



VIETNAM COMMENTARY

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

Number 2

May-Jun 1988

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NGUYEN VAN LINH'S GREAT DILEMMA A Report

since 1985 relatively modest. The party decided to proceed with a yearly program, "safe step by safe step". At the Sixth Congress in 1986 Kiet was given the honor of presenting the traditional economic report, a task performed by Premier Pham Van Dong at the last two congresses. In this report he stressed that "socialist and state economic elements will certainly play the main role, while other economic elements (non-socialist) will be continually used in the initial state of transition towards socialism". Whatever the place of the reformists within the top leadership, Kiet is far from being a "bourgeois liberal". The rejection of bureaucratic centralism and of the state subsidies system does not call for a full play of the laws of market economy.

Whether Kiet will be confirmed as the next Premier, with full power over all governmental agencies, is of decisive importance for the mandate for change entrusted to Nguyen Van Linh and the refor-

mist group at the Sixth Party Congress. The nomination of Kiet will considerably boost the position of the reformists within the party and state hierarchies. However, the continued worsening of the socio-economic situation since the Sixth Party Congress does not favor Kiet's bid for the premiership. The nomination of Do Muoi, on the other hand, will certainly be considered as a step backward in the process of renewal in Vietnam. Already the popular joke is: Even with one thousand Do Muois at the helm, Vietnam will be doomed! (*Do van roi cung chet*).

* Hoang Huu Quynh is a former high-ranking cadre of the Vietnamese Communist Party. An engineer by training, he spent four years at the Leningrad Institute of Technology in the Soviet Union. In October 1979, while on a mission abroad in Western Europe as a member of the Commission for International Cooperation in Science and Technology, he decided to defect to France, where he resides now.

Glasnost and the Gulag: The Numbers Game

Stephen Morris*

Vietnam's limping efforts since the Sixth Party Congress in 1986 towards opening up the economy have generated much excitement in several quarters. Against this background, Hanoi's recent releases of some political prisoners have been hailed as a sign that some kind of *glasnost* is at work in the tropics. But, neither Vietnam's economic reforms nor its prisoner releases signal a real break with its stalinist tradition. Vietnam's economic reforms pale in comparison with the market-oriented reforms of the Chinese today or with those of the Yugoslavs some 30 years ago. And, its prisoner releases are obviously image-building exercises aimed at influencing Washington in favor of normalizing US-Vietnamese relations for Hanoi badly needs aid of the scale that only the Americans can provide in order to get out of the economic morass it is in.

Prisoner amnesties have become an annual affair in Vietnam. They usually occur near two key dates — the anniversaries of Ho Chi Minh's coup of 19 August 1945 and his Declaration of Independence on 2 September 1945. The announcement in September 1987 that Hanoi would be releasing 6,685 prisoners, including 480 associated with the former Government of South Vietnam, and modifying the terms of 5,320 other prisoners — a larger than normal amnesty —

was clearly a part of the recent movement in relations between Washington and Hanoi. In reality, the *gulag* is nowhere near empty as yet.

A Record of Lies

The real significance of the numbers of prisoners released by Hanoi in the past few months can only be appreciated when measured against the number of people who have been consigned to prison and reeducation camps since Hanoi's conquest of the South in April 1975. The exact number of political prisoners arrested over the past 13 years is known only to Hanoi's leaders. Publicly they have admitted to having only 40,000 in the late 1970s and between 6,000 and 10,000 more recently. Hanoi's Deputy Minister of Information claimed in February 1988 that there were now "only 159 former collaborators of the Saigon regime still in the so-called reeducation camps". But, Hanoi's past lies — its 25-year denial that it was directing the insurgency in the South and its continuing insistence, almost until April 1975, that none of its troops were present in South Vietnam or Cambodia — detracts from the credibility of its public admissions.

