

THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

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LIFE WITH THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

NLF FILE SUBJ. Gen
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"The so-called P.R.G. doesn't even have a capital." This comment, meant as a clinching derogation, has fallen often from the lips of Saigon and U.S. government representatives ever since they signed the Paris Agreement in January, 1973 with that same P.R.G. A State Department official said it just one week after the U.S. had sat at the table with the P.R.G. and signed those diplomatically-binding documents (New York Times, Feb. 6, 1973). More than a year later the Saigon foreign minister was echoing the remark, as if enough repetitions might cause both the Agreement and the P.R.G. to dry up and blow away (New York Times, Mar. 10, 1974).

Such statements are an attempt to deny what to the Saigon and U.S. governments is a very uncomfortable reality -- the clear-cut and irreducible existence of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (P.R.G.). For under the terms of the Paris Agreement, there are in Vietnam now three legal governments: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north, and the two governments in the south, the Republic of Vietnam (Saigon) and the P.R.G.

This issue of the Indochina Chronicle is devoted to a discussion of the Provisional Revolutionary Government -- its organization and mode of life, its people, and its history.

In the year and several months since the signing of the Paris Agreement the number of foreign visitors to the zone of Vietnam administered by the Provisional Revolutionary Government has jumped enormously. Their reports have brought us a whole new perspective on life in the P.R.G. zone. For, what in the past had been portrayed as a society of jungle encampments, often underground and forced to shift constantly, now emerges as a society of permanent villages in the open, engaged in agriculture and commerce and proudly displaying its red, blue and yellow flag in the breeze. One recent visitor to the P.R.G. zone commented that their "society does not look radically different from the one along [Saigon] Government-held Route 1" (NY Times, Feb. 17, 1974). It was the spirit of reconciliation and open political competition embodied in the Agreement that encouraged the P.R.G. to invite Western journalists and other foreign visitors. But even more, it was a sign of increasing consolidation by the P.R.G. of its territory.

One consistent impression of visitors to the P.R.G. zone is of relative prosperity. For example, a reporter in Binh Dinh province in central Vietnam wrote:

We stop in a larger hamlet, which looks prosperous despite the fact that almost all its concrete buildings are destroyed. We

pass several bicycle-repair shops, a soft-drink and general store and a place that advertises itself as a tape-recorder repair shop. [NY Times, Feb. 17, 1974]

Another journalist visiting the Mekong Delta village of Binh Phu reported, "It seems that the Viet Cong have joined the affluent society, because there were many signs of rural wealth -- boats with outboard motors, American water pumps, plenty of food and plenty of livestock" (Washington Post, Feb. 8, 1973). When a Newsweek reporter traveled to Ca Mau, at the southernmost tip of Vietnam, he wrote, "The further I went into Viet Cong territory, the more livestock I saw and the more prosperous looking were the houses" (May 21, 1973).

The prosperity on "the other side" is both worrisome and hard to believe for U.S. and Saigon government officials. A New York Times correspondent records a conversation he had shortly after emerging from the P.R.G. zone:

"Pretty hungry over there, eh?" asks Philip Cook, No. Two man in the Nha Trang Consulate General. No, not really, we say. We at least ate plenty -- pork, rice, chicken, vegetables, beer. "Beer?" asks Colonel Tho, whose responsibilities include the "economic blockade" of the other side. Yes, we tell him, beer. "And ice?" he asks, seemingly concerned. No, we reply, no ice. The colonel looks relieved.

The reason for this concern among the Saigon and U.S. officials, of course, has to do with the severe economic crisis that the Saigon zone is now experiencing. In the last year alone,

COVER: Children on way to P.R.G. school in Loc Ninh walk through arch proclaiming "Peace, Independence, Democracy, Food, Clothing and National Reconciliation" (photo by Minh Dien, GPA).

Saigon's piaster has been devalued eleven times, and inflation has doubled the price of cooking oil, gasoline and rice.

First and hardest affected are the poor -- those living in the urban slums and refugee/concentration camps. Reports in Saigon newspapers tell of whole families committing suicide because of enormous debts incurred by fathers seeking to gather enough money to feed everyone. Members of the American Friends Service Committee have observed and reported to the Indochina Chronicle deaths in central Vietnam due to starvation.

The relative prosperity of the P.R.G. is related to several things. First of all, the P.R.G. economy is more self-sufficient and, unlike the Saigon economy, not tied to foreign aid. People in the P.R.G. zone live on the land, cultivate it, and raise their livestock on it. Just as everyone is prepared to shoulder a weapon, so is everyone able to be a farmer and a productive worker. In the Saigon areas, however, many people are prevented by decree from living on the land. They are forcibly held in the cities and in the refugee camps, often unemployed and heavily reliant on government handouts for survival. Nearly one out of three males between the ages of 18 and 44 has actually been taken out of the labor force and put into the armed forces or the national police, courtesy of U.S. aid.

In addition, electrical power is almost unknown in the P.R.G. zone, and there is relatively little demand in the civilian sector for oil, natural gas or gasoline. Thus, unlike Saigon, it remains relatively unaffected by the energy crisis. Two new small-caliber pipelines from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.) provide most of the P.R.G.'s needs.

Over the years the P.R.G. has developed ingenious ways of utilizing refuse and waste from Saigon and U.S. forces. Sandals are made from the rubber tires of destroyed trucks. From the wreckage of destroyed planes, tanks and bomb casings, the people fashion pots and pans, jewelry, pipes, tubing and farm implements. Visitors to Quang Tri report how people have fashioned houses out of the wood of Melba peach crates left behind by retreating GIs. For sale in the market in Dong Ha, a district town in Quang Tri province, were handbags woven from the colorful telephone wire of the "McNamara line." Some houses in Dong Ha actually are equipped with what used to be American telephones. Now you can call Hanoi on them. And, as for decades prior, of course, the P.R.G. has found it convenient to turn the barrel of much U.S. military hardware against its previous owners. Most recently the P.R.G. has been the willing recipient of 15 abandoned airfields, all constructed at great cost to the American taxpayer.

Recent reports explain how the P.R.G., using Saigon piasters, trades frequently if covertly with people in the Saigon zone. The Newsweek visitor to the southern tip of Vietnam wrote that

the old men and women from the P.R.G. zone "take their produce by sampan to the Ca Mau market [in the Saigon zone], and with the money they get, they then make the necessary purchase of goods" (Newsweek, May 21, 1973).

Although nearly every Western visitor to the P.R.G. zone reports bombing or shelling from the Saigon side, (some describe diving into bomb shelters), it would seem that the P.R.G. zone is definitely obtaining some advantage from the termination of U.S. bombing and withdrawal of U.S. troops. "'Now we have plenty of food to eat,' commented a woman in the central province of Binh Dinh. 'When the Americans were here we could not work in the fields. We were starving'" (NY Times, Feb. 18, 1974). Apparently it is a step forward to be bombed only by the fourth largest air force in the world, rather than by the fourth and the largest together.

Movement to P.R.G. Zone

The relative prosperity and improvement in defensive capabilities in certain parts of the P.R.G. zone have attracted, according to the P.R.G., "hundreds of thousands of people" (Giai Phong News Agency, published in Doan Ket, Jan. 5, 1974, Paris). For instance, near Bu Dop in the hills along the Cambodian border 75 miles north of Saigon, a part of P.R.G. territory since the



CHILDREN IN QUANG TRI play on abandoned U.S. tires (photo by Dierdre English).



A TECHNICIAN awaits patients at the x-ray room of the Dong Ha Hospital, Quang Tri province. Note the rubber tire sandals in front of the door. (photo by Dierdre English).

spring of 1972, a new village, Tan Xa Kiem has been set up largely by people who have crossed over from the Saigon zone (*South Vietnam in Struggle*, June 25, 1973). Mostly former workers on rubber plantations, the residents of Tan Xa Kiem are, with the help of the P.R.G., learning techniques of farming rice and vegetables.

Another instance of movement to the P.R.G. zone was described to the *Indochina Chronicle* by Diane and Michael Jones, recently returned from Vietnam where they worked for the American Friends Service Committee. Villagers being kept in a crowded Saigon government refugee camp near coastal Route 1 in Quang Ngai province, they told us, received very little food and were angry that the Saigon government was not taking care of them. "Either you feed us properly," they complained to Saigon officials, "or you must allow us to return to our land in the countryside where we can grow our own food and take care of ourselves." Their land, of course, is in the P.R.G. zone. When the villagers saw that food was not forthcoming, they returned to their villages, in spite of the possibility of being shot or arrested en route by Saigon authorities or being subjected to air or artillery attack once they were back trying to bring in the first crop.

