

Hanoi's current diplomatic campaign:

MUCH AGITATION BUT LITTLE ACHIEVEMENT

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There is little doubt that, diplomatically, Hanoi has been very active in recent months. But when one coldly draws a balance sheet, little has really been achieved: the Socialist Republic of Vietnam remains isolated. Indeed, one could say that now it is even more isolated than at any time since 1975.

Hanoi's major moves have been in the direction of China, the United States, and ASEAN. In all three cases, it has found itself in a blind alley. At the same time, wide cracks have appeared in its relations with the Soviet Union.

First, the leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) worked very hard for a rapprochement with China. Off and on, for more than a year, they sent signals to Peking that they would like to resume direct dialogue with the Chinese leadership. Such a dialogue became all the more urgent as developments in Eastern Europe, and especially, the radical shift in Soviet policy, placed Vietnam in a very precarious position militarily, economically, as well as politically.

Militarily and financially, Moscow has practically pulled the rug from under Vietnam's feet. It has ceased to support Vietnam's military adventure in Cambodia, and worse, it has made it perfectly clear that it is no longer willing to underwrite Vietnam's huge military machine. Economically, Vietnam has been given formal notice that from this year on it will be on its own: the Soviets no longer have the means or the will to carry Vietnam on its back. After months of negotiations an agreement was signed on January 31 under which Vietnam was given US\$ 100 million in technical assistance credits and 10 million in grants. Compared to more than US\$ 2000 million which Vietnam had received annually in past years, this is not so much an expression of Soviet aid as of Soviet writing off of Vietnam.

Then, there were the shock waves of the collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes, and the dissolving effects of glasnost in the Soviet Union. Moscow was no longer prepared to play, or capable of playing, the role of Big Brother. And it counselled the CPV to practice glasnost also. This had the effect of an earthquake on the CPV. The Party has cracked under its impact. Confidence was badly shaken among its members, not only among the rank and file, but also among the members of the Central Committee and even the Politburo. Indeed, the CPV is being plagued by a severe ideological crisis. This was frankly admitted by the Party's ideological review Tap Chi Cong San in an editorial article in its latest issue (12-1990) which, ironically, is a special one marking its 36th anniversary. In this same issue, Ha Huy Giap, an 80 year old veteran of the Party from its early days in 1930, said that the Party is "in a state of anarchy". Indeed, the Party is divided more than ever in its 60 years's history, at a time when popular dissatisfaction is at its highest. Yet, it is controlled by ultra-conservatives who have

rejected all thoughts of political reforms. The Party is facing an explosive, revolutionary situation. In this situation, it must seek protection from abroad, including assurances of a safe haven. The only natural protector in this case is the Chinese Communist Party, which has been also pursuing a hard line policy.

It is thus not surprising that, swallowing their pride, the CPV leaders decided to stoop, and signalled to the CCP that they were prepared to go humbly to Peking. Nguyen Van Linh told the Chinese leadership through Japanese visitors in August that he was prepared to go to Deng Xiao-ping because he was younger: a thinly veiled admission of public acceptance of junior status. And so, the Chinese agreed to receive the top leaders of Vietnam, Nguyen Van Linh, Do Muoi (the current prime minister), and Pham Van Dong, a senior adviser to the Party. But these were not received by Deng, but by Yang Shang-kun, Jiang Ze-ming and Li Peng. And the place was not Peking, but Chengdu, in the remote southwestern province of Sichuan, west of Chiang Kai-shek's unaccessible war time capital of Chungking. This reminds us of the way Emperor Ch'ien-Lung received the British Maccartney mission in Jehol, north of the Great Wall, and not in Peking, in 1793. The British mission was then considered a tributary mission, and Ch'ien-Lung treated it well, but with obvious condescendence.

The main result of the meeting, which was held secretly on September 3-7, was some sort of understanding between the Chinese and the Vietnamese concerning the settlement of the Cambodian conflict. The Vietnamese apparently pledged to put pressure on the Hun Sen government to be cooperative at the coming Jakarta meeting. The Chinese, for their part, agreed to do the same with regard to their Cambodian proteges. This led to the holding of the meeting on September 9-10, and the issuing of a joint statement.

