which side should they take: that of China, their country of origin, or that of Vietnam, their country of adoption? It is easy to see why many of them left rather than face this dilemma. If the number of people that the Americans evacuated with them at the time of their debacle, roughly 150,000, is added to the number of emigrés between 1975 and 1980, a total of around half-a-million is reached. Most of these have been Hoa. Is this a huge figure for a country of 50 million inhabitants (1), wrecked by 40 years of war? Included in the number are the 200,000 Hoa whose homes were not far from the Chinese border and who crossed over into China so as not to be in the firing line of the two armies. Who is really guilty in these cases? Firstly, Washington, where those political and military commanders who ordered the excessive bombing of South Vietnamese villages are

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(1) There are 1.5 million Palestinian refugees.



still in power today. Secondly, Beijing, where the leaders' warmongering has put the Vietnamese Hoa in such a tragic situation, although the Hoa community had been part of Vietnamese society for centuries. We find again that it is the Washington and Beijing leaders who are wringing their hands most conspicuously over the fate of these poor refugees. For the Vietnamese people the emigrés remain compatriots and brothers. We ask the international community to give them all the help they need.

**Question :** *Are re-education camps and emigration still great problems?*

**Answer :** For the Vietnamese people these are only practical problems and don't occasion any political difficulties. Our position is quite clear. The Vietnamese people completely agree with the government's line, which fully conforms to the humane traditions of our people and revolutionary movement.

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**Question :** *Is there still a North-South problem?*

**Answer :** When certain Western journalists speak of the domination of the South by the North, they are simply taking up under another form the argument used by American propaganda to justify the massive military intervention. The split is not a geographical one but has to do with class

struggle. In North and South alike there are supporters and opponents of socialism. In the historical context of Vietnam, those who choose socialism are in the majority, the minority that stands against socialism gets the bulk of its strength from abroad. The real problems are therefore of a practical nature: problems of how to make changes in a society which was colonised by France for one century (1859-1954), dominated by American neo-colonialism for 21 years, and then shaken up and traumatised by a most atrocious war, materially as well as socially and morally. The consequences of this long period of history can be summarised thus: considerable material destruction, traditional rural society turned upside-down (ten million peasants were displaced from their villages which had been bombed out of existence by the Americans), uncontrolled "urbanisation" without industrial development, growth of parasitic strata among a population continually enticed into the life of a consumer society, complex social problems, gangsterism, prostitution, drugs, superstition, the disappearance of national cultural and moral values. Saigon and its surroundings epitomised this society. Beside the Cu Chi area, which was razed to the ground by bombs and military operations, was the town and its luxury flats, hotels, villas, bars and department stores, interspersed with pitiful shantytowns. Beside all this, the Chinatown, Cho Lon. Seven hundred thousand Hoa were crowded into this old town, a real State within a State.

**Question :** *Some say that for the last five years Saigon has not been transformed by the revolution, but instead the city has badly contaminated the revolutionary movement. This would lead to a break-down of the situation which would be impossible to prevent.*

**Answer :** These commentators see only one aspect. The US political strategy was implemented with huge resources and had a deep impact, but to counter it there has been powerful action on the part of the national and revolutionary movement. And in the end it is the national and revolutionary movement that has won. Visitors to Ho Chi Minh City today should look at both faces, firstly the serious and widespread consequences of the old regime, and secondly the considerable effort that has been made to build a new society. The fight between old and new is going on in every field; from the security question, through the rehabilitation of drug-addicts and prostitutes and the renewal of theatre and cinema, to the measures taken against the black market and other trafficking, and against the corruption of some public servants. It's a huge building site and if an observer is biased, he can point out only the old ruins and ignore the new buildings that are growing up. Food rations are small, shortages are many and serious, the black market continues, youths can be seen hanging around in cafés, and it must be admitted that there are still some young women soliciting in the streets, public servants who take backhanders, and armed attacks by gangsters as well as by pro-American or pro-Chinese

agents. But if you saw Saigon at the time of liberation in 1975 and compare it with the city today, the changes are striking. In spite of the occasional armed attacks and robberies that are still frequent, you can move around safely in the city, even in the evening, with no more risk than in any American city. Drugs and prostitution are no longer in the open, flooding the whole city, but have been pushed well back; food is still a great problem, but there is no famine, no-one dying of hunger alone on the streets.

**Question :** *Some say the changes are too slow.*

**Answer :** This is not an offensive like the one which liberated Saigon in April 1975, but a drawn-out war of nerves. We could have taken Pol Pot's way out and proclaim afterwards that a radical revolution had taken place. Imagine our soldiers coming in to liberate the city, after years of suffering and deprivation. They have no more than 5-dong pocket money a month, to pay for all their needs. Then they see the black-marketeers buying 150-dong meals in the restaurants. The military command could have told the men "take your machine-guns and let the filthy bourgeois have it!" But the order wasn't given and our soldiers could only grind their teeth and put up with the sight of these people who had made their fortune out of the war and were continuing their trafficking and extortion, making money in the most scandalous fashion. They knew that this state of things

would have to end. Society can't be changed by gunfire, but only in quite different ways. Let's look at some figures:

At the time of liberation there was not a single crèche in Saigon for working mothers, and the rich didn't need them. There were 3,800 children in nursery schools, but in rich areas only, and 395,000 school pupils. In 1979 the figures were: crèches 20,000; nursery schools 95,000; schools 870,000. This was not done overnight: it was necessary to mobilise not only teachers, but all the people. The only means at our disposal to do this were the villas abandoned by the wealthy people and which were taken over to house crèches and schools. Then there are the adults who have learned to read and write, who are taking evening classes to equip themselves to fulfil their new civic responsibilities. That's the real revolution, the real human rights. And what about the tens of millions of drug-addicts, prostitutes and gangsters, who, with medical treatment and above all with the devoted care of our activists, borne along in the revolutionary current that animates our country, have become normal people again. Better still, some have become militants themselves.

I think that there is no other country, even among those well-equipped materially and with doctors, psychiatrists, etc., which has succeeded in rehabilitating so many drug-addicts. Our doctors and educators succeed not because they are more able than those of other countries, but because they are working inside a society that is pushed forward by a

wide and deep revolutionary movement. It's a sort of test for the regime.

**Question:** *Are there any other domains where important changes have been made?*

**Answer:** The South had practically no infrastructure of social medicine. Doctors dealt mostly with private patients, and the ministers of the pro-American governments paid more attention to their bank accounts than they did to the health of the people. That is why there were many endemic diseases and frequent epidemics too. Malaria, cholera, plague, tuberculosis and venereal disease were all rife. The struggle against them was undertaken on a vast scale, by massive vaccination campaigns, and by the setting-up in all city neighbourhoods and villages of health stations to treat common ailments, give vaccinations, deliver babies and promote hygiene campaigns. To summarise the progress the South has made over the last five years in various fields:

- defence of security and peace.
- major development of education at every level.
- major development of hygiene and medicine.
- society has progressively become more healthy.

A comparison between our country and others of Southeast Asia brings out the following facts: a smaller GNP than many other countries, but a less unequal distribution of social income, a much higher rate of school attendance, and the numbers of doctors and hospital beds per thousand inhabitants are higher too. And of course this is in a country that has gone

through forty years of war and is still threatened with invasion by a great power. Some results, which we could call negative ones, such as not falling into civil war or famine, don't strike the attention, but are no less important or illustrative of the nature of the regime. That Ho Chi Minh City five years after liberation has been able to take another half a million children into its schools and crèches bears witness to the vitality of the revolutionary movement. What other party or government could have obtained these results? There is no political opposition, as I told you, and there are good reasons for this: the majority of the population may grumble about certain aspects of the current state of affairs, but they know what the regime has done and lend it their strong support. They are ready to defend it against any foreign aggression.