Reconstruction

In most parts of the P.R.G. zone modest efforts toward reconstruction have begun. In Bu Dop the roads and bridges have been repaired and the rubble of destroyed buildings cleared away. New land has been cleared for the new residents from the Saigon zone and, with the help of a few tractors, is being planted with corn. One man has set up a forge in which he makes hoes from discarded U.S. oil drums.

However, the place where reconstruction poses the greatest task is Quang Tri. Eighty-five percent of Quang Tri province is now administered by the P.R.G. In the coastal lowlands, where most of the people live, hardly a building has been left standing. Bomb craters dot the landscape and the debris of several former U.S. bases spreads for acres. Yet amid the rubble the Vietnamese are going to work with what one American visitor called a "pioneer spirit." Bomb craters are being filled, dikes and dams repaired, and the land reclaimed. New water buffaloes have been herded in from the north to replace those killed during the fighting. Tractors, bulldozers and trucks have also been brought down from the north.

U.S. scientists E. W. Pfeiffer and Arthur H. Westing reported that widespread defoliation in Quang Tri had destroyed nearly all the jackfruit trees (*Environment*, Nov., 1973). The people plan to cut down the dead trees, dig out the trunks, and replant the area in pepper or tea.

One enormous problem in reclaiming the land is the existence of unexploded bombs, mortar shells and anti-personnel weapons which may lie just beneath the soil or in an irrigation ditch, ready to go off when nudged by children at play or by farmers and their buffaloes cultivating the fields. P.R.G. personnel have developed the technology to defuse these weapons when discovered, but do not have nearly enough of the proper equipment to detect the weapons before people run into them.

Dong Ha, the largest P.R.G. town in Quang Tri province, has a 150-bed hospital which before the January, 1973 Paris Agreement was underground. Now it is above ground and plans are afoot to double its capacity. Don Luce, who visited the hospital in October, 1973, reported that although there are enough trained medical personnel and although medical treatment is free, there is a shortage of some vaccines and medical equipment. "While I was there," Luce wrote,

I saw a dentist operating on an ulcerated tooth under a 40-watt light bulb. His implements were a pair of pliers and two hooks. There was a simple machine to x-ray for tuberculosis, which after mine injuries and malaria, is the most serious problem. [*The Guardian*, Jan. 23, 1974]

The P.R.G. in Quang Tri is putting great emphasis on education both for children and adults. Astounded at the level of illiteracy in the province when they arrived, the P.R.G. now boasts that 65 percent of the population has become literate. New schools are springing up everywhere, some of them built of bamboo and thatch, others in the bombed-out shells of old houses.

The P.R.G.'s only international port is in Quang Tri, at Cua Viet. There the P.R.G. has received numerous shipments from the People's Republic of China and from Italy, as well as from the D.R.V.

Life in Quang Tri has changed tremendously since the P.R.G. first "liberated" it in 1972. "Meager were the first meals in freedom," reports a D.R.V. journalist (Vietnam Courier, Oct., 1973), "rice, salt, wild vegetables, less often powdered fish." Yet, Steve Talbot of Internews, who visited the province nearly two years later, in February, 1974, reported that he saw in the Dong Ha market "a wide range of fish (we ate delicious shrimp and crab), pork, chicken, vegetables, fruit, staples like rice, salt, sugar and oil, and imported manufactured goods like light bulbs, cloth, matches, pots" (International Bulletin, Mar. 25-Apr. 7, 1974).

Social and Economic Life

Social and economic life in the P.R.G. zone has not been collectivized. As the Newsweek visitor to Ca Mau commented, "At least where I have travelled, it was clear that private enterprise is still the predominant way of economic life." In fact, everything is privately owned except certain lands which are owned communally by the village, which dates back to traditional Vietnam. All farmers own their own land, but if they don't have enough they are given more from the communal village lands or from the land of wealthy absentee landlords.

There is a great deal of sharing and cooperative work, however. Water buffaloes, though privately owned, are shared and people help each other out a good deal come harvest time. "If a farmer lends his buffalo to plow a neighbor's field," the New York Times visitor to Binh Dinh province was told, "the neighbor will in turn help the buffalo's owner to harvest his crop" (NY Times, Feb. 18, 1974). The P.R.G. reports that in many of its areas "labor-rotation and labor-exchange teams have emerged" (SVN in Struggle, Jan. 1, 1974). In Bu Dop, for instance, "cooperatives" have been formed to plant potatoes and corn and to clear land for those who have recently moved from the Saigon zone (SVN in Struggle, June 25, 1973). The youth of Bu Dop also have formed brigades to work on repairing bridges and roads and to build a new school.

The Times visitor to the P.R.G.-administered areas of Hoai Nhon district in Binh Dinh province found among the people a spirit and dedication to their cause. "Many people display an ideological awareness and a seeming determination to 'unify the fatherland' that are noteworthy," wrote James Markham (NY Times, Feb. 17, 1974). Yet only a couple of years ago the district was spotted with the outposts of the U.S. 173rd Airborne, First Cavalry (Airborne) and Americal Division, and the district was considered to be under Saigon government control. But the people who lived there then still live there now -- then as now loyal to the P.R.G. -- at least according to their stories related to Markham of brave feats against the Americans. Here we can see a bit of the P.R.G.'s "secret" weapon. While the P.R.G. finds its power in the support it receives from the people, the Saigon government bases its concept of control on military power and armed coercion.

Saigon has a presence in Hoai Nhon district, too -- in the town of Bong Son, the district capital. Daniel Southerland of the Christian Science Monitor was there at the same time James Markham was in the district villages. Bong Son, Southerland wrote, is under the "control" of the Saigon side, but:

The [Saigon] Rangers, who are the real rulers of Bong Son at the moment because of their firepower, are doing little to win anyone over to Saigon's side. Because they consider many of the people in this area to be 'communists,' they seem to think that anything goes. People complain that the unruly Rangers have been stealing everything they can lay their hands on. [Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 14, 1974]

Like the Americans before them, the Saigon forces are exerting military control for the moment while ignoring the basic principles of any serious political struggle.

On the other hand, the people of Bong Son understand political struggle very well. "Hamlet residents drew up a petition to the government demanding an end to the looting," Southerland reported. "A Ranger battalion commander apologized for what had been happening and promised punishment for the offenders. But the looting has continued." In concluding, Southerland gives a hint as to where the people's sentiments may lie. "The people sometimes point out that after the North Vietnamese occupied Bong Son in 1972, life was harsh but the Communist-led troops did not steal."

In many ways Bong Son is the Hoai Nhon of several years ago. It is this sense of patient progress, and their hard-earned understanding of why it happens, that makes the P.R.G. so sure of eventual victory.

FACES OF THE P.R.G.

Nguyen Huu Tho

Nguyen Huu Tho was not a political activist in Vietnam until he was 39 years old, when he led an urban movement in Saigon against French repression. Thirteen years later, in 1962, he was elected chairman of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front.

Tho was born into a civil servant's family in 1910 in Cholon, Saigon's largely Chinese sister city. As a student he was sent to Paris, where he studied law. After receiving his degree he returned to Vietnam and set up practice.

In 1947 Tho was arrested by the Viet Minh -- an experience which was to be a turning point in his life. Although released shortly afterwards, "this brief stay in the liberated zone got me thinking," Tho recounted in the First Congress of the NLF in 1962. "Cadres, soldiers and the people seemed to me united around a common ideal. Everyone wanted to take on a greater responsibility in the fight. And I was treated like a brother ... even though I had not yet done anything for my country" (Georges Chaffard, Indochine dix ans d'indépendance, Calmann-Levy, Paris, 1964, p. 190).

In 1950 Tho joined Nguyen Thi Binh, later to become the P.R.G.'s foreign minister, against the visit of three U.S. warships to Saigon, a visit they knew was symbolic of growing U.S. support for the French. Tho was arrested by the French in 1952 and kept in jail for two years.