According to the statement a formal agreement had been signed by the four parties. Under this agreement, each side was to have six representatives on the Supreme National Council; Sihanouk could be made 13th member and chairman of the Council; and the parties would delegate to the UN "all powers necessary" in the conduct of the elections and "the relevant aspects of the administration of Cambodia".

This communique turned out to be another worthless piece of paper, like other previous agreements because in subsequent negotiations in Bangkok in the following week, and again in Paris in December, Hanoi and Phnom Penh returned to the position they had adopted at the JIM I (Jakarta Informal Meeting, August 1988).

The Chinese naturally were very angry at this volte-face, which occurred only less than two weeks after the Chengdu meeting, and have denounced it. The Chinese news agency Xinhua said on January 18 that Hanoi (and Phnom Penh) had "obviously backed down from their original bargaining positions".

On other issues which had pitted China and Vietnam against one another, there was practically no progress. The Chinese promised no more than a gradual improvement of the relations between the two countries only after a satisfactory settlement of the Cambodian question. Of course, here, the Chinese were obviously in a stronger position, as Vietnam was the asker. Naturally, the Chinese had surely imposed tough conditions for giving its support to a CPV leadership facing very adverse

situation internationally and domestically.

Reports from knowledgeable sources say that the Chinese demanded that the CPV break clean with the Soviet Union and align itself fully on China. This is something which it is hard and dangerous for the CPV leaders to accept. Hard because of decades of conditioning by Ho Chi Minh regarding the necessity of preserving solidarity with the Soviet Union. And dangerous because for any Vietnamese leader, to appear as a stooge of a foreign power, especially of China, would be politically suicidal. This is all the more so after ten years of intense and vociferous anti-Chinese propaganda following the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict in 1979.

The latest reports from Hanoi confirm what one should have expected: the Vietnamese did not accept the Chinese demand, and insisted on remaining independent, naturally with the attendant consequence: continued isolation. On the other hand, as we shall see later on, the Vietnamese communists played a dangerous game which risked having serious boomerang effects.

The Chinese were reported also to demand that the CPV choose between China and the United States. This condition was implied in the Chinese insistence that Nguyen Co Thach must go as a price of Sino-Vietnamese rapprochement. This demand is quite logical. Thach is Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister. He is known to be an outspoken partisan of political reforms, and particularly a strong advocate of improvement of relations with the United States. Recently, Thach had taken a clearly hostile position to the Chinese. He was conspicuously absent from the Nguyen Van Linh's pilgrimage to Chengdu. The conservatives have been trying hard to oust him. The Chinese demand will surely give new impetus to their efforts.

At the time when Nguyen Van Linh and Do Muoi were in China, followed by Vo Nguyen Giap in the second half of September, Nguyen Co Thach was preparing his meeting with the American Secretary of State, James Baker, in New York. The Thach-Baker meeting took place on September 29, following three lower level meetings between American and Vietnamese officials starting on August 6. This meeting itself followed the announcement by Secretary Baker on July 18 of a dramatic shift of American policy towards Cambodia and Vietnam.

Thach had obviously hoped to secure from the American administration a normalisation of the relations between the two countries, and more immediately, a lifting of the trade embargo which had hurt Vietnam badly. But two weeks before Thach's meeting with Baker, on September 15, President Bush had already decided to keep Vietnam on the embargo list. This decision was not announced by the White House, and was made public by the State Department on September 20.

Thach was allowed to go to Washington, a first for a Vietnamese Foreign Minister, but that was about all. He obtained neither the lifting of the embargo, nor a pledge of normalisation. The Americans, like the Chinese, spoke of normalisation as a process, to unfold in stages, only after a satisfactory of the Cambodian question. Obviously, Thach had not made any formal pledge to the Americans concerning pressure on the Hun Sen government to accept the terms of an agreement involving a substantial role for the United Nations. In fact, as

it turned out, Hanoi and Phnom Penh were to reject an agreement worked out by the Security Council after many months of hard work, and as pointed above, to revert to the positions to which they had held fast at JIM I.

