

THE
"NHAN VAN"
AFFAIR

Published by APACL VIETNAM

A copy of this material is filed with the Department of Justice where the required statement under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of Harold L. Oram, Inc., as an agent of the Republic of Vietnam is available for public inspection. Registration does not indicate approval of this material by the United States Government.

THE «NHAN-VAN» AFFAIR

Published by
The Vietnam Chapter
of the Asian Peoples' Anti-Communist League

*« Our regime does not prohibit them
from loving each other,
So why do they commit suicide...
The more critical our country's situation,
The more we love and cherish it. »*

by Le Dat

**From the « Autumn Selection of
Literary Works »**

INTRODUCTION

Nhan Van (Human Knowledge) was a heretical Communist literary newspaper published in North Vietnam, which printed five issues between September 20 and November 20, 1956, before it was suppressed. In its short career under its editor Phan Khoi, it managed to bring up practically every matter which had bothered the intellectual class of Hanoi during 1956, a year of crisis for the regime, and because it was suppressed instead of dying naturally, the assumption is that the intellectuals' discontent continued on. The government crisis which, in arts and letters, was reflected in the form of a publishing battle, had a physically violent aspect in the peasants' revolt that broke out during November as the result of a brutal, bungling attempt at agrarian reform. An interesting coincidence is that the armed revolt in the provinces took place just as the Nhan Van affair was reaching its climax at Hanoi, between the publication of Issue No 4 and Issue No 5, the final one. There is no detectable connection between the newspaper and the rural rebellion, and, in fact, it would have been fantastic if such a publication had any effect on mass opinion. No doubt, it was simply that discontent was general, and felt in every quarter. At any rate, as the newspaper was suppressed, so the resentment in the countryside was smothered forcibly, while the conditions responsible for them remained.

The similarity between the general crisis in Hanoi and the one which occurred last fall in the Eastern European provinces (where, however, the intellectual and the physical aspects of revolt were more closely interconnected), is undeniable. Without much doubt, both derived from the de-Stalinization campaign of the Russian center in early 1956, although no certain connection exists between the two geographical extremes. The North Vietnamese line of intellectual communication descends through the Chinese system, which bears directly on the Vietnamese outpost. The general «thaw» implied by the Russian de-Stalinization became the «One Hundred Flowers Blooming» policy, the somewhat anti-climactical theory of liberalization ascribed to Mao Tse Tung, which was built into the rebellious intellectuals' argument as it was presented in Nhan Van.

It is impossible to say exactly when the «One Hundred Flowers Blooming» policy reached North Vietnam in the full force of its implications. However, Lu Ting Yi, the Chinese party central committee propaganda chief, made a speech defining it on May 25, 1956, in Peking, which was widely disseminated. Whatever it was meant to mean in China, it was seized by the intellectuals in Tonkin as a chance that had been looking for. The policy had been officially endorsed by the party leadership in Hanoi, and there is at least an inference that the rebellious intellectuals, who had been close to the arts and letters leaders, had hoped to goad them into an official pronouncement in favor, even before Nhan Van was launched. Whether this was their precise intention or not, the intellectuals had a lively time with the policy for six months. It seriously alarmed the hierarchy, which continued to react through early 1957 even though the overt danger had died down, and it tantalized the artists and writers with the prospects of liberty they believed it held for them. «For the prosperity of literature, art and science,» went the Lu Ting Yi speech, «the variety of a hundred flowers and a hundred schools is needed. The hundred flowers and hundred schools policy is a policy of freedom to criticize and freedom to answer criticism.» All intellectuals of communism are hedged in by their dialectical role in history, but it is, naturally, in the new pro-

vinces of the empire that the limitations of their position are felt the strongest. In Hanoi, they had been taught to expect more from the dictatorship of the proletariat than permission to write ingrown, hortatory pieces and orthodox praise. Now that truth had triumphed, they thought, they would be unhampered in speaking the truth. But then, as usual, it was too late, and all practical alternatives to orthodoxy had been obliterated.

The winter of 1955-1956 had been a severe trial in which, by and large, the Communist government had failed badly. The proletariat was on top, at last. The future existed in the present and history was on its pedestal. But still, the agrarian reform, the keystone of the Party's policy, had failed, a difficulty admitted even in the Party's propaganda. Everybody knew. But in no publication in Hanoi were the shambles of agrarian reform, referred to so mordantly as in *Nhan Van*: «In the agrarian reform, illegal arrests, imprisonments, investigations (with barbarous torture) executions, requisitions of property, and the quarantining of landowners' houses (or houses of peasants wrongly classified as landowners), which left innocent children to die of starvation!!» *Nhan Van* No. 4, November 5.

The drift toward the borders of people of all kinds had also been shocking to the intellectuals. The exodus of the South during the summer of 1954 had been bad enough. Then it seemed to continue, even after it had become illegal and the masses ruled, and the army was across the escape routes. The feeling of bewilderment at these things which were happening, when they were ordained not to happen, permeates Tran Dan's poem, «Victory Is Certain,» which was suppressed when the spring issue of the occasional magazine, *Selection of Literary Works*, edited by Hoang Cam, which printed it, was confiscated.

As the creed does elsewhere, communism in North Vietnam calls upon its intellectuals to lead the masses, to join them and to guide them. They are extraordinarily eager to do so. At first it seems quite clear. Whatever its ultimate authority is, the proletariat is always temporarily unequipped to serve as the lever of the future that communism holds it to be. The intellectuals, who have studied the dogma and its ways, are meant

to explain and disseminate it, so that masses will know that they struggled and died to put themselves on top, and that their dictatorship over every other class is their paradise on earth.

In order to play their role, the intellectuals of North Viet Nam, as everywhere in the empire, were required to submit to the authority of the Party, which, by definition, is the sole receptacle of the desire of the masses, and of their power. The intellectuals agreed. While fighting off as best they could an almost automatic tendency of the Party to convert them into slogan writers, and writers for banners and wall posters, they agreed to be submissive. The writers worried about the nature of their art under communism. It was a favorite theme of Phan Khoi's, particularly in his article in the Autumn Selection of Literary Works. But they accepted.

The crisis came when it became apparent that something was profoundly wrong. The implacable forces of history were untrammled. Past evil was suppressed by the dictatorship. The masses had achieved true democracy. The social and economic processes ordained by Marx and Lenin were on the verge of perfecting society. The economic interpretation of history was proved correct once again. But there, in the North, before everybody, was a no longer deniable condition of squalor and poverty and indiscriminate death, want, frustration, apathy, political ferocity and indeterminate longing:

« We believe in the theories of Marx and Lenin. We believe absolutely in communism, the most wonderful ideal of mankind, the youngest, the freshest ideal in all history. Then, why are we so out-of-date, why are we still living so miserably under the crushing burdens of formulae, why are we still bowed beneath the past? » — Nhan Van No. 4, November 5.

The paradox is threaded through the five issues of Nhan Van, between the columns of mechanical malice toward the West, and the equally mechanical benevolence toward the Russian East.

Phan Khoi, the editor of Nhan Van, Tran Duy, the publisher, and the paper's contributing writers, including Hoang Cam, editor of the Spring Selection of Literary Works, Tran Le Van, Nguyen Huu Dang, Tran Dan, the author of «Victory Is Certain,»

Chu Ngoc and Sy Ngoc, were occupied with a peculiar attempt to interpret the anomalies which faced them.

Their arguments have probably been used all over the communist empire by intellectuals with a vestigial sense of independence, whenever the infallible system produced unacceptable results, but perhaps this was more vivid to them, in their rawness, than to others with more experience in the system. The system in North Vietnam is more novel, and the regime less well established. The South forms a point of comparison and exerts a counterpull on the population. The minor officials and communist agents are inexperienced, and there has been little time to sort out the efficient from the dull. Erratic liberal seepings, which had been advancing and retreating from Moscow had been confusing issues ever since the Party had become supreme in North Vietnam, and the Hundred Flowers Blossoming policy had descended at the time of its worst troubles. There was no established line for heretical intellectuals, nor a prescribed course of reaction—which is probably why Nhan Van was permitted to publish in the first place. The more experienced politicians at the other end of the empire were not to give the Vietnamese Party its cue until late that autumn.