On August 1, 1954, a massive demonstration in Saigon welcoming the new peace ended in the shooting of several demonstrators by the Saigon police. That same day the recently released Tho, along with other outraged Saigon intellectuals, set up a Committee of Defense of Peace and the Geneva Agreements. On November 11, Diem's police broke up the committee, arresting Tho and other leaders. Later, in 1964, Tho commented to author Wilfred Burchett, "We had no idea at that time, but in forming the Saigon Committee and its various branches we had created the embryo for the National Front of Liberation, set up more than six years later" (Burchett, Vietnam: Inside Story of a Guerilla War, International Publishers, New York, 1965, p. 121).

Tho escaped from jail in 1961 and assumed leadership of the NLF shortly thereafter.

In the last year Nguyen Huu Tho, together with Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, has served as an important diplomatic emissary representing the P.R.G. at international conferences, travelling widely through Europe and Africa, and then returning to receive foreign diplomats in the P.R.G. as they present their credentials.



NGUYEN HUU THO listens to P.R.G. Foreign Minister Nguyen Thi Binh together with Nguyen Doa, Vice President of the P.R.G. (Photo taken in May, 1973 by Giai Phong News Agency)



Pham thi Ai-Viet

Pham thi Ai-Viet's home was in the mountainous Que Son Valley in Quang Nam province. To those who had never been there she was fond of describing the lushness and beauty of the waterfalls and hot springs near her home. She also related proud memories of the people in her village who worked, sang and shared frequent meals together. Later, when the valley was bombed, life became more difficult and many of the physical beauties of the valley were destroyed, but the spirit and strength of the people remained unchanged.

Pham thi Ai-Viet chose to remain living with some of these hardships in the Provisional Revolutionary Government zone because she knew that, as a woman, she would have more educational opportunity there than in Saigon government areas. She attended P.R.G. schools -- studying hard; working in the fields, and still taking time to collect tropical butterfly specimens in pursuit of her interest in lepidoptery. After doing well in school, she was recommended by her teachers and classmates to travel to Hanoi for teacher training. Ai-Viet was stimulated by her advanced studies in Hanoi, her further political education, and various international cultural events. Upon returning to the south, she traveled extensively, working and training teachers in three provinces. One of the things she enjoyed most was teaching literacy to adults, especially since her own parents had never learned to read and write.

Travelling to a new school, Ai-Viet stepped on a mine planted near an American outpost. She was evacuated to a Saigon government hospital in Da Nang, where one of her legs was amputated. Despite her injury, Ai-Viet felt fortunate that she had survived, and resolved to continue working for the P.R.G. Several months later, fitted with an artificial leg, she was able to return to P.R.G.-controlled areas to continue her work in education and the independence struggle generally. (by David and Jane Barton)



Thich Don-Hau

Thich Don Hau was born in 1906 in Quang Tri province. He became a Buddhist monk at the age of 20. In 1947 he was arrested by the French. In the 1960s he was a very important figure in the central Vietnamese Buddhist movement first against Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963 and later against Nguyen Cao Ky in 1966. As director of the prestigious Linh Mu Pagoda in Hue, Thich Don Hau had a large following in central Vietnam. His was a leading and daring voice in the mid-60s calling for national reconciliation. During the 1968 Tet Offensive he left Hue to form the Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces, and now he is a member of the Advisory Council of the P.R.G. In this photo he is shown celebrating the birth of Buddha at the Dong Ha Pagoda in Quang Tri province in May, 1973.

Nguyen thi Dinh

The life of Nguyen Thi Dinh is in many ways the story of the growth of the Vietnamese revolution. Today she is a member of the Central Committee of the NLF, President of the South Vietnamese Liberation Women's Union, and Deputy Commander of the P.R.G.'s army, the People's Liberation Armed Forces. But her participation in the revolution began when she participated in a 1930 insurrection in the Mekong Delta province of Ben Tre at the tender age of eleven.

The youngest of ten brothers and sisters in a family of farmers, Mrs. Dinh as a child was never able to go to school and could neither read nor write even at age 16, when she became a courier for the forces resisting the French. Two years later, in 1938, she married a man also active in the revolution. But their happiness was not to last long. Shortly after the birth of their son, Dinh's husband was thrown in jail, where he died three years later. Mrs. Dinh herself was jailed in 1940 for three years.

Upon her release in 1943 she was constantly watched by the French authorities. Nevertheless, she gradually re-established her contacts, this time with the newly-formed Viet Minh, and took on important responsibilities in the struggle to liberate her native province. In 1946 she traveled to Hanoi to report on the activities of the revolution in the south. While in Hanoi she met Ho Chi Minh.

Returning to the south, Mme. Dinh continued the armed struggle and in 1954 led the peasants of Ben Tre province in the political struggle to implement the Geneva Accords. As the Diemist repression grew, however, Mme. Dinh was forced to use pseudonyms and move frequently, often sleeping in trenches or in palm trees. She proved herself a leading political/military strategist in those years.

Mme. Dinh led the uprising in Ben Tre province in January, 1960. For the first time, an insurrection against Diem's rule triumphed in an entire province. The strength of the Ben Tre insurrection was based on a skillful combination of armed and political struggle that was to become a model strategy throughout the south.

The insurgent forces, involving large numbers of peasants, stormed Diem's militia posts, ousted Diemist village administrations and replaced them with People's Committees for Self-Management. The first regional military detachment took an oath in the presence of the people. Self-defense units were set up in all hamlets, which were turned into combat positions. Thirteen thousand Diemist infantrymen and marines counterattacked without result. A big demonstration by women, occupying Mo Cay town for a week, forced the government delegate to order the withdrawal of the troops.

Ben Tre had given the signal for general uprising. That same year Mme. Dinh became one of the founding members of the NLF Central Committee.

Mme. Dinh is a person of humility. She once said, "If I am here in the High Command, it is because the people taught me. But I am no different from thousands and thousands of other women. I am merely one of them. And how many combatants have fallen, women and men, who could have filled my post!"

(from Marta Rojas and Raul Valdes Vivo, South Vietnam, Book Institute, Havana, 1967; and From the N.F.L. to the Provisional Revolutionary Government, VN Studies No. 23, Hanoi, 1970.



Tran Van Lam

When Tran van Lam was a young boy he used to sneak away from home during the noon rest time to look through the bamboo windows of the local Liberation Front hospital. He was fascinated by the activity, the strange masks and uniforms of the medical staff, and the peculiar smells inside the hospital. The doctors began to notice Lam's frequent presence and sometimes tried to shoo him away. Then, on one occasion, a doctor challenged young Lam: "If you are so interested in what we are doing, my child, why don't you come in and help?" The doctor allowed Lam to aid the nurses by carrying fragile bottles of intravenous fluids for the patients. Lam later recalled that the responsibility given him that day crystallized his desire to work permanently as part of the life-saving efforts at the hospital.



At age 15 Lam began training to become a nurse. The Provisional Revolutionary Government training stressed that love and concern for patients were just as important as medicines. They helped Lam realize that doctors and nurses were equal to patients, not above and apart, and that such activities as washing a patient's clothes, combing a patient's hair and visiting patients' families were an integral part of their work and a measure of personal respect for the patients. In addition to this crucial attitudinal training, Lam was also instructed in acupuncture, herbal medicines, and Western medicines. As part of his training Lam traveled with medical cadre to villages to explain various public health programs.

As Lam gained experience he began to apprentice as a surgical nurse. He traveled to underground hospitals in Quang Ngai province with his medical team. During one of the many large American military operations in Quang Ngai, Lam was injured by an artillery shell. After several complicated operations he was able to return to his work despite limited use of one arm.

