

OUR YOUTH

VIETNAM



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*SOME NOTIONS OF GEOGRAPHY
AND HISTORY*

Until recently, the world did not know much about Viet-Nam, her name and history, the stubborn struggle she led at first to liberate herself from Japanese fascism, then to defend herself against French colonialism.

However, Viet-Nam is one of the oldest nations which dwells for centuries, on the shores of the Pacific.

Eighty years ago, this country extended in one united territory all along the Eastern part of the Indochinese peninsula. The French divided it into three provinces: Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina; these names are not Vietnamese, but artificial ones marking the different stages of the military conquest.

Linking the delta of the Red River with the delta of the Mekong, Viet-Nam presents a scenery of continual changes between plains and mountains, high lands and low lands, rice plantations and forests. For centuries the stream of Vietnamese emigrants followed the slopes of the Annamite Cordilleras towards the sea.

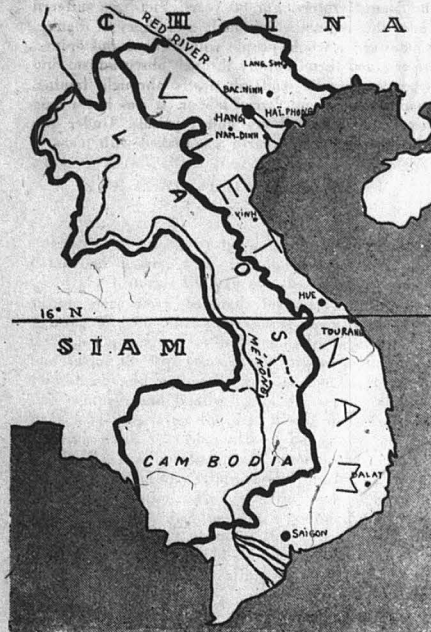
The landscape is beautiful and changing; lovely evergreen forests on the heights, vast rice-fields on the delta of the Mekong, a sweet harmony of vales and hills in Central Tonkin, an extraordinary combination of water and rocks in the Bay of Along, all this can be found in a land made for hunting and travelling of incomparable views and awe-inspiring monuments.

Natural resources are plentiful. Agriculture provides rice, maize, rubber, tea, coffee, coprah, spices. The forests are rich in precious woods. In the sub-soil can be found coal, iron ore, tin, zinc and wolfram. All these resources could have made Viet-Nam one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but they remained almost unexploited. For such is the law of colonialism: the misery of the oppressed peoples is necessary for the prosperity of the oppressor.

As for the Vietnamese people—one of the most united in the world—they are proud of its 3,000 years of glorious history and of their brilliant civilization.

It fought for a thousand years against the Chinese giant to keep her independence. Vanquished and victorious in turns, but keeping her peculiar character in spite of everything, Viet-Nam was, in the beginning of modern times, one of the few countries in the neighbourhood of China which had kept their own language, habits and traditions.

By the end of the 19th century, a new enemy appears: French imperialism. A military power, with modern weapons and a modern technique, employing up-to-date methods of exploitation and coercion. They were much more terrible than the old Chinese overlords. Viet-Nam actually lost even her name for 80 years. She was reduced to serfdom, brought back to the Middle Ages, under a foreign government which



represented, not the interest of a Western people, but the privileges of a handful of greedy capitalists and manufacturers. For 80 years, Viet-Nam suffered under this regime which made a mockery of dignity. It poisoned a whole people with alcohol and opium, undermined them morally through obscurantism and lying propaganda and physically through famine, unemployment and forced labour. It was but a long succession of slaughters and reprisals. Under the conquerors' feet, the earth was soaked with tears.

I

THE FIGHT FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION THE PART PLAYED BY YOUTH

Under the attack of imperialism, Viet-Nam was compelled to give way. But she remembered once more her history. We can say that the Vietnamese people were never defeated, for they never ceased fighting. For 80 years they sought the way to salvation. The movement for independence—a monarchist one during the first years of the conquest—became a republican and nationalist one at the beginning of this century, and finally had a democratic and popular character after the first World War. To resist extermination, Viet-Nam placed her hopes on her youth. The first defeats brought home to the old scholars that the country's fate should be shaped by the younger generation. They secretly sent children to free countries so that they got acquainted with modern science. A vast campaign for national resurrection was undertaken in literature and songs. A doomed civilization was calling on youth to carry on the fight.

