

**Sober thoughts on April 30:  
The South Vietnam Liberation Front and Hanoi Myth and Reality**

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**For the meeting organized by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation  
Ottawa, April 29, 2000**

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

For 25 years now, every year, on April 30, the Vietnamese living in exile throughout the world have gathered together to remember a day which has been called differently by different people. Some call it “Day of National Humiliation”, others call it “Day of National Resentment”, or “Day of Loss of the Country”. For all Vietnamese, April 30 is indeed a day of remembrance, an occasion for remembering what had happened to them and to their families. For some, however, it is not so much an occasion to vent anger, resentment, or regret, though, inevitably, in some degree, they share these feelings with their compatriots, but it is rather an occasion to try to find real answers to some nagging big questions, among which one stands out: why are we here, in Canada, or the United States, or France, or Australia or wherever?

Asking the above question is asking: why have the communists won, and why have we lost and had to go into exile?

For full answers to the above question, we have to delve into the history of Vietnam, and go back at least one hundred years. And then, we shall have to examine all kinds of factors, internal and external, military, political, cultural, psychological, to mention just a few. We shall not have time for that in this brief meeting. What I propose to do is to focus on what I consider to be one of the most decisive factors: the extraordinary ease with which, over the years, and still today, people have been led, or rather misled, to believe in a number of myths about Vietnam. These people come from both inside and outside Vietnam; they include not only people with little education and little information, but also and especially those considered the best informed and the most alert of society: the intellectuals, the journalists, and the academics.

One of the myths, and the most decisive one, was: the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLFSVN, or NLF, for short) was a distinct and regional organisation of South Vietnamese patriots fighting foreign invaders for an independent, democratic, and neutral South Vietnam. As all myths spread by the Vietnamese communist propagandists and their supporters, this myth is a lie. But it was believed by a very large number of people both inside and outside Vietnam. This was a major cause, and I would even say, *the* major cause, of the victory of the communists in 1975.

When I say that the myths spread by the Vietnamese communist propagandists and their supporters were lies, I do not express a subjective view, but I base this view on the statements made by the Vietnamese communists themselves in many documents published since the war ended in 1975. Having won the war they felt no more need for restraints and took pride in revealing how they had cleverly fooled people into believing what they said and thus helping them win the war. They considered this an indication of their “highest intelligence”.

### **“Strategic lies” admitted by the CPV**

When the population of South Viet Nam woke up to reality – the reality of occupation by the North Vietnamese forces – it was too late. The foreign supporters of the communists, especially among the Western press and academia, also woke up, and had no choice but to wake up, when they were told bluntly by Vietnamese communist propagandists that what they had been told were just “war stratagems”.

I will cite a typical example, the most glaring one. In December 1978, on French *television*, to a question on the “vanishing” of the NLF after their victory, Nguyen Khac Vien, the Paris-based chief propagandist of Hanoi abroad, who for years had told foreign correspondents that the NLF was a purely South Vietnamese organisation and not a creation of Hanoi, answered without the slightest embarrassment that the Provisional Revolutionary Government (or PRG, official name of the NLF after 1969) “was always simply a group emanating from the DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam, official name of the Hanoi government). If we the DRV had pretended otherwise for such a long period, it was only because during the war we were not obliged to unveil our cards”, and that “in its struggle, the Vietnamese revolution was entitled to strategic lies”.<sup>1</sup>

The question was asked by Jean Lacouture, correspondent of the prestigious *Le Monde*, the journalist who for years was considered an authority on Vietnamese affairs, who had used his prestige to spread the myth that Ho Chi Minh was just a nationalist fighting only for the independence Vietnam, and the NLF was a distinct organisation of the South Vietnamese people fighting for freedom.

