



VIETNAM

COMMENTARY

A bimonthly analysis of significant political, military, economic and other developments in Vietnam.

Number 9

May-Jun 1989

Editorial Advisory Board for Indochina Report & Vietnam Commentary:

Jacqueline Desbarats
University of California, Berkeley,
USA

Douglas Pike
Institute of East Asian Studies,
University of California, USA

Bui Xuan Quang
Universite de Paris — Nanterre,
France

Stephen Morris
Harvard University, Boston, and
Naval War College, Rhode Island,
USA

Zakaria Haji Ahmad
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Khien Theeravit
Chulalongkorn University,
Bangkok, Thailand

Chou Norindr
Paris, France

Alvin Bernstein
Naval War College,
Rhode Island, USA

Lam Thanh Liem
Laboratoire "Analyse de l'Espace",
CNRS, Paris, France

Teruo Tonooka
Strategic Institute for Southeast Asia,
Tokyo, Japan

Olivier Todd
Paris, France

Ton That Thien
Universite du Quebec,
Trois Rivières, Canada

Sponsoring Institutions:

Institute of Asian Studies
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok,
Thailand

Institut de Politique Internationale
et Europeenne — GRESASE
Universite de Paris — Nanterre,
France

Strategic Institute for Southeast Asia
Tokyo, Japan

Information & Resource Center
Singapore

Publisher & Editor: M Rajaretnam
Managing Editor: S Prema

THE NORTH-SOUTH CLEAVAGE

A New Pattern of Infighting

Le Thien Tung

LINH'S ECONOMIC REFORMS

Limits Imposed at Sixth Plenum

Lewis M Stern

LINH AND DOI MOI

Prisoners of the Neo-Conservatives?

Thai Quang Trung

DO MUOI AT THE HELM

From Perestroika to Perishstroika

Ton That Thien

SOARING POPULATION GROWTH

Hanoi's Family Planning Efforts

Lam Thanh Liem

Document

RETURN TO DOGMA **The Sixth Plenum Communiqué**

The North-South Cleavage: A New Pattern of Infighting

Le Thien Tung*

Operating as a veterans club, a group of Vietcong veterans have established a dissident movement in Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam, posing a potential threat to the stability of the Hanoi leadership and the continuing predominance of northerners within the hierarchy of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Publicly, the organization calls for an improvement of living standards. But behind this broad objective, it also calls for the introduction of basic freedoms and the dismantling of the oppressive features of socialism.

The group, which is known as the Association of Resistance Fighters, is legally registered in Ho Chi Minh City and has established branches in almost half of Vietnam's southern provinces, namely, An Giang, Hau Giang, Kien Giang, Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Cuu Long, Phu Khanh, Dong Nai and Thuan Hai provinces. It has an executive committee composed of veterans of the Vietcong "National Liberation Front" (NLF) such as Nguyen Ho, 74, a trade unionist who once was vice-chairman of the Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions; Huynh Van Tieng, 74, former director of Radio Liberation; Pham Khai, 68, former deputy head of the Military Management Committee of Ho Chi Minh City; Huynh Thi Tan, 66, a former member of the Vietnam Women's Union; and Nguyen Van Hung, 64, former deputy commander of the NLF's Special Forces in the Saigon-Gia Dinh area.

Behind these people, however, are three prominent figures who are believed to be the soul of the organization although they do not hold any official position: Tran Bach Dang, 62, the former secretary in charge of propaganda and mass organization work in the VCP's Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) and a longtime confidant of Linh; Tran Van Giau, a disgraced southern revolutionary who has spent years in the north undertaking historical research on the Vietnamese revolution; and Tran Van Tra, a retired lieutenant-general and former head of the Military Management Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, who was dropped from the military hierarchy after he had criticized the PAVN High Command in the conduct of the resistance war in the south in his memoirs, *History of the B2 Bulwark Theater: Concluding the 30 Years War*. The common trait of the association's members is their undisputable revolutionary credentials, which make them unassailable up to today.

North-South Cleavage

The formation of the Association of Resistance Fighters is but the expression of a deep-rooted resentment in southern Vietnam against northern domination. With "reunification" in 1976, Hanoi imposed a policy of "northmalization" on the south. Hundreds of thousands of northern cadres literally invaded the south. They behaved, in fact, like conquerors, occupying public buildings, factories and private houses. Hanoi also peremptorily dissolved the so-called "Provisional Revolutionary Government" (PRG) of south Vietnam and allowed the NLF army to wither away, much to the chagrin of the veterans. In the euphoria of victory, the Hanoi leadership lost sight of reality and was instead trapped by the arrogance of power. It hastily formulated the Second Five Year Plan (1976-1980) and applied to the south the Stalinist patterns of collectivization experienced in north Vietnam since 1954. The disastrous results of the plan are only too well known. They have transformed the country into one of the most backward in the world, and this has added to the growing disillusionment of the veterans. Frustrated and bitter over their being marginalized in the process of "northmalization", the association has now begun openly criticizing the regime for its ill-conceived policies. Their criticism has also extended to the disastrous choices of the party leadership in foreign policy and strategic questions, particularly with regard to the Soviet Union and China and on the Cambodian issue and the lack of freedom and basic civil rights.

The Expectations Generated by Linh's Rise

When Nguyen Van Linh returned to the Politburo in July 1985, the Vietcong veterans saw in the former secretary of the COSVN and secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee an eventual defender of "southern sensitivities and interests". Linh was identified with the economic reforms experienced in Ho Chi Minh City, which have made the southern capital a kind of regional political and economic counterweight to northern dominance. The veterans were, in fact, the most active group in the agitation for a coalition of southern constituencies, which contributed to bring Linh to power at the Sixth Party Congress in

December 1986. Linh's appointment as party secretary-general, his launching of the *doi moi* (renovation) program at the Sixth Party Congress and the promotion of a group of revolutionaries from the south, such as Pham Hung and Vo Van Kiet, to the top rungs of the leadership were mistakenly perceived by the southerners as signs that the south had triumphed. They believed a liberalization program such as that which has led to the economic dynamism of Ho Chi Minh City and the southern provinces was about to be implemented. Thus the motto in ancient Saigon soon after the Sixth Party Congress was: "The north has led the national liberation struggle. It is time for the south to take over in the new struggle for development".

The southerners, however, did not anticipate the extent of resistance to the reform effort by the northern *apparatchik* and conservative elements, whose positions were well entrenched within the party hierarchy and the governmental agencies. Although the introduction of the renovation policy has seen some opening up of Vietnam's economy the reformists have been seriously stymied in their renovation drive by the inertia of the bureaucracy. Indeed, barely two years after the Sixth Party Congress, the renovation drive appeared to have been captured by the group of Le Duc Tho-led *apparatchik* and the pro-Do Muoi neo-conservatives. Both these men, Le Duc Tho and Do Muoi, who represent the interests of the northerners, have their own pace for renovation. At the Central Committee's Fifth Plenum in June 1988, these *apparatchik* and neo-conservatives managed to have their efforts to slow down the renovation drive sanctioned. Reliable sources in Ho Chi Minh City say that Linh's failure to support southern reformist Vo Van Kiet in his bid for the premiership at the plenum and the selection, instead, of Do Muoi, a well-known conservative figure who was responsible for the forced socialization of commerce in the south in the 1970s, was perceived by the southerners as a sort of betrayal by Linh, who now appeared to lean towards the conservative elements within the Politburo.

