

Kommunistisches Programm – The Formation of the Vietnamese National State

A Society in Transition to Capitalism

The eastern fringe of mainland Southeast Asia stands out clearly from Farther India because of its natural enclosure by mountains and its culture, which is strongly influenced by China. Despite the historical connection with Cambodia and Laos in the French colonial empire and the more or less strong similarities in an “Indo-Chinese cultural region”, Vietnam clearly occupies a special position among the more Indo-Buddhist influenced countries due to its Sino-Confucian traditions – which, by the way, is already reflected in the Chinese name “Vietnam”, which means “Land of the South”. This is because the Vietnamese (Annamites) were dominated by the Chinese for a long period of their history: from 11 B.C. to 939 and again around 1400, the most important settlement areas of the Annamites were under direct control; during the rest of the time, they were subject to the Chinese tribute ritual.

Today’s Vietnam roughly corresponds to the empire of Emperor Gia Long reunited from Annam and Tonkin in 1802. It has an area of 332,566 km with a population of about 48 million, making it the most populous country in mainland SE Asia.

Geographically, Vietnam consists of three parts, which also largely correspond to the historical as well as social and economic developments. The north is made up by Tonkin with the Red River delta, its mountainous hinterland and the capital Hanoi. The centre is occupied by the mountainous, narrow coastal country of Annam (i.e. “pacified south”) with the former imperial city of Hué. The vast southern lowlands with its Mekong Delta and Saigon is Cochinchina. In this shape, the country with its two focal areas and the narrow, long connection along the Annamite coast was compared to two rice sacks hanging Chinese-style on a long supporting pole, an image that simultaneously traces the nature of the barren coastal fringe and the two large “rice bowls”, of which Tonkin is densely populated and intensively cultivated old settlement land, while the Mekong Delta is young colonisation land. The Annamites advanced along the coast in the continuous north-south movement of their land-grabbing and from the 17th to the 19th century settled in Cochinchina, whose marshy lowlands, previously only partially used, they wrested from the Khmer in particular. This settlement movement from the north let the permanent pressure from overcrowded Tonkin into the potential food space of the south become a leitmotif in Vietnam’s development, which also influences later political goals.

The concentration of the Vietnamese of both parts of the country on the lowlands is mainly due to their way of life of wet rice farming and the lack of the cultural and economic tradition of mountain farmers. This concentration of the population on the rice-growing plains led the rural settlement to unusual densities, with the more mountainous zones largely emptied. The sparsely populated mountainous countries – around two-thirds of Vietnam – are home to ethnic minorities. In addition, there are the immigrant Chinese (Hoa), who, with around 860,000 in South Vietnam, most of them in Saigon-Cholon, were much stronger than in North Vietnam, where only about 175,000 Hoa lived despite the neighbourhood to China. Overall, this results in a characteristic settlement structure for Vietnam: in North Vietnam, around 90% of the population, and in South Vietnam over 80%, belong to the culturally rather uniform “state people” of the Vietnamese; however, they live on barely a third of the land, precisely those two lowland zones with the deltas and the narrow coastal farms of Annam. Hardly any Vietnamese live above the 100m altitude line. In northern Vietnam, this means that about 97% of its population is concentrated in one-sixth of its national territory, while the rest of the land, occupied by the mountains, is home to only 3% of the population. Therefore, despite the most intensive land use, the densely occupied parts of the Tonkin Delta can hardly support their population,

and densities of up to more than 1260 inhabitants per square kilometre of agricultural land are reached. South Vietnam lacks such extremes; however, the lowlands of Cochinchina, which cover only one-third of the country, are home to the vast majority of the population there as well.

The proportion of urban settlements is higher than in most countries in SE Asia. Nevertheless, in 1967, South Vietnam still had 88% agrarian population, North Vietnam, which has richer mineral resources and older beginnings of industrialisation, 70% agrarian population. Despite a long history, especially in the north, the cities were relatively insignificant at the time of the French conquest, which was gradually pursued under Napoleon III from 1858. Due to frequent political changes, the commercial and administrative centres suffered from a lack of stability. Only the colonial development of economy and traffic led to growth and structurally French-influenced urban development. Hanoi, with a long tradition as a Chinese administrative capital, and from the 10th – 17th centuries as an Annamite capital, has been largely newly built. Saigon, founded in the 17th century, was predominantly shaped during the colonial period.

The majority of the Vietnamese, however, continued to inhabit rural settlements of consistently small, enclosed villages. Here, due to the peculiar distribution of the population, strong social tensions formed, which were exacerbated by the imperialist changes: in long-settled Tonkin by the tremendous overcrowding and the corresponding fragmentation of property relations, in the young development of the Mekong Delta by the formation of large-scale landed property with exploitation of the leaseholders. In Tonkin, about a quarter of the land was large-scale landed property, with another quarter owned by the communities; the leases of the small farmers, who barely made the subsistence level, were 40%.

The different social structure of the Mekong Delta emerged with its melioration by the French authorities in the 19th and 20th centuries. They left the proper agricultural development to the famous “free” economic play of forces, so that individual Vietnamese and Chinese invested in the land, had it developed with wage labourers, and then leased it out to small farmers. In some cases, huge property complexes were created as a result. The larger landowners consistently resided in Saigon, from where they pursued the collection of leases, but hardly any further improvements to the land. In 1930, the French themselves owned barely more than 15% of the cultivated rice-growing land, which belonged predominantly to Vietnamese and Chinese landowners. Even in the pre-colonial period, socio-economic relations in Vietnam were hardly more favourable. However, the explosive nature of agricultural relations in the Mekong Delta until very recently is shown by the following data: In 1967, there were still about 1 million farms under lease here. Their political weight becomes clear when they are multiplied by an average of 6 family members; adding another 2 million people from families without land ownership results in about 8 million, i.e. 80% of the 10 million total inhabitants of the delta for whom this extreme exploitation became the fundamental question of their existence¹.

However, while the south of Vietnam enjoys a more favourable agricultural productivity, since a larger agricultural area is available with lower rural population densities and traditionally rice can be produced in surplus, in addition to which commercial crops (especially rubber) with high production values are important, the situation is quite different for the north. Confined to the Tonkin Delta, agricultural land here covers only 13% of the country. The mountainous north of Vietnam, on the other hand, is much better endowed with mineral resources than the south. Its coal reserves are estimated at 20 billion tonnes and coal production was already around 1.7 million tonnes in the 1930s. The iron ore resources are also very favourable (reserves of around 20 billion tonnes), and tin, zinc, chrome, copper, tungsten, lead, gold, nickel, cobalt, manganese, mercury and bauxite are also extracted. Overall, this results in a favourable basis for an iron and steel as well as non-ferrous industry. Vast stores of phosphates (about 1 billion tonnes) can be used for the production of fertiliser. With this

¹ cf. R.L.Sansom, “The economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam”, Camb./London, 1970.

advantage of mineral resources and energy, and with a densely concentrated and industrious population, North Vietnam was able to achieve the strongest industrial potential in SE Asia; it was also one of the few areas that experienced industrial expansion even during the colonial period. Of course, the French were primarily engaged in imperialist plunder of raw materials. But what is important is that France, with its intrusion into this ancient cultural sphere, had to undermine the traditional social and economic foundations more and more. Vietnamese agrarian society was increasingly made subservient to the economic interests of France. And here, besides the plantation economy – especially rubber – the interests lay particularly in the mining sector. Here the French capitalists invested, creating the new classes of the proletariat and the comprador bourgeoisie. The latter assisted the colonialists’ “master people” in their robbery of Vietnam, while the former had to break the treasures out of the mountains by the sweat of their brow. In 1928, however, there were only about 33,000 industrial workers in Vietnam, mainly precisely in those coal mines of the north, plus a few thousand workers in the cotton mills and weaving mills, but this number was to increase steadily with the forced influx of French capital. Nevertheless, until independence in 1945, the share of the pure industrial proletariat in the population of all of Vietnam never exceeded 2 – 3%, and the “demographic” agglomeration of this proletariat remained essentially confined to the north, to Tonkin. All in all, Vietnam was thus a feudal society dominated by imperialism, which, however, experienced a permanent intensification of its internal dissolution processes with its formal subsumption under international capital. Until the end of the Second World War, the traditional economy of largely self-sufficient villages, in which farmers grew what they needed, clearly prevailed. The agricultural surpluses went to the parasitic landowners in the form of compulsory levies, who used them at most for speculative trading. Since, despite the penetration of French imperialism, the traditional economic form of subsistence farming and village craftsmanship prevailed and the economically ruling class maintained its rentier existence, strong social barriers stood in the way of the development of capitalist productive forces.