**Question:** *Don't the intellectuals have reservations, or even constitute an opposition? Does the old "third force" still exist?*

**Answer:** The southern intellectuals were educated during the French colonial period and under the Americans. Their sentiments are complex and often contradictory. Most are patriots, happy to see their country free and regaining its health. But when they run up against difficulty after difficulty both in private life and in public activity, many have reservations and a few are even opposed to the regime. The former third force was chiefly composed of intellectuals who were deeply opposed to the American domination and worked against

it legally under the old Saigon regime. After liberation most of them have had a vast field of activity opened up for them: in politics, culture, social affairs and science. They have become deputies, members of town administrative committees, university teachers and journalists. The Ho Chi Minh City daily *Tin Sang* is published by many intellectuals of the former third force. Some are Catholics, and a group of Catholics also publishes the weekly "Catholics and the Nation". So the intellectuals have plenty of scope for activity, but in daily life they have two kinds of problems to solve. Firstly, their standard of living has dropped considerably, to the same level as all public servants and professionals. Secondly, they all have a very varied set of ideas, from Marxism to religious thought and various philosophical theories, both Asian and European, which are not always easy to reconcile. But this is an extremely interesting historical experiment. Take the Catholics, for example; I've met many of them who believe that full participation in the building of socialism under the present regime is a basic condition for the flowering of true Christianity. Others see participation in the building of socialism, as a means to ensure a solid position for the Church which will allow it to relate to the profoundly atheist State.

**Question:** *So is there the pluralism that people talk of in the West?*

**Answer:** Yes and no. Not pluralism of parties as in the West where society is divided into distinct

and often warring classes: monopoly capitalists, middle capitalists, working class, etc. There, people are divided as to the nature of the regime they want: some fiercely defending capitalism, others choosing socialism. Here, as I have said, there is a consensus about the nature of the system. The feudal classes have been eliminated and the bourgeoisie has never grown up except as an appendage to colonialism — and neo-colonialism — ; so there is no longer anyone to stand up and defend capitalism. Capitalism for the Vietnamese has always been closely linked to colonialism.

So no pluralism on the long-term aims: defence of national independence, building of socialism. But along this one road, different social categories and strata: women, young people, followers of various religions, different ethnic groups, trade union members in factories and offices, peasants, all have their own legitimate interests which must be respected. So we have to set up machinery for them to express their aspirations. There is a whole series of mass organizations: trade unions; women's and youth unions; artists', writers' and medical associations; the churches and religious orders. Apart from their own activities, each of these sends delegates to the Fatherland Front, at the district, provincial and national levels. Representatives of ethnic groups also take part in the Front's various levels. The Constitution and the major political lines of the country are discussed by the Front, which also chooses a list of candidates to be put forward in the elections for the National Assembly.

Candidates stand for election not as members of this or that party or organization, but as candidates of the Fatherland Front. The National Assembly chooses the central government. The local government at each level is elected by the inhabitants of the cities, towns and villages. So a citizen has various opportunities to express his or her opinion:

- within the mass organization (trade union, women's union, youth union, religious body) to which he or she belongs.

- at the elections for the National Assembly.

- at the elections for local government of the province, town and village.

Peasants participate in the discussion at the general meeting of the co-operative and of the production brigade, and take part in the elections of the administrative committee of the co-operative. In factories and offices the workers take part in trade union discussions and can call the management to account directly at each general meeting — which takes place every six months. The management of enterprises must take account of the trade union's opinion and the Party organization's opinion in every important decision. When the enterprise is a large one, the Youth Union's representative has a say, too. There are also the People's Control Committees, elected by the citizens, which were set up in 1976. These have the right to make enquiries into the working of the administration each time they receive complaints from citizens. It can be said that the Vietnamese citizen of today

has more opportunities to vote and participate in public affairs than the citizen of any other country. So from the institutional point of view the system is a democratic one.

**Question:** *You said "from the institutional point of view". Does this mean that in reality the system doesn't work very well?*

**Answer:** The institutional mechanism is important, but only works in the context of the already-existing social and historical mechanisms. The parliamentary democracy of Western Europe has been, one could say, emptied of content with the coming of monopoly capitalism, the multinationals and the mass media. In Vietnam it is not the institutions which hinder the workings of democracy, or as we call it the exercise of the people's right of collective mastery, but the whole social environment. Getting the institutions to run smoothly presupposes deep changes in this environment. It also means a continual rise in the political and ideological consciousness of the population and of the level of competence of public servants. Roughly speaking, democracy works better in the towns than the countryside, better in the capital than the provinces, better in the North than the South. In the South the population as a whole has only been liberated for five years and a large proportion of our experienced militants were killed by the Americans—90 per cent in some areas. This means, for example, that when an intellectual discusses with a high-ranking official the two may be in perfect agreement about a policy to be followed.

but when the intellectual has to deal with lower, less experienced and more narrow-minded officials, he comes up against examples of bureaucracy that are often intolerable. It often happens, too, that neither the local inhabitants nor the responsible officials have understood a line that has been laid down by the higher authorities in some field or other, in which case the unfairly treated citizens cannot benefit from the rights the written law allows them and the officials do not know that they have overstepped their rights.

**Question:** *You have mentioned bureaucracy. Your newspapers including the Party organ Nhan Dan and your top leaders including the Party General Secretary and the Prime Minister have condemned bureaucracy on many occasions, and sometimes very strongly. What significance do these declarations have?*

**Answer:** In fact this is a very serious defect which hinders the working of our institutions and slows down economic and cultural progress. Authoritarianism, red tape, irresponsibility, delays, conservatism and lack of communication between offices are the main manifestations. Obviously, some officials have become die-hard bureaucrats and have to be replaced as soon as possible. But the real problem is not how to replace bureaucrats with non-bureaucrats, because each official is from one point of view a devoted militant and from the other a bureaucrat. We have to struggle against the tendency to bureaucracy, not against bureaucrats. As the revolution progresses, this evil will gradually be

wiped out. One could say that today bureaucracy is between the hammer and the anvil. The hammer is the will expressed by the leadership to fight it, and the anvil is the people's level of education and political consciousness, which is continually rising. As the general level has gone up, the atmosphere today is very different from that fifteen years ago, say. The debates inside various organizations and in the Party are much more lively and impassioned. I would say and much richer than before. But it is clear that no society can escape its shadow; the democracy operating in it is in proportion to that society's level of historical development, that's to say economic, cultural and social development. We have many shadows, but the main thing is that we have set in place the institutions and set in play the mechanisms that will allow us to move forward.

*Question: You mentioned the level of social and economic development. On which level would you situate present-day Vietnam?*

*Answer:* Let's look at the economic level first. From this point of view, Vietnam is still an underdeveloped country, lagging behind the developed countries by two industrial revolutions. The first industrial revolution was the one of simple mechanization which took place in Europe throughout the 19th century and in the early twentieth, and the second industrial revolution is the one that the developed countries have undergone during the last 30 years. In 1954, in newly-liberated North Vietnam, modern industry only accounted for 1.5% of the

national economy. From 1955 to 1965, the first bases of national industry were constructed, only to be almost entirely destroyed by the American bombing of 1965. The industry which was created in the South was entirely dependent on foreign companies. The great weakness of our industry is therefore one of the weak points of the Vietnamese economy today. Here are some relevant figures for 1979:

-- Food production: 13.7 million tons.