The members of Phan Khoi's circle were more articulate than the rest of the intellectuals, and more vivid writers than their critics, which would have been pardonable if their arguments had not taken them from an impeccable communist position to something that looked like a queer version of western liberalism; distorted, dedicated to the success of the Party and faith and the destruction of all the rest, but still comparatively uninhibited, leading, to what seemed suspiciously to be a retrogression, a plot against history, and against the masses, which is to say, the Party.

The route was, however, anything but direct. The logic of the intellectuals' analysis of crisis was primarily of the theological kind, relying on distinctions between abstractions, and that coupling of anti-theses which is more suitable to religious mysteries than politics, even theoretical politics.

Thus, Tran Duc Thao, in Nhan Van, October 15, divides politics equally into « content » and « form ».

« In the aspect of content, our regime is fundamentally and truly free. But, in the aspect of form (freedom of press, of speech, of assembly and so on), there have been some shortcomings, and this point is more important because it is in fact the forms of freedom which insure a complete contribution by each citizen to the common mission... »

And then, the argument goes: « A freedom is individual freedom. Under the old regime, its basis was an idealist dream, which the bourgeoisie used as an intellectual instrument to exploit the working class. But, under our regime, its nature has been changed, and it has a true value. Individuals must obey the community, but the community is formed of individuals and individual freedom under the people's legal principles is a condition enabling each individual to contribute actually to the building up of the community... the ideal of individual freedom is the ideal of the future, etc. »

It is circular logic, far from the linear form which serves the West.

The Party said that the general wrongness of things was due to the errors of the administrators of its programs — not the fault of the Party, not the fault of the ideology, but the fault of the petty cadres and those who acted consciously or unconsciously under the regrettable influence of the South. Nevertheless, all this could be corrected — as a matter of fact, was being corrected, starting with the criticism and self-criticism of all involved in the usual fashion, the beginning of all beginnings again in the communist system. Dictatorship, the proper corrective, was being more forcibly applied, the Party said. All would be well.

The intellectuals in opposition seized on the implications of « criticism. » Criticism had not been applied to the true faults, and what criticism there had been was not strong enough. If the « One Hundred Flowers » policy meant anything at all, they reasoned, it meant the freedom of intellectuals to criticize everything that was fallacious — always considering that the Party was perfect, and the ideology sublime — but to criticize those individuals and appendages of the Party, the misinterpretations of

doctrine, which had caused the unhappiness and the decline. The solution, they said, was not to concentrate on dictatorship, but on democracy.

The «content» of communism as it radiated from Hanoi, they said, was immaculate. What was spoiled had to do with its «form». What was needed was that the people's intellectuals be allowed by the Party politicians to criticize «form» in all its ramifications, and the distortions of the moment would be corrected, «form» would merge with «content» and perfection would be real as well as theoretical.

The Party responded by saying that all this was «class criticism.» The opposition intellectuals were using Marxist arguments to reconstitute a bourgeois society in North Vietnam. They were not criticizing mistakes, they were criticizing the Party, and beyond the Party, the masses. This, the Party dialecticians said, was a typical attitude which exists in the primitive society outside, where the masses are degraded and subordinated to superior groups, and where there is freedom only for the proletariat to suffer and be exploited, not true freedom fortified by dictatorship.

The intellectuals in opposition were not, the Party said, criticizing in a Marxist fashion, and they did not criticize themselves when they criticized. They criticized individuals, Party members, not mistakes, and they laid the Party and the masses open to hostile propaganda. And when they criticized, they did not take the trouble to recall all the wonderful things the Party had done, and so they were one-sided and partisan, which is to say, bourgeois. They seemed, in this hour of North's suffering, and danger, to criticize the North more than the South, that seat of the people's despair, opening the former to the latter's attacks. What could it mean, except that these intellectuals were the witting or unwitting agents of reaction, who had to be silenced in the interests of true freedom?

The intellectuals defended themselves, saying that their authority came from Russia and China.

The resentment of the circle of intellectuals around Phan Khoi had other sources. One was the confiscation of the Spring Collection of Literary Works, and the accompanying official excoriation of Tran Dan for «Victory Is Certain,» which is made

explicit in the article on the poet by Hoang Cam, a maudlin but enlightening piece on the artistic life in the first issue of Nhan Van. This article, and the poem, represent the artists' chronic, pathetic opposition to the official Philistine, as much as it represents applied criticism of a specific situation.

The communist intellectual is convinced that the artists and writers under liberalism are the despised prey of all the public and private Philistines of the oppressing classes. It is hard to believe that those communized intellectuals in North Vietnam can fail to be enlightened about their own status, now that the future has closed upon them:

«O! They are legion, the politicians who try to strangle art!» is the complaint attributed to Tran Dan in the first issue of Nhan Van.

From every issue thereafter there is a drip of scorn for the politician and his elementary ideas of culture, and particularly for the politician who has been foisted off by the regime as a leader of the arts. Such a man is To Huu, the head of the Central Propaganda Committee, who became the butt of the writers' polemical attacks in Nhan Van. Earlier, apparently, he had seen them tear his own creations apart: «Criticizing To Huu's poetic sequence, (North Vietnam,) Tran Dan wrote that it was insignificant and insipid in its approach to the magnificence of lift...» (Nhan Van, September 20.) Tran Dan paid for this afterwards.

A more literary attack on the preferences of the politicians is Cham Van Biem's pseudo-scientific satire, «The Robot Poet,» in the last issue. The politicians' idea of prize literature was one of the main targets of Phan Khoi's scorn in his article in the Autumn Collection.

During the summer of 1956, a series of «study meetings» were held for the artists and writers in Hanoi (For an account of these, see Tran Dan's article on the «Struggle for Democratic Freedoms» in the last issue), which possibly represented the Party giving the intellectuals a chance to blow off steam in a controlled and relatively harmless way, and at the same time giving the official dialecticians a forum for re-imposing Party control. Artists and writers are not generally the match of professional Party theorizers who, after all, have

history and the masses behind them. These meetings may have convinced some of the intellectuals' following, but they did not reeducate the principle rebels, and, in September, came Phan Khoi's broadside in the Autumn Selection of Literary Works.

Phan Khoi is an elderly curmudgeon with a long career in service of Vietnamese nationalism, laterly in the ranks of the Viet Minh, and is a rather select person by his reputation as his age, which is about seventy. During all this period, he was cantankerous, aggressive, and a thoroughly « difficult character », as the Hanoi Thoi Moi said of him September 25.

It is possible to imagine Phan Khoi as he hounded the summer study sessions from reading his article in the Autumn Selections: Garrulous, insistant, mordant, vain, petty and vindictive and inclined to waste time on reminiscence, anecdotes, illustrations, circullocutions (most of which have been edited out in this translations in order to save space). One thing he did have that is not common among the intellectual factions of communism, he would not back down in the face authority. (Incidentally, he hasn't stopped yet. There was an article dated March 3, 1957 in the Hanoi Hang Ngay referring to Phan Khoi's inexplicable insistence on demanding a forum for himself. The type is likable, at a distance).

On September 20, the first issue of Nhan Van appeared. In the meanwhile, there had been a great deal of response building up in the Party press to Phan Khoi's challenge in the Autumn Selections, a hostile reaction unmatched in volume until Nhan Van was officially closed down on December 15 and the plates for issue No. 6 confiscated, one day after Ho Chi Minh's decree on press liberties was published. The official reaction to the Autumn Selections overlapped the initial issue of Nhan Van, so that while the party organs were still preoccupied with the former, the latter was already throwing more fuel on the fire.