Although Tran van Lam has been able to live and work in P.R.G. areas of Quang Ngai province, one of the sadnesses of his life has been that his family, at various times, has been forced by U.S.-Saigon forces to live in refugee camps. At all times Lam's family has given him support and encouragement to continue his work. His family's allegiance remains firmly with the Provisional Revolutionary Government, since it has been with the P.R.G. that they have experienced a free, dignified and productive life on their ancestral lands. (by Jane and David Barton)

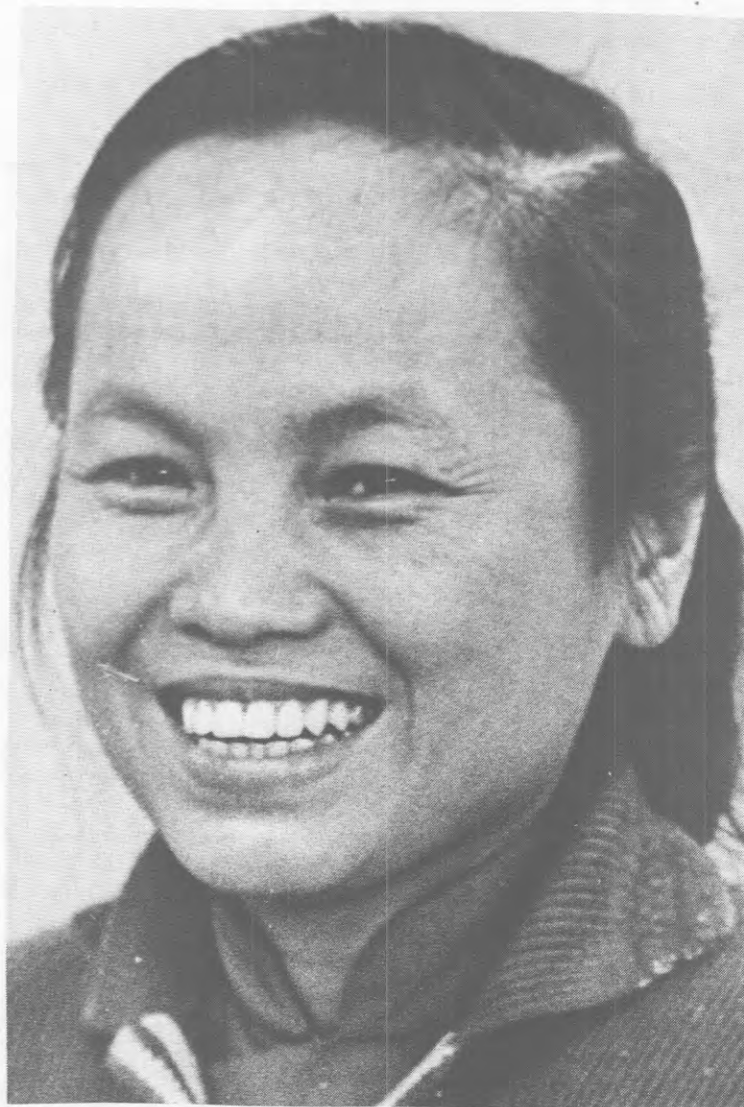


Le thi Rieng

Le Thi Rieng was born into a poor peasant family in the Mekong Delta province of Bac Lieu in 1925. By the age of 20 she was already a vigorous participant in the war against the French and was assuming important leadership positions in the women's movement. Following the Geneva Accords she encouraged other women to join her in standing up to Diem and demanding the implementation of the Accords.. Her husband, also a revolutionary, was killed in 1960, leaving her with their two children. A year later Rieng was elected to the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front. On the night of January 31, 1968 on deserted Hong Bang Street in Saigon, Rieng, then a prisoner of the Saigon regime, was executed along with other political prisoners.

Phan Minh Hien

Phan Minh Hien comes from a small village in Quang Nam province. She is married and has one daughter and two sons. In 1972 she walked for three months with a heavy pack on her back up to Hanoi in order to catch a plane to the Vietnamese Women's Conference in Vancouver. While there she told the meeting that she and her husband had spent only five of the last 15 years together, and that she seldom sees her children who are cared for by a village. "A common feeling among women in the revolution," she said, "is will we ever see our family again. But still, we try to get other women to join the revolution." Hien is studying chemistry now and says she hopes to rebuild her village when the war is over.



Nguyen Dinh Chi

Nguyen Dinh Chi was born in Hue in 1909 into a family of scholars. When she was 18 she was expelled from high school for leading a student strike against the French. Twenty-five years later, in 1952, she became headmistress of the same school, the well-known and respected Dong Khanh girls' high school. She remained in that position, where she had gained the respect and trust of many of Hue's citizens, until she left during the 1968 Tet Offensive to join the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces. She is now a member of the Advisory Council of the P.R.G.



DEVELOPMENT OF THE P.R.G.

Historical Antecedents

The roots of the P.R.G. are deep, and its origins run far back into Vietnamese history. Although officially created only five years ago, the P.R.G. draws upon a tradition that is really as old as Vietnam itself.

As many Americans have by now come to learn, the history of Vietnam has included numerous wars against foreign invaders -- in the twentieth century called wars of national liberation. For a thousand years the Vietnamese resisted and in 939 A.D. finally overthrew Chinese colonial domination. In the thirteenth century Tran Hung Dao led the Vietnamese to thrice defeat the Mongol armies of Kublai Khan. And in 1427 Le Loi drove out the occupying Ming armies.

Western European missionaries came to Vietnam in the seventeenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century the French started to extend a web of military and administrative control over the Vietnamese. Overt resistance to French colonization began among royalist elements of the scholar-gentry, joined by groups of local peasants. As French control grew more thorough and pervasive after the turn of the century, peasants often tried to refuse to pay taxes, scholars debated between the strategies of armed insurrection and finding a way to extract reforms from the French, and groups of workers refused to work on the French rubber, coffee and tea plantations.

The end of World War II in 1945 brought an end to the short-lived Japanese occupation of Vietnam. On September 2, 1945 the Viet Minh, a broad coalition that had been resisting the Japanese and their French collaborators, declared Vietnam's independence on a platform of revolutionary social and political reform. And for a few months, before the arrival of new French troops and warships from Europe, Vietnam was once again a unified, independent country from north to south, called the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.).

The French forces were finally driven from Vietnam only after a long war fought by the Viet Minh -- a war that ended with the victory of Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Accords of 1954. Although the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, for whose cause the Viet Minh peasant army had been fighting, controlled most of both north and south Vietnam by July, 1954, it was persuaded by its allies at Geneva to agree to a temporary military demarcation of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. All D.R.V. military forces were required to abandon their areas of control in the south and withdraw north. What in part led the D.R.V. to agree to this at Geneva was the assurance in the Accords that the seventeenth parallel was to be

no more than a "provisional" line, to exist until a free election could be held throughout the country in July, 1956 to reunify Vietnam under one government.

The D.R.V. was confident it could win that election. So was Dwight Eisenhower -- then President of the United States -- who wrote several years later in his memoirs that if the election had been held, 80 percent of the Vietnamese people would have voted for the leader of the D.R.V., Ho Chi Minh.

The election, of course, was never carried out. Rather, the French and then the Americans after them did all they could to establish a separate state in the south. At the head of this "state" the Americans insisted on putting Ngo Dinh Diem, who had up to this time been at a Catholic retreat in New Jersey.

Stripped of their diplomatically guaranteed rights to an election and to reunification, the Vietnamese instead saw the U.S. send in aid, armaments and advisers in an attempt to make the seventeenth parallel a permanent border and Diem's "Republic of Vietnam" a perpetual part of the "free world."

For people who, as we have seen, fought repeatedly for their freedom and independence, the message was clear. It was time to continue the struggle -- now in the southern part of their country, against the Americans and the client regime they had set up in Saigon.

"Finally, in this review of factors that would affect policy-making on Vietnam, we note that South Vietnam (unlike any of the other countries in Southeast Asia) was essentially the creation of the United States. Without US support Diem almost certainly could not have consolidated his hold on the South during 1955 and 1956.... Without US aid in the years following, the Diem regime certainly, and an independent South Vietnam almost as certainly, could not have survived."

-- The Pentagon Papers, 1971, Beacon Press, Vol. II, p. 22.

Formation of the NLF

Diem's regime was a highly repressive one, and those who had been sympathetic to the Viet Minh or who simply called for implementation of the Geneva Accords were the first to be harassed, forcibly relocated, jailed or even murdered. Yet, somehow, for every such action there was a strike, demonstration, mass petition, distribution of leaflets or other dedicated reaction.

On December 20, 1960 the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), the direct predecessor of the P.R.G., was founded. Its creation was viewed as "not a starting point, but a result, a crystallization: the result of six years of relentless struggle, crystallization of all patriotic and democratic forces" (South Vietnam: From the N.F.L. to the Provisional Revolutionary Government, Vietnamese Studies, No. 23, Hanoi, 1970, p. 25).