It was pointed out earlier that in its dealing with the Chinese the CPV leaders played a dangerous game. They did so also with the Americans. Indeed, these leaders always believed that playing one party against another and deliberately deceiving other people are manifestations of "intelligence". They forget that they are now official representatives of a state, that credibility is one of the fundamental conditions of fruitful inter-state relations, and they continued to behave as if they were still revolutionaries in opposition with no need to maintain credibility.

And so, when the CPV leaders went to see the Chinese leaders at Chengdu, they timed the meeting to precede the Jakarta meeting, the UN General Assembly, and especially the Thach-Baker meeting by a very short time. Their game was to get an agreement in Jakarta - which they did not plan to keep - just in time to have their proteges admitted to sitting at the United Nations, and more particularly, to induce the US administration to lift the trade embargo and the economic blockade against Vietnam, and to start the normalisation process. Of course if the unsaid blackmailing argument with the Chinese had been: "Look! Normalise with us, else we shall turn to the Americans soon!" the unsaid blackmailing argument with the Americans was: "Look! if you don't open your doors to us, we shall move in with the Chinese. We have already talked to them!"

The CPV leaders were seriously deluding themselves in thinking that the Americans could be so easily blackmailed. They were in a strong position: they did not need Vietnam's support or goodwill in their relations with any country in a world in which all the major powers are committed to peace and mutual cooperation. So here, as with China, the CPV leaders had little to collect for their strenuous efforts. On the contrary, they will appear as unsavoury characters to everyone.

In another direction, Hanoi's efforts also were futile, and resulted in more sound than fury. These efforts were directed at wooing ASEAN, in particular Indonesia and Thailand. The Indonesian president, Suharto, was invited to Hanoi on 19-21 November, amidst great fanfare. The Hanoi propaganda organs presented this visit as the end of Socialist Vietnam's isolation, and the western media echoed these assertions. But little was really accomplished. Again, Hanoi asked Indonesia to plead with the Americans to improve their relations with Vietnam. This is only a repeat of the game already played in 1980-83, when Under Secretary Wolfowitz was in Southeast Asia. And, as earlier, it yielded no positive results. The Suharto visit ended with the signing of several economic, scientific, cultural cooperation agreements, and the setting up a joint commission. But that will not help Vietnam out of its present economic difficulties. Only massive aid and investments can do this, and these are not forthcoming so long as the United States maintains its embargo, and more important still, so long as Hanoi persists its present economic and political course.

Hanoi has also been courting Thailand furiously by dangling

a big commercial carrot in front of the eyes of the Thai business circles. But after a short period of euphoria following Premier Chatichai Choonhavan's famous statement that he wanted to "turn the Indochinese battlefield into a market", not much was achieved. The Vietnamese battlefield was indeed turned into a market for two years, but it was a huge blackmarket. Some Thais profited, but largely by taking advantage of the legal loopholes. When the Vietnamese authorities, alarmed by the situation, took steps to suppress illegal and other means of profiteering, the market died, and Thai bona fide businessmen, like businessmen from all the other countries, had to wait for the economic, legal, administrative conditions to improve. But these conditions can improve only with the improvement of political conditions, and this depends very much on the United States, for Washington had made it clear that, in addition to a satisfactory Cambodian settlement, the opening up of Vietnam to democratisation will also affect American willingness to help.

Yet, undaunted by these negative factors, Hanoi pursued its wooing campaign vigorously. Thach was in Bangkok for a four days' official visit in late September on his return from the United States via Japan, where he also stayed four days. Prime Minister Do Muoi was to follow him shortly, and Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan has also been invited to visit Hanoi officially. But Choonhavan is now gone, and the military are again in command in Bangkok. All the flirting with Choonhavan has served little purpose. The game has to be played all over again.

Hanoi had hoped that through Indonesia and Thailand, it could penetrate ASEAN. Indeed, the CPV leaders have been speaking more and more about Vietnam joining ASEAN. But how can a communist Vietnam hope to be a member of ASEAN while refusing to open up politically, and holding on to the Stalinist and Maoist economic models? Indeed, this question has been raised recent months by Foreign Minister Wong Kang Sen and Vice Premier Lee Hsieng Lung. They have made it clear that Vietnam's admission to ASEAN is not for to-morrow. So, there also, Vietnam finds itself in a blind alley.