This, apparently, overwhelmed the hierarchy, because there is very little pertaining to the heresy in the Party press between the second issue and the last. Then, again the whole apparatus was reanimated for the purpose of demolishing Nhan Van, after it could no longer reply, and justifying the Party's action, when

there was no longer any means of criticizing it. The attempt of the writers for Nhan Van, to justify reality in terms of an antiquated, impossible doctrine, is frequently tedious and absurd. (The first intention in the editing of what follows was the reduction of tedium). Logic decomposes as they attempt to seek a Communist analysis of the causes of despair in North Vietnam, without relying entirely on those old devils, wickedness from without, vestiges of wickedness remaining within, or for correction on that old panacea, dialectical spiritualism from the center. The writing tends to retain an official style, rhetorical, repetitious (despite editing), buried under appeals to approved authorities when it is dealing with expository material, and only in a few places, where indignation breaks out, does it produce good polemics. The furious tone of the answer to Nguyen Chong in the September 30 issue is one of these places. «The Struggle for Democratic Freedom» in the November 5 issue is another.

In the more literary work, literary in «form» at least, if not precisely in «content», the writing in Nhan Van often become animated and appealing, undoubtedly because these sections contain something of the private responses which are universals of art. The creative work in Nhan Van (and in the Spring and Autumn Literary Selections) gave a distinction quite apart from its heresy, more than did the expository material, which reached out for liberty under the impression that it was something else. Together they provided a relief from the stylized emotion and grim purity of communist letters, those endless terminal moraines of literary collectivism.

For once there is a flavor to life in the North, as it is described in Nhan Van. It comes from the writers' talents for direct observation of life as it, instead of the official preference for descriptions of life as the doctrine says it should be, the so-called «socialist reality». The outstanding instance of this is Thanh Chau's rueful «We Buy Goods From the State-Owned Trade Company» in the November 5 issue. Accurate observation is persistent throughout all issues.

If the official reaction to all this was hostile, there is some indication that the paper was welcomed by the lower echelons

of arts and letters. Van Nghe, the official organ of the Arts and Letters Association, never did make up its mind about Nhan Van and got the Association in hot water. (See Nhan Dan, Dec. 21.)

Thoi Moi, a Party lining « independent » and a major paper in Hanoi, printed denunciations which were half-hearted at first, and in the end it settled for printing official communiques, stereotyped attacks and letters to the editor. It looked feeble, but this indecision meant something. (See the substantiation of Nhan Van in Thoi Moi of Oct. 5, page 68).

Nhan Dan is, of course, a straight political party organ. In November, apparently, the decision to close Nhan Van down was made, and from then on it carried the burden of the Party's main attack.

There followed the publication of the changes, and the mechanics of suppression began to function. These were revealed *explicitly, or simply in passing, revealing much in a marginal way.* There was not only the technicality of the deposits office, initially brought up in Nhan Dan and repeated in a somewhat different version in Nhan Van, but there were such things as the unintentionally funny, shrill little incident between the poet-editor of Tram Hoa (One Hundred Flowers) and the Party agent who tried to bribe him to print material against Nhan Van, described in the latter's November 5 issue. The dreadful scarcity of newsprint, and the power over the press this gives the government, crops up from time to time, in other places.

In the material which followed the final issue of Nhan Van, there is also a clear insight into the Party's manner of manipulating the « masses », by which it justified its actions, and which it used to emphasize the theoretical relationship between the masses and itself—acting in obedience to the popular will which it had itself created.

There are the remarkable, simultaneous crystallizations of desire among assorted groups, all objecting to the continued existence of Nhan Van : The resolution of the student body of Nguyen Trai School, of December 13 (which showed that the students had been implicated in the revolt), and the open letter from the comrade workers of Xuan Thu Printing House, dated

December 17, both printed in Nhan Dan.

On December 19 Nhan Dan was referring to appeals from « thousands of workers of various strata, » « petitions from schools... hospitals, organizations, etc. » all protesting the existence of the literary publication which once happily announced circulation figures of 6000 (Nhan Van, October 15). The fact that the revelation of all this animosity followed the closing of the paper apparently is not considered pertinent. The Party had received its sanction from the masses by intuition, which it is entitled to do, and it had exercised its powers.

Although it must have been obvious to the people involved in Nhan Van, fairly early in the game, that the paper was due for suppression, there was no softening in their approach to the subject of critics. In fact, it had the effect of increasing their excitement. The November issues, with their candid attacks on the regime's « democratic freedoms » conduct, on the Central Press Service, their demands for a code of law which would (at least the implication is there) protect the people from the Party for the greater glory of communism, the damaging use of the Polish and Hungarian examples (« does anyone think that they were due to a lack of dictatorship ? »), the hysterical, unfunny anecdotes, all accumulating into a recognizable argument not only for free speech and openly competing ideas, but a free society.

A Communist party suppressed still another newspaper ; liberal ideas can seemingly be generated spontaneously by closed minds—but it is also interesting that the minds which produced ideas should firmly believe that they can be placed at the service of a political system that denies every conclusion that can be drawn from them.

The end of Nhan Van, then, left Phan Khoi, his contributors and his supporters, separated from the only milieu possible for them as leading North Vietnamese intellectuals, but still hostile to the world outside. The end of their affair was, in short, utter isolation.

CONTENTS

Victory Is Certain by Tran Dan, from the Spring Collection of Literary Works.

Criticism Of The Leadership in The Field Of Arts and Letters by Phan Khoi, from the Autumn Collection of Literary Works.

Nhan Van, Sept. 20, 1956, Issue N° 1

Declaration of intentions.

« Tran Dan's Personality, » by Hoang Cam

Criticism of Nhan Van in other papers

Nhan Van, Sept. 30, 1956, Issue N° 2

« Let Us Struggle for the One Hundred Flowers Blooming Policy, » by Tran Duy

« We Are Not Afraid That the Enemy Will Profit From Our Mistakes, » by Tran Le Van

« Answer to Comrade Nguyen Chuong and the Paper Nhan Dan, » by Hoang Cam, Huu Loan and Tran Duy

« Partisanship In Arts and Letters » by Tran Cong

Anecdotes and Letters to the Editor

Substantiation of Nhan Van in Thoi Moi

Nhan Van, Oct. 15, 1956, Issue N° 3

« Development of Democratic Freedoms, » by Tran Duc Thao

« Dr. Dao Van Ngu's Interview » — Unsigned

« Some Ideas About Hoai Thanh's Self-Criticism, » by Thanh Binh

« Attention Is Directed to the Ideas and the Person of the Artist, » by Tran Phuong

« Open Letter to Readers » — unsigned

« Dissatisfaction, » by Sy Ngoc

Letters to the Editor

Nhan Van, Nov. 5, Issue N° 4

« It Is Necessary to Have a More Ordered Society, » by
Nguyen Huu Dang

« The Truth About the Offense of Poet Nguyen Binh and
the Paper Tram Hoa » — Unsigned

« Let Us Acclaim the Central Committee of the Party,
Which Listens Attentively To the Cadres and Popular
Masses, » by Phan Khoi

« The Sincere Struggle for Democratic Freedoms, » by
Tran Duy

« We Buy Goods From the State-Owned Trade Company »
by Thanh Chau — Anecdotes

From Thoi Moi— « Communique Explaining the Applica-
tion of Disciplinary Measures Against the Newspaper
Nhan Van » from the Central Press Service

Nhan Van, Nov. 20, Issue N° 5

« How Are Democratic Freedoms Guaranteed By the
Vietnamese Constitution of 1946, » by Nguyen Huu Dang

« The Lesson of Poland Hungary, » — Unsigned

« There Is No Reason for Disapproving the One Hundred
Flowers Policy, » — Unsigned

« The Disciplinary Measures Against Nhan Van By the
Central Press Service are Illegal » — unsigned

« The Robot Poet, » by Cham Van Biem

Miscellany — after Nhan Van

Letters to the Editor

Criticism of Nhan Van in other papers

Ho's Press Decree

*(Less than a fourth of the material printed in Nhan Van
appears in the following. Editing was solely to reduce bulk and
diminish tedium. In the reproduction of « Victory Is Certain, » only
four of nine verses are used.)*

«VICTORY IS CERTAIN»

by Tran Dan

(From the Spring Selection of Literary Works)

We live in Sinh-Tu Street:

The two of us

In a house, badly off for room,

Loving each other. Why then is our life joyless?

Although the fatherland today

Is said to be living in peace,

We, however, are not out of our first year yet,

And a thousand things, all in a tangle, still await us.

Working all day, my only concern at night is a good sleep.