The NLF was a front or coalition that brought together montagnards, students, peasants, professional people, communists, Catholics -- in short almost all who opposed what at that time was known as the "American-Diem dictatorship." Many were Viet Minh veterans of the war against the French. Others, like NLF President Nguyen Huu Tho, a French-educated lawyer who had once been detained by the Viet Minh in 1947, were previously unaffiliated citizens who simply dared to struggle openly against Diem.

The Front put forth a program to end U.S. political, economic and cultural domination of Vietnam and, of course, to overthrow the client regime of Diem. But the NLF program included revolutionary social changes as well, such as land reform, the establishment of democratic liberties, equality for women, and provision of medical care and literacy classes for the people.

Throughout the 1960s the NLF and its army, the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) -- collectively referred to by the U.S. government and press as the "Viet Cong" -- fought for and held areas of South Vietnam and made them free from the control of the U.S. and its successive Saigon clients. In these "liberated zones" the NLF set up its own local administration and worked to implement its national program. The NLF did not call itself a government, although it did engage in governmental functions even to the point of

developing formal contacts in the international diplomatic community.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE P.R.G.

It was in June, 1969 that the liberation forces in the south moved to form a full-fledged government -- the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam -- at a congress of representatives held somewhere in the liberated area near Saigon. Significantly, the P.R.G., like the NLF before it, was the culmination of years of patient, meticulous activity. The formation of a government at the top could only grow out of previous de facto administration at the local level.

Like the NLF, the P.R.G. remains a coalition, in this case formed of personalities from the NLF (and its member groups) and the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces. The Alliance had been formed April 20, 1968 by urban, bourgeois, often professional people and other members of the intelligentsia who had decided to leave the Thieu-controlled area during the Tet Offensive in early 1968.

The top level of the new government consists of two bodies -- one the Provisional Revolutionary Government itself, which consists of a president, three vice presidents and 18 ministerial and vice ministerial positions; and the other an Advisory Council with a president, vice president and 11 members. Huynh Tan Phat, an architect formerly active with the Viet Minh and a founder of the NLF, is the P.R.G.'s president. Nguyen Huu Tho, president of the NLF, is also the president of the new government's Advisory Council.

Nearly half the members of the P.R.G. and its Advisory Council were members of the Viet Minh. They thus bring to the new government a continuity with the resistance against the French. One member of the Advisory Council, Nguyen Cong Phuong, is 86 years old and participated in some of the earliest reformist movements around the turn of the century. P.R.G. Foreign Minister Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, well-known in the press for her four years as the P.R.G.'s chief negotiator at the talks in Paris, is the granddaughter of Phan Chau Trinh, a famous and respected early twentieth century anti-colonial leader.

However, a third of the P.R.G. membership at this top level officially joined the NLF or the Alliance only in 1968. A continuing influx of new blood, some of it quite young, is important not only for developing new leadership, but also for refreshing and reaffirming the ties of the liberation forces to the people in Saigon-controlled zones. The new minister of public health, for example, Dr. Duong Quynh Hoa, was a socially prominent woman practicing medicine in Saigon until she left for the liberated zones in



FARMERS AND SOLDIERS dredge an irrigation ditch in Quang Tri province in October, 1973. (photo: Ngoc Dan, Giai Phong Agency)

VIỆT-NAM CỘNG-HÒA

PHỦ TỔNG THÔNG
PHỦ TỔNG ỦY DÂN VẬN

Saigon, ngày 9 tháng 6 năm 1973.

Số: 176STUDV/PB/CNT/KSAL.

CHÁNH VĂN PHÒNG ĐẶC BIỆT
PHỦ TỔNG ỦY DÂN VẬN

Kính gửi : Ông ~~Trần Văn Lam~~
150/5 Võ Tánh

- SAIGON -

Thưa Ông . . .

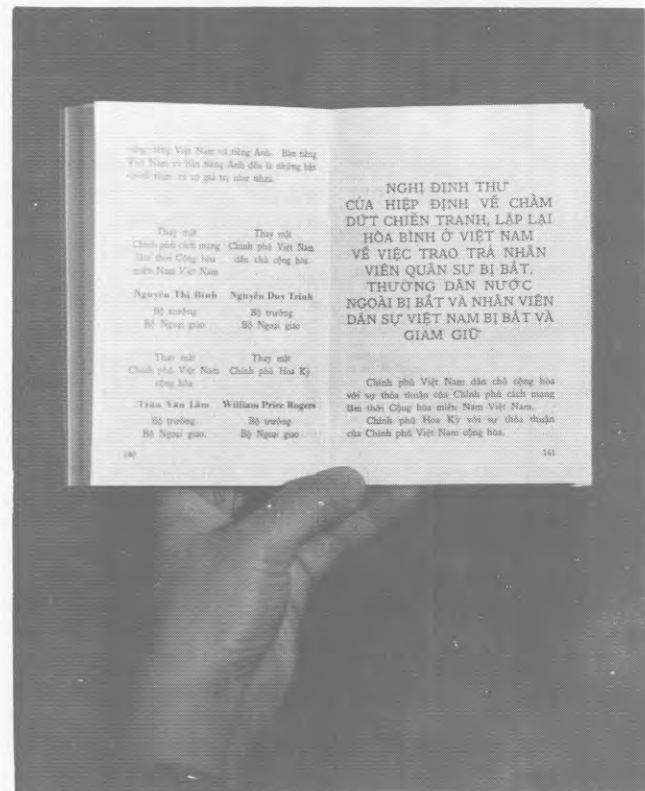
Trân trọng kính tin . Ông . . rõ :

Phủ Tổng Ủy Dân Vận rất tiếc không thể cấp
giấy phép cho xuất bản tác phẩm : **CHẤM DỨT CHIẾN TRANH
VÀ LẬP LẠI HÒA BÌNH Ở VIỆT NAM**

mặc dầu Phủ Tổng Ủy Dân Vận đã cho cử xét tác phẩm
này với một tinh thần rộng rãi tối đa.

Kính mời Ông . . vui lòng đến Phòng Kiểm Soát
Ấn Loát Phâm Quốc Nội, Phân Nhứ Kiểm Soát Ấn Loát Phâm
thuộc Phủ Tổng Ủy Dân Vận, số 17C đường Phan đình Phùng
Saigon để nhận lại bản thảo ./.-v

Kính thư,



THE DOCUMENT AT LEFT dated June 6, 1973 from the Saigon "Special Office of the Commissioner of Propaganda" advises the applicant that the commissioner "is very sorry he cannot grant permission to publish" the Paris Agreement. The applicant is invited to "happily come to the Office of Domestic Censorship" to pick up his application. THE PHOTO AT RIGHT shows a copy of the Paris Agreement as published and distributed in the P.R.G. areas of the south. Note on the left page the equal status accorded to the P.R.G. Foreign Minister, Nguyen Thi Binh, and the Saigon Foreign Minister, Tran Van Lam (photo on right by Michael Kling).

1968. A member of the P.R.G.'s Advisory Council, Mme. Nguyen Dinh Chi, was the headmistress of the oldest and best-known girls' high school in Hue until she left for the liberated area in 1968.

Most of the members at this level come from a decidedly bourgeois-intellectual background. More than half of the top-level P.R.G. members are university-educated -- about half of them in France.

The P.R.G. naturally has organizations too at the city or province level, the district level and the village level. Through popular elections People's Revolutionary Councils are elected at each level, in turn appointing People's Revolutionary Committees. If war conditions make full-scale elections impossible in specific areas, the People's Revolutionary Committees are appointed by congresses of people's representatives. The People's Revolutionary Committees are made up of representatives of village Buddhists, women, peasants, youth, Catholics, small traders, handicraft workers and other local interest groups.

Citizens of peasant and tenant farming background tend to make decisions at the village and district levels, and as they increasingly learn how to read and write and acquire administrative

experience they are moving rapidly into higher positions as well. This is in stark contrast to the Saigon system, where peasants and tenants are frozen out almost entirely and an urban military and bureaucratic elite monopolizes access to formal education and thus to administrative influence.

The P.R.G. adopted the flag, national anthem and political program of the NLF and assumed its tasks at the four-sided talks in Paris, which actually had begun just six months prior to the P.R.G.'s formation.

In forming a government the P.R.G. was not setting up a separate state in the south. Although enjoying diplomatic recognition from the D.R.V. in the north, it is but a provisional government, pending formation of a coalition in the south and eventual reunification with the D.R.V. The formation of a government was the next logical step as the liberation forces consolidated their power in the south and sought to present themselves as a distinguished and equal participant in the Paris negotiations.