Unlike earlier Chinese conquests, which could not fundamentally change the mode of production because they did not represent a higher one, the French conquest did sweep Vietnam into the vortex of international capitalism, but only to the extent that France’s interests in agricultural and mineral raw materials were to be satisfied. Politically, the French relied precisely on the traditional class of landowners, who, on the other hand, could only secure their social survival through the French. In this respect, the French represented both for Vietnam: on the one hand, the first contact with the capitalist mode of production and thus the possibility of their own capitalist development, but on the other hand, precisely the decisive political barrier to annihilate the outdated barriers of their own mode of production.

It is true that the “self-sufficient” division of labour in the Vietnamese villages was increasingly dissolving. It was replaced by a division of labour mediated by the market, which increasingly assigned the production of agricultural commodities to the countryside and that of commercial commodities to the city. But the emergence of this simple commodity production, as the origin and basis of a capitalist commodity production, was repeatedly prevented from its fundamental expansion by the lack of an agrarian surplus. Thus, the market principle always remained largely “peripheral” for the villages. They primarily produced products and not commodities, i.e. exchange values. Only a small part of the farmers’ yields were brought to market. Economic development in the sense of a primitive accumulation of capital was still always tied to the fact that the self-sufficient peasant production unit was broken up. Only when the peasants opened up either as suppliers of agricultural and commercial commodities, in each case putting aside the manufacture of products for their own needs, i.e. specialisation, could they appear as relevant buyers of urban commodities. However, this new stage of the social division of labour could only be achieved if the cities were deprived of their privileged

position in the overall economic production and exchange process and rural locations of commercial commodity production and markets with a local catchment area could emerge alongside them.

As already said, French imperialism, on the one hand, provided decisive impulses for the emergence of generalised commodity production in Vietnam and thus for a strengthening of the preconditions for capitalist development. On the other hand, Vietnamese society was constantly socially conserved by the French. Both moments meant a permanent intensification of the country's internal contradictions: the peasants were indeed increasingly deprived of their traditional way of working, as they were severely exploited by growing leases. But they were at most pauperised, hardly ever proletarianised, because the landowners saw no point in "investing" their squeezed out sums.

On the other hand, it is all too clear that under such social and political relations, fermentative processes must form, especially when dealing with a people like the Vietnamese, who have always prided themselves on their stubborn resistance to foreign invaders. It is equally clear that a multitude of passionate patriots had to form among the educated Vietnamese who sought to free their country from the terror of the foreign master humans, to reconquer the way forward for the country in its agonising dilemma of a blocked future and an oppressive past.

Against this background sketched so far, the most important social representatives of the social storms gain in contour: First the French as "emissaries" of imperialist capital, then the native parasitic landowners, together with the merchant bourgeoisie, allies of these reactionary functionaries of capital; on the other side the exploited peasants and, as new classes, the representatives of capitalist possibility, the revolutionary bourgeois as citizen – together with his counterpart, the proletariat; both, however, extremely weak in numbers, but increasingly present as a reality, since they are constantly recreated by the social contradictions of this colonial "transitional society" to capitalism.

The Actuality behind the Việt Minh Myth: the Social Movement in the Tentacles of Bourgeois Compromisers

What obviously makes today's assessment of Vietnamese events after World War II so confusing is the very fact that a significant proportion of these patriots formally operate as "Marxists", etc. Fundamentally, however, this means nothing, because after all, anyone can adorn themselves with this abstract term. But it is no coincidence that the national-bourgeois movements of the 20th century like to peddle this claim. The fact that the bourgeoisie has consistently established its class rule with all the noble ideals on its lips and has every time wanted to conceal its dictatorship with its slogans has always been confirmed by history.

The fact that the Vietnamese ideologues of capitalist development, at least outwardly, competed under this "trademark" is solely a product of the tragic defeat not only of the Russian, but rather of the international proletariat after World War I. The revolutionary strength of the European proletariat, let alone the American, was not enough, as is well known, to win a victory against "their" bourgeoisie, thus throwing the Russian revolution back on its national industrialisation task. But it is madness to imagine that this task could have been achieved in Russia solely through the popular clichés of capitalists, possibly even with liberal-democratic slogans. On the contrary. Counterrevolution asserted itself as imperative, since after the international defeat of the proletariat, only the national programme of a capitalist dictatorship of development could be on the agenda. And the Russian proletariat had to be beaten with its own weapons. Under their banners, with their slogans of struggle, ostensibly invoking their vision of the future, the best revolutionaries were massacred, and the rest forced into the factory and to forced labour. All this simply because of the imperative of the most rigorous development of the productive forces, for stronger capitalists were already lying in wait to blow out the life-light of the developing Russian capitalism and to subordinate it to their dictates, to colonise it quite simply.

In the Stalinist functionary of Russian capital, the specifically bourgeois doubling of the practitioner of exploitation and the herald of human happiness finds its most bizarre results. Out of the need to clean up the proletarian revolution, he made his own counterrevolutionary virtue. In this way he could dress up his dictatorship, in this way he could justify his ideology of class harmony and Volksgemeinschaft, in this way he could nip in the bud any attempt at an autonomous workers' movement. And as a by-product, it came about quite automatically as a happy coincidence that all attacks against him had to hit the communist perspective of a revolution first: for the only thing that was really going to work out in those countries of the East in the end was the permanent breeding of radical anti-communists.

With this Stalinist counterrevolution, the fate of all other pre-capitalist countries was also sketched out. With the defeat of the proletarian revolution in the capitalist countries of the West, they were all relegated to the bloody path of defending their national accumulation against a rapacious and brutal developed capitalism. The grand perspective of a fundamental change in development due to a victory of a revolution against capitalism, which Marx as well as the early Third International had pointed out, had thus become impossible. What remained was demagogy. For how could one abolish a capitalism that did not even exist; how could one pass off the anti-colonial struggle as "socialist" when, with the annihilation of colonial rule, one only removed the most important barrier to the development of bourgeois society; how could one speak of abolishing wage labour when one first had to forcibly separate the producers from their means of production in order to make them toil as wage labourers; how could one speak of abolishing commodity production when commodity production still had to be generalised as capitalist; finally, how could one speak of overcoming or dominating the law of value when the quasi-natural effects of this law of value were only just beginning to assert themselves with the development of the productive forces. Protection of one's own productive forces from the outside, i.e. the greatest possible autarky, and absolute concentration on productive labour, i.e. production of surplus value, these are the most important criteria of any developing capital accumulation. And of course, the conditions for a developing capital and an already developed capital are not one and the same. These are two totally different periods of accumulation. Also, any development of capital at the end of the 20th century takes place under completely different international conditions than at the beginning of the formation of European capital. What remains, however, is the necessity of exploitation and the best possible concealment of this fact by the functionaries of capital.

The Vietnamese patriots only knew that it was necessary to break the colonial tyranny and, with that, to settle accounts with their own feudal class in order to lay the foundations for their own development of productive forces. Their most important representative Hồ Chí Minh always expressed this openly. The fact that his life's path drove him into the ranks of the Stalinists only strengthened him in this will, which was dictated to him by the real conditions of his country. To say that Hồ was not a real capitalist, therefore he was not a bourgeois revolutionary, is simply laughable. Practically never were real capitalists the proper driving force in the formation of the capitalist mode of production. They were always far too glued to their account books to have the long-term perspective and radicalism needed for this. It is therefore no coincidence that the exemplary "great bourgeois revolution", namely the French one, was mainly staged by the "petty bourgeois" and "intellectuals". These did not even shy away from killing the proper bourgeois, if necessary, in order to justify the victory of the bourgeois revolution before the eyes of their comrades-in-arms, the peasants, artisans and wage-earners.