Early Arrests

A more credible source than the Hanoi government is defector Nguyen Cong Hoan, who has testified before a US Congressional Committee (1977) as well as in several American news interviews. Hoan had been an anti-Thieu legislator elected to the former National Assembly of South Vietnam. When the communists conquered the South, they rewarded him for his wartime stand by appointing him to the new rubber-stamp National Assembly. This anti-government record during the years of the US-backed Thieu government as well as his privileged status under the communist regime makes Hoan's account plausible.

As "representative" of Phu Khanh province in the National Assembly of the new order, Hoan had visited prisons and reeducation camps in that province. Extrapolating from the 6,000 prisoners in his province of 300,000 people, Hoan concluded that

there must be about 340,000 prisoners in the whole of South Vietnam, with 200,000 being the absolute minimum. And, based on the execution of 700 people in his province, and learning of similar events in other provinces, he also concluded that tens of thousands of people had been executed in South Vietnam between 1975 and 1977 alone.

Many of the details of Hoan's account — for example, the fact that prisoners are underfed and overworked, and that many who fall ill die later from inadequate medical attention — have been supported by the accounts of countless other refugees, including former anti-Thieu student leader Doan Van Toai (imprisoned for 27 months under the communists) and the former Justice Minister of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government, Truong Nhu Tang. Hoan's claim of tens of thousands of executions is also confirmed by the research of Karl Jackson and Jacqueline Desbarats of the University of California.

Be Men and Women of Vision

*A Message to the Refugees of Indochina from Raul S Manglapus**

I had occasion to be invited to the eighth anniversary of the Philippine Refugee Processing Center in Morong, Bataan. On the way there, I was shown a boat in which some of the refugees travelled to this country. I am told that the boat could hold 12 persons. When six were asleep, six had to stand up for lack of space.

It delighted me to think that more than a thousand years ago, the ancestors of the Filipinos were also supposed to have come from where they came in Asia, in boats perhaps bigger than the one today's refugees came in. The ancient boats were called *barangay*. Our ancestors came here and eventually established their own nation which we now call the Philippines.

Those who have come from Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea to save themselves left their country for an uncertain future. But so did those Malays who came in their *barangay* to an uncertain future in this country, where they built themselves a new nation.

Where these refugees are going are already established nations, like the United States of America and Norway. But in those nations, there are democratic constitutions that will permit them to utilize their talents, their native culture and their original drive for development so

that they might participate in the building, perhaps, of a new America and a new Norway.

I am not a stranger to being a refugee. I was a refugee from the previous government in our country. My family had to escape from the Philippines through Malaysia, through Sabah. And who are those who helped my family in their escape? Now, that Marcos is safely in Hawaii, I can reveal the secret. It was the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Not only my family but many more Filipinos escaped the dictatorship in this country in order to find a place where constitutional freedoms would be available so that they might speak out for freedom in their country. And now, after thirteen and a half years of refuge in the United States, I am back and, as one can see, I am back in political power in this country.

Therefore, those who may be saying to themselves, "What future is there for me? Only an economic one? No freedom? Only a living and no Constitution?" They should save themselves, look around and note that democracy is the way, not only of the future, but of today.

Note how many countries in the world have returned to democracy in the last 15 years. Sixteen of them. Who knows, one of these days, the

country that they left behind might also be returned to democracy.

Therefore, refugees should be men and women of hope and should be men and women of vision. While they are away, they should help the countries that welcome them with their own talents and their own vision to reshape and strengthen themselves.

America is still a young country and today's refugees can help America reshape itself. Norway is an older country. I was there only a year ago in the depth of winter and, although it was very cold, I found a people with very warm hearts. I am sure that is what many of today's refugees will find when they settle in Norway.

And when they are already there, remember us, Filipinos.

We have struggled for our democracy. We got it back but we are still fighting to keep our democracy alive because democracy cannot be taken for granted. Freedom is something one fights for everyday, and by seeking refuge abroad, there is shown a willingness to continue to fight for freedom. Do not stop that fight and do not forget us when making that fight abroad.