And when my wife and children are sick, I anxiously care

for them.

Now I am gay and forget everything, but I suddenly

remember and then, just as suddenly, I forget again

The hundreds of minor daily occupations.

Thriftily we live.

Why should we care what they are plotting in faraway

America or other such lost lands

To harm our lives ?

They say that down South lives a gangster by the name of Ngo.
His only talent is to act as Khuyen and Ung (1) for the
Americans.

His dreadful weapon is a dull sword,
With which to split the country asunder
Under the rainy Northern sky I walk.

The ground is sodden with the endless wet.

Suddenly, I feel a pang in my back,

While blood is dripping on the mud.

Who struck a blow across my back ?

Ah ! That dull sword !

It did not cut clean — and how painful !

They had wanted to split me in two.

O my fellow countrymen ! If my back ever turns cold,
Do find out whether it really is a sword cut ?

Not cut clean, but painful.

The fatherland's back is bleeding today.

II

While the evacuation to the South was in full swing
I lived terrible hours.

Under rain-darkened sky,

In groups, clinging to one another, they went.

I, now a thoroughly angry man,

Tried to obstruct them, using my body as a barricade.

Halt !

— Where to ?

— What for ?

Because we have no money, they lamented, and no rice,
No father, no lord, and no what not !

A few, males and females, even said because of the dull
life here :

— Here we would crave

Wind and cloud...

Now listen !

(1) Khuyen and Ung are kidnappers in the novel « Kim Van Kieu ».

Our skies happen now to be gloomy and sad,
They nevertheless are our own, so why leave them and go
away ?

Beyond the clouds yonder

Lies our entire South.

How can you mistake it to be American land,
Where cabarets, wine and women,
And freedom and liberty are yours for the asking,
And dollars aplenty, simply by holding out your hand ?
And buffaloes and rice fields—and days and nights full of
happiness.

And, all that notwithstanding, how can you have the heart
to leave our skies ?

Feeling like crying, I wanted to stop every child who was
going away :

—Are you really leaving me ? — And to cling to every
departing man's flaps and heels.

I felt like shouting, but my voice was hoarse...

— No ! Stay ! For

Although our bit of land is gloomy,

It is better than

America

A million fold...

How can it be forgotten so easily ?

Friends who are heading South,

Let me ask you what you need ?

Why do you not tell me frankly ?

I know,

— What you need is a heart and a brain

My words grew harsher,

But suddenly, crying was all I could do,

Crying my heart out under the stormy skies.

And away they keep going.

—But why those weary feet ?

Why those tears ?

What disheartened them ?

The ground seemed to hold back their feet,

The wind their garments.

For, leaving the North, it was as though they were going to
part with the land of the living.

As though approaching the last minutes of their lives.

All were holding them back: —every bush —every pebble
—Every garden —fig tree —and sycamore.

Speechless, but crying,

Wide-eyed, back they stared at the earth and the sky,

At sunny scenes or faraway cloud bursts,

At the old roads or blurred stars.

Oh, this land, how could it ever be forgotten?

This land, where they had known warmth, cold, and sweet
savory things?

But today, rains and winds kept coming,

Showering on those who were going to leave the North...

Who was taking them away?

Who?

And where to? — And why were they weeping?

Meanwhile, the winds kept blowing from a million directions.

O North, O South, you were parting, and your hearts broke.

On my knees, I prayed and begged the rains and storms,

Not to add to their misery by pouring on them,

For those already unlucky men should be spared the punish-
ment of nature.

Their gardens and farms were neglected, their houses deserted,

And the South still lay a thousand leagues away, and their
own country, so sad, was yet so lovely.

Away they went, but their hearts and souls lingered.

O Northern lands! Look after their properties.

III

In Sinh-Tu Street I lived,

And had such heart-breaking days!

I walked

And saw no streets

And no houses,

I saw only the rain drops

On the red of red banners.

I met my sweetheart in the rain,
She was looking for work, everywhere.
Morning, she started out, but back she came in the evening.
— They told me to wait, she confided,
And I dit not inquire further. What for?
It rained and rained.

For three months now
She has been waiting,
Living only in the future,
Like a lovely orphan, night and day
Clinging to other orphans.
On she walked,

 In the rain,
 Her head low,
 Her shoulders bent,

A girl barely in her nineteenth year.
My sweetheart!
How could she know
Where all our misfortunes

 Came from?

How could she have known

 What was America, and what was Ngo?
Whether the sun shone, or whether it rained, alone she
 walked,

Unaware that their shadows

 Were cast
 Upon the destinies
 Of each of us.

On she walked, her head low, in the rain.

How heart-breaking those days were.

On I stepped,

 And saw no streets,
 And no houses,

Only the rain drops

 On the red of red banners.

How heart-breaking those days were!
I walked on,
 And saw no streets,
 And no houses,
Only the rain drops
 On the red of red banners.

o
o o

CRITICISM OF THE LEADERSHIP IN THE FIELD OF ARTS AND LETTERS

by Phan Khoi

(From the Autumn Selection of Literary Works)

... What I am going to write is in prose and conforms to the truth, nothing but the truth. I am no poet, and my criticism will contain no mystery, no complication... It will be as straightforward as «elephants' bowels and ox lungs.» Readers will see plainly what I mean. There is no fear of misunderstanding.

I want to tell the truth, but I have been warned by some people that «there are truths that should not be told.» I did not believe them. This can only happen under certain regimes, but under our government, which regards criticism and self-criticism as its own weapons, all truth is worthy of being revealed.

I want to criticize. Someone warned me: «We all agree to have criticism inside our organization, but it is not advisable to criticize through the press. Our enemies can distort published remarks. I did not believe this either.

The time when we have to give each other advice behind closed doors is past. It is now necessary for us to settle our internal conflicts before the public, whose perspicacity will show us the way to go. Besides, since we have recognized that it is the

people who feed us, that we are to serve their interests, and that the people, as a whole, is master in the country, and that they are entitled to control all our activities, why then keep among ourselves what we can let them know?

...What must we do now? It is true that our regime reflects splendour and magnificence, but who are we? We are people who have spent a part of our lives under feudal, colonial and imperialist regimes. A few bad thoughts derived from these regimes are still in our minds, and are the source of wicked phenomena that can only be ignored if we blindfold ourselves. It is time to look straight at these phenomena, disclose and amend them. A complete amendment is imperative. Only such an amendment can embellish and strengthen our regime, and make of us worthy Marxists, Communists, and citizens of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Is it not true that we want to «consolidate the North?» The correction of our erroneous thinking is, therefore, an important factor in the economic and cultural expansion which is needed to consolidate this zone.

For these reasons, I am writing this criticism of the direction of the Vietnamese Writers and Artists Association, which I served in since it was created, in the northern regions, eight or nine years ago, until today. And my criticism will be frank.

At the time when the Association still existed in the northern regions, its methods appeared quite simple. Marxism and socialism were applied to serve the country, the people and, above all, the war of resistance. It is impossible to know whether or not writers and artists fulfilled correctly and properly their duties then, but it is certain that they strove to follow these lines of conduct. Had they any complaint against the leaders? Almost none. Or, if they had some, the greatness and agony of resistance war at that time was overwhelming, and left little time for complaint.

I am not trying here to discover the reason why the problem of the direction of literature and arts developed, why the mass of writers and artists became discontented with the leaders of their branch after the victorious return to the capital.

The word «mass» of writers and artists suddenly employed here may astonish some readers, but only this word can give

an idea of the antagonism which exists between the leaders of letters and arts and the body of writers and artists. These two groups, united during the resistance war, are now divided into two camps.

The mass counts within its ranks not only the writers and artists who had followed the resistance in the northern regions, but also those who had stayed in the now-liberated zone, and those assembled from the South or from Interzone 5. In short, they are a huge mass, which can easily be turned into a hostile camp by the maladresse of the leaders.

Under the regime of the bourgeoisie, antagonism was a common thing between people and government, between employers, pupils and schools. But under ours, it is necessary to put an end to all antagonism. As long as antagonism exists, it produces bad situations and difficulties for the regime.