Thereafter, and especially after the great exodus of the boat people in 1978, Lacouture, now called “a colonialist” and denied a visa for Vietnam, wrote very harsh criticisms of the communist regime. Others also joined in, for example Jean Daniel of the magazine *Nouvel Observateur*, which also had been a strong backer of Hanoi. They used such terms as “disillusion” (disillusion),<sup>2</sup> “intoxication” (drugging),<sup>3</sup> Even the respectable and cool *The Economist* of London denounced Hanoi’s “lies”.<sup>4</sup> But it was all too late by then. South Vietnam had already fallen under firm communist control; boatload after boatload of Southern Vietnamese had to brave the dangers of the sea and flee to avoid living under

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<sup>1</sup> *Nouvel Observateur*, 18 December 1978

<sup>2</sup> - *ibid* -, 18 February 1978

<sup>3</sup> *Le Monde*, 18 February 1983

<sup>4</sup> *The Economist*, 26 February 1978

communist rule, and over one million of them were to seek asylum in the foreign countries which, like Canada, were generous enough to accept them.

However, the dropping of all pretences by the victorious communists had one positive result: the history of the 1954-1975 period, and of the 1945-1954 period also, was considerably clarified. Those engaged in the work of dismythication and exposition of the communist lies can do their work in peace today without fear of being accused by the anti-war people of being “reactionaries”, “agents of imperialism”, “running dogs of capitalism” etc. because since 1975 more and more former NLF people and even disillusioned members of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) have publicly denounced in their speeches and writings the deception they had suffered at the hand of Hanoi.

What is very noteworthy is that the VCP leaders and the VCP propaganda organs have published numerous documents and books in which they themselves candidly revealed the truth by taking pride in explaining that the lies they had spread were the expression of the “supreme intelligence of the Party”. I refer you particularly to the official history of the Party (*50 Years of Activities of the Communist Party of Vietnam*),<sup>5</sup> with its companion booklet *Phấn đấu xây dựng nước Việt Nam xã hội chủ nghĩa giàu đẹp (Struggling to build a rich and beautiful socialist Vietnam)*,<sup>6</sup> and *Thư vào Nam (Letters to Comrades in the South)*,<sup>7</sup> The author of the last two is Le Duẩn. These three books are most instructive, because in them, the leaders of the CPV candidly stated their real objectives, and explained retrospectively in detail how they had planned and carried the war in the South from Hanoi, in particular how they had used various tricks to fool everyone to achieve their objectives. I shall give concrete examples later.

From the writings of the disillusioned ex-NLF and PRG members, the best one, because it is the most revealing and most authoritative, is Trương Như Tảng’s *A Vietcong Memoir*.<sup>8</sup> Tang was a southerner, from a rich family, and a graduate of the French Institute of Political Science. He joined the NLF-PRG and rose to the position of Minister of Justice. He was the most high-ranking member of the NLF-PRG to have defected and joined the boat people. He now lives in exile in France. The sub-title of his book is: *An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath*. But it should really be: *An NLF Insider’s Account of How its Southern Members Were Fooled and Used by Hanoi during the War and Dumped Thereafter*.

There are many other such books, unfortunately they are in Vietnamese. I will mention only one which has caused great stir among the Vietnamese community: *Viết Cho Mẹ và Quốc Hội (Written for Mother and the National Assembly)*<sup>9</sup> by Nguyễn Văn Trấn. Also a southerner and from a rich family, Tran dropped his studies and joined the CPV in his teens, rose to important positions in the Party, knew practically all its leaders, was very

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<sup>5</sup> Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Hanoi, Nha xuất bản Su that, 1976

<sup>7</sup> Hanoi, Nha xuất bản Su that, 1986

<sup>8</sup> San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Publishers, 1985

<sup>9</sup> Houston, TX. Van Nghe Publishing House, 1995

conversant with its internal affairs, and could therefore write with great authority about what happened inside this party. I hope this book will be translated into English some day, so that you could find out more truths about the Vietnam War.