Everywhere, then, Vietnam has found its way blocked and its efforts futile. This happens at a time when relations with the Soviet "brother" are beset with uncertainties. Obviously, it is no longer realistic, and especially no longer safe, to talk about unshakable solidarity with the Soviet Union as "the cornerstone" of the Party's position on external relations and to pledge to educate future generations to always feel gratitude towards the Soviet Union, as was stressed in the Resolutions of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Party National Congresses. The CPV leaders have good reasons to be angry at Moscow, and especially at Gorbachev. In fact, some wanted to start an anti-Soviet "study" campaign, but the attempt was stifled immediately by others. The CPV leadership is ideologically disoriented, yet, out of sheer habit, it keeps looking toward Moscow, hoping that somehow salvation will come from there. Indeed, the draft of the new Political Platform made public in December still stresses the party's determination to "fuse genuine patriotism with working class' internationalism" and pledges to "fight tirelessly to consolidate and develop the friendly relations with the Soviet Union and the socialist countries (sic!)....". This makes rather odd reading

today.

Diplomatically, as economically and politically, the CPV is like a ~~leaky~~ boat drifting towards a deadly waterfall, with its shift gear blocked in neutral position. The riders on the boat keep pressing on the accelerator, and feel very pleased at hearing the motor roaring furiously. But the boat keeps drifting downstream towards the waterfall.

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VIETNAM IN 1990:
AN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RETROSPECT

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In early December 1990, in the name of the Council of Ministers, Vice-Premier Vo Van Kiet presented to the eighth session of the Eighth National Assembly the Council's Report on the Socio-Economic Development Plan for 1991. The report said that thanks to the continued social and political stability of the period 1989-1990, productivity rose significantly in a number of key sectors like oil, electricity, cement, and steel. That was "an indication that....we can overcome the new obstacles and move forward....and if we do not take advantage of the opportunities in 1991, we shall have to spend many years to make the same gains as in 1989-1990".

Yet, according to a broadcast by Hanoi Radio on 24 December 1990, the same Vo Van Kiet warned that the economic-social situation in 1991 will be "extremely difficult". He said that "we must continue to reduce inflation to the lowest level, and consolidate financial and foreign exchange management". This contradictory statement indicates that Vietnam's economic prospects were none too bright, contrarily to what had been forecast in the plan. According to this forecast, GNP was to increase by 4.5 %. Why this discrepancy?

First, we must review the socio-economic achievements mentioned by Vo Van Kiet and compare them with the report on the regression of the socio-economic situation by Premier Do Muoi. This will enable us to assess with certainty whether Vietnam had moved forward or backward in 1990.

A deteriorating economy

Following the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam had to carry out a number of financial and economic measures in 1989, such as repaying foreign loans which had fallen due, stopping the printing of more money, and applying an austerity program. As a result, it recorded a number of successes: inflation was brought down to 40 from 1000 %, 1.4 million tons of rice were exported, placing Vietnam in third place among the world rice exporting countries.

The above results have astounded many western financial circles, and certain businessmen anxious to curry favour with the Vietnamese authorities have characterised those achievements as the two miracles of the "doi moi" (perestroika) policy applied since 1986.

However, according to a broadcast by Radio Hanoi on 24 December 1990, the year 1990 witnessed a return to the dark times because "the international and regional situations presented many complex developments as a result of the deep crisis and the fundamental changes occurring in the member states of the CMEA (Cocom), in particular in the Soviet Union, and because of it we were confronted with big problems. We lost an important source of international privileged treatment".

In plainer language, the break up of CMEA deprived Vietnam of a big market accounting for 60 % of its trade, and the cut of US\$ 500 million of aid in fiscal year 1990 seriously affected every area of its economy: agricultural production suffered because of the shortage of fertilizers, the bulk of which (about 1 million tons) used to be provided by the Soviet Union; in the industrial sector unemployment rose and productivity fell because of lack of raw materials; off-shore oil production stagnated because the Soviet Union refused to increase investments; the negotiations of the labour export contracts with the countries of Eastern Europe were halted; the processing of goods under contract to the East European countries suffered heavily because of reduced demand.