It was after this shift towards a more conservative approach to the renovation process that the southern revolutionaries, already in a state of moral secession from the party hierarchy, decided to break away and establish a dissident movement. Indeed, the association's leadership had publicly thrown its support behind Kiet before the National Assembly convened in June 1988 to select the prime minister. Although representatives of the 14 southern provinces cast their votes (36 percent) in favor of the former mayor of Ho Chi Minh City, Kiet lost out to Do Muoi. The "indecisiveness" displayed by Linh in this selec-

tion process heightened the veterans' disillusionment with him.

Exploiting the Land Issue

The next step in the association's action program was the mobilization of southern public opinion around the land issue in order to put additional pressure upon the party leadership and the conservative wing of the party. Throughout the summer of 1988 a wave of peasant demonstrations took place in Ho Chi Minh City and most of the southern provinces, with the encouragement of the liberal elements within the party's southern apparatus. The land issue had become the new battle horse of the southerners in their call for economic liberalization. The peasant demonstrations forced the Politburo and the Central Committee Secretariat to adopt a series of urgent directives for the decollectivization of agriculture.

This was a major success for the association. Even more striking, the media in the south, supposedly under the control of the *apparatchiki*, bypassed directives to refrain from reporting these demonstrations and decided to blow up the whole issue, thus encouraging more people, particularly the intellectuals and petty traders, to join the protest movement. The issue snowballed to such a point that in December Linh had to convene a crisis session of the Secretariat, with the participation of the party secretaries of the southern provinces, in order to "do everything possible to resolve as soon as possible the land issue and to stabilize the situation in the southern provinces".

Another Long, Arduous March

The land issue has enabled the association to extend its membership network. In Ho Chi Minh City alone, it now claims to have gathered a total membership of more than 10,000, belonging to some 20 city-wide occupational and professional groups. Its branches function as innocuous veterans clubs which hold regular gatherings between journalists, writers, workers and even military men.

The association has openly criticized the leadership by circulating a series of petitions which explicitly call for the resignation of several high-ranking officials to take responsibility for the food shortage. In August, the association also began publishing a fortnightly paper, *Truyen Thong Khang Chien* (Tradition of Resistance). The first two issues contained stern attacks against the party and the government

for the mismanagement of the economy for the past 10 years. Although the third issue was forbidden by the Hanoi authorities, some 200,000 copies have been secretly printed and circulated, much like the *samizdat* in the Soviet Union, reflecting the considerable interest in and the broad support for the dissident movement.

Is the association likely to become a de facto pressure group or even an opposition movement? At the recent Sixth Plenum in March 1989, Linh warned: "Any scheme to play down or neutralize the party leadership or create political counter forces to the

party in the society must be prevented. We will not accept pluralism". The VCP boss was probably referring to his former but disillusioned supporters. The stage is thus set for a new pattern of internal conflict in Vietnam, which promises to be another long, arduous march for the Association of Resistance Fighters.

* Le Thien Tung is an associate fellow of the Information & Resource Center.

Linh's Economic Reforms: Limits Imposed at Sixth Plenum

Lewis M Stern*

The Sixth Plenum of the VCP Central Committee was held from March 20 to 29, 1989. The customary end-of-year plenum that would have been held immediately before the December 1988 National Assembly meeting was postponed to afford the National Assembly a limelight underscoring its independence and influence.

Nguyen Van Linh's March 29 closing address depicted a plenum marked by "frank and open discussion" that had focused on evaluating progress in the economic field and the process of "social democratization", and ended by claiming modest successes for the reform program. Under the regimen of economic and social reforms, he claimed, a wider range and greater quantities of consumer goods and foodstuffs had been made available, the grain supply had become less strained, the rate of price increases had slowed, and the people's confidence in the system — or in its basic ability to provide minimal economic security — had been "initially restored". In his words:

The policies on renovating the economic structure along the line of concentrating on the three economic programs, on developing the potentials of the various economic components, on renovating the mechanism of economic management, on reorientating foreign, national defense and security policies, on democratizing social life, and so forth have been more clearly reflected in life and brought about initial results. We cherish the fruits of labor created by untold energy and the stalwart struggle spirit of our cadre, party members and the people. Like a person who can now begin to get up, though unsteadily, after a long, serious illness, this is a welcome and encouraging sign.

However, the "high level of unanimity" was limited to a broad agreement on the shape of the enduring problems, and a basic consensus on the instruments required to address those problems. There remained serious disagreements within the Central Committee over the thrusts of programs central to the reforms and over approaches to particular issues. Linh crystallized several of the disagreements in his closing address, focusing on the differences of opinion over the expansion of foreign trade, the role of market mechanisms, and the central importance of the mixed economic forms to the program of renovation, the character of government control over the economy and the role of the party.

Foreign Trade

Linh identified two opposite "tendencies" within the party on the subject of the strategic decision to expand foreign economic relations, the first being reluctance to expand relations and excessive caution once the doors are opened, and the second being the excessive emphasis on the positive, redeeming aspects of an open trade and investment environment that rejects "preventive measures" against "unfavorable possibilities". He advocated continued initiatives to expand foreign economic relations, based on "unanimous" Central Committee agreement on the "regulations and orientations for expanding foreign economic relations". He urged the party to take initiatives to cope with the dislocations and problems caused by this decision by applying reasoned, planned but dynamic means of implementing the

strategy. Linh spoke of the need to revamp the State Committee for Investment and to train a substantial cadre to do business with foreign countries as two indispensable steps, suggesting that ministerial and personnel weaknesses continued to threaten the efforts to upgrade Vietnam's "active participation in the process of the international division of labor". The Central Committee's plenary communique, however, was somewhat more terse and less prescriptive in formulating a position on the foreign trade issue, indicating that Linh may have represented a more optimistic, forward-leaning position than the Central Committee was prepared to take. While Linh reported "unanimous agreement" on the need to "actively participate in the process of the international division of labor — particularly with the Soviet Union, Laos, Cambodia and other socialist countries as well as India while developing our foreign economic relations with all other countries", the communique did not acknowledge this formula as an article of faith. The communique noted that the regime had indeed "shifted" guidelines for a foreign relations strategy, and that this had "gradually opened up new possibilities and advantages to develop our relations of cooperation with our neighboring countries and with other countries in the world", but was much less programmatic about actively pursuing this end. It called for a more modest, incremental change that acknowledged the trend towards expanded economic relations, without the enthusiasm showed by Linh for participation in an altered division of national economic labors. The communique committed the party to "gradually work out a socioeconomic strategy to determine guidelines for the arrangement of the economic structure and investment structure in the 1991-1995 Five-Year Plan and the expansion of economic relations with foreign countries". Moreover, it contained a terse reminder of Vietnam's obligations to the socialist community of nations as the context in which the expansion of foreign trade should be considered:

It is necessary to combine patriotism and proletarian internationalism and socialist internationalism, and to combine the strength of the nation with the strength of our time under the new conditions.

The Strategy of the Mixed Economy

According to the secretary-general, a significant number within the party continued to abhor the market, and consequently had failed to understand the necessity of the limited ventures into market ex-

perimentation that characterized the Soviet reforms. Linh represented the view urging the expanded reliance on market mechanisms and closer examination of the application of market structures to select sectors, especially the export program.