### **In politics perception is reality**

One of the slogans one frequently heard during the Vietnam War – American phase: 1954-1975 – was that the main objective in this war was “winning the hearts and minds of the people”. This is a way of saying that the psychological aspect was the most important one in this war. And psychologists, political scientists, sociologists would tell us that most people usually act on the basis not of the actual truth, but of what they perceive to be the truth. Thus, in conflicts involving masses and crowds, usually perception is reality. This is particularly true in political struggle, i.e., in war, since all wars involve both military and political objectives, and in real terms, the political objectives are the more important of the two. Here, perception is reality. And since myth is a perception, in a war the side which is successful in creating myths and having them believed by the masses will end up as the victor.

The communists had a full grasp of the decisive importance of the psychological factor, and the need to create and spread myths about themselves and about their enemies. In this they were highly successful, thanks to the credulity of many Vietnamese, and to the ignorance, naivety, self-delusion, self-flagellation (masochism), cynicism and deception of many foreign, especially western, intellectuals, journalists and academics.

The distortions about Vietnam by these people have been refuted by the hard facts since 1975; they have also been increasingly exposed in books by other journalists and academics in recent years. The latest of these has just reached the Canadian bookstores. It is *Shadows and Wind, A View of Modern Vietnam* by Robert Templar<sup>10</sup>. I recommend that you read it, just to realise how western opinion has been misled by its journalists and academics who have readily allowed themselves to be used by the leaders of the VCP and their propaganda organs.

What the leadership of the VCP sought was to anchor in the minds of people inside and outside Vietnam the perception that the war in South Vietnam was a civil war, waged by the population of South Vietnam against an oppressive regime maintained in power by the United States, and what the people of South Vietnam wanted was an independent government pursuing national solidarity and democracy internally, and neutrality externally. Also, North Vietnam supported this fight, but had no direct part in it; in particular it had no troops south the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel (the line dividing the country as part of the Geneva Agreement of July 1954).

The consequence of the widespread acceptance of the above myth are that sooner or later the government of South Vietnam would be doomed, and this, for two reasons: 1/ the

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<sup>10</sup> Toronto, Penguin Books, 1999

fight of the NLF-PRG was perceived as a legitimate one; in Vietnamese parlance, the “chính nghĩa” – just cause, legitimacy – appeared to be on the side of the rebels; and 2/ the war being perceived as a civil war, American intervention was unjustified, and America should get out.

In a culture, which places a paramount value on legitimacy, possession of such legitimacy is vital in any conflict. So, the government of South Vietnam, perceived as lacking legitimacy, was psychologically and politically at a great disadvantage: it could not rally the people behind it. On the other hand, American aid to this government, perceived as intervention in a civil war, would not receive the unwavering support of public opinion, in particular of American opinion, and without this support, American aid to the government of South Vietnam could not be maintained.

Yet, it is obvious that without American support the government of South Vietnam would not have the political, diplomatic, military and financial means to survive an onslaught of the Vietnamese communist forces backed to hilt by Communist China, the Soviet Union and the communist bloc. We know now that, already in 1963, President Kennedy was contemplating withdrawal from Vietnam, and in September of that year, in a famous interview with Walter Cronkite of CBS, he stated that the Vietnam War was a civil war.<sup>11</sup> Then American intervention under President Johnson was increasingly opposed by American opinion. This opposition worsened, took the form of violent demonstrations, and forced the presidential candidates in 1968 to make disengagement from Vietnam a major point of their electoral platforms. And the Quit Vietnam movement took a dramatic turn in April 1975. At the height of the communist general offensive, the US Congress voted to cut off aid to Vietnam, and on April 23, when the communist divisions were poised to give the final assault on Saigon, Mr. Gerald Ford, president of the United States, pronounced the words which will ring for ever in the ears of the non-communist Vietnamese: “Today, we turn the page on Vietnam”. This put non-communist South Vietnam in the situation of having to fight, alone, against a coalition of communist North Vietnam, Communist China, the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. Naturally, that was too much for a little country of 27 million people. We can compare this situation to a hypothetical one in which President Roosevelt would declare on the eve of Hitler’s impending invasion of Britain that “Britain is on its own”!