That Hồ and his crew were never proletarian revolutionaries and communists, but highly cautious, anxious tacticians compared to, for example, their earlier French colleagues, is shown by their behaviour in the hour of independence. And this is no coincidence, because independence is nothing but a farce from the start, given today's international capitalist interdependencies. Alone, one would never stand a chance against developed capital. And the necessity of a stronger alliance partner puts

one in the awkward predicament of having to protect oneself against too strong an appropriation by this “brother” from the outset.

Far from home, the Vietnamese nationalists organised their movement with the support of the Russian Stalinists. In February 1930, they created the “Vietnamese Communist Party” from three precursors, which was only renamed the “Indochinese Communist Party” following an ukase from Moscow. At the time of its foundation it had 211 members. And although it was clear that a national movement could win a militant base among the impoverished peasantry alone, land reform was by no means at the forefront of the programme.

That the time was ripe in Vietnam too was shown by the first workers’ strikes in 1928/29 and 1930, which were dominated by trade unions with around 10,000 members under extensive control of the “CP”. The Stalinist Peasants’ Union, with its approximately 70,000 members, also played a role in the peasant uprisings that also began in 1930 and led to the creation of the first “soviets” in Indochina – the famous Xô Viết Nghệ-Tĩnh – in the Annam area in 1931. This was the first revolutionary mass uprising in recent times, which was mainly carried by the peasants. For the time being, however, the French succeeded in annihilating it in blood.

Although the Vietnamese peasants proved their militancy, and although it was clear that only radical agrarian reform could increase this peasant militancy, Hồ and his people had nothing more urgent to do than to suppress the peasants’ radical aspirations from the outset. Especially here they proved to be typically anxiously manoeuvring representatives of their class. The fundamental problem of every bourgeois revolution – precisely the social question of agriculture – was largely excluded for the time being because of its explosive nature in favour of the second main task – national liberation. And this also has its own compelling logic. Indeed, the bourgeoisie can only break the strong opposing front with the help of the peasant battalions, but for their dirty work the peasants demand their price. They want to realise their eternally unfulfilled dream of their own agriculture, they want to divide the large estates of their oppressors among themselves, and henceforth eke out a peaceful life of small-scale farming.

But that is never the programme of the bourgeois. Against this peasant perspective of small-scale agriculture, he sets his programme of a capitalist agrarian order, in which the peasants at best find a place as agricultural labourers, but for the most part must be pressed into the industry that is to be developed. The agriculture of the bourgeoisie calculates with large dimensions, for here the surpluses are to be yielded, which are the prerequisite of any industrialisation. Thus it is always urgent for a bourgeois to keep the radical impulses of the peasants, generated by social need, under control, lest they spoil his beautiful plan. And that peasant militancy is not only advantageous is shown by the example of the French Revolution. It certainly acquired its unprecedented militancy apart from the poor townspeople mainly through the radicalism of the peasants. But in order to help the revolution to its victory, the bourgeoisie had to watch as the peasants put their programme of private land grabbing into practice and were difficult to drive away from it even later because of their revolutionary spirit. The effect was remarkable. The country with the most sweeping bourgeois revolution never found the dynamism in the industrialisation process as, for example, Germany, which, as is well known, had never experienced a victorious bourgeois revolution. Until the end of the Second World War, French industrial development struggled along, and it has never been able to fully overcome its relatively strong agricultural component.

The relationships between peasants and the bourgeoisie in a bourgeois revolution were and are thus always complex and fundamentally contradictory. This must come into play all the more in the case of a bourgeoisie which, like the Vietnamese, was completely in the tow of the Russian Stalinists. For now

the strategists of Russian great power politics were sitting in Moscow, for whom social movements only fitted into their calculations to the extent that they helped to secure their own national position.

While the 1st Congress of the CP of Indochina in Macao in March 1935 in Hồ's absence had found the revolutionary situation in Vietnam extremely favourable, Hồ was in Moscow. There, as is well known, at the 7th World Congress [of the Comintern], the Stalinists declared their formula of the popular front policy, which is still valid today. In the final analysis, this new line meant nothing else for the Vietnamese nationalists than that they were forced to enter into an alliance with their mortal enemies, the French colonial power, represented by the camp of the landowners. On the other hand, this meant that the new "alliance partner" had to be protected from the radical ambitions of the peasants, which is why an agrarian programme was hidden away in the drawers. After all, it took the Stalinists a full year to correct the Vietnamese line and switch to an "Anti-Imperialist Popular Front" by a CC decision in July 1936. After the victory of the popular front in France, links were also quickly established with the colonial master.

The initially still strong opposition to this betrayal of the national cause was eliminated with the rigorous severity learned from the Russian model. This was the time of the elimination of "Trotskyists", of course also in Vietnam "stooges of the fascists", who had to be annihilated. The break with the "Trotskyist" wing, which was particularly strong in Cochinchina, became definitive when Hồ's faction sharpened the popular front line by a decisive degree: After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, these "heroes" of the Vietnamese revolution called for the struggle against the "Japanese fascists" to be given priority over the struggle against the landowners, and even to ally with the French against the Japanese.

This policy reached its preliminary culmination in May 1941 at the 8th Plenum of the CC, which was presided over by Hồ, who had returned to Vietnam in January after an absence of almost 30 years. Now the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội, abbreviated "Việt Minh") was created with the aim of *"uniting all patriots, without distinction of property, age, sex, religion or political views, to work together for the liberation of our people and for the good of our fatherland"*.²

Now, finally, after 10 years, Hồ could put to rest even the most cautious agrarian programme, thanks to the eradication of resistance in his own ranks. Even the phrase "expropriation of counterrevolutionary landowners for the benefit of poor peasants" was dropped. Hồ later justified this as follows:

*"The party changed its tactics in time. With the intention of uniting all patriotic forces... the party temporarily withdrew the slogan of agrarian revolution.... Thus we sought to unite all forces in the struggle against the imperialists.... (and) to include the patriotic landowners."*³

For the sake of mobilising the peasants, the Vietnamese Stalinists thus relied on the indigenous landowners, and thus on those whose inevitable demise could only be halted by the presence of the colonialists – and later the Americans. As recently as November 1940, peasant uprisings had been bloodily put down by the temporary joining forces of the Japanese and the French. Binding oneself to the landowners and thus putting the "bridle" on the peasants therefore meant nothing other than betraying any national movement, certainly not least out of fear that one might lose control over the peasants. What remained was the degrading role of supplicant at the court of the colonialists.

² cf. Nguyen Kien Giang, "Les grands dates du parti de la classe ouvrière du Vietnam", Hanoi, 1960, p. 41.

³ Ho Chi Minh, "Selected Works", Vol.4, Hanoi 1962, p. 43.

This sad spectacle was staged by Hồ at the turn of the last imperialist war. The stronger capitalist countries had parried the challenge from the “late developers”. To the phonily harmonious tune of Roosevelt’s Good News, these heroes of democracy set about reclaiming the territories that had temporarily slipped out of their control. For Vietnam, they had come up with the following: England from the south and China – Chiang’s at the time, of course – from the north were to occupy the country and “liberate” it from the Japanese. Subsequently, it was to be transferred to the “rightful owner” France, which could not yet fully resume its imperialist ambitions due to a lack of transport capacity. And the new long hero of the French [De Gaulle] had already spoken in Algiers on 8 December 1943 of the “necessity” for France to re-establish itself in Indochina. Although one did not want to become a “colony” oneself, one wanted to continue to keep others subservient.

Meanwhile, the Việt Minh tirelessly appealed to the former revolutionary traditions of their master – as if that had been nothing but a past episode for these people too. Or Hồ relied on the Americans, who were now to become the new masters of the Asian world as well.

On the other hand, the French government, made up of one third each of socialists and Stalinists, made no secret of its intentions: on 24 March 1945, it announced its Indochina programme, in which it unequivocally demanded the formation of a federation of five countries of Indochina. In this way, the French government wanted to keep the three Vietnamese “countries” of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina apart forever, alongside Cambodia and Laos.

By contrast, the social movement reached its boiling point with Japan’s surrender in August 1945. On 16 August, a “National Committee for the Liberation of Vietnam” was formed, raising the slogan to be *“determined to take power from the hands of the Japanese fascists before the Allies arrive.”* On the night of 19-20 August, the people’s pent-up rage gave vent to itself.