-- Steel production: 108,000 tons.

Coal output: 7.9 million tons.

-- Electricity: 4,200 million kilowatt-hours.

-- Cement: 1 million tons.

-- Cultivated area: 6.7 million hectares for over 50 million inhabitants.

So when you talk about Vietnam, you have to consider it both as a socialist country, with all the possibilities that the establishment of socialist socio-economic structures allows, and as an underdeveloped country, with all that that implies in terms of difficulties, of inherited problems, and of fetters. Let us take for example the problem of corrupted civil servants. Underdeveloped Vietnam cannot pay high enough salaries to its civil servants and a certain number of them who cannot make ends meet accept bribes from time to time. But socialist Vietnam has no ministers, generals or top executives with fat bank accounts and private villas, who do business with national and international companies, as they do in capitalist countries.

Therefore corruption will disappear as the living standard rises, if sanctions are imposed against those who take bribes, and [with well-conducted civic education. Legal sanctions are not the best weapon, as the culprits are too clever to allow themselves to be caught up in the rules and regulations. Firstly it is inside the Party that political education should be undertaken, and political sanctions taken, even when there is insufficient legal evidence to bring someone to trial. Yet another instance of the Party's vanguard role Corruption will also disappear with the disappearance of corrupters, because as long as there is a stratum of traders and traffickers willing to grease the palms of officials, corruption will remain. So transformation of the relations of production is the best weapon.

*Question: Is transformation of the relations of production enough?*

*Answer:* Not at all, because we say that there is a threefold revolution to be carried out: in relations of production, in culture and ideology, and in science and technology. Our Party believes that in our country's case the scientific and technological revolution is the key link. Socialism can't be built with primitive technology, low productivity and a low standard of living. Neither is it built with what has been called "pre-industrial mentality". We are building an industrial and agricultural society with a high technical level, starting from a backward agricultural society, with people and cadres who are

used to small-scale craftsmanship and agricultural production. Cadres who had been cultivating a little plot of land or commanding a battalion of partisans woke up to find themselves in charge of several hundred hectares, or an important factory. They had everything to learn and it is easy to see why mistakes were made. In time of war, economic rationality doesn't count for very much. When a bridge must be built, you don't calculate whether it's profitable, because troops and arms have to be brought through at any cost. In traditional, pre-industrial society, technical know-how was no very important: skills were relatively simple and a leader chiefly needed moral and political authority. This criterion is no longer sufficient. Traditional society was self-sufficient, regions and even villages could cultivate and manufacture everything they needed. There was no problem of co-ordination of local economies, nor, most importantly, of the submission of the local economy to the needs of the national economy. It was not so much decentralisation as autonomous social units linked together very loosely. Little by little, Vietnamese society changed. Not only were socialist structures built but industrial bases were born, new techniques appeared, economy and society became much more complex, and brand-new problems of organization and management have arisen. We know which general direction to take and that is a great advantage, like navigating with a compass. But a compass is not enough: we need an accurate map to indicate the pitfalls to avoid. We have to draw this



map as we go along. We can learn a lot from other socialist countries; this has already spared us much fumbling, but the historical conditions are different from one country to another. We have continually to reassess how far we have come. The successive wars in which we have been involved have hindered our Party and people from concentrating our efforts on this meditation about the concrete problems of economic and social construction.

**Question:** *Would it be true to say that the resolution of the 6th Plenary of the Central Committee (in mid-1979) was a turning point in this respect?*

**Answer:** Yes, in the sense that the resolution modifies and fills in important gaps in the general line laid down by the IVth Party Congress in 1976; **no**, in the sense that it is definitely not a radical turn-about and doesn't turn its back on the old line. It tries above all to rectify certain practices inspired by a certain mentality, which is characterised by two basic aspects: utopianism and voluntarism. Utopians want to skip stages with no heed for reality, from there to the belief that human will by itself can overcome all obstacles is only a short step. A short step too to the belief that those who don't think as you do are backward or reactionary. And a short step to the economic errors which lead to artificial shortages and avoidable conflicts. The food shortage and the lack of consumer goods, which were caused by the long years of war and the natural disasters, were aggravated by such errors. Added to that was the fact that the 1976 — 1980 five-year

plan was drawn up before the danger of war was clear. So the resolution of the 6th Plenary aims to

- modify certain plan targets in view of the current situation, building the economy while taking account of the needs of national defence.

- elaborate the basic characteristics of the present stage in order to rectify certain utopian or voluntarist practices.

- struggle against corruption, bureaucracy and other negative phenomena.

**Question:** *What are the resolution's most important points in the economic domain?*

**Answer:** Firstly, to fight against the tendency which seeks to bring all sectors under State control, irrespective of profitability. The resolution states that the national economy in the present stage is made up of different sectors: State, co-operative, individual, and, in the South, capitalist and mixed (joint State-private). Although the State sector plays the leading role, the contribution of other sectors should not be underestimated, and in particular individual production should not be treated as "condemnable". The main criterion for setting up an enterprise in whatever sector should be profitability: there is no chance that capitalism will rear its head again in the present conditions of Vietnam. Individual and family production do not necessarily lead to capitalism. One should always respect the principle that the form of organization of an enterprise should be determined according to the following three considerations:

— the existence of a minimum material and technical basis.

— competent cadres with the necessary moral authority.

— the understanding and support of the people.

The last point is especially important for forming agricultural co-operatives. There must be a preliminary stage of thorough-going explanation among the masses, of training skilled management, and a minimum of equipment before a co-operative is actually set up. Many cadres have tried to go too fast and the co-operatives they have set up have failed. It has been necessary to put the brakes on, not to slow down the co-operativisation movement but to check the impatience of those who want to skip certain steps.

**Question:** *Is there the same problem in the North where co-operatives have already been set up?*

**Answer:** Obviously, in the South the idea of co-operatives is a new one, middle peasants are more numerous than they were in the North, trained personnel is lacking, and this impatience has led to negative results which have to be rectified. But the problem is also there in the North; in some cases people have tried to go too fast and set up co-operatives which were too large for the equipment available and the managerial ability of the present cadres. In the North other errors have had to be corrected. During the war years, in order to assure a minimum ration for everybody, particularly families with children in the army, war invalids and the sick,

there was an egalitarian distribution of food; everyone received a fixed quantity per month, however much work they had put in. This mode of distribution doesn't stimulate productivity and able-bodied people sometimes refused to work for the co-operative in order to spend time on more lucrative occupations. The new regulations stipulate that after a portion has been taken aside for the truly needy, the share of each member will be strictly calculated according to work done. There is another amendment to the regulations: certain land left fallow by the co-operative for a few months in the dry season can be taken over in small parcels by families willing to cultivate it. Individual peasants, like co-operatives, having made the required deliveries to the State, are free to sell the surplus either on the free market or to the State. The price is not fixed in advance, but is to be negotiated at the time of sale. These measures will permit the individual labour of the peasant to complement the stock of food and other products on the market. So also will the lifting of certain restrictions with respect to handicrafts, small industry and small trading permit some improvements in the production and distribution of goods.