* Raul S Manglapus is Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines.

I have attempted some estimates of the number of prisoners, based on the known or presumed size of the "target groups" publicly ordered to report for reeducation in 1975. One shortcoming of this method, however, is that much of the basic data was left behind in South Vietnam during the precipitate American evacuation. Information from the Pentagon and other published records shows that the biggest target group — South Vietnamese army officers — totaled 106,450 on 1 January 1975. Police officers numbered about 12,500. The number of civil servants ordered to register is difficult to ascertain, but the total number of civil servants in 1969 (the last year for which data is available) was 75,490. To these must be added several thousand judges and elected village chiefs. Then there are also the leaders and cadres of the "reactionary", that is, anti-communist, political parties, whose numbers are unknown.

There is one final category whose numbers are known. These are the *chieu hoi*, the Vietcong who defected to the South Vietnamese side. There were 220,000 of them. No plans were made to evacuate them as South Vietnam collapsed. Their names were left behind in undestroyed American files. Those *chieu hoi* who had actively helped the American and South Vietnamese governments break the clandestine Vietcong infrastructure in many provinces of South Vietnam by disclosing the names and whereabouts of their former comrades were always targets for execution by the communists. They made up a large number of those executed after the communist victory. Even those *chieu hoi* who did not assist the counter-insurgency were liable to be arrested merely for the "crime" of having abandoned the revolution for private life.

While it cannot be denied that more than 150,000 people were evacuated by the rapidly departing Americans in April and early May 1975, this evacuation did not make any real difference in the target group numbers for two main reasons. First, the evacuees included not just the adult males who were the bulk of those Hanoi had targeted, but also women and children. Second, the evacuees included many families whose adults were not on the communist hit lists: friends of American diplomats, servicemen, civilian contractors, journalists and others. The American evacuation thus saved but a few of the potential victims of communist reprisal.

Other Victims

The story does not end with these early arrests. Tens of thousands of people were arrested in later

years. These included persons unconnected with the former South Vietnamese Government who dared to publicly criticize the new regime. Catholic priests, Buddhist monks, artists and journalists were included in this category. Many were tortured in order to extract "confessions" to espionage and have since become of special concern to Amnesty International and other human rights organizations.

Still, the total number of South Vietnamese prisoners does not complete the picture for the communists had also, since their 1954 takeover of power, arrested people in what used to be North Vietnam. In the wake of the party's land reform terror of 1953-1956, which saw at least 50,000 innocent people executed, tens of thousands were also sent to reeducation camps in the North. Many did not survive their 25-year sentences. Their places have now been taken by new victims ranging from those who had complained about Hanoi's war against the South to those like Vietnam's greatest poet, Nguyen Chi Thien, who today languishes in Hoa Lo Prison.

The recent releases, therefore, do not fundamentally reduce the list of political prisoners in Vietnam. Even if similar numbers had been released yearly since 1975, Hanoi would not have emptied half of its *gulag*. Of the more than 200,000 arrested, over 100,000 probably remain in prison.

All this neglects the repression that afflicts the 50 million Vietnamese citizens who are not incarcerated. All non-party members are regarded by the regime as potential subversives. Vietnam's Public Security Bureau keeps an eye out for "reactionaries" and plots to escape to the West. Its agents monitor households, neighborhoods and movements throughout the country in order to replenish the *gulag* with new inmates. And, in the case of former detainees, release has little significance even if they are willing to accept communist rule for they do not enjoy the rights of citizens. This complaint was, in fact, aired by a returnee in an article in *Saigon Giai Phong* last October. My interviews with refugees also reveal that many of those released are subsequently rearrested.

Clearly Vietnam's new leaders, who are not even fully prepared to move away from central planning to rescue their ailing economy, have yet to move away from the stalinist structure of repression. The Hanoi regime is still the worst violator of human rights in Southeast Asia and one of the five or six most oppressive regimes in the world.

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