Linh seemed to suggest the continued existence of a strong lobby within the party for extremely limited, closely controlled utilization of the private and household economies in the reform of the Vietnamese economy, in spite of what he identified as the "high level of identical views" on the "necessity and long-term strategic significance" of "economic democracy". He defended the introduction of mixed forms and unbridled private business, arguing that the contours of the socialist economy had been irrevocably altered by the introduction of the mixed economic forms, and that the non-socialist elements in the economy would continue to function uninterrupted, for the foreseeable future.

Linh confronted those within the party who argued for a statute of limitations on the functioning of those capitalist forms on the assumption that they represented a quick means of fixing the state-controlled economy, and should be corralled and expunged as soon as the situation had stabilized. The secretary-general argued that the new rules would remain the governing guidelines for economic behavior until they made a difference. In his words:

Marx observed an economic form does not disappear when it still has its production force and when there is no higher and effective form to substitute it. At present and for a long time to come the state economy and cooperatives will still be unable to satisfy the people's multifarious demands. The length of time [that the state and cooperative economy will have to coexist with the mixed and the individual economy] cannot be determined by a specific number of months and years. It can be settled only by the level of economic development and by the vigorous growth of the socialist economy to the point of meeting nearly all demands for goods of society.

Linh strongly defended the party's decision to "recognize the existence and development of the private economic component". He castigated the persisting prejudices against that economic form, the failure to accurately evaluate the contribution of the private component, and the instinctive attempt to limit the development of the constituent parts of a mixed economy. He also identified another tendency within the party that reflexively defended the novel introduction of private economic forms, and failed to understand the deleterious effects of a spontaneous, uncontrolled development of the new components in

the absence of organized and close management control. Linh thus represented the view that encouraged the guidance of the private and household economy towards investment in production and services, underwrote limits to the participation of those forms in trade and food-catering businesses, endorsed continued state control and the right of the central government to conduct inventories of the goods and assets of these businesses, and generally supported the notion that these private components of the economy could be nudged in a gradual manner to accept socialist rules for economic activity.

Socialist Transformation

Linh argued for a judicious use of law and leverage in government attempts to contour the economy, and against forceful and disruptive exertion of state prerogatives. He sought to blunt the potentially costly use of intrusive enterprise registration policies, of state mandated limits on products authorized for sale by private businesses, and rules governing the ways in which goods produced in excess of the level defined in the state plan could be used by producers. Instead, Linh favored a more orderly means of guaranteeing compliance with price management policies, assessment of profit and collection of taxes, and protection of the role and prerogatives of the state in controlling the market in an increasingly decentralized system. In his words:

It is mainly through the process of using management, regulation, inventory and control by the socialist state that we orient the capitalist economy toward different low and high forms of state capitalism.

Linh took an unequivocal position against the excessive use of state intervention that had been directed against the southern economy in the 1978-1979 Socialist Transformation of Private Industry and Commerce:

There is no need to use the sabre-rattling word, transformation, that scares people because its former impression still remains heavy. The former simplistic and rude transformation procedures have disabled the production force of private individual and capitalist economies that are always essential to our society.

However, the plenum communique enshrined the term "socialist transformation" as an expression of continuing commitment to the "socialist road", an indication that supporters for the more cautious, incremental implementation of reforms were able to impose caveats on the unrestrained use of capitalist

economic mechanisms. According to the communique, the reformist agenda — including the adjustment of the economic structure through the use of investment capital and renovated mechanisms of investment and the implementation of the policy on multi-component economic structures — bought into focus issues of "long-term strategic significance relating to the rules governing the road to socialism from small production". That path towards socialism consisted of both an effort to "democratize" the economy by guaranteeing citizens the freedom to make a living in accordance with the law, and a simultaneous attempt to effectively carry out "socialist transformation" according to the policies declared by the Sixth VCP Congress.

However, Linh was not prepared to argue for uncontrolled reorganization of the economy. Though he gave strong emphasis to the view that administrative orders cannot replace market relations, Linh favored the planned management of the commodity economy. In his words, the regime's policy was to make "full use" of the commodity-money relationship and market relations "as objective existing relations to link through market activities producers with consumers and to spur competition to make production more dynamic and effective". However, "full use" of market relations to propel the socialist reform involved a dimension of planning and authoritative regulation of the market mechanism. Linh, for example, maintained that the state must influence the money-commodity balance. In his words:

We must continue to promote market developments so as to allow for equal and legal participation by all economic components. Nevertheless, control and guidance should not be relaxed. It should also be pointed out that the market does not negate planning, for the major factors of market — purchasing power, stocks of commodities — should and can be planned to a certain extent.

While the communique reflected Linh's acknowledgment that controlling inflation is the most pressing task and reiterated the commitment to renovating the mechanism of economic management, it also reflected the Central Committee's diminished desire to use the market and other economic levers to modify the socialist structure. Instead, the communique emphasized the extent to which structural, tactical and policy change did not spell departure from the overall ideological ends of the Vietnamese revolution. Renovation, according to the communique, does not mean changing the goal of socialism. Instead, it means "ensuring the effective realization of that goal through the adoption of correct concepts of

FOR THE RECORD

While actively expanding foreign economic relations, we must uphold our vigilance against negative influences. Once our door is open, not only will the pure and healthy air pour in but dust, flies and mosquitoes will also follow.

— Nguyen Van Linh in his speech at the closing session of the VCP's Sixth Plenum on March 29, 1989.

socialism and suitable forms, steps and measures". According to the communique:

Marxism-Leninism always serves as the ideological foundation of our party and guides the entire revolutionary undertaking of our people. Renovation in thinking is designed to overcome erroneous concepts and enrich correct concepts about our time and socialism for creative application and development, rather than to break away from the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Renovating the organization and operational mode of the political system is meant to strengthen the party's role of leadership and the state's managerial efficacy and to develop the people's right to master — that is, to enhance the strength and efficiency of the dictatorship of the proletariat and make the organizations of the political system operate in a more dynamic and effective manner.

To Linh, the situation that had obtained in the economy required new thinking, new definitions and flexibility, which did not signal abandonment of overarching goals but rather demanded a practical

recognition of constraints and necessity. In his closing speech he stated that:

Comprehensive socioeconomic renovation inevitably entails renovation in the organization and operational mode of the political system along the line of continuing to broaden socialist democracy. This is an area in which we do not have much experience, but we must act with determination, caution, and careful preparation so as to preclude otherwise unavoidable adverse consequences.

Linh, in short, placed more emphasis on solving problems and making socialism work better than on hatching enduring rules and axioms to describe the reforms and their role in the overall enterprise of the Vietnamese revolution.

In conclusion, it can be said that Linh's maneuverability was further constrained by the Sixth Plenary session, which more stringently defined the operating assumptions of the increasingly cautious, incremental Central Committee, without foreclosing on the reformist goals. He was reminded that his formula for remaking the economy and the party-state structure of power was limited by the reluctance of at least a plurality of party decision-makers to accept major departures from the political, ideological and organizational core of the revolution.

* Lewis Stern is Assistant for Indochina in the office of the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and do not reflect the policy or position of the US Department of Defense or the US government.

Linh and Doi Moi: Prisoners of the Neo-Conservatives?