THE PARIS AGREEMENT

The talks at Paris moved slowly and indeed got almost nowhere for four bloody years. The world had to wait through the expose of the My Lai massacre, "Vietnamization," the 1970 Cambodian invasion, the 1971 Laos invasion, the 1972 spring counter-offensive, and the Christmas 1972 B-52 terror bombings of the D.R.V. before the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam was finally signed on January 27, 1973.

In some ways the Agreement resembled the Geneva Accords of nearly twenty years earlier. The foreigners, this time the Americans, were forced to withdraw their troops and military advisers. Unlike the Geneva Accords, however, those who were opposing the foreigners -- this time the P.R.G. and a number of D.R.V. forces -- were not required to withdraw from the territory they controlled. There was to be an in-place cease-fire. There were to be elections too -- this time only in the south -- organized sometime after the establishment of the cease-fire, the restoration of democratic liberties and the formation of a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord made up of representatives of the Thieu government, the P.R.G., and the "third force" neutralists. Perhaps most important for the P.R.G., it was recognized within the Agreement as having status and privilege equal to that of the Saigon regime. The P.R.G. signed the Agreement as an equal, and throughout the Agreement Saigon and the P.R.G. were referred to as "the two South Vietnamese parties."

In the time since the Agreement was signed, however, events have pointed ominously toward a repetition of what followed the Geneva Accords. Most of the American troops have withdrawn, it is true. Yet the Saigon government, with clear U.S. backing, has adamantly refused to adhere to important provisions of the Agreement. As presented in greater detail in an earlier issue of the Indochina Chronicle (No. 30, Jan. 21, 1974), Saigon has proved unwilling to transfer the conflict from a military plane to a political one as required by the Agreement. To give an example, Saigon has refused to allow freedom of movement and residence in compliance with Article 11, since it knows that to do so would mean that many of the refugees now crowded into the camps and urban slums of the Saigon zone would return to their villages, often in the zone controlled by the P.R.G. As for elections, Saigon has proposed to schedule them at a very early date, before establishment of a real cease-fire, before restoration of democratic liberties and before formation of a viable National Council. The P.R.G., under Saigon's proposal, could participate only as a political party calling itself the National Liberation Front and subject to the Saigon constitution, not as an equivalent governing element as indicated in the Agreement.

When the Agreement was signed, newspapers in Saigon daring to publish parts of it were censored or confiscated. The photo on page 13, left side, shows the result of one newspaper publisher's effort to gain permission to print the text of the Agreement. The P.R.G., on the other hand, welcomed the Agreement and distributed copies of it widely. Daniel Southerland reported in the Christian Science Monitor (Apr. 14, 1973): "In the Liberated Front zone, we talked with ordinary guerrillas who referred to specific articles in the agreement. I met one rifle-carrying guerrilla who also carried a copy of the protocol to the agreement which concerns the cease-fire provisions and Joint Military Commissions." More recently (Feb. 19, 1974), James Markham reported in the New York Times that while visiting the P.R.G. in Binh Dinh province,

One of the most striking things to a visitor here is the exaltation of the accords, which occupy a place in public proclamations and propaganda that sometimes seem to rival the stature of the revered last testament of Ho Chi Minh. The agreements are "cheered" and "welcomed" on flowered arches that dot footpaths in the district. All propaganda hinges on them. Hand-written copies hang from the walls of village offices.

DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES AND SETBACKS

In the diplomatic arena the P.R.G. has scored a number of gains since the signing of the Paris Agreement. The P.R.G. is now recognized by 38 countries. By June, 1973, just a few days before the P.R.G. was to celebrate its fourth anniversary, the ambassadors of eight countries presented their credentials to Nguyen Huu Tho in the town



LAWYER TRINH DINH THAO (at left), Vice President of the P.R.G. Advisory Council, and his wife join others including foreign diplomats in events celebrating the fourth anniversary of the founding of the P.R.G. in Dong Ha, Quang Tri province on June 4, 1973 (photo by Kim Hung, Vietnam News Agency).

of Dong Ha in Quang Tri province. In July the ambassadors of nine more countries travelled to the P.R.G. and followed suit.

At the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Algiers in early September, 1973 officials of nearly 100 countries representing almost 2 billion people, more than half of mankind, the P.R.G. was recognized as the sole legitimate representative of South Vietnam. The following week Fidel Castro made a visit to Quang Tri province in what must have been the first visit of a head of state to the P.R.G.

The P.R.G. has not been without its diplomatic failures, however. In the spring of 1973 United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim made known his intent to explore the possibility of inviting the P.R.G. to open an observer's mission at the U.N., a status already enjoyed by the Thieu administration. But the invitation was never issued and rumors circulated that the proposed invitation was the victim of intense lobbying by the U.S. delegation.

More recently, the P.R.G. was prevented from participating in a Geneva conference on Human Rights in Wartime, held in February, 1974. Convened to update the 1949 Geneva Conventions on War Crimes, the conference was expected to discuss napalm and other anti-personnel weapons used



A P.R.G. BOOKSTORE in Dong Ha, Quang Tri province (photo from Viet Nam News Agency).

by the U.S. and Saigon governments against the P.R.G. Le Monde reported that the U.S. actively lobbied against the P.R.G. and made known its intent to walk out of the conference if it were seated.

THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY

The Paris Agreement affirms the admittedly difficult reality that in the part of Vietnam south of the seventeenth parallel there are now two administrations, two zones and two armies facing each other. The Agreement does not specify, however, which administration is the legitimate government of the southern part of Vietnam. Rather, it leaves that to be worked out by the Vietnamese, through steps outlined in the Agreement.

Both sides, the Saigon government and the P.R.G., naturally already claim full legitimacy to govern. The P.R.G. explains its claim in a small book published in August, 1973, entitled On the Existence of Two Powers in South Vietnam. In this book the P.R.G. bases its argument on two criteria: 1) its democratic administration of the territory and population of South Vietnam; and 2) the independence of its regime and its history of struggle for national self-determination.

On the basis of its own criteria, the P.R.G. would seem to have a strong case. On the first point, certainly both sides administer territory and population. This fact is acknowledged by the P.R.G. But its denial by the Saigon government

led one elder in the P.R.G. village of Binh Phu in the Mekong Delta to comment to Martin Woolcott of the Manchester Guardian (Feb. 8, 1973), "The main purpose of your visit is that on the outside people say there are no people in the liberated areas, no houses, no buffaloes -- and you are here and you can see that people are happy, families are working as usual."

As for the democratic or undemocratic nature of the Saigon regime, the most dramatic questions are raised in reports of respected international organizations and committees of the U.S. Congress on the tens of thousands of political prisoners still held in Saigon's jails. And, while nobody can claim that the P.R.G. is a model of Jeffersonian democracy, the fact that it depends for its very existence on popular support and, in addition, that it freely publicizes all sections of the Paris Agreement and campaigns for their total implementation, stands in stark contrast with the attitude of the Saigon regime.

In terms of the second criterion for legitimacy, the regime's struggle for self-determination and its present independence, we have already seen how the Saigon regime was created by foreign

powers while, on the other hand, the P.R.G. inherited the mantle of legitimacy of the anti-foreign struggle. Saigon, far from being independent, is almost entirely dependent on foreign aid. An earlier issue of the *Indochina Chronicle* (No. 24, Apr. 8, 1973) demonstrated how the U.S. pays some 90 percent of the cost of maintaining the Thieu regime in power. U.S. Agency for International Development administrator Robert Nooter confirmed Saigon's reliance on U.S. aid when he admitted to the House Committee on Government Operations (November 12, 1973) that an estimate that the U.S. is supplying two-thirds of the Saigon government budget "is in the ball park."

The World Bank, in an in-house report ("Current Economic Position and Prospects of the Republic of Vietnam," January 18, 1974), predicted that "net aid required in 1980 would still be on the order of \$770 million a year or about \$100 million higher than seems probable for 1974."