Generally speaking, there was a shortage of all essential goods while consumer goods smuggled in from neighbouring countries flooded the home market and killed off local industries. The budget deficit was growing because foreign aid was no longer available while the government had to continue subsidizing state enterprises which were losing money.

The above factors constituted a threat, and undid the achievements mentioned by Vo Van Kiet.

According to the most recent reports, in 1990, especially between June and December, the prices of all products and of foreign currencies rose; in particular, the rate of inflation rose 100 % in the last two months of the year. The quantity of rice exported could not reach the projected targets of 2.1-2.5 million tons because of the shortage of raw materials, fertilizers, and because of weather inclemencies. A number of provinces in the North and the Center experienced a shortage of rice. Even in the Mekong delta, in the Nha Be area, signs of "famine" were reported .

Meantime, internationally, increasing pressures were brought to bear on Hanoi to settle the Cambodian question according to the plan worked out by the United Nations Security Council. Vietnam could have improved relations with the United States, China, ASEAN only after a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian question. The lifting of the economic and trade blockade, and the establishment of good relations with the International Monetary Fund, with the World Bank, with the Asian Development Bank leading to the borrowing of large sums depended on the goodwill of the United States. This depended on Vietnam's willingness to make concessions and to contribute to the settlement of the Cambodian question and the accounting for the MIAS before 1975.

Increasing political repression

The conservative faction led by Le Duc Tho clearly dominated the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee at the end of March 1990, but fell into the embarrassing situation of being incapable of defining a clear ideological orientation for social development because of their conservatism, as Premier Do Muoi revealed in an interview with The Nation (Bangkok) in Hanoi on 8 December 1990. He said: "We have experience in fighting wars, but we know absolutely nothing about management". The CPV leaders began to experience this embarrassing situation when the political changes occurred in the socialist countries of Eastern

Europe, and the social structures of the Soviet Union underwent modification (elimination of article 6 of the Constitution, the article which had given a monopoly of power to the Communist Party).

However, the conservative leaders of Vietnam held fast to their rigidified ideological orientation, which had become out of step with the new situation; they continued to repeat the old tunes, denouncing "the wicked plots and maneuvers of the imperialists and the reactionary forces". This was the line proclaimed in a resolution, Resolution 8, which ironically was presented by the official propaganda organs, amidst much fanfare, as one which clearly expressed the Party's determination to adopt "doi moi" (perestroika).

Another cause for surprise was the Resolution of the Ninth Plenum at the end of August 1990. This resolution made no reference to the upheavals occurring in Eastern Europe; it said nothing about the wicked plots of the imperialists, but mentioned only internal problems, the "socio-economic difficulties" which Premier Do Muoi had brought to the attention of the National Assembly during the sixth session.

The main task of the Ninth Plenum was to discuss the basic documents related to the draft Platform on the building of socialism during the transitional period, and the draft Program of economic development until the year 2000 to be presented to the Seventh National Congress of the Party planned for May 1991. Compared to the Platform of 1930 the new draft Political Program fails to show a clear projection into the future, contains only vague, half-hearted, patchy arguments. This is a clear evidence that the Party has become disoriented when confronted with the new situation and with the big tasks to be accomplished at a time of instability and upheaval.

The designation of a member of the conservative wing, General Le Duc Anh, the Minister of Defense, as chairman of the Organisation Committee of the Seventh National Party Congress, with full powers to choose the delegates to the Congress, is an indication that the dogmatist faction of the Party will have full control over the program and the running of the Congress. The vague contents of the resolutions of the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Plenums of the Central Committee support the view that there are serious divisions inside the Party, and momentous events are likely to occur before or after the Seventh Congress.