Thai Quang Trung*

Two years after the Sixth Party Congress, the neo-conservatives of Do Muoi's mold and the Le Duc Tho-led *apparatchik* appear to have now captured the VCP leadership. Nguyen Van Linh and other reformist figures still occupy prominent posts in the government and party but they are captive to the neo-conservatives and the *apparatchik*, who appear to be dictating the direction and pace of the *doi moi* (renovation) and *coi mo* (openness) program. The continued presence of the reformists is probably intended to give credibility to the powerful coalition that the neo-conservatives and the *apparatchiks* as well

as the military establishment have forged among themselves. This assessment is strengthened by developments at the landmark Sixth Plenum of the VCP Central Committee, held in March 1989, which suggest a slowing down in the renovation and democratization process in the country.

The Sixth Plenum was the most important gathering of the VCP since the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986. Originally, Linh had wanted to convene an extraordinary conference, similar to the Moscow party conference convened by Mikhail Gorbachev in June 1988, in order to give new impetus

to Hanoi's renovation drive. But the lack of consensus within the Politburo on the direction and pace of economic and political change and probably Linh's failing health prevented him from doing so.

A Step Backward

Prior to the Plenum, an official had announced that the meeting would "propose new initiatives to accelerate the reform policies because the situation is pressing". His statement, which was carried by the *Agence France Presse* newsagency, also maintained that there was "no opposition between conservatives and liberals on the objectives as defined by the Sixth Party Congress, only differences on the speed with which the reforms should be implemented". Contrary to this announcement, however, the Plenum failed to adopt any concrete measures to tackle the economic situation. Reliable sources from Ho Chi Minh City and close to the prime minister's office reveal that the guidelines adopted at the Plenum were defined during the Politburo's meetings in December and January. At those meetings, the Politburo had agreed that the aim of the renovation drive was to enable socialism to work better; abhorred what it called "negative phenomena" that had emerged in the renovation and democratization process and called for continued vigilance against them; and lamented that renovation had brought about adverse effects upon society, particularly a loss of confidence in the party's leadership and the socialist regime. The communique issued at the end of the Plenum stressed that "the reforms were designed not to change the goal of socialism, but to achieve it more quickly".

As for reform of the political system, sources from Ho Chi Minh City say that several Central Committee members from the south, voicing mounting pressures from the population and inspired by recent developments in the Soviet Union, the Baltic states, Poland and Hungary, had suggested adopting the "Hungarian pattern for the deepening of socialist democracy". The communique, however, ruled out the prospect of a multi-party system emerging in Vietnam. It maintained that reform was meant "to strengthen the party's role of leadership ...". Referring to the party's pledge to "broaden democracy", it declared: "This is socialist democracy, not bourgeois democracy. Democracy must go together with centralism, discipline, the sense of responsibility as citizens, and respect for the law".

All told, the Plenum reflected the fact that the reformists have had to concede to the neo-conserva-

tives and the *apparatchik* on the pace of economic and political change. A major reason for this forced *modus vivendi* is the damage inflicted on the party's leadership role by the campaign for renovation and openness. The recent riots over the land issue in the south as well as the growing candor of the media in their criticism of the party leadership and the bureaucracy must have made it evident to all, including Linh himself, that if the leadership of the party is not reestablished, the party would lose its control of the economic and social situation. Linh himself warned in his Plenum speech that "All attempts aimed at weakening or nullifying the party's leadership and creating political counterweights to the party in society must definitely be checked. ... We do not allow those who take advantage of democracy and openness to attack the party and its leadership". And, whatever small measure of political and economic liberalization the Hanoi leadership had previously considered would have now been checked by the lessons learnt from the rebellion in China.

Recent Personnel Changes

The official who had made announcements prior to the Plenum also suggested that the "Politburo could also be expanded to include several members who favor speeding up economic reforms". This would have been a move that would have strengthened Linh's hand. But, contrary to expectation, no major changes were made at the Plenum. And, changes made prior to the Plenum, in fact, strengthen the assessment that the star of the neo-conservatives and the *apparatchiks* is on the rise.

One such personnel change that buttresses the position of the neo-conservatives and the *apparatchiks* was the appointment in November 1988 of Politburo member Nguyen Thanh Binh as a standing member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee. Binh is a long-time protege of Le Duc Tho and his entry into the Secretariat is likely to consolidate the position of the *apparatchiks* within this central organ, which supervises the day-to-day work of the party.

In another significant recent change, Phan Van Khai, the former chairman of Ho Chi Minh City's people's council, was appointed to the post of chairman of the State Planning Commission on March 2. While this may be considered a qualified plus for the reformists, it appears more as a move by the neo-conservatives and the *apparatchiks* to present a semblance of progressiveness while holding the reformists responsible for any failures that the reform effort may encounter. Khai's brief, in fact, is to "streamline state

control over the economy". Khai is a graduate from the CPSU party school and the Plekhanov Institute, where he read state planning studies. Although he is considered a close associate of Vo Van Kiet, he is far from a genuine "liberal".

Meanwhile, the Le Duc Tho group has started mobilizing support for Tran Xuan Bach, a permanent secretary, third in line to the top, to eventually succeed Linh, should the latter become incapacitated. A former head of the "B68 Bureau", which runs Cambodian affairs, Bach is currently in charge of the Secretariat's ideological questions cum current affairs section. He is known to be a conservative in the mold of Yegor Ligachev of the Soviet Union.

Thach's Increasing Assertiveness

One of the most interesting recent developments within the VCP leadership is the new role that Nguyen Co Thach has been carving out for himself. Since the Fifth Plenum, when he was nominated for the post of prime minister, alongside Do Muoi and Vo Van Kiet, the foreign minister and deputy prime minister has been playing a more assertive role publicly. Indeed, he has been behaving increasingly like a contending candidate for the premiership after Do Muoi. According to Linh's economic adviser Nguyen Xuan Oanh, Thach has mobilized a growing circle of advisers, who regularly provide him with dossiers not only on foreign affairs but also on economic affairs. And Thach knows well that with the impending withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia his stature will increase.

In a New Year's Day interview, which appeared prominently in the party daily *Nhan Dan*, Thach outlined his vision of the world and current international

trends which reflected a noticeable departure from the old guard's manichean view of the world. Referring to the waning of the Cold War, he said that "the struggle over the past four decades, which took place mainly on the political and military fields, is becoming mainly an economic struggle". "The process of restructuring and renewal, which is being carried out in large numbers of countries in the world, especially in many socialist countries", he added "is aimed at reforming political institutions and the economy in line with the technological revolution and the trend of internationalizing the world economy".

Elaborating, Thach warned that "the ever-widening economic gap is becoming a threat to the security and national defense of each country". He also observed that "all countries tend to vigorously reduce the burden of national defense expenses in order to concentrate all forces on this historical economic race on a global scale". Obviously with Cambodia and Afghanistan in mind, Thach philosophized that "military adventures, especially military mires abroad, will pose a monumental danger to any country in the global economic and technological race". In this environment of renewed international relations, he remarked, "a closed-door policy is suicide and opening doors is one of the necessary conditions for economic development". He added that "military and political alliances are no longer barriers to economic relations in the world", thus suggesting that Vietnam, while maintaining its alliance with the Soviet bloc, must expand its economic relations with the West. He also proposed to "associate the Vietnamese economy with the world economy and to strive for an optimal position in the international division of labor". And to participate in the international division of labor means "to accept competition and the laws of free exchange in the world", and this requires "a complete renovation" of the Vietnamese economy, he declared in conclusion.