### **The facts as told by Hanoi (1954-1959)**

I shall now give you the major facts concerning the myth spread by the Vietnamese communists, and relayed and amplified by their foreign supporters.

What I am going to tell you is contrary to what you have usually seen and heard over the years on television, or read in 90 % of the books and writings on the shelves of the public and university libraries. In anti-war terms, it is “politically incorrect”. Therefore, I must stress that these data are taken from the official publications of the CPV, in particular the

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<sup>11</sup> On this, see Francis X. Winters, *The Year of the Hare: America in Vietnam, January 25, 1963 – February 15, 1964*, Athens and London, The University of Georgia Press, 1997.

official history of the CPV: *50 Years of Activities of the Communist Party of Vietnam* and the two books by Le Duan: *Letters to the (Comrades) in the South* and *Struggling to build a rich and beautiful socialist Vietnam*. Le Duan was General Secretary of the Party from 1960 to his death in 1986. In that commanding position, he was the principal architect of the Party's policies regarding the South and the supervisor of their implementation during the whole period of the Vietnam War. The letters mentioned are particularly revealing. They were letters sent by him to the Southern Command between February 7, 1962 and 30 April 1975, and kept secret until 1986. They contained the explanations of strategy and tactics adopted by the CPV leadership for the war in the South, and Le Duan's instructions to the high cadres there on how to conduct the war. For the post-1975 period, I shall refer mainly to Trương Như Tảng's *A Vietcong Memoir*. Tảng was one of the founding and leading members of the NLF, a minister of the PRG, and was thus in a position to know what was going on inside the highest echelons of the Party, and to speak with full authority.

Now, what do these publications tell us?

The first truth made clear by these publications is that it was Hanoi which really started the war in South Vietnam and was responsible for American devastating intervention. Only less than three months after the signing of the Geneva Agreement (20 July 1954) the VCP leadership in Hanoi already prepared for war in the South. The Party's history writes:

“The Party left in the South many cadres to engage in secret work. In *October 1954* [emphasis mine] the Southern Committee of the Party was set up to lead the revolutionary movement there.

“In *June 1956* [emphasis mine]...the Political Bureau [sitting in Hanoi] stressed that it was necessary to strengthen our armed and semi-armed forces, set up resistance bases and secure a strong popular support.... to maintain and develop our armed forces.

“In *August 1956* [emphasis mine]. Comrade Le Duẩn.... in charge of the Southern Party Committee wrote a book *Revolutionary Road in South Vietnam*, pointing out that the liberation of the South was a revolutionary road”<sup>12</sup>

One of the principal myths about the Vietnam War was that the population of the South was obliged to rise up against the government of Mr. Ngô Đình Diệm because in May 1959 he had the National Assembly of South Vietnam pass a law, the famous Law 10/59 to repress the people brutally. This myth was spread by a well known American professor and author, considered a great authority on Vietnam, Bernard Fall, whose name you have probably come across in your readings. Fall says that Hanoi's intervention was “very much open to question”.<sup>13</sup> But what does the Party's history say?

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<sup>12</sup> *50 Years...* p.140

<sup>13</sup> Bernard B. Fall, *Last Reflections on a War*, New York, Doubleday, 1967, p.184

“In *January* 1959 [here I stress *January*], the Party Central Committee [sitting in Hanoi] held its 15<sup>th</sup> (enlarged) plenum to outline its policy in the South...It pointed out that...The immediate task was to overthrow the Ngô Đình Diệm ruling clique.”<sup>14</sup> There followed a campaign of terrorism, scores of South Vietnamese officials were murdered, and the law, passed *five months* after the January decision of Hanoi to raise the level of “revolutionary violence”, was a reaction of the South Vietnamese government to this intensified terrorism, and a measure to prevent further terrorism. Indeed, the history of the Party says: “In the light of this plenum, at the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960 our people in the South rose up in concerted action”<sup>15</sup>

The History reveals that in January 1961, at a meeting to assess the situation in South Vietnam,

“The Political Bureau decided to entrust the Army Party Committee and the Reunification Committee with the task of helping the Central Committee guide *military* [my emphasis] work in the South. It also decided to strengthen the Central Office for South Vietnam and Party committee, *send more cadres and supplies (material, military, financial means)* [my emphasis] and expand communications to the South....”<sup>16</sup> That was almost a year before Kennedy decided to send troops to Vietnam.