The first to enter the struggle were emancipated scholars. Gradually the peasant youth joined the fight

at the side of the young intellectuals. It is interesting to note that the first revolutionary organization, the most modern one, was the "Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Association", created in 1925. The following year, the "Revolutionary Party of New Viet-Nam" appeared, and was closely followed by the "Nationalist Party". These three parties laid the basis for all the other organisations which were to play their part in the evolution of Viet-Nam. All of them were youth movements which contributed in the most effective way to the development of national consciousness and the propagation of democratic ideas among the masses.

The Revolutionary Youth Association, in particular, sent many young people abroad, mostly to China and Russia, to complete their revolutionary education. Moreover, well-trained, young people successfully infiltrated into factories, in order to organize underground trade unions. The students also gave their support, and proved to be the most enthusiastic of all. For several years, it was possible for this organization work to be performed in relative calm. But soon, events were to take a more dramatic course, owing to the world-wide economic crisis, as well as to the increasingly effective work of agitation.

The strikes in the schools were the first mass manifestations of the Vietnamese youth. When the great patriot Phan-Chu-Trinh died, all the students and school boys in Viet-Nam decided to observe a national funeral. In some places, ceremonies were held in the schools. The colonial administration suppressed these patriotic manifestations with its usual brutality: mass expulsions, closing of schools, confinement and even deportation were the means of repression employed against the young patriots. Strikes spread



To defend their country threatened by colonialism the young Vietnamese left everything to lead the hard life of partisans in the « Maquis ».

to the postal workers, to the clerks of the Bank of Indochina, and to the workers in the Arsenal at Saigon.

The struggle which the students' manifestations had started went on until the tragic events of Yen-Bay, in 1930. Yen-Bay, the red city, where a Vietnamese garrison had mutinied, was to give the signal for a general insurrection in the whole Tonkin delta. The surrender of the garrison brought about the disappearance of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party which had not succeeded in drawing the peasant masses into the struggle. A savage repression followed. Without mentioning those who fell in the fight, hundreds of Vietnamese patriots were deported and others sentenced to death. One of the leaders of the movement, Pho Duc Chinh, was executed at the age of 19.

After this, the revolutionary movement was silenced for a number of years.

But when, on the appeal of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1941, all sections of the people united in the broad front of National Liberation, Viet Minh, the youth enthusiastically joined in. In the South, it was the organization "Youth in the Vanguard" which led the struggle for liberation. In the whole country, the youth brigades for National Safety played an essential part in the underground fighting as well as in the open struggle for power in August 1945. During all the period of Japanese occupation, the youth of Viet-Minh displayed a ceaseless activity. They created underground organizations and voluntary committee to rescue and give help to Allied pilots forced down on Vietnamese territory. Harrassing the Japanese convoys, distributing antifascist leaflets and papers, teaching the population guerilla warfare, they were fighting everywhere.

When the order for general insurrection was given in 1945, well-officered young people, familiar with revolutionary tactics launched the onslaught against the traitors.

In fact at no stage of the struggle for liberation could the work of the revolutionaries be dissociated from that of the youth. It is safe to say that the Vietnamese Revolution of August 1945 was prepared and carried out mainly by young people.

II

YOUTH IN THE NEW VIET-NAM

After August 1945, when the Democratic Republic was proclaimed and the people's government created, the young Vietnamese took no rest. They had helped to install the Republic with a fight; they were going to consolidate it with their work.

One of the most pressing problems was the struggle against famine. We cannot show here under what circumstances the problem had to be grappled and how the Vietnamese Republic solved it. But we want to describe the contribution of the youth to this titanic effort. We only want to say that, in the battle for production it always fought in the vanguard. Its own enthusiasm helped to stimulate and win the support of the whole nation. "Not a square inch of uncultivated soil,—No idle hands,—these slogans had to materialize and groups of young people went throughout the country to give them publicity even in the remotest villages.

And they also set an example. The students cleared the gardens of the University City and the flower-beds were soon replaced by rows of sweet potatoes and



First Congress of the « Youth for National Salvation » (27-9-45), under the chairmanship of President Ho Chi Minh and Ex-Empress Bao Dai, an Adviser of the Republic.

maize. In each district, the groups of young people received a field in the suburbs on loan. The girls worked as hard as the men. Even the little boys wanted to take part in the common endeavour. Everybody got his allotment, where he could proudly watch the growing of a plant of pumpkin and of some maize. Most of these young people were members of the Children's National Association for National Salvation. Soldiers in Nhatrang set a moving example: at the climax of the war they availed themselves of their very short rest time to cultivate the outer parts and flanks of their trenches.

In that way the ghost of famine was conjured away by the coordinated effort of all the people. The part played by the youth commanded respect.

Another great victory of a major importance for the future of the Vietnamese nation was the liquidation of illiteracy. In that field too, the youth played an essential part.