Thach's new focus on the economy and his more comprehensive definition of security, with emphasis on economic development and an open-door policy, is consistent with Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign policy. In fact, Thach's vision is reminiscent of the Vladivostok spirit. But is Thach's worldview shared by the rest of the VCP leadership? Does his interview imply that a comprehensive readjustment of Vietnam's foreign policy is in the offing?

Much will depend on Thach's fortunes, which will in turn hinge on his ability to win the goodwill of the neo-conservatives, the *apparatchiks* and the military establishment. Thach is obviously aware of this, which is why up to now he has been receptive to the warnings of the hardliners regarding the Cam-

TIN DAC BIET!

On March 3, Vo Dong Giang, a deputy foreign minister and a close aide of Nguyen Co Thach, and Dau Ngoc Xuan, the former chairman of the State Planning Commission, were both appointed vice-chairmen of a newly-created "State Commission for Cooperation and Investment". According to a very reliable inside source, Thach appears to be the behind-the-scenes boss of this commission. But there is said to be intense competition between, on the one hand, Thach's clientele — who would include the more than 40 relatives for whom he has managed to secure positions in the government over the past few years — and the *apparatchik*, on the other hand, for control of this new commission as it is considered to be a source of enormous income.

bodian issue. Indeed, his New Year interview contained no self-criticism with respect to the Cambodian adventure, unlike Gorbachev's admission that Afghanistan was "a bleeding wound". Neither the Sixth Plenum communique nor Linh's speech contained a comprehensive review of foreign policy or a new world outlook. Instead, the communique recited past formulaic expressions such as "proletarian internationalism" and "socialist internationalism", leading to the conclusion that while the neo-conservatives

and the *apparatchik* will allow Thach to say his piece for international consumption, their international behavior will still be guided by past prejudices against the capitalist west.

* Thai Quang Trung is research director at the Information & Resource Center and coordinator of its Indochina research project. He is author of, among other publications, *Collective Leadership and Factionalism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985).

Do Muoi at the Helm: From Perestroika to Perishtroika

Ton That Thien*

Since Do Muoi took over from Vo Van Kiet as premier in June last year nothing has changed in that unhappy land. If anything, not only has the situation worsened, but the rotting process has, in addition to affecting the economy, spread to its social, political and military fabric as well.

In Vietnamese *do muoi* means also "pouring in ten"[liters]. Thus when Do Muoi's election was announced a pun immediately made the rounds in Vietnam. It went thus: "Pouring in 10, 100, or even 10,000 [liters of gasoline] will be of no use [for the machine won't run]". And so, once more, Vietnamese popular wisdom has been proven right. Neither Do Muoi, nor anyone in the VCP can do anything to stop the rotting process in spite of the brave words uttered about *coi mo* (*glasnost*) and *doi moi* (*perestroika*) at the Sixth National Congress of the party in December 1986.

Admission of Failure

The utter failure of Hanoi's economic policies was admitted publicly during the meeting of the National Assembly last December. At this meeting Kiet presented a report candidly admitting that everything had gone wrong and that no progress had been made at all since the Sixth National Congress. Some major points in Kiet's report were:

- food production is insufficient and "could not meet the minimum needs" of the population;
- management of state enterprises has been sloppy and erratic, leading to the appearance of "absurd phenomena" and heavy losses;
- the circulation of goods has broken down completely because of the total disorganization of the system;

- a heavy external deficit has been incurred because of the accelerated depreciation of the currency, and the government has lost control over the foreign exchange market;
- there has been an upsurge of "negative social phenomena", namely corruption, extortion, theft and smuggling; blackmarketeering and tax evasion have become pervasive "from north to south";
- inflation has become very serious and uncontrollable;
- an anarchic administration and erratic and arbitrary management have produced "an increasingly chaotic economic and social situation".

During the 10-day debate, some rather candid statements were made, thanks to *glasnost*. One was by Tony Oanh (Jack Owen to Americans). Oanh is the Harvard-trained Nguyen Xuan Oanh, a vice-premier in the "illegitimate" regime of pre-1975, who has been pulled out from an obscure backroom research office and made economic and financial adviser to the socialist government in the hope that his advice can help the government produce a miraculous turnaround of the economy, especially by encouraging foreign investors to flood Vietnam with dollars. Now also a deputy to the National Assembly, Oanh said bluntly, "We have been talking about *doi moi*, but there has been nothing new at all. If I were a foreign investor, how would I dare invest money in the present inflationary situation of the country?"

A more candid statement was made by Do Muoi. He said: "I feel completely at a loss what to do. ... Only the comrades in the National Assembly can solve the problems. The Council of Ministers is completely impotent. And the party can only define the line to be followed. The rest is up to the National As-

sembly". He added that the government had no other solution than printing more money to defray its expenses. Repeatedly using the terms "regression" and "the critical point has been reached", he lamented that although the 1986-1990 Five-Year Plan was to end in two years' time very little had been achieved so far.

So, two years after the proclamation of *coi moi* and *doi moi* and of the determination of the party and the government to reverse the "negative" trends, practically nothing has been accomplished. As Do Muoi confessed in the same debate, the leadership has been "groping in the dark".

The tragic situation has been best summed up by Tran Van Giau, a party veteran. Now in his seventies, Giau was one of the first graduates of the University for the Toilers of the Orient in Moscow and one of the first Vietnamese communists to return to Vietnam to agitate openly in the 1920s (when Ho Chi Minh was still in Moscow). Said Giau in *Tuoi Tre* (Youth) of October 27, 1988: "How is it possible that we, revolutionaries, have created such a mandarinal, feudal, state? ... When we create a state and we allow it to become impoverished, it will squeeze its people; if one gives officials starvation salaries, they will naturally exploit the peasants. I am over seventy and never have I seen the peasants in such a state of poverty..."

An Impoverished State

A few statistics will make the picture clearer. *The Boston Globe's* H D S Greenway, who visited Vietnam in February, reported that the salary of a civil servant was equivalent to US\$8 per month, while that of a teacher no more than US\$4 per month, half of what they used to earn two years ago. Inflation was running at the rate of 700 per cent in 1988 (over 1000 per cent, according to the *Agence France Presse*), and only the new rich and the sons of "superior cadres" had enough to eat. The situation has not changed since then. Food production in 1987 was only 17.7 million tonnes, 1.5 million less than in 1986. The target for 1988 was 19.2 million, but it is unlikely that it was reached. Meanwhile, the population has continued to increase by over a million a year. It should be recalled in this connection that the Second Five-Year Plan (1976-1980) had set a target of 20 million tonnes and that in 1976 the population was 54 million, compared to 63 million at present.

Apart from the inclemencies of the weather and damages caused by insects, the main causes of low food production are the severe shortage of fertilizers, the refusal of the peasants to produce more than their

own needs as a form of passive resistance to high taxes (between 60 and 80 percent of crops), and unrest in the rural areas owing to disputes about land ownership (many peasants whose land was occupied by cadres from the north have resorted to violent protest, and this unrest has even spread to Ho Chi Minh City, where the peasants have gathered to demonstrate against the government).

Low production means low revenues for the government. The budget, therefore, could not be balanced. The deficit was serious: 27 percent in 1986, 24.3 percent in 1987, and 29.6 percent in 1988. The government, short of cash, could not pay its employees on time. Many received their salaries one month late. On some government rubber plantations, workers did not get paid for two or three months. The government had to dip into its reserves and foreign aid funds. To balance its budget it is now planning to abolish all subsidies. Fees would henceforth be imposed in schools and hospitals — a practice that one would expect rather from Mr Reagan or Mrs Thatcher than from a socialist government. Naturally enough, students have protested loudly, as these increases would add to their woes, employment prospects being poor.