This “August Revolution” of Vietnam was sealed on 25 August with the voluntary abdication of Emperor Bảo Đại – though he remained “supreme” advisor to the new government – in favour of a Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The rest was just a formality. On the 29th Hồ became president of the provisional government and on 2 September the proclamation of Vietnam’s independence took place in Hanoi. The declaration of independence was drafted by Hồ himself. Again, he remained true to himself by having it begin with the same pretty formulas as the American one. He obviously hoped to soften the mood of the decisive world power, not seeing that the present imperialist governors had little to do with their revolutionary ancestors. It is the tragedy of every revolutionary bourgeois to make acquaintance with the practices of his counterrevolutionary colleagues. Although Hồ had already received enough lessons from the French, the often ridiculous-looking desire to compromise with imperialism is in keeping with the nature of the emerging bourgeoisie in the colonial countries.

Towards the imperialists, he had only niceties and attentive gestures in mind. Not least for this reason, Hồ officially dissolved the CP on 11 November 1945 – which, on the other hand, did not mean much, of course, since it had long since been allowed to disappear behind the various “fronts”. But it was well known that imperialists always react allergically to this designation and hardly bother to scrutinise this revolutionary claim for its actual content. For an imperialist, this mindset is only consistent. As is well known, he smells in every change of the status quo the sinister forces of darkness that want to cut off the living space for his “enlightened” message. Whether social struggles at home or national-bourgeois movements, he rightly sees only the attack on his profit opportunities. And since one prefers not to speak plainly, the imperialist and his ideologue still prefer the moral embellishment. If the enemy proclaims himself the “devil”, all the better, otherwise the propaganda machine will stick the right label on his skirt anyway. And adorned with this mark of Cain, even the biggest atrocity is legitimate, after all, an inveterate imperialist does not philosophise about “violence against things” or “violence

against persons”, he only knows violence as such – because for him all persons are things, namely objects of his exploitation.

As polite and courteous as Hồ – whom we here always refer to as the personification of a social force – behaved towards his rich relatives, he could be brutal with those who did not agree with the way he conceived of. Above all, one had not yet finally settled accounts with the “Trotskyists”. And because it was so convenient, all disobedient, i.e. revolting workers and peasants were declared outlaws. This is again typical of every bourgeois revolution, only with the small difference that in the past one also took action against the “right”. For Hồ, however, there were only “friends” on the right for the time being; for him, the enemy was on the left. The anti-Japanese uprising had set the peasants in motion, who suffered from a particularly severe famine that year. Every peasant movement made the landowners tremble, as they knew that their land was in danger and that they could not rely on either the Japanese or the French to repel the peasants’ attacks. But they were in good hands with Uncle Hồ. Against attacks from the left a clear warning was given:

“All those who incited the peasants to occupy landowners’ property will be severely and mercilessly punished. We have not yet made the communist revolution that will solve the agrarian problem. This government is only a democratic government, which is why such a task cannot be solved by it. Our government, I repeat, is a bourgeois-democratic government, even though the communists are now in power.”⁴

And this was not empty talk, but brutal practice. The peasants were forced to shut up, the “ringleaders” were liquidated – and for general reassurance there was the spectacle of “free” elections on 6 January 1946. So Hồ did everything to prove himself worthy of his masters in a foreign land. For colonialists, the crucial test for possible native governors, as is well known, is whether they can keep “order” in the country as they themselves do. Hồ wanted to pass this decisive litmus test under all circumstances. This was particularly evident in South Vietnam, where the uprising was also extremely militant, but the Stalinists, because of their reduced presence compared to the North, could not so easily nip all the workers’ and peasants’ actions in the bud. But one did what one could. Through their press, the Việt Minh ordered the dissolution of all partisan units that had fought against the Japanese. All weapons were to be handed over to the Stalinists’ police force. The groups targeted by this decision were not so much the militant religious sects, but especially the workers’ councils, some of which were armed. Immediately after the Việt Minh, in close cooperation with the other national and religious forces, took power in Saigon on 25 August, they began hunting down the “Trotskyist” organisation “The Struggle” (Tranh Dau), and in early 1946 their leader Tạ Thu Thâu was assassinated by them – this despite the constant assurances of “critical” support for the Việt Minh and its government: as is well known, this is the opportunist formula among the “Trotskyists”. Above all, however, the Stalinists wanted to eliminate the fighting workers, because it was not through the broadest struggle that the Việt Minh wanted to reconquer Vietnam from imperialism, but solely through negotiations. And for that it needed “peace and order” in the country. The populace of Saigon was therefore called upon to disperse to rural areas, avoid clashes and “remain calm”. And thus it was no miracle that the French troops, supported by English Gurkhas, who occupied important buildings in Saigon on the night of 22-23 September, initially met with little resistance. However, this imperialist provocation led to reactions that spread like wildfire in the city. Insurgencies then flared up in all the workers’ quarters. The Việt Minh did not at all take the lead in these spontaneous revolts, but rather launched a nasty trick. Leaflets said: *“The French... are obviously enjoying murdering our people. There can only be one answer to this: the food blockade.”*

⁴ Per R.F. Turner, “Vietnamese Communism. Its Origins and Development”, Stanford 1975, p. 43.

While the Việt Minh tries to “starve out” the French – a ridiculous undertaking, since British ships control access to the harbour – it tries with all its might to reach negotiations with the British, which actually take place and end with a ceasefire on 1 October. On 5 October, General Leclerc, commander-in-chief of the French troops, arrives in Saigon. His mission is to restore “order” and “build a strong Indochina within the French Union”. Meanwhile, the “negotiations” between the Việt Minh and the British continue. The sole result is that British and Japanese troops are allowed “free and unimpeded passage” through the districts occupied by the insurgents. In keeping with its policy of order, the Việt Minh consciously agreed to this arrangement. Since it is too weak to deal with the workers, the imperialists are to do the job for it. The imperialists of course bring in more and more troops to occupy the remaining strategic points in Saigon. Then, on 12.10, the French, together with the Gurkhas, undertake a general attack on the main insurgent quarters. Despite desperate resistance, the defence lines of the workers around the city centre are gradually being eliminated. That the Việt Minh became the dominant power in the following years was only achieved through the blood of many murdered workers and peasants. And it was these counterrevolutionary actions of the Việt Minh that ultimately made it possible for the imperialists to take possession of Vietnam again so easily.

But the repertoire of these bourgeois revolutionaries was not yet exhausted. Now the farce of negotiations with the French was really just beginning. The French were back in the country and expanding purposefully. On February 28, 1946, they concluded an agreement with the Chinese, who had occupied northern Vietnam up to the 16th parallel on September 12 in accordance with Allied agreements. With this, the French replaced the Chinese. After a series of bloody clashes between the occupation forces and the population, an agreement was reached between France and the Việt Minh on March 6, 1946. On this basis, France recognises the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as an independent state, but French troops are authorised to replace Kuomintang troops in the north. Furthermore, the negotiations are to be continued at another location.

The following day, Hồ and Leclerc issue a joint communiqué calling on the Vietnamese people to extend a friendly welcome to the French troops. Although there is great commotion among all the nationalists, the first French units thus land in the North on 8 March in the port of Haiphong. In order to better discipline the growing opposition to this policy, the Stalinists found an even “broader” united front on 25 May with the programmatic slogans “independence” and “freedom”: the Hội Liên hiệp Quốc dân Việt Nam, or Liên Việt for short.

Thanks to the stalling tactics of permanent negotiations, the French imperialists had already come a long way again. In the South as in the North, they had been able to establish themselves with the help of the Việt Minh, not least because all radical, militant struggles of the Vietnamese peasants and workers were determinedly put down, with the Việt Minh even using imperialist help when it could not manage on its own. But Hồ wanted to negotiate and the French needed time to settle down properly again. Thus, a Vietnamese delegation led by Hồ was shipped to France. The first surprise came to Hồ on the flight. On 1 June, the French proclaimed the “Autonomous Republic of Cochinchina” in the south of Vietnam, although they had just committed themselves in the March treaty to let the population decide on the future in a referendum.

Hồ did not turn around to finally seriously fight the French, as might be expected. No, he had his principles, which he had formulated in this way when justifying the treaty to “his” people: *“It is a sign of wisdom if one negotiates instead of fights. What’s the point of sacrificing 50,000 or 100,000 men when you can achieve independence through negotiations, even if it might take five years?”*⁵

⁵ J. Lacouture, “Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography”, Frankfurt 1968, p. 141.