At the sixth session of the National Assembly Do Muoi reported that unstable social conditions were the consequences of the Party's bitter experiment in orientation and policy, of its errors in strategy, of its inability to define clearly the necessary premisses for advancing to socialism without passing through the capitalist stage. Yet he believed that the CPV was still capable of overcoming all difficulties to prove the preeminence of socialism because "the Communist Party is the force that guarantees political stability, that has led the country through 15 years of difficulties, and is loved by the people".

In order to guarantee political stability and counter the demand for pluralism of "a number of people", as Do Muoi confirmed to The Nation, the Ministry of Interior has always been the organ taking the lead in protecting socialism, protecting the

Party, controlling and checking the people to prevent all acts "aiming at overthrowing the regime" from the outside through the operation "carry fire to the home front".

At the end of May 1990, a whole series of security measures were put into effect to prevent "the serious decline in public security and law and order". A month earlier, the political security agencies had anticipated and arrested those who planned to hold demonstrations against the Party on the occasions of the big celebrations of April 30, May 1, and May 19. The National Assembly, at its sixth session, had authorised the Ministry of Interior to extend the list of crimes leading to arrest, and to prolong the period of detention of suspects before their trial by people's courts.

A directive concerning the control of culture and the arts, put into force by the Secretariate of the Party at the end of July, stated clearly that "it is necessary to maintain firmly the ideological orientations of the Party, to deal effectively with all confusion on the cultural and artistic front, in particular with the schemes that aim at smearing the truth, at negating the achievements of the revolution, and that manifest dissatisfaction with the Party and opposition to its leadership".

A week later, the Party's Secretariate put into effect new measures aiming at exercising tighter control of the press, although the press had already been subjected to "close watching" in January. Chief editors, directors, publishers must be Party members, and they are responsible for applying the ideological orientations of the Party. The directive also said that it is necessary to prevent the introduction of reactionary and depraved publications.

Thus, politically, to ensure stability and the security of the Party, the directives put into effect at the end of 1989 concerning the prevention of crimes remained the safe card to be used by the Party for suppressing all discontent and opposition from every individual and every organisation.

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VIETNAM: A NATION ADRIFT
(A Witness' Report)

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The Vietnamese economy at present is a capitalist commercial economy bearing the strong imprint of colonialism and backwardness. It is an economy in which the industries are in their death throes. Imported consumer goods smuggled in from neighbouring countries are flooding the country, transforming it into a market for foreign unsalable surplus products. Some 90 % of the state enterprises and high-graded co-operatives have gone bankrupt, and unemployment is widespread. All state economic bodies are centers of heavy smuggling and corruption. All public agencies, central and regional, are like teeming worms feeding on the national economy, vigourously sucking its substance, leaving the state treasury with nothing but empty shells.

People say: "The Vietnamese state is a house leaking in the roof", and cite the Confucian warning: "Misconduct at the top, lawlessness at the bottom". The ordinary men and women see clearly the lower cadres take bribes, operate in cahoots, steal public property, trample on moral principles, break the law, but they cannot set hands on the big criminals - the high mandarins of the revolution - the directors general, vice-ministers, ministers, members of the Central Committee and of the Politbureau -. These people lead a kingly life, feeding on the blood of the people; but, shamelessly, they incessantly and loudly lecture the people on the need to tighten their belts, to work hard, to practice thriftiness, to remain pure, to maintain integrity, to place the public interest above personal interests.

The Vietnamese economy is adrift, leaderless. And the state apparatus is totally impotent. The Vietnamese economy is like an exhausted buffalo which has collapsed into the grey mud and is being carved up with vigour by unprincipled butchers.

The Vietnamese communist regime is in its death throes. This is a stark truth which is evident even to the most naive observer. The socialist economy of Vietnam is dead. Nowhere in the country, from the North to the South, is there any room for the socialist structures to survive and develop. The capitalist economy has spread spontaneously like "wild grass", and has stifled the stunted cells of the so-called socialist economy.

The huge army of unemployed has filled the sidewalks, set up hawkers' stands selling all kinds of goods from Thailand, China, Japan, Singapore...turning the state stores into deserted graveyards. There, no customer is in sight, and the sales clerks - once behaving arrogantly like power wielding officials of the told times, and now victims of an insolvent state - are pitifully pulling long faces and living in dire poverty. When I entered an Intershop state store in Hanoi, the female sales clerk told me: "We have no goods for sale!"