In addition to foreign aid, the U.S. is still sending advisers to the Saigon government. The P.R.G. claims the number stands at 25,000, while the U.S. admits to only about 7,000. Whatever the figure, these advisers play a vital role in supporting Saigon. The *New York Times* reported on February 25, 1974 that there are "large numbers of American citizens who have become integral parts of the South Vietnamese supply, transport and intelligence systems." Specifically, the article continued, there are "2,800 American civilians without whose skills South Vietnam's most sophisticated weapons would fall into disrepair."

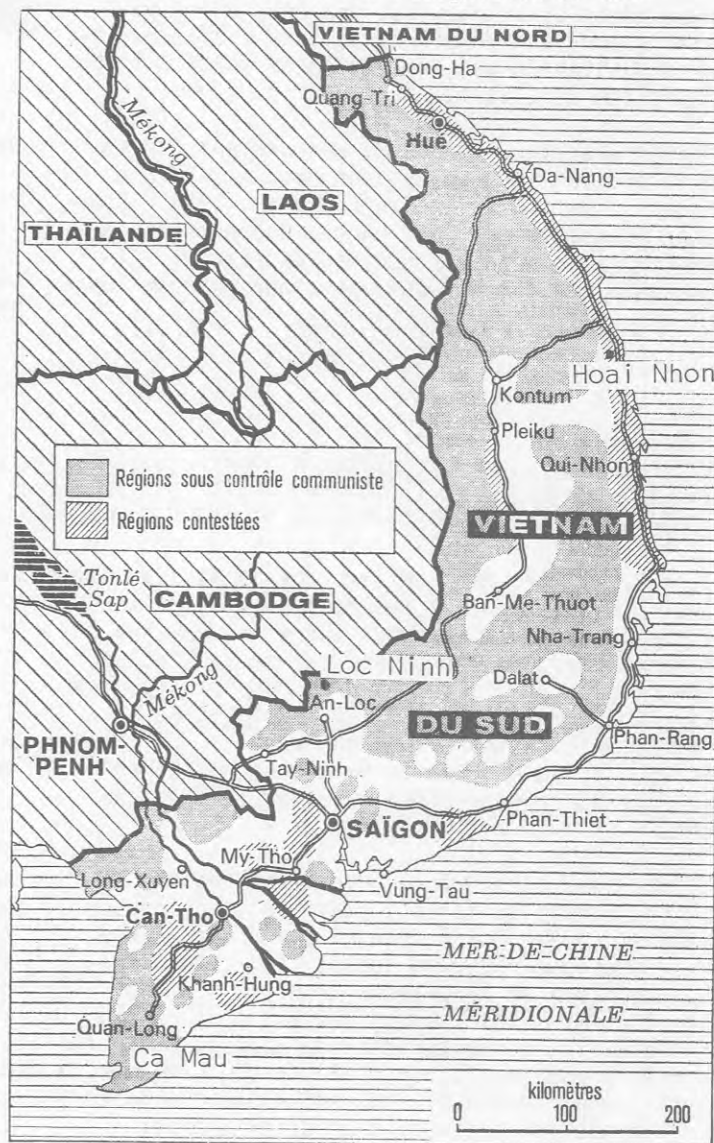
The P.R.G. also receives foreign aid, of course. But it is not nearly so dependent on it as is the Saigon regime. The *New York Times* on April 13, 1972 reported that "Aid from foreign countries to North Vietnam and the P.R.G. is about one tenth of American war costs, by U.S. government estimates, using statistics from U.S. intelligence sources."

With such small increments of foreign assistance the P.R.G. theory of surviving and growing amidst the people must always be fashioned into practical reality, or it would be destroyed in a matter of months. As indicated above, the P.R.G. has grown from popular struggle, from the bottom up, unlike the Saigon government which was set up by foreigners and has tried repeatedly, without success, to extend its apparatus down to the village level.

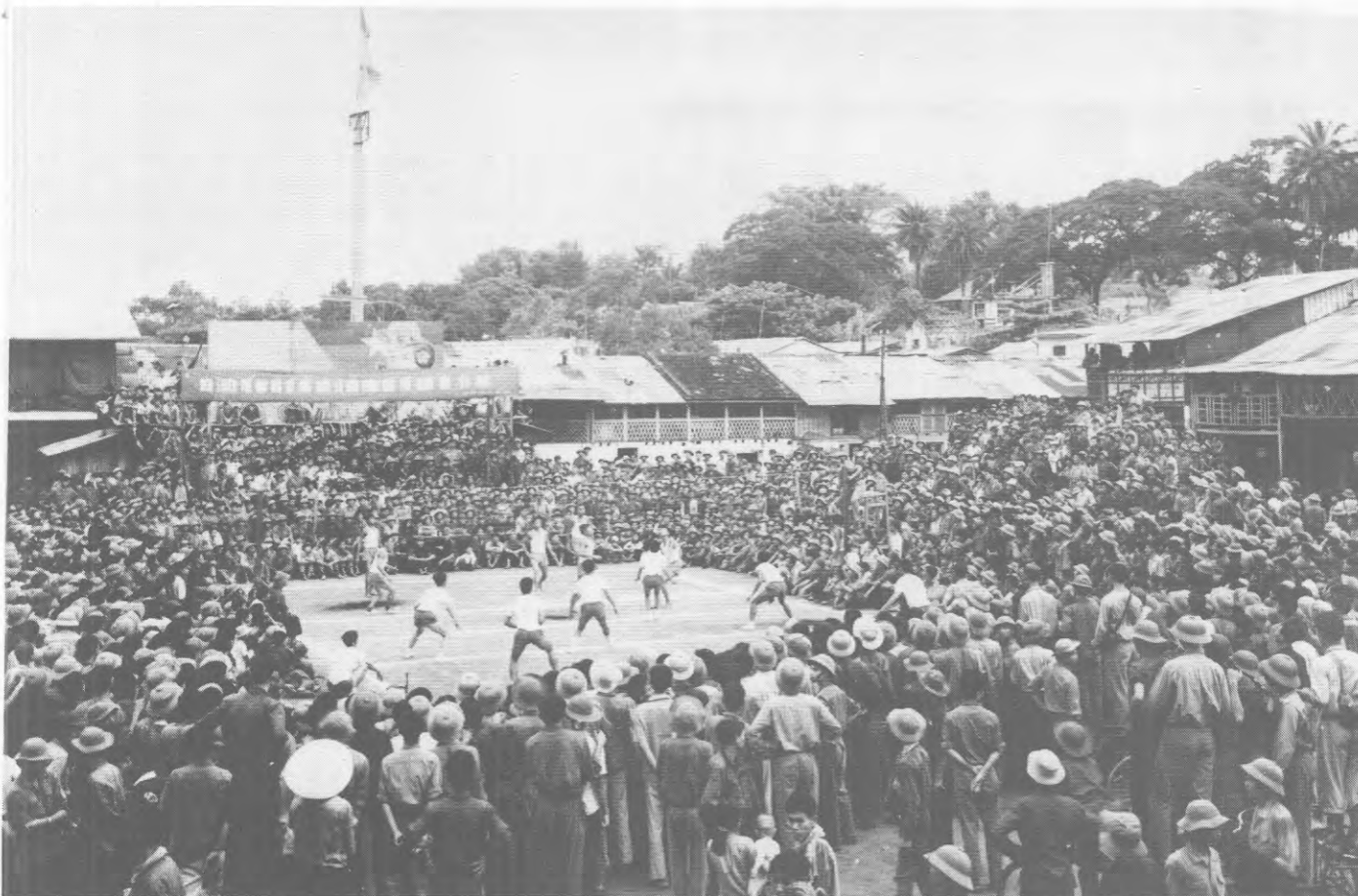
FOREIGN AID OR FOREIGN INTERVENTION?

In discussing the failure of the Vietnam ceasefire to work, Richard Falk wrote in a January 12, 1974 article in *The Nation* that "One key to whether the situation is allowed to slide back into full-scale war with U.S. participation is whether foreign governments and international institutions respect the basic concept embodied in the Paris Agreement of treating the P.R.G. and R.V.N. [Saigon] equally."

For example, diplomatic recognition of either administration in the south is an act by foreign governments that can in a formal sense bestow added legitimacy to the favored administration. When France announced the recognition of the



THIS MAP from *Le Monde*, Jan. 30, 1974, shows the approximate areas of administration of the P.R.G. (grey) and the Thieu government (white). Contested areas are indicated by the cross-hatches.