For fear of too strong social eruptions, these modern bourgeois revolutionaries à la Gandhi seem to choose the less bloody path. Yet they cause exactly the opposite. The Indian original also prevented any broad radical movement. The social congestion then quite logically unloaded itself in a mass mutual slaughter of the hysterical religious communities; add to this the chronic stagnation of the economy and the permanent misery of the peasants due to the prevented or suppressed agrarian revolution – then one can only appreciate what kind of mass graves the so seemingly non-violent apostle of peace Gandhi produced. Things are similar with the soft Hồ. A radical, certainly not bloodless, strike against the imperialist scoundrel would have been far more likely to succeed than this wretched haggling. Not to mention the blood sacrifices still to come. So Hồ flew on to France – and was first deported to Biarritz by his “hosts”. He could now take a walk here for three weeks before the official state visit was to begin on 22 June. By pure coincidence, it had of course turned out that France had no government at all, as elections were taking place at the very same time. Hồ’s patience knew no bounds. He was now staying in a second-class hotel, was “locked in”, so to speak, but only commented on his situation with a smile, saying that he had experienced “worse places to stay”. The official state visit, during which the French bourgeois took note of this sad hero with obvious discomfort, lasted until 4 July. Subsequently, negotiations on Franco-Vietnamese relations began in Fontainebleau, deliberately isolated from Paris and with the participation of French “experts” only, i.e. without authoritative politicians. On the Vietnamese side, the current [1980] Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng chaired the meeting. It is hardly surprising that the consultations dragged on through the days without results. France wanted Indochina back, Vietnam wanted independence. Phạm had had enough by the beginning of September and went home on 9.9. Who remained was Hồ, who continued until mid-September to get something in writing in his hand by hook or by crook. The result was a paper officially referred to as the “modus vivendi of 14 September”. The content was broadly in line with the March treaty, noting the guarantees of French interests in the North and adding that democratic freedoms in Cochinchina would be respected. Furthermore, a cessation of hostilities in the south was envisaged, to be carried out by both sides. So all just empty talk – and that after more than three months in France. It is probably rare in history that a supposed revolutionary has been fobbed off by his opponent like this. And yet Hồ is being glorified today as the ancestor of Vietnamese “communism”! The situation is indeed hard to swallow.

But the melodrama was not over yet. On 18 October, his ship reached Vietnam and he immediately exchanged pleasantries with the French High Commissioner again. On the 23rd, he appeared before his people empty-handed and had the Marseillaise intoned for the reception in Haiphong. And in Hanoi, his key sentence was:

*“The French are quite benevolent towards us. The same must be the case from our side towards them. We must be courteous to the military and conciliatory to the French nationals. The whole world must realise that we are a civilised people.”*⁶

Meanwhile, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe repeated **exactly the same** words to his “people” a few weeks ago. The words and deeds of the Sandinistas who came to power in Nicaragua in 1979 are documented in this same issue. Social determinism operates relentlessly and shapes even the speeches of the great “leaders”.

Just one month later, the French put Vietnamese civilisation to the test: at dawn on 23 November, they fired on Haiphong from all guns. The French admitted to more than 6,000 dead, the Vietnamese talked about 20,000. Five days later, the French had the city in their hands. They had used the time that had passed extensively for reorganisation. Now they felt strong enough to finally clean up the “Vietnamese spook”. Only now did the Vietnamese government call for a general uprising, but not

⁶ J. Lacouture, “Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography”, Frankfurt 1968, p. 163.

without still desperately trying to get back into talks with the French. All its hopes were pinned on Léon Blum, who had become the new prime minister on 12 December. But the French felt that their hour had come. The first Indochina war had begun.

The First Indochina War

Now the decades-long ordeal of the Vietnamese people begins. It remains important to note, however, that it was above all the low radicalism of these “revolutionaries” and their constant fear of popular movements that virtually helplessly handed the country over to imperialism. For the latter only wanted to negotiate because it had to regroup its troops. Only when the Vietnamese “revolutionaries” were forced by the constant actions of the imperialists, they had to react. They then mobilised their “people” as needed, who were indeed full of pent-up anger and wild hatred against the imperialist oppressors and their local lackeys. But they only mobilised it in order to betray it again to the imperialists in the next round of negotiations. The struggle of almost 30 years is certainly a heroic example of the will to fight and the bravery of the Vietnamese people; on the other hand, it is a fatal proof of the constant anxiety and cowardice of its bourgeoisie. Only under the bloody blows did it ever find any semblance of stature at all.

The 1st Vietnamese War began with a retreat from the cities, which were already left to the French after the first heavier fighting. The only ones who had to stay were the workers, who now had no chance on their own against the enemy. In Hanoi, nevertheless, a regiment of workers resisted for two full months before surrendering. Thus the French once again extinguished the proletarian movement that had flared up again in the summer of 1946.

The “government” of the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] had retreated to the mountains, to the countryside. From now on and in view of the war, the agrarian question acquired a decisive importance, because it was not possible to win this war without the support of the peasants. Only now, when cannon fodder was needed, did the Stalinists proclaim the need for agrarian reform, whereas before they had always defended the landowner in the name of national unity. But even now they waited until 1950 to lower the lease rates. The undeveloped land was distributed “free of charge” and handed over to the recipient as property after two years. At the same time, they tried to promote cooperation. From now on, agrarian reform was under constant pressure to mobilise the peasants for the war and to achieve an increase in production.

Until 1949, the fighting was accompanied by constant offers of negotiation from the Vietnamese to the French. In January 1950, Hồ once again appealed desperately to his colleagues to tolerate him at their side table. However, the echo came from a completely different direction, because in the meantime the international situation had changed fundamentally. The Maoists had invaded Beijing in 1949 and established diplomatic relations with the DRV on 18 Jan. On 31.1. the Russians made the same move. On 1 May, the Vietnamese proclaimed their affiliation to the “democratic front led by the powerful Soviet Union” and on 16 August, Hồ declared that his government was a member of the “anti-imperialist bloc of 800 million people”. And on 11 February 1951, Vietnam once again had a “Worker’s Party of Vietnam” (Đảng lao động Việt Nam).

It was the time of the worst “anti-communist” hysteria in the West, the time of the Korean War and the McCarthy-era pogroms in the USA. These experts in global imperialist strategy now of course had what they needed. For them the case was clear, imperialists as well as “leftists” were and are in agreement at the latest since that date that Vietnam belongs to the “communist” bloc. The Trotskyist artistic formula of the “deformed workers’ state” struggles to whitewash this exposing partnership. But Vietnam had no other choice, since the constant offers of negotiation to the French and also to the USA always went unheard and instead the imperialist escalation was pushed forward. Under these conditions, the Vietnamese patriots inevitably had to seek protection in the other imperialist camp,

which was gradually making its mark. It was no coincidence that they had waited as long as possible to do so, because they were aware that Western imperialism would now pounce on them all the more furiously and that the “help” of the East would create new ties and dependencies. In today’s world of international hierarchy of variously strong countries, each country’s national claim to “sovereignty” very soon gets caught up in the vortex of violent struggles for the trophy of victory as champion of the world market.

So the Vietnam question now became internationalised and for the US it was no longer a question of how to act. If until then they had at least tried to give the appearance of neutrality, they now fully embraced the French and were to successively become the proper imperialist opponent in the following years.

The outcome of this first round is well known: The French no longer had any stature, they had misjudged history and were now themselves dependent on the USA – soon they were to withdraw and concentrate on the possessions in Africa that were crucial for them. Not even the growing supplies of the USA could put down the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people, now supported by Russia and China, against the imperialist dictate. The French were crushed at Điện Biên Phủ in the spring of 1954. The fighting people had liberated two thirds of the country with its blood from these megalomaniac master humans. And it would now have been really easy to finally put an end to this spook, because the defeat of the French had been total. But Hồ and his crew now proved all the more that they knew how to win, but that the only passion they knew was negotiating, and that they were happy to give up a large part of the positions they had conquered in the battle for this. It was the hour of the Geneva “peace”.