**Question:** *The expression "to boost production" is often heard these days. Will this set of measures affecting small production be able to push the economy forward in a decisive way?*

**Answer:** I don't think so. Small production does make an indispensable contribution, but not a

decisive one. The decisive factor is the profitability of the large units, that is to say the State enterprises and co-operatives. Not only do these two sectors lack raw materials and equipment, but they are not yet able to use the equipment and materials they do have to the full. This is due to several factors:

- management which is often too rigid and hinders operations, bridle initiative and slows down decision-making.

- unsuitable work norms, pay scales and bonuses. Political mobilisation is used too often, rather than precise calculation of productivity and work norms.

- Leading cadres often lack the necessary level of technical or managerial training. Some have even degenerated to become abusers of power or minor despots.

So we have to implement a whole series of reforms, giving more autonomy to enterprises by making the regulations more flexible, working out a new system of norms, pay scales and management guidelines. We have to make sure that personnel are given refresher courses and that the obviously incompetent or corrupt ones are replaced. Many prices and taxes have to be revised, accepting the continued existence of the free market for a long time to come. All this has to be done, we mustn't forget, at the same time as great efforts in national defence and while we have to give substantial aid to Laos and Kampuchea (greatly benefitting at the same time from their support and co-operation).

**Question:** *This is a set of measures of varying importance affecting a number of areas of the economy. Isn't it a radical change in economic policy?*

**Answer:** As I've already said, these reforms are to fill in gaps in the general line laid down by the IVth Congress, without being a change of orientation. This general line of building socialism is laid down for a whole historical period, but the historical evolution it represents is marked by different stages, and economic policy has to be adapted to the characteristics of each stage. Although the general line remains the same, the practical ways in which it is applied need to be modified from stage to stage. We are moving from an under-developed economy to one of large-scale socialist production. This period, called a period of transition, stretches over many years, during which the socio-economic structures change at the same time as the level of competence and ways of thinking.

Today our lives are undergoing thorough social change. Over many years, we have first of all transformed the relations of production and then created new material and technical bases. Society today is nothing like the one we knew fifteen years ago. We have to change all our styles of work, management and even thought. A new generation has been born and is being brought up in our schools. Even the relationships between parents and children, relationships within the village have changed. That's why, besides the economic reforms,

we have to lead a series of reforms in other fields during the 1980's, particularly in education.

**Question:** *What is the purpose of the educational reform? Isn't your present teaching system already a great success?*

**Answer:** It's true that one of the greatest fruits of our revolution has been the establishment of an educational system at all levels, so that every child under 15 may attend school. In general education alone, the number of pupils has risen from 10.3 million at the end of 1975 to 12.8 million in 1979. This is in spite of all our material difficulties. But since society has changed, the system has to be completely reformed. The reform is already being worked out and our education will in future years be composed of the following stages:

- 0 to 3 years — crèches run by the National Committee for Protection of Mother and Child, which has the status of a ministry.

- 3 to 6 years, nursery schools.

- 6 to 15 years, nine years of basic education.

- 15 to 18 years, about 30% of students will go on to secondary schools.

- at 15, the other students will continue in vocational schools or work-and-study schools.

In work-and-study schools, half the day will be devoted to productive work and the other half to studying. After a few years, these schools should become self-financing and require no further financial assistance from the State. This system has already

been tried out in all the districts and we think it will enable us to give secondary education to all young people by the end of the 1980's. The specialised services are working with the experimental schools to give the finishing touches to new textbooks and new teaching methods, in order to make teaching more alive and closer to social life. It must be admitted that the teaching methods being used at present are old-fashioned. There is a lot of innovation to be done in this field.

**Question:** *You have mentioned considerable difficulties and the complexity of the problems to be solved. Do you think that your people and your Party will manage to overcome them?*

**Answer:** Certainly. Our advance is uncertain and we have to move in small steps, but the route that has been charted is a good one. Our people are hard-working and aware of their responsibilities. Our Party is experienced and when it makes mistakes it has the courage to repair them with self-criticism. This is another aspect of its great strength. But not everything depends on us. Whether socialism is to be built with ease or with difficulty in our country depends not only on our own efforts, but also on the unfolding of our international relations.

## II. FOREIGN POLICY

**Question:** *World public opinion at the moment is focussed on the question of Kampuchea and particularly on Vietnam - Kampuchea relations. How can one assess the situation in that country?*

**Answer:** The government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea is in complete control of the situation there. One year after liberation it can be affirmed that the rebirth of this country which was literally disintegrated by four years of Pol Pot rule is an undeniable fact. Six hundred and fifty thousand hectares of land have been brought back under cultivation and the first harvest has already been gathered. Together with international aid, which is becoming larger and better distributed, this has averted the threat of famine. Though there are still serious problems in the food supply, this does not alter the fact that the alarmist reports which appear so frequently in the Western press have more to do with psychological warfare than with news. In Kampuchea as a whole, 700,000 children are already attending school, 40,000 in the capital Phnom Penh alone; about 15,000 teachers are teaching again; the school of medicine and pharmacy has reopened with

728 students. Forty major enterprises are back in operation. Throughout the country, new provincial and village administrations are being set up; the regular army and the people's militia of the new government are ensuring the inhabitants' security. The National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea (NUFSK) and the government are broadening out gradually, taking in members of the former Sihanouk government or of the royal family, intellectuals who have survived the massacre. A currency will be issued very soon. The situation has become irreversible, in the sense that no force in the world is any longer capable of putting agents of Beijing or any other power back in the saddle in Phnom Penh.

**Question:** *Where does the Heng Samrin government's strength come from? In the West it is often claimed that this regime is only held up by the support of the Vietnamese forces.*

**Answer:** The Pol Pot regime, barbaric as it was, was unable to prevent the creation of a resistance, which began as early as 1975. Though forcibly repressed, this resistance nevertheless managed in about mid-1978 to form itself into a solid organization, notably among officers and political cadres of the army. President Heng Samrin is himself one of these officers of the Pol Pot army who realised that Pol Pot's political line was leading the country straight into total extermination. Then the National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea (NUFSK) was set up and the present government was formed from this organization. The base of the

Heng Samrin government is this vast opposition to Pol Pot's reign of terror, it is the grim determination of the whole population never again to let the agents of Beijing and the imperialist powers return to power. For that would mean a new massacre followed by another war against Vietnam. The consolidation of the present government means peace and the possibility of rapid regrowth for the country. The Khmer Rouge, the Khmer Serei, and politicians like Sihanouk or Son Sann who want to return to power with Chinese and American help are all going contrary to this profound aspiration of the Kampuchean people. A few years of peace and Kampuchea will soon regain its vitality. It is a rich country which, with its 2.5 million hectares of fertile arable land, its favourable climate and the excellent fishing in its rivers and lakes, easily manages to feed its population under normal conditions. We think that if peace and security are maintained, Kampuchea will become self-sufficient in food sooner than Vietnam.