Not only the stores, but almost all the factories and the production co-operatives have disintegrated because their goods find no buyers, as they cannot compete with the goods brought in

through smuggling.

The government, which has no source of revenues and hence no money to pay the cadres and officials, has hit upon the "brilliant idea" of declaring large numbers of cadres and officials too weak to work, and thus has a good pretext for sending them into retirement. Consequently, the number of unemployed has increased continuously.

Not surprisingly, massive unemployment is a source of growing criminality. Thieves and bandits are multiplying like mushrooms. Armed robbers operate with immunity against the population, and even attack the police in the cities. Passengers travelling on the roads running through forested areas are no longer safe because of bandits. The security agencies are powerless because these bandits are former soldiers and commandos dismissed from the armed forces. They are men who have risked their lives on the battlefields of Cambodia, and are now forced to become criminals on their return to the country. Those who are less courageous have turned to petty thievery. They steal everything that can be sold. On the other hand, prostitutes and hoodlums are present everywhere. This is a special feature of a Vietnamese communist regime in its death throes.

The Vietnamese communist government has become powerless not only in regard to coping with the social ills, but also to handling the state economic machine. It is incapable of providing leadership; it cannot control the enterprises. As a result, it has let these enterprises operate in total freedom so that they can provide for their staff in any way they see fit. This has led to open and legal banditry. The directors, heads of enterprises have become little kings, the new capitalists. These big bandits have been legalised and openly use the people's property to enrich themselves through trade. Consequently, whichever way you turn, you run into banditry and extortion, and appropriation of public property is general.

The bandits are high level cadres in the Party's apparatus, from the central to the regional levels. They are like hungry monster snakes; they grab as much as they can in order to prepare their escape because they know full well that the regime they are using to enrich themselves will collapse and disappear in the not too distant future.

The lower cadres, in their smaller way, engage also in corruption, shady practices, working in cahoots, in order to survive because they cannot feed their families and themselves with their insignificant salaries.

Thus, corruption in the Vietnamese Communist Party has become an incurable disease. The only way to cure it would be knocking down this cancerous regime and replacing it with a new one. This will be the only way of salvaging the economy and saving the hapless Vietnamese people.

The collapse of the socialist economy has also pulled down socialist Vietnam with it politically. This is an evident truth, an objective and inescapable law. A number of relatively knowledgeable Vietnamese communists have also sensed this truth, and favour a progressive transformation of the communist system into a pluralist democratic system to conform to the objective law of social development and to meet the deepest aspirations of the Vietnamese people, from the North to the South.

These knowledgeable party members try to steer the ship of state out of the present economic and political crisis. Unfortunately, they do not hold the majority in the central communist leadership. Their efforts are torpedoed, and their lives endangered, by the commercial thieves and the corrupt cadres, the wilful conservatives in the Politburo and the Central Committee who are plotting against them.

Many progressive communists want to clean the state machine in order to move forward on the road of pluralist democracy, of cooperation with all countries of goodwill wishing to do business with Vietnam; they want to lead Vietnam progressively out of its present state of backwardness and poverty and make it march in step with the advanced nations of the world. They are enthusiastically acclaimed by the people, but are under fierce attack by the reactionary communists. There are rumours in Vietnam that Vo Nguyen Giap has escaped an attempted assassination, that the only son of Nguyen Van Linh has joined the refugee underground network to flee abroad in order to avoid being harmed by the reactionary communists, that Do Muoi and Nguyen Co Thach have been assassinated.

Politically, as economically, the country is adrift. This means that each agency, its region has its little king, and these tyrants do as they please, serving the interests of their own groups being their only concern. As a result, different agencies and different regions pursue different policies. The heads of agencies, the chairmen, secretaries of the regional and provincial committees, have become the corrupt mandarins lording over their distinct territories.

Vietnam has become a lawless country. It is a country stood upside down. The Vietnamese society is a society without principles, a society in which the law is ignored, human rights trampled upon. It is a society which has fallen frighteningly to the profoundest depths of depravation.