Now the war-weary and defeated French showed a willingness to negotiate again – and the victorious Vietnamese government had nothing more urgent to do than to respond. Invoking the “spirit of 6 March 1946”, this first fraudulent manoeuvre by the French, the combatants and their assistants gathered in Geneva in July 1954. Certainly also under the decisive and devastating pressure of the present “friends” Russia and China, but in the end nevertheless in continuation of their old policy, these Vietnamese special editions of patriots gave away the victory won with heavy losses by the fighting peasants and workers. Instead of sealing the victory with the final conquest, the Vietnamese delegation agreed to the “provisional” division of the country at the 17th parallel. One wanted to achieve reunification again without violence. One has to imagine this enormity: The Việt Minh controlled about 2/3 of the country before 1954 and its influence had steadily increased throughout the country as a result of the struggle. It was victorious, but still willing to retreat to a smaller area, which was also poorer than the areas to be cleared. In doing so, one trusted the renewed phonily harmonious tune of the imperialists, who spoke of general elections in two years. As if one had not made enough experiences with these democracies. And the USA did not even sign the treaty, but openly threatened with its future “anti-communist” intentions. As absurd as the policy of the Vietnamese patriots may seem – it was perfectly logical under the given conditions. It fully corresponded to their class nature, which itself dictates their illusions and their misconceptions. They did not want to antagonise the imperialists, but to play with them in the “concert of nations”, i.e. they counted on their help to build up the country and by means of a global compromise tried to avoid falling back into total dependence on a great power. Therefore, the anti-imperialist struggle now as well as later against the USA was accompanied by overtures, which were particularly strong after the victory. The balancing act – a thoroughly consistent nationalist policy – is just as impossible to avoid as the eventual fall to the ground of actuality, i.e. into the arms of a “protective power”. Here lies the bane of ascending nations in the age of imperialism.

But let us return to the Geneva Agreement of 1954. This agreement already contained the precondition for a new war. It put an end to the conflict at the very moment when the Vietnamese had proved their

striking superiority. It decreed that French troops should concentrate in the north and then withdraw south of the 17th parallel. For the Vietnamese in the south, the reverse was true. In addition, especially under pressure from Zhou Enlai, they had to withdraw completely from Laos and Cambodia. The whole thing allowed the French to rescue their divisions trapped in the Red River delta. Moreover, the agreement ensured that the approximately 100,000 Vietnamese soldiers were withdrawn from the south, leaving the peasants there, who had barely begun to divide up the land, to face the cruellest repression without defence.

Northern Vietnamese “Socialism”

Every bourgeois revolution has two central tasks: first, the national and second, the social. In a unified economic area, the foundations for the capitalist development of the productive forces must thus be laid by overcoming old relations of production. The national task had been half betrayed: After the “peace”, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie disposed of about 55% of the population and 49% of the area of all of Vietnam. But traditionally, the north had been dependent on rice supplies from the fertile Mekong. By “voluntarily” renouncing the South, one had thus cut oneself off from these rice supplies. In addition, of course, agriculture and industry in the north had been largely disrupted by the war. The political defeat at the conference table therefore had harsh consequences for the population: It was only possible to survive in the short term through harsh rationing measures; in the long term, there was a necessity to decisively strengthen productivity through agrarian reform in order to obtain the means for industrialisation. The parasitic big landowners now had to be definitively eliminated – if they hadn’t already left for the south. In a consistently spontaneous movement, the peasants occupied numerous estates. Despite official laws, the government thus ran the risk of losing control over these measures. In this first agrarian reform of North Vietnam in 1953/57, about 45% of the cultivated land was redistributed and 2.1 million land-poor or landless farmers were provided with land. However, the size of the farms was far too small. Therefore, a second upheaval soon followed: “collectivisation” into “production cooperatives”. By 1963, 97% of the farms had been absorbed into these, mostly cooperatives of the “higher” type, in which, after complete takeover of the land ownership and the means of labour, the remuneration for the individual was calculated exclusively according to labour performance. In 1966, there were around 28,000 collective farms, as well as some larger state farms, especially for export crops. The Tonkin Delta was fully covered, the small remainder of the non-collectivised land is in the remote areas of the mountain tribes.

It is no coincidence that the renewed expropriation of the peasants and their tendential forced conversion to wage labour lasted a relatively long time, because this bourgeois agrarian policy was accompanied by numerous protests and resistance actions, of which the peasant uprising of November 1956 in northern Annam stands out above all because it was reported by Western witnesses. Only a strong army action could restore “peace and order” at that time, during which around 6000 peasants were shot or deported. Only Hồ’s “father figure” succeeded again and again in calming the agitated hearts. However, he was not able to work miracles either. It is therefore hardly surprising that by the beginning of the 1960s Hồ’s authority had seriously deteriorated. It was not until the outbreak of the second war by the Americans that his reputation among the people was to be revived.

The social task of a bourgeoisie means nothing other than clearing away the rubble of the old, pre-capitalist relations, not least in agriculture, in order to help the development of the productive forces to a decisive breakthrough. The parasitic landowners must be eliminated, the small farmers and leaseholders must be torn out of their subsistence economy in order to increase the agricultural surpluses through an agrarian-capitalist mode of economy. In this context, it is a fundamental mistake to believe that the small farmer programme of land grabbing is identical to the bourgeois-capitalist one. For every bourgeois, on the other hand, it is clear that above all an agrarian economy practised on a large scale with extensive expropriation of the small farmers is a prerequisite for capitalist

development. This is all the more urgent in countries like Vietnam, which have to feed a large population on scarce arable land, many of whom live and work in the cities and in industry, and thus have to be fed by agriculture. It is clear that this reorganisation of petty-bourgeois agriculture can never take place without coercion.

In industry, the tasks were no less immense. Due to the war, the weak industry of North Vietnam had lost about 85% of its production capacity. The French corporations had mostly left voluntarily for the South, although the North Vietnamese would have liked to keep them. So industry had to be completely reorganised. And it is again one of the popular picture-book ideas that this task could only be carried out by individual entrepreneurs. If they are not present and the state therefore takes over this task, it would no longer be capitalism. Capitalism is generalised – that is, capitalist – commodity production based on wage labour, in order to accumulate and force a constant development of productive forces. Capitalism is the exploitation of surplus labour, and whether this is done by a private entrepreneur or by a state enterprise is of no importance whatsoever for the social relation between wage labour and capital. It is simply laughable to believe that an underdeveloped and constantly attacked capital like Vietnam's could make the industrialisation process dependent on the whims and fancies of some individual figures. Only if one adheres to completely antiquated images of capitalism can one come up with such ideas. In the developed capitalism of the West, with growing concentration and centralisation, personal capital dissolves more and more and becomes the impersonal one of large "public companies"; the early capitalist societies are under the pressure of this highly developed capital, have to overcome the pre-capitalist fetters under this pressure and embark on the path of accumulation. And yet it is precisely in these societies that the past "idyll" should come alive again in the view of such ideologues!

Cooperation in agriculture and state control in industry and foreign trade are thus "socialism" for the leaders of North Vietnam, for the Western bourgeoisie as well as for all supporters of the Russian or Chinese blocs. Since this "socialism" is in essence nothing other than bourgeois dictatorship of accumulation, it is not surprising that all the capitalist categories of wages, profit, market, etc., wreak havoc in it and become more and more virulent in proportion to the development of the productive forces. Nor is it surprising that all these states and their politicians must behave no differently from bourgeois nation states and representatives of weak capitals that want nothing more than to protect their productive forces from an attack by the stronger ones in order to complete their construction of capitalism.

The Second Vietnamese War

It came as it had to come. From February 1955 onwards, France ceded its place to the USA – contrary to the provisions of the Geneva treaty, of course. The strongest imperialist country now took over the defence of the "free" world, and the Vietnamese were soon to feel what that meant. In the slipstream of the USA, the old faction of landowners and compradors installed itself in the South, which could only ever prolong its existence as parasites of imperialism. Of course, these leeches of the people were against a change in the status quo, so they were the ideal allies for the US. Counterrevolutionary developed capital always still combines with any pre-capitalist reactionaries in order to prevent independent bourgeois-capitalist development as much as possible.