Such phenomena are due to the mistakes made by the leaders during the last two years. Here are some examples. I only mention typical cases, and I shall leave the problems of organization and administration, of which I know very little, to those who are familiar with them.

In a talk organized at the headquarters of the Association of Arts and Letters, some time after my return to Hanoi, the problem of « liberty of artists and writers » was raised by an eminent cadre. . . The problem was stated as follows : Some writers and artists asking, or intend to ask, for liberty of expression, an unlimited freedom comparable to « a passer-by, who sees a beautiful portfolio under another man's arm, seizes it with the excuse that it is his unlimited right to take what he wants. » The cadre concluded : There must be control, and the writers and artists must comply with it.

Practice shows us that things do not happen that way. In my opinion, the problem was misstated.

All writers and artists of the resistance joined the Arts and Letters Association, and submitted themselves to its direction. If they had not been willing to comply, they wouldn't have joined. As for the authors in the newly liberated zone, they could have emigrated to the South, should they not have wished to submit themselves to the same authority. In short, no writer or artists in

North Vietnam has asked for boundless liberty, or tried to « seize portfolios », and I wonder why such a problem should have been raised.

...Because of such misinterpretations, the leaders have more rigid control over writers and artists...In addition, the most simple and harmless thoughts and opinions of the people are repressed. I have had personal troubles of that kind. I am going to relate them here, and nobody can charge me with « inventing stories and distorting the truth, » as they charge enemies.

A few weeks after our return to Hanoi, in an artistic gathering, a Soviet comrade observed that we had made great progress in the musical, painting and theatrical fields. But he had nothing to say about our literature, since he could not read the Vietnamese language. I answered him that, on account of some handicaps, the Vietnamese literature did not come up to the other cultural branches.

In another gathering, talking about music, someone made an apology for Vietnamese classical music. Despite my small knowledge of music, I am conscious that our classical music does not reach great heights. I expressed my opinion, and said that an artists of a friendly country had criticized our classical music as still having a primitive character, due to the repetition of « a-y-a » and « tinh, tinh, tinh. » A few days later, I met Mr. Hoai Thanh on the second floor of our association headquarters. Mr. Hoai Thanh reproached me for having expressed such ideas, and above all, for quoting a foreign artist's opinion to discredit our classical music. Hardly had I prepared myself to answer when he was gone. I went into my room and lay on the bed, getting angry, not with Mr. Hoai Thanh, but with the board of directors. Since then, I have never expressed my opinion at gathering, and when asked by my friends why I kept silent, I said that I had no opinion. Even if I have an opinion, I don't care to express it any longer. I would add that I have waited impatiently for Mr. Hoai Thanh to criticize the above-mentioned opinion. He never did, for criticism and self-criticism are rarely employed in our service. There have been only two criticisms during the last two years, one over the poem « North Vietnam », by To Huu, and the other about

the poem «Victory Is Certain», by Tran Dan, of which I will speak later. That was restrictive of freedom of expression and thought, and now I shall tell about a restriction against freedom of composition. Last October, I was assigned to make a speech at the Lo Tan commemoration. Before delivering it, I had to submit my speech to the direction. In the text, I observed that Lo Tan had a good command of Marxism, but that he had never employed a Marxist expression in his work. It made me think of the silk worm. If instead of spinning silk thread, it rejected mulberry leaves, it would not be a silk worm. Mr. Nguyen Tuan asked me, «Who do you want to hit with your allusion?» and suggested that I correct it. I was astonished.

Why, every time that I take the floor, am I accused of «aiming» at others? Nevertheless, I promised to correct it.

Further in the same text, I observed that Lo Tan was in favor of direct translation. Mr Hoai Thanh asked me to amend this sentence, with the excuse that there are several kinds of translation. He thought that if Lo Tan's direct method is considered as exemplary, it amounts to saying that President Ho's indirect method in translating the novel, «The clandestine OBCOM» (OBCOM, a provincial committee of the Communist Party) was wrong. I didn't protest, but promised to rectify this observation (and I rectified it right in front of Mr. Hoai Thanh), although in my speech I only referred to the method employed by Lo Tan, without taking it for a model, or mentioning President Ho's translation. In spite of these concessions made to the direction, when it was time for the commemoration, I read the original of my speech, without any changes, to the audience and did not notice any reaction on its part.

...Today's leaders are as awed by tabus as they ever were in olden times. The same tabus apply now as under Tu Duc's and Thieu Tri's reigns in the old Vietnam, when literature amounted to four classical books and five canonical ones— except that contemporary literature has become Marxist.

Let us go back to the problem of «liberty of writers and artists.»

As I told you before, writers and artists do not ask for boundless freedom, and have submitted themselves to direction. They

have only asked the question : « How should this direction be applied? » It must be added that the writers and artists want freedom, but only in the artistic field.

Is it true that arts and letters must serve politics, and therefore that artists and writers must let themselves be guided by politicians? If politics wants to achieve its aims, why doesn't it use slogans, banderols, instruction sheets, communiques? Why does it appeal to arts and letters?

Politics whispers in the ear of arts and letters : « The reason I like you is because I want to profit by your art. ». This can be fruitful in a certain sense, but arts is a separate field, and politics should never invade it. Freedom of the arts is asked. I think that politics has no reason to refuse this freedom. In our time, one principle of « mutual benefit » is applicable to every kind of collaboration.

However, during these last two years, the leaders of arts and letters have overstepped the limits, and have paid no attention to this tacit agreement. On the contrary, they are trespassing more on the freedom of writers and artists in their own domain.

Most of the branches of literature and arts have been « led by the nose in the service of workers, peasants and soldiers, » and have been urged to « serve in due time. » It is the truth, and we have nothing to say against it. But, the mass of writers and artists must also obey other directives from the the leaders.

Let us take, for example, the musical competition. A piece of music classified as « indifferent » by the examiners (they are able musicians) was reclassified by the Current Affairs Office (of the Association of Letters and Arts) under the excuse that the « words » were beautiful and in accord with the policy of the Party and government. Despite the examiners' protests, a high award was given to this piece of music. One of the examiners complained to me and said that they should have organized a literary competition instead of a musical one. I think that this examiner was right, unless the members of the Current Affairs Office were competent musicians, and the music itself had been reexamined.

At the next National Congress of Letters and Arts, such facts will be pointed out by the representatives of each branch.

The above has disclosed enough of the unbearable vexations

suffered by literature: It is not necessary to list here every quarrel between « mother and daughter-in-law ».

Messrs Nguyen Tuan and Hoai Thanh are famous authors. I don't say that they lack ability in the literary field, but each of us has his own art, which reflects his own personality. Only a variety of arts and personalities can create the spectacle of « One Hundred Flowers Blooming ». If, on the contrary, a single style is imposed on all writers and artists, the day is not far off when all flowers will be turned into chrysanthemums.

This attitude of the leaders has contaminated the whole capital of Hanoi. Any board of editors can correct or reject my articles, as it suits them, even if there is no reason for correction or rejection.

Recently, before July 20, a certain review, let us call it by its name « To Quoc » (Fatherland), asked me to write an article for it. It would have been sufficient to ask me to write something about the South. Instead, in his letter, the editor gave me a plan for my article: requirements, objectives, etc. and he also indicated a maximum of 1500 or 2000 words! A great bitterness overtook me. I looked for a pretext and refused. (Maybe I am too touchy, and need to be corrected).

O, Do Chieu! (Ed. — A scholar known for his independent spirit) In your time, you exclaimed: « Since I am not taking an examination, why is a subject imposed on me, and the length of my text limited? »

Yet, in our time, eighty years later, I am still being given subject, a plan, and the maximum of words I can write. What can I do to remain myself, O old literate man?

Such a leadership has led to the affair of the Spring Collection of Literary Works. To tell the truth, I am not acquainted with the authors of the works, but when reading their articles, I saw at once that they were discontent with their leaders. (Maybe there is a certain telepathy between fellow sufferers).

New Year's day morning, Mr. To Huu visited the headquarters of the Association of Arts and Literature. Before a number of authors and artists, he asked for my opinion on the Spring Collection. I replied that only Tran Dan's poem was somewhat unintelligible and disadvantageous, on the other hand,

Phung Quan's and Le Dat's poems were well designed «to fight against conventional ideas,» and «to clear out filthy thoughts,» but they should have been shorter. Mr. To Huu retorted: «What's the use of letting them waste more ink and paper?»