Unemployment was high: 6 million (out of a total of 63 million) according to *Nhan Dan*. Two among the major reasons for this situation are: (a) factories were working only at half capacity because of a shortage of raw materials and poor transportation; and (b) piling up of goods unsold because of high prices resulting from artificially high exchange rates and the excessive high fees charged by foreign intermediaries (Vietnam currently having no personnel or experience in foreign trade) as well as shoddy quality.

Foreign investments have still not flowed in as expected in spite of the passing of a new investment law. The Hanoi leaders considered this law to be the most liberal in the world. To foreign investors, however, the regulations concerning the application of the law were too "vague", and administrative anarchy, erratic management, extensive and pervasive corruption, and, of course, runaway inflation, practically cancel out the favorable effects of the law.

In this connection, it should be mentioned that the exchange rate, which was 368 dong to the US dollar before November 10 last year, was devalued on that date to 2600 dong (with a blackmarket rate of 5000 dong), and again to 2800 dong on December 14 (black market rate: 4400 dong), and is expected to deteriorate further. This has obviously made investors wonder how much they would have to pay in dong per dollar when they seek to repatriate their profits. On the other hand, the professional merchant

class, which could have turned Vietnam into perhaps not a Singapore but at least a Thailand, has been ostracized or driven to seek refuge abroad. The government is now trying hard to induce them to come back, but without too much success so far. Even so, the royal treatment given to a few who did remain has already caused bitter comments from the party rank and file — those who believed that they had fought to make south Vietnam safe for socialism.

Thus, so far, Hanoi's expectation that foreigners will rush to invest has not materialized. A few foreign firms (mostly Thai, Singaporean, Japanese, Indonesian and Taiwanese) have signed up, but this was motivated by the desire to stand at the head of the queue rather than by the prospects of doing business and making profits in the near future. The main attraction was not the investment law, but the prospect of dirt cheap labor costs and freedom from victimization by the local authorities later for lack of enthusiasm now.

Lastly, there is uncertainty concerning the party's leadership, which has been practically deadlocked by the struggle between reformists and conservatives. The deadlock will have to be broken at the next party congress in two years' time, when Do Muoi will face the party with empty hands, or even sooner, if Nguyen Van Linh, whose health has been reported to be seriously failing, dies.

"Negative Social Phenomena"

The struggle between reformists and conservatives has been exacerbated by the deepening and the spread of "negative social phenomena". Visitors to Vietnam have been struck by the obvious return of the south to the old "decadent capitalist ways". As Greenway puts it, "the once sullen and defeated Saigon is showing its vulgar, hustling, entrepreneurial spirit once again". A class of *nouveau riche*, composed partly also of the cadres and officials of the new regime from the north who have used their positions to amass wealth by corrupt practices, is riding high among an increasingly impoverished population.

The rotting process is not only becoming more visible in the south, but it has also spread to the once puritan north, and there is no stopping it. Against the glitter of gold, the party has no effective defense. As a refugee who recently left Vietnam told this writer, "the most effective weapon against the communists is neither politics nor war, but gold; nothing can beat the golden weapon!" (He knew what he was talking about. He had bought his way out of jail and out of

the country. He had also bought himself the right to take out whatever he wanted from the fortune he had amassed in real estate and trade in antiques. And while he was in the country he could go wherever he wanted and do practically whatever he wanted.) It is thus not surprising that veteran revolutionaries from the north are wondering out aloud who has really won the war.

Dissatisfaction with the regime has spread to its very foundations — the troops and the cadres. The troops have perhaps got the worst deal in the rotten situation. Given the government deficit, their salaries absolutely cannot be increased significantly to allow them to cope with runaway inflation. But even their most basic need, daily supplies of rice, has not been regularly met. Cases of troops resorting to forcible seizure of rice-carrying trucks or of food from peasants have been reported. In fact, the high echelons of the army have sounded the alarm about restlessness and indiscipline in the ranks of the armed forces. And when the 300,000 or so troops are demobilised (apparently under Soviet insistence), these soldiers, who have been taught everything about killing, getting killed, hating and mouthing meaningless propaganda, but nothing about the skills required for surviving in a peaceful and normal world, will add to the ranks of the unemployed.

The fate of the honest officials and cadres is no better. Faced with runaway inflation, they have to choose between watching their families live in abject poverty, resign and try to make a precarious living, or join the crowd of new rich by indulging in corruption. They are under pressure to adopt the latter course: as honest guys frowning on illegal activities or hindering these activities, they put their security at risk. So the best solution seems to be joining the crowd, having comfortable lives and enjoying protection. Even veteran high cadres cannot escape from this situation. Thus corruption, theft of public property, extortion and other "negative social phenomena" have now spread so wide and so high that it is impossible to eliminate them. The whole system has become infected and habits may become so ingrained that one may wonder whether a spectacular improvement of the economic situation will change them.

The VCP leaders are becoming increasingly aware that they are caught in a dilemma. If they want the economy to improve, they must go forward with *glasnost* and *perestroika*. But this will favor the south, for it is clear that only the southerners have the entrepreneurial drive and expertise, together with the capital (brought out from concealment or obtained from relatives abroad) and the foreign connections necessary to start businesses, increase production and

generate employment. But these southerners — the vanquished enemies — have to be induced to put all those assets to work by more *glasnost* and *perestroika*. On the other hand, the more control is relaxed, the more the "negative social phenomena" will thrive, the more the distance between northerners and southerners will grow, the more the ranks of the party will be divided, and the more the foundations of communism will be shaken.

The conservatives have become so alarmed by this development that at the Sixth Plenum from March 20 to 29 they pulled the brake on the liberalization movement by making it clear, through the voice of Nguyen Van Linh, that "we advocate broadening democracy ... but we do not tolerate pluralism". And, the VCP Central Committee resolved that "Renovation does not mean changing the goal and ideal of socialism, but instead, it means ensuring the effective realization of that goal ...". It is meant "to enhance the party's role of leadership ... that is, to enhance the strength and efficiency of the

dictatorship of the proletariat and make the organizations of the political system operate in a more dynamic and effective manner".

However, with a Gorbachev firmly committed to *glasnost* and *perestroika*, it is impossible for the VCP leaders to shirk this course. It is clear though that Do Muoi has little chance of succeeding, and if he fails, Moscow will surely want to see in command in Hanoi someone who is a more conspicuously solid supporter of the Moscow line. For Do Muoi, it is a matter of being damned if you do, and damned if you don't. For him *perestroika* has indeed become *perishtroika*.

* Ton That Thien, professor at the Universite du Quebec, Trois Rivieres, Canada, is a visiting fellow at the Information & Resource Center. He specializes in the study of Vietnamese communism. He has just completed a book entitled, *The Foreign Politics of the Communist Party of Vietnam*, which will be published soon by Taylor & Francis, New York, USA.

Soaring Population Growth: Hanoi's Family Planning Efforts

Lam Thanh Liem*

Since its reunification in 1976, Vietnam has been experiencing rapid population growth. Its population has soared from 53.7 million in 1980 to 64 million today, and will probably reach 67.5-68 million in 1990. The annual rate of population growth, according to the United Nations, is about 2.7 percent — among the highest, if not the highest, in Southeast Asia. It is also higher than the official projection of 2.2 percent for the 1981-1985 Third Five-Year Plan. This rate of growth has become an alarming issue for the Vietnamese authorities, who face some 1.6 million additional mouths to feed every year.