I should mention in this connection that like with Nguyễn Khắc Viện in the case of the NLF, the European public also got a TV shock from no lesser a person than the famous General Võ Nguyên Giáp himself, the chief of the armed forces of North Vietnam.

On February 16, 1983, on the French TV channel TF1, General Giáp calmly explained to his audience that the Ho Chi Minh trail was opened by a decision of the CPV leadership in 1959 to carry cadres, troops, and war material to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia, down the “Ho Chi Minh trail”. Here, I should point out that the “Ho Chi Minh trail” was far from being a “trail”: it was called by American Embassy officials in Saigon “the Harriman Memorial Highway”, after Mr. Harriman, who negotiated the Laos 1962 Accord. But even this appellation is not appropriate because, as shown by the map on page 7b, published by an official organ of the Hanoi government in 1985, it was not just *one trail, but a vast network of highways* permitting the transportation of large numbers of North Vietnamese troops and war supplies and material to the South, as the statistics on the map indicate. This explains why it was impossible for South Vietnam to defend itself against North Vietnam as it had a very long common border with North Vietnam – all jungles -- through both Laos and Cambodia.

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<sup>14</sup> - *ibid* -, p.143

<sup>15</sup> - *ibid* -, p.144

<sup>16</sup> - *ibid* -, p.161

### THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL NETWORK



*La Piste Ho Chi Minh.*  
Editions en langues étrangères, Hanoi, 1985



Michel Tatu, a well known correspondent of *Le Monde* pointed out on this occasion that General Giáp's admission shows that the preparation for war and the blatant use of Laotian and Cambodian territory by North Vietnam occurred "well before President Kennedy decided to dispatch American troops to Vietnam" in late 1961, and that "for 15 years...we have thus been intoxicated [drugged]".<sup>17</sup> Now, said Tatu, it is too late to do anything about it, but one could at least "draw the appropriate lesson". He did not say what lesson. But obviously, the lesson is not to trust any more in what the CPV leaders say. But these leaders did not care any more about being caught lying; they even blandly admitted these lies in the Party's official history.

So much for who started the war in South Vietnam, and was responsible for American devastating armed intervention.

### **The facts as told by Hanoi (1960-1975)**

As I stressed earlier, the widespread myth that the war in South Vietnam was a war waged by patriotic southern Vietnamese for legitimate South Vietnamese ends was one of the two major causes of the fall of South Vietnam to communism. This myth is now dispelled by the publications mentioned. These publications tell us clearly that the NLF was a creation of Hanoi, which used it as a front (i.e. a screen) for conducting its war in South Vietnam. This is the second truth revealed by the Party's publications.

The history of the Party records that "on 20 December, 1960 the representatives of all social classes, political parties, religious sects, ethnic minorities and strata of the people in South Viet met...and set up the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam". The meeting approved a 10-point working programme whose fundamental point was to overthrow the Ngô Đình Diệm administration "in order to turn South Vietnam into an independent, democratic, peaceful, and neutral country..."<sup>18</sup> As we shall see later, the NLF will become the Provisional Revolutionary Government in 1969, with a similar program.

We know now that, except for the destruction of the South Vietnam government, none of the above 10-point program was implemented after the communist victory in 1975. But one point should be given special attention here: it relates to neutrality. This was an aim, which gained the NLF considerable sympathy and support at home and abroad. But, as the official history of the Party and Lê Duẩn explained *after 1975*, it was just a tactical ruse!!