I held my tongue. I had enough experience to know that I must not risk any further hazardous observations.

A few days later, I learned that these thin booklets had been confiscated. I thought that it was a very bad policy to magnify such insignificant incidents, and by that, to incite curious people to buy these booklets clandestinely at three thousand «dong» each. Why do the leaders of the literary branch act as if they are frightened? Ho Phong, in China, tried every means to sully his leaders, nevertheless, his «Three Documents,» and even his «Suggestive Letter» were openly published without anybody being afraid.

However, on a drizzly spring afternoon, a meeting was held at the headquarters of the association, from 7 p.m. until 1 a.m. the next day, to «criticize» Tran Dan's poem. It was rather the young poet's trial, a political stratagem designed to isolate him, and to divide the editors of the Spring Collection. This stratagem proved successful. Among nearly 150 congress members, a few dozen voiced their unanimous condemnation of Tran Dan. Many members who thought that Tran Dan's culpability, if any, was not so great, kept their opinion to themselves.

I remember that Tran Dan was charged by a deputy with having written the word «He» in capitals. According to the deputy, the word «He» in capitals has been used for a long time to designate President Ho, while in the accused poem, this word is used for another purpose. To hear this accusation made me imagine that I was back in the royal court, where Mr. Nguyen Mo (Ed.—John Doe) was charging Mr. Le Mo (Ed.—Richard Roe) of the crime of lese majeste, for having resorted to Tabu words. Fortunately, I woke up at the height of the Congress of the Literature and Art Association.

Then came Mr. Hoai Thanh's criticism, carried in the Review of Literature and Arts, in which the author accused Tran Dan outright of joining the reactionary camp to fight against our people.

(Review of Literature and Arts, No. 110, March 1, 1956).

How easy it is to incriminate a man in our country. In China, Ho Phong, one of Chiang Kai Shek's agents, was exposed only after several years of investigation. I was even told that a sword engraved with the sentence « offered by Chiang Kai Shek » was found in Ho Phong's things. With such a proof, Ho Phong's guilt was undeniable, but to incriminate a man with his poetry is an unimaginable injustice.

Tran Dan is nevertheless luckier than the young bachelor of arts Nguyen Thuyen, son of General Nguyen van Thanh in the Gia Long reign. Tran Dan was charged with being a traitor for a 500 line poem, while Nguyen Thuyen was not only sentenced to death for 56 lines of no precise meaning, but his relatives were also implicated, and his father had to kill himself by poison. This shows how liberal our democratic and republican century is compared with the despotism of Gia Long's reign.

Finally, Mr. Nguyen Dinh Thi, editor of the Review of Literature and Arts, published successively three long critical articles on the Spring Collection. After publication, Mr. Thi showed them to me and asked me what I thought.

I spent a whole day reading these articles, and I answered Mr. Thi that the problem was misapprehended. The Spring Collection business concerned the leaders more than the mass of writers and artists. I pointed out to Mr. Thi that the reaction of the mass was the result of an unskillful leadership, and that even if the reaction was wrong, that was nothing compared to the leaders' mistakes. In his three articles, however, Mr. Thi was concerned only with avoiding all responsibility and putting it on the editors of the Spring Collection. It was a grave injustice, not to say an extravagance, on Mr. Thi's part. I am writing these lines by the light of a twenty candle power electric lamp. I swear by this lamp that Mr. Thi had recognized the correctness of my observations, and had promised to write critically of the leaders. But he has not written it yet.

In his first article, Mr. Thi charged the authors of the selection of having, like wet nurses, « stuffed the mouths of new born babies full with their big breasts. » It made me think of some stories of the old time. In 1920, I was employed as an accountant

by the Bach-Thai Company in Haiphong, and could see with my own eyes Mr. Bach Thai Bui, the manager, exploit his employees, but one day, Mr. Bui pointed an accusing finger at the workers and cried out: « You have bled me of all my money. »...

It is a common thing to shift one's faults over to somebody else in order to shut his mouth. It was what Mr. Thi had done to Tran Dan, Phung Quan and Le Dat, who had no breasts, nor newborn babies.

None of them ever protested. The mouth was, indeed, well stuffed.

When the literary prizes for 1954-1955 were announced, Hanoi public opinion deprecated the mediocre works of some of the poets. My statement may be regarded as vague and groundless, but unfortunately there is only one Review where art criticism can be published, and this review belongs to the Association of Literature and Arts. No opinion had a chance of being published. Nevertheless, there was concrete proof of this discontent. The review Tram Hoa (Hundred Flowers) published three critical articles on Xuan Dieu's poem, « Ngoi Sao » (The Star). After the third article was printed, the review stopped such activity. A referendum would reveal this side of public opinion, if anybody wanted to know.

In my capacity of member of the council of examiners, I agreed with the public even before the announcement of the results. I was one among ten examiners. I do not remember exactly if I was designated or nominated... I worked and was paid for my work, but when it was over, I reproached myself for having taken part in it.

The literary works were examined by sub committees for literature, poetry, novels, plays etc. Later, a council was held by these sub-committees to classify the works that had been chosen. In case of disagreement, a hand vote was to have resolved the question.

The day a council was held to classify the poetry, I protested against the award of second prize to « The Star » by Xuan Dieu. This poem was at best worth third prize. When I cited some unintelligible verses in it, Mr. Huy Can, an examiner, said that I did not want to understand them.

In principle, if Mr. Huy Can wanted to make me understand Xuan Dieu's verses, he should have explained them to me, instead of reproaching me with not wanting to understand them. Yet, the whole board of examiners kept silent, as if they all understood these verses. I quoted some more bad verses and said that Xuan Dieu's new poems are inferior to his old ones. An examiner, whose name I forget, asked me: « If what you say is true, are the Party's efforts to reeducate Xuan Dieu useless? » Fortunately, another examiner raised his hand to stop debate over the question, saying that the argument was mistaken. However, I had already retorted that: « The Party has taught Xuan Dieu how to make a revolution, rather than how to make verses. » Confucius said: « Four horses cannot go faster than a word which has escaped. » My criticism caused a vote in which I represented the absolute minority.

Another time, a council was held to classify the novels. I protested against Nguyen Huy Tuong's « The Life of Luc, » which was awarded second prize. I read six or seven paragraphs of it and concluded that the novel contained some unlikely characters, conflicting with a socialist regime in its first stage. It would not be advantageous to our literature for foreigners or enemies to read such a prize work. Nobody objected to my remarks, but when the vote came, I still represented the absolute minority.

When all was over, and there were no other meetings of the examination board, I was handed two memoirs, which had received third prize, and was told to read them and to make observations. I found that Hoai Thanh's « Beloved South » was only a typical article without any literary value. On the other hand, Hong Ha's « Towards the Work fields » needed more work. Remembering my vain attempts to disqualify Messrs Xuan Dieu's and Nguyen Huy Tuong's work, I did not want to waste my strength discussing Hoai Thanh's, and only wrote a few words on a piece of paper suggesting that Hong Ha's « Towards the Work Fields » be given second prize. I never knew what happened to my note.

Later, a meeting was held between examiners and artists. In principle the jury should have suggested that the artists express their opinions, for we are no longer in a time when the

candidate has to accept all decisions taken by corrupt examiners, as in the old feudal days. But nobody was aware of this omission. At the end of the meeting, I asked permission to express my concern, and a few others also asked to voice theirs. I told them about the two hand votes and said that in spite of the results, I didn't yield the majority. An artist said that he was surprised to see such disagreement among examiners once the choice had been made, but I was more surprised than he to see the astonished artist put the blame on me, although he had not attended the meetings of the board of examiners.

On the day of the awards, I was appointed by the organizing committee to be one of those who gave out the prizes. I disliked having to distribute the three that I contested, so, I refused. In order to make my opinion clear, I didn't even applaud when these prizes were given to the winners.