New Measures for Birth Control

As the population growth continued to escalate and defy the projections for the Third Five-Year Plan and as the worsening economic crisis in 1985 saw the numbers of unemployed rise, Hanoi's leaders were forced to adopt a series of drastic measures:

(a) A New Law on Marriage and Family

In its December 1986 session, the National As-

sembly adopted a new law on marriage and family. This new law holds that the monogamic home constitutes the base of Vietnamese society. Persons caught committing bigamy will face 6-12 months of imprisonment. The law also stipulates a maximum of two children for each family.

(b) A New Family Planning Policy

The authorities also defined a new family planning policy, which has been publicized and explained to the population through so-called "education sessions". Methods of contraception are also taught at these sessions. The new policy tries to encourage birth control by giving various incentives to married men and women who undergo sterilization. The allowances that were given to people who sterilized themselves have been raised from 500 dong to 1,500-2,000 dong. Benefits such as free medical expenses and two weeks of paid convalescence leave are also extended to them. In addition, people who undergo sterilization would be exempted from compulsory "socialist work" for one year. Workers who pledge not to have children for three years will get an annual bonus of 5,000 dong, while those who respect their

generate employment. But these southerners — the vanquished enemies — have to be induced to put all those assets to work by more *glasnost* and *perestroika*. On the other hand, the more control is relaxed, the more the "negative social phenomena" will thrive, the more the distance between northerners and southerners will grow, the more the ranks of the party will be divided, and the more the foundations of communism will be shaken.

The conservatives have become so alarmed by this development that at the Sixth Plenum from March 20 to 29 they pulled the brake on the liberalization movement by making it clear, through the voice of Nguyen Van Linh, that "we advocate broadening democracy ... but we do not tolerate pluralism". And, the VCP Central Committee resolved that "Renovation does not mean changing the goal and ideal of socialism, but instead, it means ensuring the effective realization of that goal ...". It is meant "to enhance the party's role of leadership ... that is, to enhance the strength and efficiency of the

dictatorship of the proletariat and make the organizations of the political system operate in a more dynamic and effective manner".

However, with a Gorbachev firmly committed to *glasnost* and *perestroika*, it is impossible for the VCP leaders to shirk this course. It is clear though that Do Muoi has little chance of succeeding, and if he fails, Moscow will surely want to see in command in Hanoi someone who is a more conspicuously solid supporter of the Moscow line. For Do Muoi, it is a matter of being damned if you do, and damned if you don't. For him *perestroika* has indeed become *perishtroika*.

* Ton That Thien, professor at the Universite du Quebec, Trois Rivieres, Canada, is a visiting fellow at the Information & Resource Center. He specializes in the study of Vietnamese communism. He has just completed a book entitled, *The Foreign Politics of the Communist Party of Vietnam*, which will be published soon by Taylor & Francis, New York, USA.

Soaring Population Growth: Hanoi's Family Planning Efforts

Lam Thanh Liem*

Since its reunification in 1976, Vietnam has been experiencing rapid population growth. Its population has soared from 53.7 million in 1980 to 64 million today, and will probably reach 67.5-68 million in 1990. The annual rate of population growth, according to the United Nations, is about 2.7 percent — among the highest, if not the highest, in Southeast Asia. It is also higher than the official projection of 2.2 percent for the 1981-1985 Third Five-Year Plan. This rate of growth has become an alarming issue for the Vietnamese authorities, who face some 1.6 million additional mouths to feed every year.

New Measures for Birth Control

As the population growth continued to escalate and defy the projections for the Third Five-Year Plan and as the worsening economic crisis in 1985 saw the numbers of unemployed rise, Hanoi's leaders were forced to adopt a series of drastic measures:

(a) A New Law on Marriage and Family

In its December 1986 session, the National As-

sembly adopted a new law on marriage and family. This new law holds that the monogamic home constitutes the base of Vietnamese society. Persons caught committing bigamy will face 6-12 months of imprisonment. The law also stipulates a maximum of two children for each family.

(b) A New Family Planning Policy

The authorities also defined a new family planning policy, which has been publicized and explained to the population through so-called "education sessions". Methods of contraception are also taught at these sessions. The new policy tries to encourage birth control by giving various incentives to married men and women who undergo sterilization. The allowances that were given to people who sterilized themselves have been raised from 500 dong to 1,500-2,000 dong. Benefits such as free medical expenses and two weeks of paid convalescence leave are also extended to them. In addition, people who undergo sterilization would be exempted from compulsory "socialist work" for one year. Workers who pledge not to have children for three years will get an annual bonus of 5,000 dong, while those who respect their

family planning contract will earn an extra-month's salary.

The policy also punishes those who do not observe family planning. The *can bo*, civil servants and workers are advised to avoid having babies in quick succession. They are told to observe an interval of five years between two conceptions. The head of the organization committee in their respective workshops would have to sanction their "family planning calendar" and penalties for failure to observe the "calendar" can range from suspension of family allowances and other year-end bonuses to dismissal from the enterprise. Repeat offences can, in some cases, be punished by a forced fitting of the intra-uterine device (IUD), while local authorities can refuse to issue birth certificates to babies that were conceived in defiance of officially-sanctioned "calendars". Psychological pressure can also be used against large families. Public denunciations during seminars are one such form of psychological pressure. Public enterprises can also reject work applications from workers with large families.

Through its network of mass organizations the government has also been advising young people to postpone marriage till a later age. The ideal age it has recommended is between 20 and 22 for women and between 22 and 25 for men.

Mixed Results

Hanoi's family planning has scored remarkable progress in Ho Chi Minh City: two out of three women are currently practicing contraception (against 45 percent in 1985). In the provinces, it has also produced noticeable impact, with one woman out of every three practicing birth control (against 25 percent in 1985). The mandatory sterilization of new mothers is perhaps the most efficient means of family planning. To be sure, the worsening of living standards in Vietnam has also forced people to limit the size of their families, while the family planning education program has contributed towards raising the people's awareness.

Nevertheless in the rural areas, the family planning policy has had a slower impact than in urban areas, with a high percentage of women refusing birth control. A recent study shows that only 3 out of 55 female respondents in the countryside (5.6 percent) were receptive to the idea of birth control.

There are, of course, many reasons for the policy lacking appeal in the countryside. The level of education of the peasantry is very low, and peasant women

still maintain well-ingrained prejudices and ancestral beliefs that a large family is blessed by heaven and that children, especially male children, are needed to perpetuate the family heritage (the family name and the family land or enterprise) as well as to perpetuate the practice of ancestor worship. In the countryside, a large family means also a bigger work force to cultivate the land. The peasantry is also profoundly religious, with most of them being Buddhist (90 percent). Their religion teaches them that contraception is a sin and abortion a crime.

On the whole, the application of the family planning policy has led to serious moral and social conflicts in Vietnam, where the confucianist tradition is still very well entrenched in spite of a decade of forced socialism. Vietnamese families cannot understand the morality of self-criticism sessions where couples with many children are publicly humiliated. The government has had to take these social sensitivities into account and soften the application of its family planning policy.