As early as 1938, youth representatives took part in the creation of an "Association for the propagation of Quoc Ngu". Some students of the University of Hanoi wholeheartedly devoted themselves to this task, at a time when the colonial authorities used all possible means to prevent the intellectual youth from having contacts with the people.

They could not suppress this Association completely, but considerably hampered its action among the masses, so that it was compelled to suspend its activity provisionally in March 1945.

The drive against illiteracy could not reach its full scope before the Revolution of August and the establishment of the Democratic Republic. It was waged amongst the largest sections of the population as,

thanks to up to date methods, education became accessible for all citizens, even for the least gifted ones.

Except for the armed resistance, if a national effort ever bore the mark of youth, it certainly was this crusade against ignorance. It was the common work of all the Vietnamese: teachers of both sexes gave their utmost support, but they were not alone; public employees, clerks, tradesmen and peasants wholeheartedly collaborated with them. The eagerness to learn was only equalled by that to teach. In a republican and democratic Viet-Nam, they are learning everywhere: at home, in pagodas, in market places, in factories, in the fields and on the front line. Whenever they can spare a little time, they rush and look for the ABC book. If they find a difficult word, they stop a passer-by and ask for his help. The unnumberable difficulties of a country at war and the efforts of construction could not stop the Vietnamese people's drive for education.

Success surpassed the most optimistic forecasts. In 1946, in spite of a tense situation and a total lack of material, two and a half million citizens of all ages (some were more than sixty) were taught how to learn and write. As a basis for comparison, in 1938, under the colonialist regime, the total number of people attending from grammar schools to the Faculties of Hanoi, totalled 400,000.

The horrible war forced upon Viet-Nam by the French colonialists did not help that progress. A plan has been drafted according to which 6 million citizens will have acquired the requisite elements of education, i. e. will be able to read and write. The slogan has been put into practice: every Vietnamese citizen must be, apart from his routine work, either

a teacher or a pupil or both. Our young people are of course enthusiastically devoting themselves to this new campaign.

The inheritance of the old regime is a great handicap. Viet-Nam has neither beautiful universities, nor great institutes. But we are justly proud of our popular education system which in one year and a half trained six times as many pupils as the colonialist regime in 80 years.

In the field of culture, the young people carried out important, although less conspicuous, work.

A student of 16, Miss Nguyen Thi Kim, started and led for years the struggle for a revival of poetry. Young poets, many of whom were still studying, joined her in order to terminate victoriously the fight. Freed at last from useless scholastic shackles and euphemisms, Vietnamese poetry developed in an impressive way.

The August revolution brought about a tremendous revival of music, whose promoter, Luu Huu Phuoc, is also a young student. For generations, Viet-Nam has not had a single musician. Amateurs were ceaselessly playing the same obsolete melodies on the same old-fashioned instruments. Viet-Nam was several centuries behind in musical development. The youth are now trying to catch up. Songs springing from the depths of their souls give their rhythm to their march. If Vietnamese musical production cannot as yet be even compared with that of the Slav and Western countries, its freshness and vigour are full of promises.

As we have seen, the youth in the New Viet-Nam are always in the vanguard, whether fighting for liberation or devoting all its strength to the building of our Society.



An episode of the fight against famine : Girls collecting food for the starving.

It is precisely for these reasons that in our country youth is honoured everywhere, to such an extent that the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam is considered a Republic of students. For in our country the young people enjoy exactly the same rights as the grown-ups. One of the fundamental rights, the right to vote, was granted to all citizens of both sexes who are 18 years old, as well as the right to be elected. This is not a mere formula, since in the present National Assembly, 7 % of the deputies are less than 25, and 70 % less than 40. Which parliament in the world could boast of such an amount of young men?

Our ministers also are amazingly young: Giap, Minister of National Defence, is 35; Nam, the late Under-Secretary of State for the Interior, was 38.

Under these conditions, it is easy to understand that the young Vietnamese are now enjoying all the fundamental, social and political rights: equal pay for equal work, right to instruction and amusements, right to apprenticeship, prohibition to enforce hard work upon young people, etc.

As a matter of fact, the problem of youth cannot be coped with in Viet-Nam in the same way as in the other countries. The young Vietnamese need not struggle for the triumph of their aspirations, but to defend a State which has already given them everything. That is why, when the colonialists are trying to destroy the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam in order to re-establish the old oppressive rule, without any hesitation all the Vietnamese youth stand up against the invaders.

They would rather have devoted their efforts to the construction of the country; and promote a better living, to consolidate peace and democracy. But as a war has been imposed on them, they will discharge

their duty. They are fighting half naked, bare footed, sometimes even without weapons and ammunition, but they fight fiercely all the same for they know their cause is just.