About the end of June, I was sick and entered Hospital C. I saw some military men around me read a collection of poems by Ho Dac Khai entitled «The Fighter», and criticize it. I borrowed it and found that it was really awful. And yet this collection was awarded the third literary prize. Even though I was a member of the examining board, I did not see these poems — only a communique saying that the collection in question had first been given a prize for encouragement, and only afterwards had been upgraded to third prize. Isn't it natural to wonder who had made this decision?

According to Mr. Xuan Dieu, after the announcement of the results, the board of examiners was compelled to launch a propaganda campaign in favor of the prize works. Some editors were entrusted with the review of these works, but very few criticisms were published. I asked one of the critics the cause of this situation and was told that «there were too many difficulties.» I thought that he was completely right. It is much easier to award a prize to a work than to launch a propaganda campaign in its favor.

By the end of July, only two reviews had been published in the Review of Literature and Arts. The appraisal by Mr. Hoang Xuan Nhi (an examiner) on «The Life of Luc» didn't satisfy the readers, who found it too «soft,» and unworthy of a university

professor. Mr. Hoai Thanh's review vainly tried to justify Xuan Dieu's collection of poems, «The Star,» but these justifications were strained and weak, and could not refute the three critical articles published in the review Tram Hoa. There is something about Mr. Hoai Thanh's behavior that I can not admire. His review was written after the three articles in the review Tram Hoa came out, yet he made me believe that he had deliberately ignored them. Did he mean to cast them into oblivion as Pham Quynh had to Ngo Duc Ke's newspaper Huu Thanh?

Another fact might surprise those who noticed it. Messrs Xuan Dieu, Nguyen Huy Tuong and Hoai Thanh were candidates and examiners at the same time. Not only were they members of the board for the final examination, but also of the board for the semi-finals. How did it happen that such liberties were allowed? Even in feudal times, an examiner was obliged to resign when his relatives presented themselves for examination. In our time, the examiners themselves are allowed to submit their candidacy. Perhaps, in the times of Ho Chi Minh, human nature has changed completely, and all men have become «incorruptible,» or, is it because every mouth is well stuffed?

...I hope that our association will apply the principle of democratic centralization, that is, the Literary and Arts branch will be led in conformity to the wishes of the writers and artists. Let us not repeat the same mistakes committed during these last two years, that is to base everything on the opinion of a few leaders and impose on the mass of writers and artists what is against their will.

When this is done, there will be no more antagonism, and it is an important point in the program of cultural expansion for the consolidation of the North.

Hanoi, July 30, 1956

ISSUE NUMBER ONE

Hanoi Nhan Van, September 20

(Excerpts from the declaration of intentions)

... Just as the Party and the government have set up a program for development of culture and improvement of social activities, we believe we should make our own contribution to this work by publishing Nhan Van. It is for this reason that our journal will be essentially cultural and social.

... Under the leadership of the Lao Dong Party, and in compliance with Marxist-Leninist principles, Nhan Van will work with a realistic spirit for the strengthening of the North, and for national unification. Thus, it will prepare the way for carrying out socialism in accordance with Party aspirations, which are also those of the entire people.

To make many promises and produce little is worse than to promise little but realize much. Similarly, to gain confidence by words is worse than to gain it through acts. So, in this first issue, we spare words and promises.

Nhan Van

Hanoi Nhan Van, September 20

« Tran Dan's Personality, » by Hoang Cam

(« Before me was a heroic child of the Party, faithful through all tests, who knew how to cherish his party and how to excise all cankers which might inflict injury on the Party and on the army's prestige... »)

The first time I met Tran Dan was in a vacation camp reserved for Army artistic troupes in 1951. He was a small, thickset man with brawny legs and arms. His voice was usually hollow; his laughter candid. His slit eyes were crowned with shaggy eyebrows, which gave his countenance a severe appearance. But he looked like a child when he laughed.

I had known him by reputation for a long time. Early in 1947, a certain Tran Dan had made a name among the artists of the troupe at Son La. He became famous for his cartoons and poems, the original nature of which had gained the admiration of associated artistic and literary groups. Nevertheless, it was rumored that he remained misunderstood by his fellow actors, and that the political cadres had developed a dislike for him.

In 1951, under Tran Dan's leadership, many groups of artists, numbering several hundred and including authors, directors and actors, were preparing to give performances for the troops in an important operational theater. Under the shade of a bamboo forest, Tran Dan, in a gentle, familiar voice, delivered lectures about literature and people's art, literature and art by the people and for the people under the leadership of the Party...

By the end of these conferences, Tran Dan had won the affection of almost all artists, who now considered him as an old friend... After the Dien Bien Phu victory, Tran Dan spent sleepless nights rewriting for the third time his novel «The Human Tide» on that historic, magnificent victory.

«The goal I have assigned myself does not concern the novel, but poetry. I shall try to create here a special method of description, not original but independent». Tran Dan told me this in confidence when he finished his novel, «The Human Tide». He also showed me another manuscript, entitled «The Drumming of the Future».

Tran Dan's work did not win me over at first reading. I took him for an eccentric. I read his novel two, three times, without being satisfied, but I finally discovered something out of the ordinary and routine. Nevertheless, I did not appreciate this form of poetry. Later, after reading several of Tran Dan's poems, I realized that «this boy is not ordinary.» This did not necessarily mean

« good » in my opinion.

However it may be, thanks to his poetry, I thought very much of a poet's responsibility to life ; to thoroughly study life to express himself in a personal way, and to create a very particular world. This is what led me to note that all of Tran Dan's poems contain something of the unhappy, the inscrutable, and the sad, as well as the impulsive, the ardent, the frank and courageous.

Although his verses did not penetrate deeply into my soul, his research in the field of poetry compelled my respect and affection. Tran Dan often said, and I agreed with his view : « Everyone has his own way of composing his poems. Certain verses are like the sound of the flute, others are like the clarion, or the beat of a drum. We cannot demand that they all be alike. It is only under these conditions that the deep harmony between poetry and song can be realized ».

... As soon as he finished his novel, « The Human Tide, » Tran Dan was sent to China on a special mission, that of writing the Vietnamese commentary for the film « Victory at Dien Bien Phu ». But he was chaperoned by a political cadre who had full powers of decision. The latter, instead of contenting himself with expressing his views on the text of the commentary, ventured too far into the literary field. He imposed his will on Tran Dan, dictating even words and sentences to him. He used political, arid and superfluous expressions, and insisted at all costs that they be put into the commentary.

At first, Tran Dan maintained a most obedient attitude toward this political cadre in writing his commentary. But when the latter brazenly encroached on literature, Tran Dan began to show his feelings. He asked to be excused, and thus left to his fellow cadre the « literary » part of the commentary. Differences between the scholar artist and the political cadre were multiplying in Tran Dan's mind. Consumed with anguish, Tran Dan complained to his fellows : « O, they are legion, the politicians who try to strangle art ! What can we do to inform the central committee, so that concrete measures can be taken on behalf of writers and artists ? This is our duty. I trust the party. I love it. I will follow it to the end. »

That was the motive behind Tran Dan, Then Tu Phac, Do

Nhuan, Hoang Cam, Hoang Tich Linh, and a number of other writers and artists in the army who wrote at Hanoi, early in 1955, several proposals on literary and artistic policy, which were immediately sent to higher levels. This plan was on the verge of being approved. A few high ranking cadres of the army approved its major points, and praised in particular its constructive spirit.

While this proposal was being discussed, a girl suddenly entered Tran Dan's life, a twenty year old Catholic who lived in the newly liberated capital. Both youths were passionately in love, for the first time. Tran Dan, though bordering on thirty, had never been loved. He came down (to Hanoi) two or three times, in defiance of army regulations. Using sick leave, he went to live with his beloved for fifteen days. He even asked from his superiors authorization for marriage. He could not renounce his love, even though he knew that countless obstacles stood in its path. Indeed, nobody except a few friends approved the intimate relationship. Some took the self-righteous approach: «Tran Dan is certainly falling into moral decay. No sooner does he return to Hanoi than he is already spoiled. There's pacifism for you.»