**Question :** *Why are Vietnamese troops still stationed in Kampuchea? And how long will they stay?*

**Answer :** The Vietnamese forces came firstly to pursue the Pol Pot troops who had attacked Vietnam, and then at the request of the NUFSK to help to save the Kampuchean people from genocide. Now the routed Pol Pot troops have regrouped in Thailand, where they are fed and equipped by Beijing. Pro-American forces, the Khmer Serei are also based in Thailand. The Khmer Rouge and Khmer Serei

are recruiting among the refugees, and combine to form a real counter-revolutionary army, which Beijing and Washington are trying to get back into the country in order to unleash civil war and overthrow the government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. This government, which is in the process of consolidating itself, asked for help from Vietnam and an agreement was signed in February 1979 between the two governments. Under the terms of this agreement, Vietnamese troops will stay in the country until the day when the Kampuchean government asks them to withdraw. The day when the Kampuchean government will be capable by itself of resisting the threat of the pro-Chinese and pro-American forces, it will ask the Vietnamese forces to leave. All the Vietnamese hope fervently that this day will come as soon as possible: Vietnamese troops will not stay a day longer. But as long as the Kampuchean government has not made this request, no force in the world can oblige them to withdraw. Certain governments have pressurized Vietnam by cutting off economic aid, China is threatening to make war on us. Vietnam will accept any hardship and sacrifice to keep its commitments to the Kampuchean people.

**Question :** *Why such stubbornness? Hasn't Vietnam had enough of war? And isn't aid to Kampuchea a very heavy burden?*

**Answer :** Vietnam has to send to Kampuchea troops, workers, technicians, doctors, and specialists in a variety of fields, to help our Kampuchean

friends defend and rebuild their country. The Pol Pot men destroyed even families' crockery, even school stationery. We have had to send foodstuffs, medicines, cooking utensils, exercise books, pens and pencils, although our people also suffer serious shortages of food and goods. Our government has no difficulty convincing the Vietnamese people to make these sacrifices, because for every Vietnamese person, to defend Kampuchea and help it to rebuild is to defend and help Vietnam itself. Imagine if Germany was threatening Holland and Belgium, wouldn't it be natural for the French to come to the rescue of these two countries? Geography and history have woven close links between the three Indochinese countries: Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos, and they have been obliged to form a common front against foreign aggression.

**Question:** *It is said that, on the contrary, the Vietnamese and Kampuchean peoples are motivated rather by age-old feelings of mutual hostility.*

**Answer:** It is true that in past centuries the Vietnamese and Kampuchean monarchs were often at war. In the 13th century, an Angkor king tried on two occasions to invade Vietnam, then from the 17th century onwards, Vietnamese kings invaded Kampuchea repeatedly and annexed the lower part of the Mekong delta. But if one goes back through the centuries, it was the Thais (formerly called the Siamese) who destroyed the Angkor Empire, and not the Vietnamese; and the last annexation of Kampuchean territory by the Thais was not in the

17th century, but in 1940 when with Japanese support they took from Kampuchea vast areas of Battambang, Stung Treng and Kompong Thom provinces. Neither the mass media of Beijing, nor those of the West mention this age-old hatred between Kampuchians and Thais. When this ancient hostility between Vietnamese and Kampuchians is evoked and when attempts are made to keep it going and worsen it, this is for precise political objectives. Another historical trend which has developed since the colonial conquest is forgotten, or deliberately ignored: the militant solidarity between the Vietnamese and Kampuchean peoples in opposition to colonialism for the reconquest of their independence.

**Question:** *Would you please give us an idea of this militant solidarity?*

**Answer:** In 1862 the French occupied the three eastern provinces of the lower Mekong delta, which were part of Vietnam. From this base, they moved up the Mekong and a year later in 1863 occupied Phnom Penh. So a foreign power which occupies Saigon will sooner or later take Phnom Penh, and vice versa. With the era of Western colonial expansion, the fate of the peoples of the three Indochinese countries became linked. In 1884, a few months after having completed their conquest of Vietnam, the French imposed a treaty of complete protectorate on Vietnam and Kampuchea. In 1893 Laos was in turn subjected and the French then created so-called French Indochina, with a unified administration, the

government of all Indochina. From 1864 there were Kampuchean patriots, such as Achar Soa or Pokambo, who co-ordinated their activities with Vietnamese patriots. In 1930, in order to struggle against the government of all Indochina, communists of the three countries founded the Indochinese Communist Party, calling on the three peoples to unite and fight French colonialism. Colonialism did its best to divide the three peoples; French administrators and historians did their best to exacerbate the hatred between Vietnamese and Kampucheans. Among these two peoples there were two tendencies:

- true patriots and progressives who made a call for solidarity and unity in the anti-colonial struggle and for co-operation to build a better society.

- reactionaries who tried to revive past hatred.

During the war of liberation against the French forces, from 1945 to 1954, Kampuchean patriots created a National Liberation Front and called for the aid of Vietnamese troops. So Vietnamese and Kampuchean patriots fought side by side for many years, yet the Vietnamese forces withdrew as soon as the French colonialists retreated from Kampuchea. From 1954 to 1970, the Sihanouk government succeeded in maintaining its independence and neutrality. But in 1970 Sihanouk was overthrown by the pro-American government of Lon Nol, and in order to resist the American and pro-American forces, Sihanouk called for Vietnamese troops. Once again, the Vietnamese came to fight side by side with the Khmer resistants, only to withdraw straight away

in 1975 after the liberation of Phnom Penh. So it is not the first time that Kampuchean patriots have called for Vietnamese help.

**Question:** *What is Sihanouk's attitude to this question?*

**Answer:** Sihanouk is a complex and changeable person. On the one hand he is a feudalist and a paternal despot wielding a completely personal power, on the other he is on occasion a patriot. According to the circumstances one side or the other may dominate. Until 1953 he found little difficulty in accepting the French protectorate and then Japanese domination, and then French tutelage again. The armed resistance against the French from 1945 to 1954 worried Sihanouk as much as it did the French. In 1953, to check the resistance, the French signed an agreement which restored independence to Kampuchea, giving power to Sihanouk, who was there and then proclaimed as a great patriot who had seized independence from the hands of the French. From 1954 to 1975, Sihanouk did recognise that the great enemy of Kampuchea was American imperialism, which had already taken hold of South Vietnam and part of Laos, and that he could count on Vietnam to resist the American domination. He had enough lucidity to see that the Americans could not win in Indochina, but he lacked the courage to refuse in 1969 the renewal of mainly American military aid. He also refused to democratise political life in the country, concentrating all power in his own hands. Though his political cleverness allowed



the country to keep its neutrality until 1970, his mistakes opened up the way for the manoeuvres of pro-American groups and led to the coup d'état of March 1970. From 1970 to 1975 he lived in Beijing; from 1975 to 1979 he was the prisoner of Pol Pot, then exiled himself to Beijing again. Since 1970 he has had practically no contact with the Kampuchean people, for whom the most important thing today is to oppose the return of the pro-Chinese forces, whether they are led by Pol Pot or Khieu Samphan or Sihanouk. I think that the collusion between Beijing and Washington has deeply impressed him and led him to think that the revolutionary movement of the Indochinese peoples would never be able to defeat such a massive force.

In any case, all those in Kampuchea who seek foreign help to try and oppose the present government are doomed to failure. In face of the Chinese threat today, the Indochinese peoples are more united and stronger than ever. This alliance of the patriotic and revolutionary forces of the three countries, which began with the struggle against French colonialism, and was consolidated during the common struggle against the Americans, has emerged victorious and strengthened after the victory against the pro-Chinese Pol Pot regime. The patriotic and revolutionary movement in Kampuchea has suffered considerable losses, the great majority of its militants having been massacred, but from among the people and above all from the young people who suffered tremendously under Pol Pot, new forces, new activists are emerging, who are determined to rebuild

their country. The results achieved during the first year of the regime prove that one can have confidence in them.