To be efficient, the family planning policy would require the setting up of a whole network of health services, with sufficient doctors, medicine and medical equipment. But, sadly, the government lacks these, even in the cities. The sanitary situation is worse in the countryside, where the peasant still lives in medieval conditions of hygiene and health. In 1983-1985, when the government launched its campaign for mandatory sterilization, there were serious cases of infections in various rural areas. News of this traumatized the peasants, causing them to reject the birth control program.

Since this failure in the countryside, the government has decided to concentrate its family planning efforts in urban areas, instead of pursuing it on both fronts. However, even though the birth control campaign has made enormous progress in the urban areas, the population growth has still not been curbed as some 80 percent of the population live in rural areas. This explains why the food situation continues to worsen. The food deficit has reached the alarming level of 8 million tons of paddy per year. The process of land decollectivization has still not produced the expected results. Meanwhile, the authorities continue to make unrealistic projections of a 2 percent growth rate for the year 2000.

* Lam Thanh Liem is a research fellow at the Laboratoire Analyse de l'Espace, CNRS, Paris, France.

Return to Dogma: The Sixth Plenum Communique

The communique issued at the end of the Sixth VCP Central Committee's landmark Sixth Plenum, held from March 20 to March 29, contains ominous suggestions of a slowing down in Hanoi's version of perestroika and glasnost. It upholds the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and defends centralism and the leadership of the communist party. And, while it recognizes the expediency of seeking foreign capital and technology, it continues to identify the country firmly with the socialist bloc. The following are excerpts from the communique.

We have readjusted our national defense strategy, accomplished our missions on various battlefields, reduced our military strength, rectified the regular army, and strengthened the disposition of people's war. There have been changes in the political security task in favor of the new situation.

We have strengthened solidarity and renovated cooperation in various respects and have increased our solidarity with the Soviet Union, Laos and Cambodia as well as with other fraternal socialist countries.

We are shifting our guidelines for our foreign relations strategy and this has gradually opened up new possibilities and advantages to develop our relations of cooperation with our neighboring countries and with other countries in the world ...

In the process of carrying out renovation, we must thoroughly understand the following basic principles:

Advancing socialism is the inevitable path for our country and this is a clear-sighted choice made by Uncle Ho and our party. Building a socialist Vietnam is the goal and ideal of our party and people. Renovation does not mean changing the goal of socialism, but instead, it means ensuring the effective realization of that goal through the adoption of correct concepts of socialism and suitable forms, steps and measures. Marxism-Leninism always serves as the ideological foundation of our party and guides the entire revolutionary undertaking of our people. Renovation in thinking is designed to overcome erroneous concepts and enrich correct concepts about our time and socialism for creative application and development, rather than to break away from the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Renovating the organization and operational mode of the political system is meant to strengthen the party's role of leadership and the state's managerial efficacy and to develop the people's right to mastery — that is, to enhance the strength and efficiency of the dictatorship of the proletariat and make the organizations of the political system operate in a more dynamic and effective manner. Party leadership is the factor deciding the success of our people's undertaking to build and defend the socialist fatherland. We must criticize the tendencies to negate or belittle party leadership, and at the same time we must attentively listen to and accept sincere views critical of shortcomings in party leadership and party building.

Broadening democracy in all fields of social life and developing the people's right to mastery is both the goal and the driving force of building socialism. This is socialist democracy, not bourgeois democracy. Democracy must go together with centralism, discipline, the sense of responsibility as citizens, and respect for the law. Democracy requires leadership, and leadership must be aimed at developing democracy in the right direction and through correct democratic methods. Democracy is applied to the people, but strict punishment must be meted out to those who undermine the gains of the revolution, security, and social order.

It is necessary to combine patriotism with proletarian internationalism and socialist internationalism, and to combine the strength of the nation with the strength of our time under the new conditions.

On the basis of the aforementioned principles and proceeding from the conclusions drawn from the review of realities in two years' implementation of the Congress resolution, it is necessary to continue accelerating the process of renovation in all domains in accordance with the following major viewpoints, guidelines, and policies:

- Adjust the economic structure by concentrating on achieving various targets of the three economic programs, by tapping all sources of investment capital, and by renovating the mechanism of investment.
- Vigorously step up the implementation of and continue replenishing the three economic programs of the country with emphasis on the targets set for grain, food, some essential consumer goods, and a number of major export goods.
- Gradually work out a socioeconomic strategy to determine guidelines for the arrangement of the economic structure and investment structure in the 1991-1995 Five-Year Plan and for the expansion of economic relations with foreign countries.
- Consistently implement the policy on multicomponent economic structure and unleash all production capabilities ...

It is necessary to bring into play the driving force of science and technology combined with the need to develop the commodity economy, to step up activities related to external economic relations and quickly increase the sources of foreign currency revenue, and to acquire capital and advanced technology from foreign countries in order to effectively develop the national economy ...

It is necessary to heighten vigilance, to consolidate national defense and security, and to ensure activity under all circumstances for the defense of the country and for maintenance of political security, social order, and safety.

Efforts must be made to step up activities related to foreign relations with the aim of firmly preserving peace. This must be done together with taking advantage of every opportunity and favorable condition to gradually stabilize and develop the economy and society, build socialism, and safeguard the country's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, thereby contributing to the common struggle for peace, national independence, democracy, and socialism ...

As the Vietnamese communist leadership engages in an unprecedented stern self-criticism, in the name of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, there is also an urgent need within the academic, media and diplomatic communities to reassess objectively the legacy of communism in Vietnam. *Vietnam Commentary* is conceived to open a broad debate on Vietnam and thereby provide new insights into the Vietnamese political system, its economy, society and other aspects.

Vietnam Commentary carries articles and comments written by highly qualified analysts who are well informed about developments in Vietnam. A wide range of opinions is accepted in its columns in order to stimulate a debate of quality and to ensure that truth is not monopolized by any totalitarian thinking. While designed primarily for the decision-maker, the area specialist, the journalist and the overseas Vietnamese, it is also hoped that the debate generated within the columns of *Vietnam Commentary* would eventually contribute to influencing the evolution of the situation in Vietnam.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please address all subscription enquiries to:

Europe
Asia Pacific
Information Centre
P O Box 270
1211 Geneva 21
Switzerland

Thailand
DD Books
32/9-10 Sukhumvit 21
Lane Asoke
Bangkok 10110
Thailand
Tel: 66-2-2585827
Fax: 66-2-2590038
Telex: 21172 TEA MD TH

Singapore &
the Rest of the World
Information &
Resource Center
Orchard Point P O Box 79
Singapore 9123
Tel: 65-7349600
Fax: 65-7336217
Telex: RS 20134 EIIR

Philippines
Asia Pacific Research
Institute, Inc.
P O Box 4423, Manila
Philippines 1099



Vietnam Commentary is owned and published on a bimonthly basis by Information & Resource Center, which also publishes *Indochina Report* and *Manila Report*. Editorial Office: Information and Resource Center Pte Ltd, 6 Nassim Road, Singapore 1025. Publisher/Editor: M Rajaretnam; Managing Editor: S Prema; Printed by: Hoong Fatt Press, Singapore. Reproduction of *Vietnam Commentary* or any part thereof without the publisher's permission is strictly forbidden. Quotation with attribution is encouraged. We welcome contributions in English, French, Vietnamese or Chinese dealing with current developments in Vietnam. The editors assume no responsibility for manuscripts or other materials submitted. Items submitted for consideration will be returned if requested.