Others, affecting stern looks, demonstrated vigilance: «Watch out! We'll fall into our ranks!»—so the love of Tran Dan and the Hanoi girl became food for gossip among comrades, none of whom took the trouble to discover the truth. Canards, mockery, and also «point of view,» the character and thought of the capitalist and the proletarian classes, and so on—were the grandiose themes lifted from political tracts to strangle this love.

Tran Dan, his head buried in his arms, spent hours weeping, grief-stricken, in the untidy house of his intended. Between the two youths hung a barrier of shame, commiseration and pain. She ceased to care for her looks, and put away in the wardrobe her long, colored dresses, many of which had been shortened and re-dyed. Long gone was her crystalline laughter. Her voice now trembled with tears. On Tran Dan's advice, she had surrendered her rights to collect rents from a few rooms which she owned, to turn them over to the committee of housing management, but not before she widened her black eyes and, completely astonished, asked: «How can we live under these con-

ditions, darling? Why must we refrain from collecting rents? Does the government condemn property owners?» And so on.

Tran Dan considered it his duty to make needed explanations to his beloved, to guide her in the way according to which it is necessary «to work for a living,» and «not to batten on others.» The figure of this young woman going in search of a job in the rain I discovered with pity in the poem, «Victory Is Certain,» published in the Spring Selection of Literary Works.

In their house on Sinh-Tu Street, a blanket of dust shrouded tables and chairs. Every day, as soon as he had finished his meals, Tran Dan returned to his unit to hear the whispered gossip which circulated among the comrades. For her part, the young woman barefoot and shabby, went on hunting a job. She started early in the morning, returning only at nightfall: «On she walked, in the rain, her head low, her shoulders bent...»

Tran Dan was about to go mad. He could not remain quiet. He went from and returned to his unit, but everywhere he felt invisible threads tightening inexorably, strangling his heart.

At this moment, there occurred important events in the artistic movement. Criticizing To Huu's poetic sequence, «North Vietnam,» Tran Dan wrote that it was insignificant and insipid in its approach to the magnificence of life, and that it involved a serious mistake: Cult of personality and deification of leaders. Tran Dan's novel, «The Human Tide,» the edition of which ran to tens of thousands of copies, was a best-seller. His criticism of the novel, «Escape from Paulo Condore,» by Phung Quan, was as virulent as that against the poems in «North Vietnam.» His caustic and rough tone provoked objections. Countless writers and artists like him, living the same conditions of exhaustion and tension, charged with the load of a political line, of bourgeois spirit, pacifism and so forth, felt themselves being drawn into a somber world where truth seemed to be submerged by all kinds of odious preconceptions and callumnies. Tragedy had arrived at its most dramatic stage. Tran Dan was suddenly confined to his unit just as Tu Phac had been isolated in a classroom for no education, while his wife was pregnant. One, two, three months passed. During the first days, she

groaned as if suffering from fever : « What is my crime ? What crime have I committed to be thus detained ? » His beloved could not see him.

The first symptoms of her pregnancy deeply depressed her. She grew so thin that she was only skin and bones. Abandoned in her untidy house, with a thin dog as her sole companion, without parents neither brother nor sister she occasionally received a visit from a neighbor, a wooden sandal merchant who prepared her a bowlful of rice soup. Once I went to see her and found her looking ten years older. She asked me, between sobs : « Why doesn't Tran Dan come to see me, my friend ? » I tried to console her : « He's on a special mission for a little while. You're sick. If you want anything, we'll help you. » « I've had enough of this ! I'll die, » she replied. « I'll die and never be worried again, and at the same time I won't be making trouble for you. »

Tran Dan's close friends had to take turns visiting her, explaining, comforting, assisting this girl who had loved for the first time, and whose womb was already torn with pain.

Tran Dan's instinct for self-preservation was so strong that he was able to resist premature suicide. He was so young. His poem, « Victory Is Certain » was thus composed around April of 1955. After a three month internment for reeducation, Tran Dan was finally permitted to come back to his beloved, who at first poured out her discontent. But she had begun to make a layette for the baby stirring in her womb. She had, besides, found a job. « Gone is the rain...The wind no longer blows...A sunbeam shines on the red of the flag... »

Later on, Tran Dan was commissioned as a land reform observer. He entrusted his poem, « Victory Is Certain », to Le Dat. Tran Dan had almost forgotten it because he was so involved with day to day problems, and also because he was occupied with other poems. The Têt festival was coming. Several comrades were in the throes of literary creation. I ran back and forth between friends making small contributions to their work. I felt called upon to edit a Spring Selection of Literary Works as a contribution to the blossoming of a new spring of culture.

I considered inadmissible and contrary to the Party's regime the « prohibition from writing » proposed by a few people

against Tran Dan. Consequently, since Tran Dan was on a mission to a remote region, and because I did not know whether he had written anything else, I published his poem «Victory Is Certain» in the Spring Selection. If this flower were permitted to blossom, it would perhaps be useful, instead of noxious. But, alas, before it could blossom, it was trodden on. The Spring Selection was banned, as was the poem «Victory Is Certain». It was rumored that the dictatorial clique of the cultural world had taken its revenge for being violently attacked during the criticism of the poem «North Vietnam». Tran Dan and Tu Phac were thrown into jail. This was the second phase, more terrifying than Tran Dan's drama. A storm was thundering across the literary and artistic world.

«Tran Dan is a reactionary!» «There are reactionaries in the circle of Spring Selection!» Such were the rumors which circulated, coming from one did not know what source.

The bad news struck us in full significance once, when Tran Dan and I were eating rice one day. K. (Tran Dan's intended) turned pale, her eyes wet with tears, and let her chopsticks fall.

«If anything happens, of course it will be our fault. Why was the Spring Selection printed?»

Still, despite my qualms, I felt for my part some pride in publishing the review. True, it did not contain exceptional work, but, at least, it exposed certain problems, that of social welfare, Van Cao's work, that of nonconformity, Le Dat's. Thus, if I published Tran Dan's poem, «Victory Is Certain,» although it had not gained my entire satisfaction, it was because it was out of the usual rut of poetic uniformity. At least, a few fish had wriggled to the surface of the water, so quiet so long.

During the rainy days of Têt, the dictatorial clique in the cultural world had been meeting all the time to decide on ways of banning the Spring Selections. A suffocating atmosphere hung heavy over the authors of pieces printed in the publication. Then came the night when charges were filed against the poem «Victory Is Certain». It was as if a man had been startled out of his sleep by shouts of «Help! Help! Bandits! Here they are!»—as if all at once, roused from sleep, everybody immediately armed himself

with spears and swords and ran out to compete with his neighbors in swooping down on a mere shadow figure. This common reflex is the same among all who defend their houses and villages: The black silhouette collapses, and, satisfied, all the people quietly go home to bed. The next day, at sunrise, when they open their doors, everyone realizes that the gang of pirates was merely a night walker in search of a little coolness.

They were in the right, those who had struck with their sticks. « Someone shouted, and so we struck a blow ». They were men who love their villages and homeland. Therefore, they were not at fault.

The guilty were those who had shouted for help, those who first used the word, « Reactionary, » so that all the village went for Tran Dan and beat him to death.

I have thought often of it, my heart heavy and bleeding. The verdict, returned that night, blaming, or rather condemning a poem, and in effect its author, to death, was at the same time an anonymous threat to those writers and artists who might desire to blaze a creative path, different from that adopted by the already mentioned dictatorial clique.

After this verdict, I heard no more of Tran Dan, but I was sure that he was this time effectively imprisoned. While K. was writhing in torment giving birth to her first child, sprung from a bitter love, her beloved went away without knowing when he might come back...

... After studying the resolutions of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, a happy thought leapt from my heart: « Tran Dan will surely be released. » Indeed, he went home on a summer evening. This did not surprise me, because I trust implicitly in the clear-sightedness of the Soviet Communist Party and the « truth » to which our party firmly holds.

He was back! On meeting him, I could not utter a word. Tran Dan was always cheerful, but his face still bore the stamp of suffering. His complexion had sallowed, and his body had grown thinner. Nevertheless, before talking, he burst into young and spontaneous laughter. He showed me four poems composed during his detention. He affirmed that he had been released owing to the perspicacity of the Party Central Committee.