**Question :** *How can one explain what happened in Kampuchea under Pol Pot ?*

**Answer :** Pol Pot's politics have two principal aspects : genocide at home, and war to the death against Vietnam in foreign policy. Two factors came together to cause this : firstly the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary-Khieu Samphan group's own political line, and secondly Beijing's projects. Briefly, it could be said that the Pol Pot group is made up of adventurers with a mixture of ideas, leftist and nationalist, often lunatic ; the political support and material aid of Beijing unfortunately gave them the means to put their disastrous programme into action. This group dreamed of :

- reforming the great Angkor Empire, taking back from Vietnam the entire lower Mekong delta, including Ho Chi Minh City.

- carrying out a radical revolution, suppressing in the most brutal way everything which they believed to be the curses of the old society (money, commerce, the arts, religion, science, etc.) which led to the massacre of intellectuals, Buddhist monks, artists and even sportsmen.

To realise these visions they had to raise a large army and force the entire population to work day and night on huge projects, mostly irrigation ; anyone who opposed this crazy policy was mercilessly done

to death. For Beijing, the Pol Pot clique was an instrument for attacking Vietnam from the south and thus facilitating a Chinese attack on the northern border. A firm hold over the Pol Pot regime plus the crushing of Vietnam would allow Beijing to establish its domination over the whole of Indochina, and thence to advance towards all Southeast Asia where 20 million Chinese already hold important economic positions. In 1975 Pol Pot possessed 6 divisions of 5 - 6,000 men each, with no artillery, armour nor aircraft. Beijing furnished arms and advisers to bring this army up to 23 divisions, providing it with heavy armaments and aeroplanes. One can see why from May 1975 Pol Pot began to launch the first attacks on Vietnam and why for four years he consistently refused all offers of negotiation made by the Vietnamese. Certain of Chinese support, he believed he could defeat Vietnam. The events of January 1979 are easy to explain: in December 1978 after the great floods which had ravaged our country, Beijing thought that Vietnam was completely worn out and set the Pol Pot troops at the attack, while Chinese troops were being concentrated at Vietnam's northern border. The Pol Pot attack would oblige the Vietnamese forces to look to the south and give Beijing a pretext to attack Vietnam on the northern border. Deng Xiaoping received Washington's sanction for this. Both Beijing and Washington underestimated the strength of internal opposition to Pol Pot and the vitality of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement.

*Question : Now it is this vitality of the Vietnamese that worries many people in Southeast Asia, according to some Western newspapers anyway. It could lead one to imagine the Vietnamese army invading in turn Thailand, Malaysia...*

*Answer :* Southeast Asia is a vast region of 300 million inhabitants which today produces 100 million tons of crude oil, considerable quantities of tin, rubber, tropical woods, vegetable oil, etc. The oil reserves are very large. Where do these raw materials go? To Japan, to the USA, to Western Europe. Japanese, American and European multinational companies have installed many enterprises in Southeast Asia; many Southeast Asian cities are places of cheap entertainment for millions of Europeans, Japanese and Americans. From the cultural point of view, the region is submerged by films and other products of the West and Japan. In the middle of this highly-integrated neo-colonial system, there are Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea who refuse to be drawn in, they're the spanner in the works which risks snarling up the whole machine. Geographically, Indochina is necessarily on the route of any expansionist attempt by Beijing in the direction of Southeast Asia. One can see why the Washington-Beijing axis is concentrating its attacks on the Indochinese countries, especially Vietnam. The virulence of the Chinese and Western mass media towards us does not surprise us. In fact the real burden on the economic and cultural life of this region is neo-colonial domination. What threatens

these countries is the expansionist politics of Beijing. An independent Indochina which can check the manoeuvres and aggression of the Washington-Beijing axis can only be a source of support for the other Southeast Asian peoples to throw off the neo-colonial yoke and avert the threat of Chinese domination.

**Question:** *How can one precisely define Vietnam's policy towards the ASEAN countries?*

**Answer:** Vietnam and the ASEAN countries have vital interests in common: to defend national independence and safeguard peace. Vietnam has no interest in provoking conflicts with the ASEAN countries or in interfering in their internal affairs: it has enough enemies without creating new ones. Vietnam is therefore ready to enter into friendly economic and cultural relations with these countries, on the basis of mutual respect for the independence and sovereignty of each side. Vietnam is ready to enter into bilateral talks with each ASEAN country and to participate in regional discussions. We will do everything in our power to improve our relations with these countries; but we think that actions like the attempts to revive the SEATO military pact or to bring back the American forces of intervention to Thailand are highly dangerous for peace in the whole sector. Thailand has no interest in unconditionally supporting the politics of the Washington-Beijing axis or in letting its territory be used as a base for the Kampuchean and Lao counter-revolutionary forces maintained

by Beijing and Washington. Certain circles of businessmen or military and political circles closely linked to Washington are trying to poison these countries' relations with Vietnam, but we think that the great majority of the peoples of this region would support a policy of peaceful co-operative relations with our country. For us the most real danger is Beijing's expansionism, combined with a permanent threat, the neo-colonialism of the great capitalist powers, especially the USA. Against these enemies, the Southeast Asian peoples are our natural allies, so as to speak.

**Question:** *Some would reproach you for your alliance with the Soviet Union, your membership of Comecon. Perhaps China would not have attacked you ..*

**Answer:** Imperial China attacked us frequently over the centuries. France attacked us in the 19th century although the Soviet Union did not yet exist. The USA attacked us although we had not yet signed a treaty of friendship and co-operation with the USSR and were not yet in Comecon. Our alliance with the USSR and our membership of Comecon are the logical and necessary consequences of the general line which our people and our Party have followed for the last 50 years. In the long and arduous struggle that we have been leading against the imperialist and reactionary forces, the revolutionary and progressive forces of the entire world have been our most precious allies. The Soviet Union has since its birth constituted the strongest support for the liberation movements of colonised

peoples. Today, not only for Vietnam, but also for Cuba, for Angola, for Afghanistan, and for all the other peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the existence of the Soviet Union and other industrially developed socialist countries allows under-developed countries like Vietnam to skip the stage of capitalist development and go directly to socialism. Material and technical aid and economic and scientific co-operation with the developed socialist countries are decisive factors for the modernisation of our economy. We entertain economic relations with many capitalist countries, but these economic relations are subject to the fluctuations of the market and to the more or less hostile policy of the governments. It is only in promoting organic co-operation with the developed socialist countries that we can build up our economy. The treaty of friendship and co-operation with the USSR and our membership of Comecon have therefore reinforced our national independence, politically as well as economically. These links don't prevent us from having the most friendly relations with other countries like India, Algeria, Mexico, etc.