The History explains:

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<sup>17</sup> *Le Monde*, 16 February, 1983

<sup>18</sup> *50 Years....* -, p.146

“The Party’s policy of neutrality for South Vietnam was a flexible tactic aimed at rallying all patriotic forces and people against the US-Diemists and isolating the US aggressors and their henchmen to the utmost.... It was a transitional step to liberate the South, reunify the country and lead the whole country to socialism”<sup>19</sup>

The official history does not mention foreign countries, but Lê Duẩn gave a fuller explanation to his comrades at the 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Central Committee in 1976: “With regard to our neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, we explain to our friends that...we do not advocate “the export of revolution”, “export socialism” to other countries. That is why we have been able to win over to our side the neutral forces...”<sup>20</sup> This was a deliberate lie, as the Southeast Asian countries were to find out after 1975, when Hanoi threatened to support revolution in those countries, and then brazenly invaded and occupied Cambodia.

Meantime, to cope with American intervention, which began in 1965, in early 1966 Hanoi set up another front organisation: “The Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces”. As Trương Như Tảng explains, the NLF had relied more and more heavily on the North, and become too identified with Hanoi, so:

“It was now past time for a strong effort to reestablish the image of the South’s revolution as a broad-based movement that includes Southern nationalists of every stripe...the blue half of the NLF flag had become too red. What was required was an organisation structured along government lines, made up of the strongest nationalist figures in the South who had not joined the Front (and who consequently were not tainted, in the popular mind, by Communist sympathies), an organisation that could maintain an aura of autonomy and independence”.<sup>21</sup>

In June 1969, after the start of negotiations with the Americans, yet another “front” organisation was set up: the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). Trương Như Tảng, who was made a Minister of Justice in that government, explains:

“Our goal was to influence public opinion: domestically, where a noncommunist government would give us added credibility with the South Vietnamese populace; internationally, where we would be able to compete with Saigon for formal recognition (and the potential support that would come with it); and in the United States, where we would enhance our claim of representing the Southern people, giving the peace movement additional ammunition...From here on in we would be able to wage full-scale diplomatic warfare”.<sup>22</sup>

The very lengthy program of the PRG included the following noteworthy points:

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<sup>19</sup> - *ibid* -, p.162

<sup>20</sup> *Struggling to build..* p.17

<sup>21</sup> *A Vietcong Memoir*, p.131

<sup>22</sup> - *ibid* -, p.147

1. “5. Realize broad democratic freedoms.... Prohibit every terrorist and revenging act and any discriminatory treatment of those who have collaborated with this side or the other side, living at home and abroad...Respect of faith and freedom of worship...”
2. “6...Encourage bourgeois industrialists and businessmen to contribute to developing industry, small industries, and handicrafts.... Guarantee the right to ownership of production means and other property of citizens according to state law...
3. “11...The unification of the country will be achieved step by step through peaceful methods and on the basis of discussions and agreement between the two zones, without coercion by either side”.... Implement a peaceful, neutral foreign policy”<sup>23</sup>

All the above will disperse like smoke in the wind right after the communist victory on April 30, 1975, as Tang and most of his southern compatriots were to discover.

### **April 30 and after**

During his years in Moscow, Ho Chi Minh had learned to master the technique of fronts, and he had taught his disciples well. They knew that fronts should be created for the specific purpose of providing communists with screens from behind which they could direct their attacks at their enemies with little risk to themselves. Once the aim has been achieved, not only the fronts are no longer needed, but also they become cumbersome, and should be resolutely discarded. This is what happened to the various fronts set up by Hanoi in South Vietnam: NLF, Alliance of Democratic Forces, and GPR. Only two weeks after the North Vietnamese troops seized Saigon, the NLF/GPR was terminated cynically, abruptly and brutally. And within a year, the whole “South Vietnam Liberation” apparatus was liquidated as well.