Popular discontent has reached its highest peak. The people openly condemn the depraved communist government and demand a revolution to change the regime totally. They do not believe at all in "doi moi" (perestroika): to them this is only a trick aimed at relieving somewhat the pains of a communist regime in its death throes. The people inside the country need someone to ignite the revolution; they need a true patriotic political organisation to stand up and lead them in carrying out the revolution.

It is most regrettable for Vietnam that the democratic forces inside the country have not coalesced into an opposition capable of raising the banner of the just cause, and, by non-violent means, rallying the fighting forces to transform the corrupt communist regime into a pluralist democracy in response to the common aspirations of the people. The people is an invincible force, but this force can come into being only if it is assembled and hardened under the leadership of an exceptional patriotic party.

In their death throes, the reactionary communists are ganging up to fight and break those who advocate reforms along the line of pluralist democracy, to quash the budding pluralist democracy which is developing vigorously in the hearts of the people.

At present, the reactionary clique in the country is frantically conducting a campaign against pluralist democracy. They have shamelessly proclaimed: "The Communist Party of Vietnam must keep the monopoly of power; Vietnam cannot have pluralist democracy. If we accept pluralist democracy, we fall into the trap of the imperialists. We must retain power; we must absolutely uphold the revolution, thoroughly maintain class dictatorship". They have sought to scare the rank and file with such talk as: "if we allow power to be wrested away from us, if the former officials and military of the Ky-Thieu regime come back, then once more there will be a bloodbath...."

With such nonsensical arguments, they are banding together in order to stem the wave of demand for freedom and democracy, oppose the knowledgeable communists who are in favour of a peaceful change to pluralist democracy to allow the ordinary communists to withdraw honourably. The arguments of the communist reactionary ruling clique have been opposed by the people, and this clique is aware that the bells have tolled for the end of communism.

The Vietnamese from abroad who revisit their country feel acute pains on seeing their compatriots lead an utterly precarious life. Countless children cannot go school because their unemployed parents cannot afford to send them there. Countless engineers, doctors, intellectuals, the cream of the nation, are treaded upon and have to drive pedicabs at night to survive. Countless lovely young girls are forced to engage in prostitution in order to earn a living. Countless small traders, men and women, have been ruined by dishonest merchants, and submerged in debts, have volunteered to go to jail in order to avoid being killed by their creditors' henchmen. Countless pure and innocent youths have suddenly become demons, street thieves, murderers on the country's roads.

The whole country is writhing, groaning, and screaming in anger. "Stop the monsters! Save Vietnam!! Save the people!" Those are the cries of our countrymen inside the country. Even communists who have devoted their whole lives to the cause have raised their voices and joined in the denunciation and the condemnation. The question asked by all is: "How long will this situation be allowed to continue?"

* Nguyen Anh Tuan was among the patriotic Vietnamese who chose return to North Vietnam to serve the country during the war. He became disillusioned after 1975 and left the country as a refugee and settled in England. He is a regular contributor to the Thong Luan magazine (Paris). He recently visited Vietnam under a different name.

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TON THAT THIEN FAX 1 514 737 5447 Sun 3 March 91 1830 h

To Information and Resource Center FAX 65 733 6217 15 pages

For Raja and Thai

I am faxing three articles totalling ¹⁴~~15~~ pages:

1. Hanoi's current diplomatic campaign:

MUCH AGITATION BUT LITTLE ACHIEVEMENT

TON THAT THIEN

6 pages

2. VIETNAM IN 1990:

AN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RETROSPECT

THANH CHI

4 pages

3. VIETNAM: A NATION ADRIFT

(A Witness Report)

Y
NGUEN ANH TUAN

4 pages

Because typing is single-spaced, certain pages may be blurred. If so, please report immediately for replacement.

I think that with Thach Reng's article, we should have an excellent issue of VC.

Incidentally, the title of this article should be:
Christmas Eve Talks on Cambodia at Paris:

once more "consensus", but no settlement in sight

(note the reference to Paris)

I feel good after all that. Don't you?

Many make copies for the texts
for Raja & Thai to read while
you are typing.