The elections did not take place, of course. If a bourgeois revolution qua electoral vote is already a nasty joke anyway, which is slowly becoming more and more fashionable, these super-democrats very quickly disown their shallow slogans if they cannot be harnessed for their own purposes. In the West, democracy is a means for the bourgeoisie to have its dressage in corpse-like obedience and factory labour confirmed again and again. In South Vietnam, however, popular sentiment was boiling and not at all taken in by the blessings of the imperialist moralisers. For in the predominantly agrarian south,

the landowners were now firmly back in the saddle and rode the blood out of the peasants' ribs. The agrarian reforms were nothing but a farce here.

And since the fraud manoeuvre of the imperialists with the prevented elections was clear to everyone, the resentment gave vent again in a spontaneous, constantly growing resistance. From 1957 onwards, these actions took on serious forms and, from 1960 onwards, they are sustained by the "Front National de Libération" (FNL) – an association of more than twenty nationalist groups – formed in the South. Only hesitantly did North Vietnam pledge its support for these liberation struggles on 14 May 1959, and it was not until September 1960 that the North publicly announced that it would not leave the fighters alone.

This is then the beginning of a spiral without end, in which the USA brings in ever stronger battalions. From 1962 onwards, the USA is involved with its own troops; the several thousand "advisors" are no longer enough. In the well-known "incidents" of 2 and 4 August in the Gulf of Tonkin – very much in the tradition of the fascist raid on the Gleiwitz radio station at the beginning of World War II – the strategists in the Pentagon procured their legitimacy before the world public. Since then, people in the West have been able to witness a bloody military spectacle without precedent every evening. And the fact that the wage-earners of the West looked on with indifference or, incited by the imperialist propaganda machine, even enthusiasm at this mass murder of imperialism and did not lift a finger is proof enough of the dramatic defeat that the international workers' movement suffered between the two world wars and from whose effects it is still suffering.

The aim of the war was clear: the intervention in Vietnam was to be a historical example and a lesson for all underdeveloped countries that wanted to challenge the regional "balance" guaranteed by the imperialists of the West. Thus, more and more Vietnamese peasants were to die for the tranquillity of the Brazilian bourgeois, for the royal house in Rabat, the feudal "Illustrados" in Manila, and so on.

The USA – as is well known – spared no means for this cementing of the global status quo. From 7 February 1965, the north was also bombed and since then Hanoi has had to live under bombs. In the south, the population is driven into the cities or into "strategic" concentration camps. The land is "ploughed up" with all weapons and contaminated by chemicals of all kinds. The peasants lose their land, the city dwellers their jobs. Productive life is dying out more and more. Soon, because of US interference in the country's economy, this rice chamber of Vietnam became an area that had to import rice to escape famine. Only the American commodity supplies keep this people alive while breeding a myriad of parasitic existences. This and the countless hookers are only the most important keywords of the US imperialist civilisational desert produced there. All in all, South Vietnam provided an advantageous basis for the USA to use its superior economic power to shape the regime politically at will, especially since one knew how to find helpers for money in a corrupt and terrorist upper stratum. The whole policy of the USA since 1954 was aimed at cementing the division of Vietnam under systematic sabotage of the Geneva Accords. Even the imperialists can no longer deny this since the publication of the so-called "Pentagon Papers".

Not only did the horrors of war, known to many other peoples, befall Vietnam, but an inferno, the likes of which world history had never seen before, befell a small country that wanted nothing more than to carry out its national and social transformation to the capitalist mode of production. What was in store for the Vietnamese people was expressed with cynical candour by General Westmoreland, the commander-in-chief of the US forces:

"In further strategy towards the North Vietnamese, we will continue to exert 'maximum pressure' in every possible way until Hanoi recognises that its country has been bled to the brink of national catastrophe and will be forced to review its attitude."

The then chief of staff of the US Air Force, Le May, had already declared in 1965 that *“the whole of North Vietnam would be brought back to the stone age by aerial bombardment”*. The intervention of the USA in Vietnam was from the beginning a textbook example of a modern variant of colonialism for the actualisation of imperialist aims in the South-East Asian region.

The basic decision of the USA to use its economic and military power to strengthen its position in Vietnam and to annex the southern part of the country to the “free world”, i.e. to its own world policy, led to all the further consequences with compelling necessity. Even if the intention had been solely the military and strategic objective of the infamous “Containment of Communism”, this would have undoubtedly constituted a neocolonial attack, for colonialism means the domination of a foreign country for the purpose of its exploitation in any form. This exploitation need not consist in the immediate appropriation of raw materials or in any other enrichment of the colonial power.

And with unparalleled brutality, the US imperialists put their programme into action. As is well known, the consternation about Auschwitz knows no bounds, and cynically, it was precisely the representatives of the US imperialist cultural offensive who once again moved the world to tears with their political kitsch “Holocaust”⁷. These specialists devoted to illusions approach the subject of “Vietnam” only very timidly and, if at all, then of course in a intricately “profound” manner. Yet the material for a terrific “Godfather” ran here. For the mafia is indeed a small fish compared to imperialism, just the pocket edition of big politics. The gangsters terrorise the “clients” from the middle class and, if they don’t toe the line, they clean up their joint with dynamite. The imperialist state also talks about protecting and defending freedom, but in case of refusal it can show off in a completely different way. It then wages a war of extermination against the civilian population with all means at its disposal. In comparison, the wildest shootouts in Chicago are nothing but ridiculous children’s theatre. It is no coincidence that reading the Pentagon Papers feels like reading an intimate report from the criminal milieu: Professional torturers and perpetrators of violence are at work here for the most developed capitalism; the yardstick for their actions against Vietnam is “increasing the pain quotient”. And here torture was indeed collectivised: they wanted to torture the Vietnamese people through all forms of suffering and death to the point that they would be willing to bend unconditionally to the will of the USA. But this is nothing less than applying the popular principle of torture not against individuals but against an entire people. It is always the same: the status quo is sacred and any attack against this declared eternal state of affairs is nothing but subversion that must be violently broken. As has been mentioned, one believes oneself to be in the gangster milieu and yet one only looks into the serious faces of imperialist capital.

We still remember the outcome. The coup first went completely to shit. After the Tet Offensive in January 1968, the Yankees were left speechless and talked of negotiations, to which Hanoi, hasty as always, immediately agreed. The first poker round began in Paris on 10 May. As is well known, it dragged on until January 1973, when it ended with the rotten compromise of “neither war nor peace”. In April 1975, this drama finally came to an end with the conquest of Saigon and the headless flight of the last imperialists and their courtiers. At least 2.5 billion dollars (!) per month spent on the war and, with Asian landsknechts, a total of around 1 million soldiers had not been able to prevent defeat.

Now finally: Construction of Capitalism

Now the country was united, but badly scarred by the ravages of war. 14 million tonnes of bombs, artillery shells, mines and ammunition had fallen on Vietnam. That was about ten times more than during the Second World War in Germany. The industry of the north was again largely destroyed and

⁷ What is meant is a 1978 American four-part television miniseries called “Holocaust”.

large parts of the agricultural economy lay in ruins. 4 million dead, 5 million wounded, 1 million widows and orphans each can only reflect in meagre figures the social mortgage of the war.

The tasks were daunting in other respects as well. The potentially rich country, with its combination of raw materials in the north and the fertile rice chamber in the south plus the suspected oil, had to be consolidated as quickly as possible. Lack of infrastructure and severe social tensions were only the main obstacles. While the North could now at least begin its reconstruction in peace under already familiar political conditions, the situation for the South was quite different.

The once self-contained economy of the South had been broken up since the French colonial period, but then degenerated, especially at the hands of the USA, into an imperialist outpost with all its typical distortions. The economy was flooded with foreign commodities. Neither tariffs nor other barriers protected it. The average Vietnamese had only two ways out in the course of colonial development: Either he took refuge in agriculture, clinging to the soil and dividing up the small piece of family land yet again, or he turned to intermediate trade and other unproductive tertiary occupations that were entirely geared to the needs of the "metropolises". As a result of this subjugation to the imperialist "division of labour", on the one hand, the pre-capitalist elements, including the landowners possessing rice land, were strengthened and, on the other hand, an unproductive layer of middlemen and service professions in the cities was fostered. The colonial structure of the country eventually led to the big cities, especially Saigon, acting like magnets on the country's population and becoming unhealthily bloated. The US bombing did the rest. According to South Vietnamese statistics, the proportion of the urban population in the South increased from 15 to 43% in the period 1960-72. In Saigon alone, the population grew from 1.8 million (1972) to 3.8 million (30.4.1975). The cultivated land decreased in the same proportion. In 1974, the service sector, artificially inflated by the US presence, accounted for more than 50% of the domestic social product, while agriculture (including forestry and fisheries) and industry accounted for only 40% and 10%, respectively.