In 1967, Bernard Fall, already mentioned earlier, told his truth-hungry readers that “nothing justifies the.... claim to the effect that without Hanoi’s full support, the N.L.F. would disappear into thin air like a desert mirage”.<sup>24</sup> Another well-known American professor, considered a great expert on Southeast Asia, George McTurnan Kahin, director of the prestigious Center of Southeast Asian Studies of Cornell University, added his weighty voice to that of Fall. He said that “the insurrection is South-rooted; it arose at Southern initiative in response to Southern demands”, and “There is no evidence...that the Liberation Front for South Vietnam was formed at Hanoi’s order” and “insurrectional activity against the Saigon government began in the South under Southern leadership not as a consequence of any dictate from Hanoi, but contrary to Hanoi’s injunctions”.<sup>25</sup> But, as post-1975 events have now indisputably established, Fall and Kahin were a long way

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<sup>23</sup> - *ibid* -, Appendix, p.336 and ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Last Reflections on a War, op. cit.*, p.187

<sup>25</sup> John W. Lewis and George McTurnan Kahin, *The United States and Vietnam*, New York, The Dial Press, 1967, pp.119-120.

off the mark. They have now been formally contradicted by an NLF insider and VIP, Trương Như Tảng, who tells the following enlightening story.

On May 15, 1975, two weeks after the occupation of Saigon, a big victory parade was held, with CPV leaders from Hanoi and NLF/PRG attending. Tảng writes:

“After a long time, the military units came into sight, troops from every North Vietnamese Army outfit, all of them wearing distinctive new olive-colored pith helmets...

“At last, when our patience had almost broken, the Vietcong units finally appeared. They came marching down the street, several straggling companies, looking unkempt and ragtag after the display that preceded them. Above their heads flew a red flag with a single yellow star – the flag of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Seeing this, I experienced a physical shock. Turning to Văn Tiến Dũng [the commander of the communist forces which attacked Saigon] who was then standing next to me, I asked quietly, “Where are our divisions one, three, five, seven and nine?”

Dũng stared at me a moment, then replied with equal deliberateness: “The army has already been unified”. As he pronounced these words, the corners of his mouth curled up in a slight smile.

“Since when”, I demanded. “There’s been no decision about anything like that”.

Without answering, Dũng slowly turned his eyes back to the street, unable to suppress his sardonic expression...A feeling of distaste for this whole affair began to come over me – not to mention premonitions I did not want to entertain.

In the days that followed, I became aware that our police and security were being handled by various DRV departments”.<sup>26</sup>

In the following pages Tảng gave vent to his disenchantment and bitterness, using such emotion-charged terms as “physical shock”, “devastating disillusionment”, “involved in the discovering of a farce”, “well and truly sold”, “despair worse than the shock of discovering duplicity”. He terminates his memoirs with this sober and eloquent thought: “...the national democratic revolution became a casualty.... In the process, the lives that so many gave to create a new nation are now no more than ashes cast aside. That betrayal of faith will burden the souls of Vietnam’s revolutionary leaders....”<sup>27</sup>

Here Tảng is wrong. The leaders of the CPV felt no burden at all, but proceeded with the accelerated unification of Vietnam and “socialist transformation” of South Vietnam. The end of 1976 completed the unification process.

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<sup>26</sup> A *Vietcong Memoir*, pp.265-265

<sup>27</sup> - *ibid* -, p.310

In the summer of 1975, the 24<sup>th</sup> plenum met at Dalat and, disregarding all the pledges made in previous years, decided to accelerate the unification and socialisation of the country. On November 15 they held a Political Conference on Reunification of the country. On 25 April 1976 they organised nation-wide elections for a single national assembly. At the end of June, the new Assembly, meeting in Hanoi, decided to rename the country *Socialist Republic of Vietnam*, make Hanoi the capital of the whole country, and change Saigon's name to *Ho Chi Minh City*. At its fourth National Congress in December, the Party decided to drop the name of *Vietnam Workers' Party* and call itself *the Communist Party of Vietnam*. Thus ended the South Vietnamese Liberation Front, Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces, and Provisional Revolutionary Government, indeed all dreams of a distinct, free and non-communist South Vietnam.