**Question:** *Is this an abandonment of the former policy of maintaining a balance which Vietnam followed for many years, remaining linked to both the USSR and China?*

**Answer:** Between the two partners, China and Vietnam, which is it that has changed "in its heart and in its guts" as we say in Vietnamese? As long

as the Beijing government was following a policy of anti-imperialism in foreign affairs and a policy of real aid to our country, we had fraternal relations with China, just as we did with the Soviet Union. We hoped for a long time that the disagreements between the two big socialist countries would eventually be settled. Unfortunately, the Chinese leaders gradually moved on to a policy of collusion with imperialism on the one hand, and on the other hand hostility followed by aggression towards us and towards the socialist countries and the progressive forces of the whole world. So we can't stay half-way between the Chinese and Soviet positions. Quite independently, we took up a position which accords with our national interests and with those of the world revolutionary movement, a position which is in contradiction with that of Beijing, not because the latter is Chinese, but because it is reactionary. Let's look at the facts. In 1971, the Beijing leaders, with Mao Zedong, opposed the liberation of Bangladesh, taking sides with the reactionaries of Pakistan who were massacring the Bengladeshi patriots. The same year, they let the Vietnamese leaders know that China would like to see the Vietnamese give up the struggle to liberate the South of our country. In 1972, at the time of Nixon's visit to Beijing, the bargaining became apparent. Beijing was to pressurize the Vietnamese to abandon the liberation of the South of their country, while Washington committed itself to aiding China in other fields. 1973 saw Beijing's support for Pinochet against the Chilean patriots and democrats; Beijing's

hostility towards the Paris Agreement which stipulated the retreat of the American troops from Indochina. 1974 saw the Chinese attack on the South Vietnamese Paracel islands, with the assent of the American Command. In 1975 as we have seen, Beijing launched Pol Pot against Vietnam in order to prepare its own attack on our country. During all this time, from Angola to Iran, everywhere Beijing and Washington were working hand in hand. Now in early 1980 the Washington-Beijing axis is making great efforts to try and take its revenge after all the defeats it has suffered in Kampuchea, in Iran, in Nicaragua and in Afghanistan. The visit of the American Defense Secretary to China has sanctioned this implicit military alliance which has already been in force between the two countries. And in his message on the state of the Union at the beginning of this year, Jimmy Carter underlined the importance of this China-US alliance for Washington's policy in Asia and in the world. The projects to instal new missiles in Western Europe, to deploy the American fleet in the Indian Ocean, the establishment of new American interventionist forces, Carter's violently anti-Soviet line, all show to what extent this alliance between Washington and Beijing has affected the policies of both these countries in a reactionary and warlike direction. With Chinese complicity, Washington believes itself able to realise the dream it has long cherished to encircle the Soviet Union from both the east and the west (with NATO). With American aid, the Beijing leaders believe they

can modernise rapidly and as a priority their armed forces, the instrument of expansion. Great threats loom for world peace. We are back to the period of the Cold War.

*Question : Some think that the Beijing leaders are still however revolutionaries and that their alliance with Washington is only a tactical one.*

*Answer : A revolutionary power can follow a policy of temporary compromise with imperialism in order to avoid adventurism, but not a policy of systematic alliance in every domain, as the leaders in Beijing are doing today. Communists in some country or other can formulate reserves or criticisms of certain aspects of the policies of other countries, but not affirm that these countries are the bitterest enemies of humanity, the first to be struggled against, who must be punished. This sort of foreign policy is a truly reactionary one: there is nothing communist about it and it is indicative of home policy too. Many changes have taken place, deeply transforming the character of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and government, that is a reality to which one cannot shut one's eyes. For all those who have for many years placed their hopes in the Chinese revolution it is a bitter realization: for us Vietnamese it has been heart-breaking to see former comrades and brothers change into enemies, and what enemies! We could not believe our eyes when we took back the towns and villages occupied by*

Chinese troops during their attack of February-March 1979. When they retreated, they had specialist teams destroy all the economic installations, schools, hospitals, crèches, etc, building by building, including even historical monuments. The result is that four towns and 320 villages have been destroyed, along with 735 schools (out of 904) razed to the ground, 428 hospitals and health stations, a whole mining complex, 41 big farms and lumber sites. This month-long occupation brought back sad memories of the 1945 occupation by the troops of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek). There have definitely been deep changes in China.

**Question :** *How do you explain these changes? How can communists become reactionaries, as you claim they have? The leaders at any rate*

**Answer :** It is not enough for a person or a group to claim to be communist for it to really be so. A party is formed which declares itself communist, people join; this party and its member nevertheless remain tied to a whole social context, they operate in given historical circumstances, come under various influences, and may become truly communist or deviate along other paths. The Chinese Communist Party, which was founded in 1921 by fifty or so intellectuals, was operating in a country where the industrial working class counted for less than one per cent of the population. It had begun to build up a working class base and recruit among urban intellectuals, but from 1927 onwards it was forced by Jiang Jieshi to flee to the countryside, so

for the 22 years until its return to Beijing it had been operating solely in the countryside, entirely cut off from urban society and virtually without international relations. That's why, in spite of its Marxist declarations of faith, its leaders and activists found it hard to avoid the imprint of their peasant surroundings and traditional ideas. Its history from 1927 to 1945 and even in later years resembles the history of peasant insurrectionary movements of past centuries much more than it does the history of a modern revolutionary movement. The peasants' anti-imperialist and anti-feudal fighting spirit became diverted to counter-revolutionary aims. In spite of prolonged internal struggle, the truly communist elements in the Party were submerged and little by little eliminated. Marxist doctrine gave way to a special ideology dominated by two powerful ideas which had always motivated Chinese peasant movements in the past: a peasant utopianism which wanted to build an egalitarian society immediately, and the re-creation of the great old imperial China. In the second stage, once the foreign imperialists had been excluded from China, the peasant utopianism lost its foothold and the establishment of a militarist bureaucracy led to the predominance of the idea of an empire. What was communist disappeared and what emerged was only nationalism. To be a nationalist in China always means to think of restoring the grandeur of the Middle Kingdom which dominated Asia for 20 centuries. Mao Zedong, at the beginning principally a peasant utopian, ended up with the character of the Emperor on top. As for Deng

Xiaoping, he is the representative of the militarist bureaucracy which is resolved to build a powerful China, ready to make alliances with anyone, without worrying about any revolutionary principle. (What does it matter if the cat's white or black, so long as it catches mice). For Mao and Deng alike, to modernise the country means first to acquire intercontinental missiles, atom bombs and other ultra-modern armaments so that China can set itself up as a great power, and as soon as possible as the greatest world power.

**Question:** *In the face of the Washington-Beijing axis, isn't Vietnam's position particularly difficult?*

**Answer:** We don't hide the difficulties. But as we say in Vietnam, Beijing and Washington may sleep in the same bed, but each has its own dreams. Washington is looking for a market, raw materials and Chinese mercenaries to fight the USSR and the Asian revolutionary movements. Beijing is looking for American aid to increase its own power, while at the same time pushing the USA to war against the USSR, which would be China's opportunity to rise from the ruins of the two greats as the world's most powerful nation. From 1972 to 1975 we fought the military might of America with Beijing's political support; today we face the threat of an eventual armed aggression by China, which enjoys the support of Washington. But the Washington-Beijing alliance is rent by contradictions. We won in 1975 and again in 1979.

**Question:** *Why do those who would like to turn China into a great power not prefer an alliance with the USSR?*

**Answer:** China as a great power, that can imply two absolutely opposite orientations. It could mean a socialist China where the principal objective is the satisfaction of the people's material and cultural needs; or a domineering, imperial China. An alliance with the Soviet Union would be conducive to development within China and the Chinese Communist Party, the rise of forces opposed to the power-crazed militarist bureaucracy and to the imperial despotism of Mao Zedong. That's the reason for the furious anti-Sovietism of these chauvinist and traditionalist forces, as an alliance with the Soviet Union would jeopardise their power inside the country. In other words, it is inside China that the game was eventually played out. For the moment, the authentic revolutionary forces have lost out, yet a return to imperial China is impossible. This dream of a new Middle Kingdom right in the twentieth century is completely contrary to the real aspirations of the Chinese people and those of the peoples of the whole world; it is a deliberate sacrifice of the welfare of the Chinese people and endangers world peace. This wholly anachronistic policy cannot last. Without minimising at all the great difficulties we have to confront, we are entering into struggle against this imperial policy certain of being able to resist it victoriously.