The consequences for any government that wants to create the general framework for capital accumulation are obvious: nationalisation of foreign trade, formation of cooperatives in agriculture and the trades, establishment of state enterprises, disentanglement of the overpopulated cities and drying up of the bloated intermediary trade. After 1975, development in this direction was initiated in all areas. For almost three years, the officials from the north tried the soft way. However, even so, over one million urban dwellers were resettled in two years into so-called new "economic zones" in the countryside, resulting in about 350 000 ha of new land for cultivation.⁸ But this was no way to break the Chinese trade monopoly. The traditional structures of families and secret societies held together too tenaciously for success to be achieved without radical interventions. And these became increasingly necessary. The distribution of commodities completely collapsed, unless it was in Chinese hands. The Chinese traders mainly operated on their own account and were anxious to make big money as quickly as possible, because who knew how long they could keep it up. In any case, the farmers of the Mekong preferred to sell to the Chinese at favourable prices rather than to supply the state buyers at fixed prices. They would rather grow only as much as they needed to live on. So the state hardly had the means of power to extort what it urgently needed from the peasants. The trade channels were simply not in its hands. Not least because of this, agricultural yields remained constantly insufficient. It was not until 23 March 1978 that the Chinese quarter of Saigon – Cholon – was sealed off in order to eliminate this uncontrollable entity by force.

The tasks were clearly defined by the material constraints. The overpopulated north had to be relieved agriculturally in order to feed its population as well as to obtain raw materials and foreign currency for industrialisation through exports. To achieve this, the main task was to bring the South up to its

⁸ "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", 30.7.1978.

potential level of performance. Agricultural production had to be increased and a surplus had to be increased. This meant thinning out the cities and repopulating the countryside, forcing the agrarian division of labour up to the formation of agro-industrial complexes in which high-performance crops are to ensure constantly high yields per hectare with the additional measures of fertilisation, irrigation and plant protection and the use of machinery. This is also the agrarian-capitalist model of a Green Revolution for the Vietnamese. Here, the surpluses from the South are to supplement a growing industry in the North – and the whole thing is to be financed, if possible, from the oil off the coasts, which has so far only been assumed. This is the general outline of the dream of the Vietnamese bourgeoisie. But anyone who thinks they can find some kind of socialism in it is really beyond help. They are only lying to themselves.

This wish list was presented at the 4th Party Congress in December after the official unification of Vietnam on 2 July 1976. By the turn of the century, Vietnam also wants to have a seat and a voice in the club of capitalists. For the time being, however, it's not about dreaming, but about tangible things, because the problems are piling up too enormously. The framework is provided by a four-year plan for 1976-80, which one is, however, wisely prepared to correct every year. And the wish list is not modest: The production targets for 1980, for example, were originally as follows: 21 million tonnes of cereals (mainly rice and maize), 1 million tonnes of sea fish, 1 million ha of new land reclamation, 1.2 million ha of afforestation, 16.5 million pigs, 10 million tonnes of coal, 5 billion kWh of electricity, 2 million tonnes of cement, 1.3 million tonnes of fertiliser, 250,000-300,000 tonnes of steel.

The basis is to be agriculture, on whose yields light and heavy industry are to be built. And in laying this foundation, one has so far only experienced unpleasant surprises. In 1977, Vietnam was hit by droughts, which had a particularly damaging effect on rice production in the north of the country. In the spring of 1978, the cold weather destroyed a considerable part of the rice plants in the central and northern parts. In the Mekong Delta, there were also plant pests whose destructive rage could not be contained due to a lack of pesticides. The greatest damage, however, was caused by the floods in August and September, which destroyed a good 2 million tonnes of the rice harvest. Production was correspondingly low: in 1977, at 11.3 tonnes of rice, it was 2 million tonnes less than planned, which is why one was forced to import 1.6 million tonnes of rice. The figures for 1978 were no less catastrophic, as can be clearly seen from the rice rations per capita and month: April 1978 – 13 kg, in July 17 kg and after the flood disaster: in September 9 kg and in March 1979 just 1 kg. Where the rice bowls are empty, there is no need of any chatter.

Disappointing for the Vietnamese bourgeoisie, however, were not only the results at home, which despite massive pressure on the peasants and workers have so far yielded hardly anything positive, but the representatives of capital were severely disappointed by their established colleagues in the West. They now reckoned with the generosity that had hitherto been denied. They apparently seriously believed that after this unfair struggle, imperialist capital would let what had happened rest. Mind you, it was not the victorious but heavily injured "David" who wanted recourse now; he could not afford that with his destruction. No, the imperialists, who had so badly battered a newcomer, continued to be stubborn. The Vietnamese bourgeoisie has obviously not yet grasped the rules of the game of today's struggle of all against all on the world market. Perhaps it has also internalised the old sayings of "dignity", "ethical life", "decency" etc. too much. But it was very soon that it was taught the next lesson. For the ideologues of imperialism, in any case, the matter was quite simple:

"Hanoi's propaganda continues to suggest to the West a guilt complex, an obligation to make amends for sins of destruction committed. In contrast, one should not lose sight of the fact that North Vietnam

waged a war of aggression and occupied South Vietnam by force of arms after the Americans withdrew".⁹

And Vietnam did not so much beg as offer investment opportunities. Sure, they wanted \$3.25 billion in "compensation" from the Yanks. As is well known, they have not seen a penny to date. But the Vietnamese left no stone unturned to do business with the West. Vietnam was certainly not only thinking about importing technology, but above all about independence from the "communist brothers". One did not want to be drawn into the conflict between Russia and China and wanted to remain as "neutral" as possible. But here, too, as we know, everything turned out differently. Now one praises the Russian imperialist to the skies and becomes the punching ball for China.

Yet everything had been so beautifully thought out. In April 1977, a law on "foreign investment in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" was passed, guaranteeing both security of engagement and free transfer of capital and profits. With joint ventures, in which the foreign capitalist could hold up to 49%, but also "free production zones" with contract processing for export and 100% foreign capital, one wanted to lure the imperialists from the West. Through the second imperialist set, especially Japan and France, it was hoped that Uncle Sam – in a merciful mood again over time – would also press the prodigal son to his breast. The old dream of a peaceful partnership, which Hồ already wanted to achieve with France, was thus to be actualised after all. On 25.4.1977, Phạm Văn Đồng landed in Paris to fraternise with the former colonial power. France then also provided about 1/3 of the economic aid from the West in the last few years. It was certainly not altruism or belated remorse; rather, French capital wanted to secure its 125 businesses in South Vietnam.

Towards Japan, Vietnam was even prepared – albeit only after three years – to recognise the South's old debt of \$75.7 million plus interest, just to get its hands on Japanese "economic aid". Vietnam became a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank at a time when it only had observer status in CMEA. It wanted to get back into business with the West by all means.

In the field of forces of the imperialist confrontations, one was looking for a point where the sucking forces of China, Russia and the USA would neutralise each other in the final result. That was where one wanted to settle. But this point was not to be found, least of all in Southeast Asia. This bane of the young ascendant nations in the age of imperialism reverberates on the imperialist powers in a complicated interrelation. The USA had fought tooth and nail for decades over Indochina, finally to be courted at length and in earnest by Vietnam itself after being driven out. China had supported Vietnam against the Americans. The victory of the protégé on the southern flank, however, was bound to lead to the outbreak of power-political antagonisms between the two and at the same time intensify the rivalry between Russia and China for supremacy in Vietnam. Because of its decision in favour of a de facto alliance with China, the USA had to reject Vietnam's overtures and thus drive Vietnam into the arms of the USSR against its wishes. This shift in the balance eventually led to the complete consolidation of the Chinese alliance with the USA against Russia. History took place behind the backs of all actors.

So, since July 1978, Vietnam has necessarily been a full member of CMEA. For all imperialists and leftists, this is only the final proof again of the true or deformed character of this country. History deceives its would-be interpreters.

Source: "Kommunistisches Programm", 1980, N.25/26, p. 38-52.

⁹ "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", 3.3.1979.