The enemy's overwhelming superiority in equipment does not impress them. All the nation is engaged in this life and death struggle. But the youth do make the greatest efforts and the greatest sacrifices.

In our army, as in all the armies in the world, the fighting units consist mostly of young people, and what is characteristic of the revolutionary Vietnamese army is that the staff is made up of young men. We already know that the Minister of National Defence, Vo Nguyen Giap, who is the supreme commander of the Army, in charge of all the operations, is less than 40. This is characteristic of all ranks: as soon as they leave the training school, the officers and political commissioners are sent to the front line. They gave evidence of their heroism, in spite of their age. Many of them have already died on the battlefield, but others are always coming and replacing them. Others are present who are ready for the greatest sacrifice. All want to live in freedom or to die for freedom.

III

WHAT DO THE VIETNAMESE YOUTH WANT?

The young Vietnamese want above all a happy and free future with the right to a decent job, to a free education and to healthy amusements. This seems natural, but under the colonialist regime, work of any kind was always a coercion, because all-mighty masters were only thinking of oppressing the working class. Owing to the lack of social laws, they were at the mercy of their employers. By the fact that the State was levying a direct tax amounting to 20 % of already insufficient wages, misery was aggravated. We can understand now why famine was chronic. No rice and no education. One school for 3,000 inhabitants, one teacher for 2,000, one pupil per 50. What was called education had actually but a single purpose: to train on a strictly limited scale the auxiliary staff which was necessary to make the administration and the trusts work.

There as no such thing as to give the young people healthy amusement: opium, alcohol and prostitution meant a higher income; they had besides another advantage: by degrading youth, they suppressed any nascent national consciousness.



Behind their band, the Pioneers are participating in the electoral campaign. In Viêt-Nam, boys and girls vote at 18.

The young people will not tolerate such a regime any longer. They want a society in which dignity and happiness are not empty formulas.

Education must be free, regardless of wealth or class. Every young people must also have a profession to earn a decent living. When they are working, the young people must be remunerated according to their work and not to their age. They need entertainments and amusements which will not undermine their physical and moral health: stadiums, swimming-pools, sports centres, cinemas, libraries, must be put at their disposal in an adequate number.

The youth knows that only the revolutionary government of the Democratic Republic is willing and able to secure them all that. That is why they are devoting all their efforts to consolidate the Republic. The Vietnamese democracy can only fully achieve its aims if it develops the tremendous responsibility of those who are in charge of our young people, for it is by them that the whole nation is being educated. The youth are playing the part of an intermediary, a necessary one, which cannot be replaced because of its devotion and dynamism.

Whatever its importance may be, education can only create the psychological conditions for the development of democracy. From now on, we must face practical tasks. The youth must support all the popular aspirations and firmly defend the power of the people against any internal or external threat.

Then we must reconstruct a Viet-Nam that is devastated by war, better still, build a new Viet-Nam, more prosperous and more powerful than ever. Viet-Nam was purposely maintained for centuries in an economic backwardness. Agriculture is still using



One of the thousand of popular schools in which the young Vietnamese are fighting against illiteracy, a reminder of 80 years of French colonial rule.

archaic methods, industry does not exist, trade is under foreign control. We must build from nothing; but young people do not lack courage, and the example set by their comrades, the heroic young people of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, U.S.S.R. and so many other countries cannot but inspire and stimulate them.

Viet-Nam is still a poor and weak country. The youth will change her into a prosperous and powerful one. To achieve that aim, they fear no effort, they balk at no sacrifice. For long years from now onwards, they will have to work hard and be satisfied with little. They wholeheartedly and enthusiastically accept the slogans of the new life: toil, frugality, honesty and rectitude. Much patience, much toil, much time is still required until this happy future of which they are dreaming materializes.

Today they are facing another reality: they must take up arms to defend their imperilled country. Not satisfied with undermining the Vietnamese Republic by their intrigues, the colonialists undertook this merciless war in order to destroy it by force. Our young people have decided to fight to the last, for in this war the cause of Viet-Nam is that of justice. The very life of the Democratic Republic is at stake, and the cause of the Republic cannot be dissociated from that of youth.

But our young people know that they are not isolated in their present fight. By defending their country, they are also defending peace and democracy. They are convinced that only peace and democracy can ensure humanity a better life.

United by strong bonds of solidarity with all the peoples which are fighting throughout the world for

the same ideals, our Youth confidently face the radiant future which will fulfill its aspirations and make Viet-Nam the land of this beautiful motto: "Independence-Freedom-Happiness".

THE END

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