THE P.R.G. TOWN of Loc Ninh gathers to watch the volley ball finals, September 29, 1973. (photo: Quang Khanh, Giai Phong Agency)

D.R.V. and renewed its recognition of Saigon, the P.R.G. understandably objected. Senegal, on the other hand, announced that it would recognize both regimes in the south. To the P.R.G. this was acceptable, but Saigon immediately broke off relations with Senegal.

Although the initiation of diplomatic recognition is significant, it is not nearly as important as the granting of foreign aid to the competing administrations in the south.

For Saigon foreign aid has provided the where-withall for it to ignore the peace Agreement and to attempt to impose its own terms on the future of Vietnam. It has provided Saigon with the military and economic shield behind which, so far at least, it has been able to ignore the major political compromises called for in the Agreement.

Saigon's failure to observe the Agreement has not deterred its donors from continuing, even increasing, their aid. In fact, Saigon is being rewarded for breaking the cease-fire and ignoring the Agreement.

This year the U.S. has given the Saigon regime \$1.45 billion in economic and military aid. For next year the administration is asking Congress for \$2.4 billion, or an increase of 65 percent (NY Times, Mar. 11, 1974).

The World Bank is now involving itself deeply in Saigon's search for aid. Currently the bank is reportedly proposing a consortium of wealthy nations to provide aid to Saigon as well as to Laos, Cambodia and the D.R.V. (Washington Post, Mar. 12, 1974).

The World Bank report mentioned above makes clear the bank's wish to prop up the Saigon government while ignoring the P.R.G. The report states, for example:

It is the broad conclusion of this report that ... Vietnam can be a viable state with a modest reconstruction program and a gradual reduction in the present heavy absorption of human and physical resources in the military.... This conclusion rests at bottom on the rich agricultural resources of that part of Vietnam over which the Government has control (though not free of occasional enemy incursions).... [emphasis added]

The bank's goal, to make specifically the Saigon administration a "viable state," flies in the face of the Paris Agreement's implicit concept of equality between the P.R.G. and Saigon. In World

(Please turn to page 19.)

MARCH 22, 1974 P.R.G. PROPOSAL

FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PARIS AGREEMENT

Much of this new P.R.G. proposal is identical to the one put forth April 25, 1973. However, there are some interesting innovations.

1. "Immediate end to the shooting and strict cease-fire throughout South Vietnam." Twice in the past year the P.R.G. and Saigon have agreed to issue cease-fire orders, yet obviously the shooting continues. This time, the P.R.G. proposes that the full texts of the cease-fire orders and appeals be widely disseminated via public radio, newspapers, and news agencies.

2. "Return of all captured and Detained Vietnamese civilian and military personnel." Here the P.R.G. refers to a total of at least 215,000 people seized by Saigon before January 28, 1973, yet not released in previous prisoner exchanges. Many of these people are affiliated with neither Saigon nor the P.R.G., hence the P.R.G. states that they should be allowed to "return freely to their families and organizations in the area under the control of either [South Vietnamese] party." So far, Saigon has tried to force prisoners of this third segment to identify themselves in some way with the P.R.G.

A time limit of three months is proposed for this additional return of prisoners. It is also indicated that personnel captured and detained after January 28, 1973, by either Saigon or the P.R.G., should be included in these releases.

3. "Full democratic liberties to be ensured immediately to the people." This is largely a restatement of Article 11 of the Paris Agreement, providing for an end to acts of reprisal and discrimination against those who have collaborated with either side, as well as freedom of speech, press, assembly, organization, political activity, belief, movement, residence, work, property ownership and free enterprise. The P.R.G. also states that the Saigon administration should do away with concentration camps, put an end to forced residence, and terminate all other wartime measures "at variance with the spirit and letter of the Agreement."

4. "Prompt establishment of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord." Here the P.R.G. indicts the U.S. for continuing to interfere in the internal affairs of South Vietnam, and condemns both the U.S. and Saigon for trying to block further development of the third political force, composed of those "organizations and persons of all political or religious tendencies, now in South Vietnam or abroad, which do not side with either party and which stand for the Agreement." Nevertheless, the P.R.G. affirms that the third political force has managed to survive Saigon repression and continues to develop. "This force must play a worthy role in the political life of South Vietnam at present and in the future."

The P.R.G. proposes that the National Council, comprising three equal segments as stated in the Paris Agreement, be set up no later than three months after the new cease-fire orders and appeals. By way of practical negotiating procedure, it suggests the following:

The two South Vietnamese parties will issue joint or separate statements in the same terms expressing their willingness to enter into consultations with the organizations or personalities of the third political force, in a spirit of national reconciliation and concord, equality and mutual respect, with a view to speeding up establishment of the Council.

5. "The organization of truly free and democratic elections." While the National Council must set the date of general elections, the P.R.G. suggests they be held "no later than one year after establishment of the Council." These elections would be for a constituent assembly, which would formulate a new constitution for a new government of South Vietnam.

6. "Settlement of the question of armed forces." The two South Vietnamese parties will agree on mutual reductions and demobilization of troops, "so as to lessen the people's contributions and to devote human and material resources to peaceful reconstruction of the country." After the general elections and formation of a new government, dealt with in point five, a "unified army will be built up in South Vietnam for the defense of the peace, independence, and sovereignty of South Vietnam, and for the sake of the people's interests."

* * * * *

Predictably, spokesmen for Saigon have already denounced the new P.R.G. proposal. However, some administration officials in Washington have indicated cautious interest, perhaps reflecting the uncomfortable knowledge that the U.S. Congress and American people are increasingly losing patience with the situation -- especially indefinite bankrolling of Nguyen Van Thieu. Previously, Saigon and the U.S. attacked P.R.G. proposals for not providing a firm time schedule for elections. Now, however, the P.R.G. has suggested one year from establishment of the National Council, and this is perhaps open to further bargaining. If the U.S. does prevail upon Saigon to talk seriously, efforts may well move forward on two levels: (1) Joint Military Commission implementation of the cease-fire; and (2) substantive meetings of the P.R.G.-Saigon consultative conference in France to arrange further release of detained personnel, democratic liberties, and formation of the National Council. If the U.S. Congress cuts military aid to Thieu and keeps budgetary subsidies to Saigon no higher than last year, we venture to predict that there will be a National Council in operation by December, 1974.

Bank terms, the P.R.G., far from being an equal, exists only as the "enemy."

Japan and some Western European countries are underwriting parts of Saigon's budget as well. France, it is reported, "is determined that there be 'not a penny of difference' in the aid it will give North [D.R.V.] and South [Saigon] Vietnam" (Wash. Post, Mar. 12, 1974). France seems proud of its impartiality here, yet of course it chooses to overlook the P.R.G.

Saigon, frantic for as much foreign capital as can be located, has already leased rights to American and French concerns for oil exploration off the southern Vietnam coast. More contracts are to be awarded in several weeks. With very little success so far, Saigon is seeking to attract foreign capital with what has been called the most "liberal" investment law in the third world. Qualified foreign investors, for instance, will enjoy a special five-year tax holiday and will be able to transfer all profits out of the country.

To the P.R.G. Saigon has no right unilaterally to grant rights for foreign exploration of natural resources. The P.R.G. even denies itself that right. In a recent statement the P.R.G., placing the issue in the context of the Paris Agreement, emphasized that "only an organism resulting from free and democratic general elections organized by the National Council of Reconciliation is competent to deal with the problem of natural resources" (Le Monde, Feb. 26, 1974).

If Vietnam is ever to find peace, it must be permitted the proper environment. The Paris Agreement provides -- on paper -- such an environment. It was signed by the U.S., D.R.V., P.R.G. and Saigon. It was later "guaranteed" by the major world powers. The first step toward peace is to recognize in practice the existence of two administrations in the south. Equally important is the necessity of refusing support to whichever administration fails to adhere to the cease-fire and all other provisions of the Agreement. If the Nixon administration continues to ignore the Agreement, the U.S. Congress can terminate aid entirely. If this is utopian, then the fact remains that other foreign powers can stand by the terms of the Agreement and effectively isolate the U.S. as the continuing law-breaker. Eventually, the U.S. must cease and desist.

This issue of the Indochina Chronicle was researched and written by Chris Jenkins, with editorial assistance from other members of the Center staff. Chris worked in Vietnam with International Voluntary Services from 1966 to 1968.

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Issue No. 32 - April 17, 1974

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