Tăng bitterly noted that “as the weeks slid by, it was impossible to shut our eyes to the emerging arrogance and disdain of our Party staff cadres – almost as if they believed that they were the conquerors and we the vainquished”.<sup>28</sup>

Recalling that at the Third Party Congress in 1960, Tôn Đức Thắng [who later replaced Hồ Chí Minh as President of the DRV], had stated that the CPV's position was that “Owing to the differences in the situation of the two zones of the country, the South must work out a program that.... is suitable to its situation”, Tăng remarked that

“These sentiments were of course reemphasized for Western consumption. “How could we have the stupid, criminal idea of annexing the South?” said [Prime Minister of the DRV] Phạm Văn Đồng to various foreign visitors. “We have no wish to impose communism on the South”, said [chief Hanoi negotiator] Lê Đức Thọ to the international press in Paris. But both the solemn internal line and the somewhat less solemn public assurances had been discarded like trash within a month of victory. By then it was clear that there was no further need for subterfuge – either toward the Western media or anti-war movements, or toward the Southern revolution itself.

“With North Vietnam's People's Army firmly in charge, there was in fact no further need for any of the techniques of seduction or covert control that circumstances had previously called for”.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed! And the myths put out by the CPV, swallowed so readily by credulous southern intellectuals and romantic idealists, and spread all over the world by themselves and by well meaning or dishonest western intellectuals, journalists and academics have turned out to be only big lies which would result in the ruin of millions of lives.

After pointing out the myth Tăng neatly sums up the reality about North-South, CPV-NLF/PRG relations as follows:

“It was a time of unalloyed cynicism on the part of the Workers' Party [CPV's official name before 1975] and stunned revulsion for those of us who had been their brothers-in-

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<sup>28</sup> - *ibid* -, p.266

<sup>29</sup> - *ibid* -, p.284

arms for so long...Now, with total power in their hands, they began to show their cards in the most brutal fashion. They made it further understood that the Vietnam of the future would be a single monolithic bloc, collectivist, totalitarian, in which the traditions and culture of the South would be ground and molded by the political machine of the conquerors. These, meanwhile, proceeded to install themselves with no further regard for the niceties of appearance.

“The PRG and the National Liberation Front, whose programs had embodied the desire of so many South Vietnamese to achieve a political solution to their troubles and reconciliation among a people devastated by three decades of civil war – this movement the Northern Party had considered all along as simply the last link up it needed to achieve its own imperialistic revolution. After the 1975 victory, the Front and the PRG not only had no further role to play: they became a positive obstacle to the rapid consolidation of power”.<sup>30</sup> Tang also recalled that during a visit to Hanoi in July 1976 to attend the inauguration of the new National Assembly, he was told blandly by Trường Chinh [former General Secretary of the CPV] that “The strategic mission of our revolution in this new phase is to accelerate the unification of the country and lead the nation to a rapid, powerful advance toward socialism; the Front and the PRG not only had no further role to play, but become obstacles....”<sup>31</sup>

In the final analysis, however, the hard and painful truth about it all is that the fault lies really not with the communists who, by conviction and training, are heartless cynics and inveterate liars, but with those like Trương Như Tảng and other romantic dreamers who have thrown intelligence, education and common sense overboard and enthusiastically swallowed communist propaganda. They served as willing tools of the Hanoi communists to inflict misery on their southern compatriots. They did not suspect that, eventually, they themselves and their families also would become the victims of their own folly: Trương Như Tảng was one of those responsible for the boat people exodus, but he himself will have to join the boat people in order to continue to live as a free man.

There is a sober lesson to be drawn from April 30, and that is: never throw away the most valuable gift that man is blessed with: intelligence and common sense.

Ottawa  
April 2000

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<sup>30</sup> - *ibid* -, p.268

<sup>31</sup> - *ibid* -, p.269