**Question:** *How would you assess the present situation between China and Vietnam?*

**Answer:** Large numbers of Chinese troops are being concentrated at our northern border. Every day commandos make incursions into our territory, carrying out sabotage, kidnapping or assassinating local people and officials. Politically, as either side of the border is inhabited by the same *montagnard* ethnic groups, Nung, Hmong, Zao..., the Chinese authorities are trying to regroup these peoples in order to set them against our government. On the sea, from the border down to Da Nang, Chinese naval units provoke incidents from time to time. At the negotiating table, we have made concrete proposals: the withdrawal of troops to a fair distance either side of the frontier, establishment of a demilitarised zone with a joint control commission, negotiation on the recommencement of normal relations between the two countries. The Beijing side has laid down the precondition that the Vietnamese government change its policy towards Kampuchea and the Soviet Union and recognise Chinese sovereignty over the Hoang Sa islands (Paracels). It's not a negotiating point, it's a diktat, and it's not for China to dictate our foreign policy. The Chinese leaders have spoken openly on several occasions of inflicting a second punishment upon Vietnam. We are obliged to hold ourselves ready for any eventuality. Let us not forget either that Beijing is putting very strong military pressure at the Laos-China border, and that all the former partisans and mercenaries of the various old pro-American parties have regrouped in China. Attempts

at subversion of the present Lao government are being made in parallel with this military pressure at the borders; the possibility of an attack against Laos should not be ignored. As at the time of the fight against French and American imperialism, Vietnam and Laos have to co-ordinate their efforts. Laos has only 3 million inhabitants in an extensive territory with very long frontiers; the Lao government called on Vietnamese forces to help it defend itself. For Vietnamese fighters and technicians, to defend Laos, and aid it in the economic and technical fields, is to defend and aid Vietnam itself. In the present conditions our policy is to:

— seek to negotiate, letting escape no opportunity to find a peaceful solution, accepting any compromise so long as it does not sacrifice our independence and sovereignty. We did this in 1946 and 1954 with France and in 1973 with the USA.

— if combat is forced upon us, we shall take up the challenge and fight to the end for our independence and freedom. Either they will notice in Beijing that it is impossible to crush Vietnam and will change their policy, as happened in Paris and in Washington; or in the long term the Chinese people themselves will force a change of policy towards Vietnam.

**Question:** *You seem to cherish some hopes in regard to the Chinese people. But didn't you mention that the revolutionary forces in China had lost out?*

**Answer:** Since the Opium War in 1840, the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples, both assaulted by



Western imperialism, have entertained fraternal relations on the basis of militant solidarity against imperialism. Similar problems confronted the two peoples in regard to building the new society, and the perspective of socialism linked us even more closely. After the triumph of the revolution in China in 1949, China became a solid base of support for us, while Vietnam was a bulwark for China, protecting its southern flank. So, truly fraternal relations existed for several years. We still have immense gratitude towards the Chinese people, towards its technicians and workers who came to help us during the 50s and 60s. When the Chinese leadership changed its line to one of hostility and then aggression in our regard, Chinese technicians working in our country expressed their disapproval; when our students were expelled from China, their teachers and fellow students showed sympathy towards them. For some years, the Chinese leaders have been undertaking a massive campaign, carried on also by the Western mass media, to excite hatred of Vietnam among the Chinese people, in order to prepare public opinion for the armed aggression. It is certain that among backward strata of the population this campaign can achieve its goal, but it is also certain that the Chinese people, after over a century of struggle against imperialism, are no longer the people of the old imperial China, although the setback of the revolutionary forces is a serious one, for several million militants have been massacred.

*Question: Several million?*

*Answer:* Exactly. When I say millions I am taking a conservative estimate, some speak of tens of millions. What has been called the Cultural Revolution was a veritable civil war. From the rectification campaigns in the 40s, through the period of the Great Leap Forward, to the Cultural Revolution especially, the Chinese Communist Party has been literally decimated, above all the leadership and higher levels. The opponents of the chauvinist great-power policy were eliminated, then there have been the struggles between the various factions, between the partisans and adversaries of Mao. This struggle continues on two fronts: the faction fighting at the top, and the struggle between the leadership and the people who aspire to their own well-being and to peace and not to the restoration of imperial grandeur and war. Even in past centuries this popular opposition to the policy of imperial greatness and to wars of expansion was very much alive: a re-reading of the great poets of old China will give you an idea of it. Anti-imperialist feeling is still very strong, and it is difficult for the leaders to justify their close collusion with Washington. A large working class has been born in China and so has a modern intelligentsia, a sizeable proportion of the peasantry has become aware of its rights. Sooner or later, the Chinese people will start to express more and more strongly its opposition to the politics of Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng. For these politics will lead to the recolonisation of China by the West and Japan, to war and to poverty.

**Question :** *So you're quite optimistic ?*

**Answer :** We will have some very hard years ahead. In home affairs, our country is confronting quite new problems, very hard ones. In foreign affairs we have to confront powerful enemies, all the more hostile now they feel threatened by the world revolutionary movement which never ceases to move forward. False moves and temporary setbacks are inevitable, but we believe that we will eventually achieve our aims : to keep our national independence, build socialism, and have friendly, peaceful co-operation with other peoples, for we have many factors in our favour :

— support and help of the socialist countries and progressive forces throughout the world ; we are most insistent on the fact that the world revolutionary and progressive movement is making gains, and that the Vietnamese revolution develops in the framework of this world movement and not in isolation.

— our people and Party have great experience of struggle and they can recognise and rectify any errors made.

— we are fighting today with our national territory completely liberated and not as before when the country was entirely occupied by the enemy or divided in two. Today we have a certain material and technical basis, and a body of qualified staff and technicians which we lacked only a few years ago.

We will solve the problems patiently one by one. Your help is particularly precious to us, both materially and morally. Thank you very much.

**Question :** *How can Dutch people, and Westerners in general, help Vietnam ?*

**Answer :** Our Dutch and other Western friends can help us in two main fields. Firstly and fundamentally, politically, to help us preserve our independence and defend peace, as both are seriously threatened at this moment by the aggressive politics of the Washington — Beijing axis. A vigorous campaign of explanation of our problems to Western public opinion, which is being really hammered right now by the mass media, would be a great help to us.

I wrote in 1961 that "the best help that men of goodwill in the advanced countries can bring to the under-developed countries is still the struggle for peace. For a Vietnamese patriot, the memory of the "gestures" of Henri Martin or Raymonde Dien will remain always infinitely more precious than all the dollars in the world".

Then in science and technology. In this domain there is the aid of governments, which is all-encompassing, but which is tied to changing political situation ; and then there is the people's aid which comes directly from people of goodwill. If you total up the money value of this aid it doesn't seem very important : in fact if it is selective, i. e. directed

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1. See *Expériences Vietnamiennes*. Editions Sociales, Paris, p. 180.

towards specific areas, its effectiveness can be very great. It often happens that we lack one link in a production process which blocks everything; in that case one man or a team of technicians or scientists can get the whole process moving again. The same thing is found with regard to certain equipment, spare parts, documents, reagents, seeds... Meetings and seminars between our technicians and researchers and their Western colleagues are extremely useful. We think that, even if some capitalist governments are hostile towards us, people of goodwill can maintain the most friendly relations with our people.

*Hanoi, February 1980*

