

SAIGON, AUG. 11, 1965. A visit to a textile plant in the Gia Dinh prefecture, district of Go Vap produced interesting information. I was received by the president of the firm, who is also president of the Vietnam Employers Association -- a surprisingly young man named Phan Ba Thuc. He took the initiative in giving a summary of the state of industry: Rubber is the biggest item in Vietnamese production. Rubber companies total between 4 and 8,000 employees on the plantations. There are five companies, French owned.

Another major industry is electric power production, French-owned, with about 2,000 employees. (Due to Viet Cong sabotage of power lines, Saigon has inadequate current necessitating periodic turning off of power in each section of the city on a rotating basis. I dread the possibility of being caught in my hotel elevator, a small dark cage.)

The brewery industry has some 700 employees. The brands, Larue and Trente-troi, and Coca Cola are the principal products. Jute mills have some 500 employees. Also French-owned.

Vietnamese and Chinese owned industries include textiles with some 3 mills employing 8,000, and smaller mills with an unestimated number. Thuc's company ~~(Nam)~~ (NAM-A) South Asia Textile Co. has 400 employees, using two shifts, but would like to work 3 shifts if enough skilled workers were available. There is a shortage of skilled workers, and NAM-A trains about 90 percent of its people. The government has no training program. Thuc would like to have about 100 more weavers. The company's principal ~~xxxx~~ activities are weaving and dyeing, no spinning.

chairman

Thuc is also ~~president~~ of the Vietnam Employers Association, with 200 member firms. They are mostly industrial enterprises and plantations; it has few trading firms. They employ 130,000 workers.

His own company uses girls as weavers; the supervisors and maintenance men (he calls them adjusters) are men. For his staff of 400 he has only 4 supervisors and would like at least a dozen more. The draft, however, which now claims all between the ages of 20 and 30, makes this impossible. Thuc says he is required to discharge and may not hire 20-30 year olds. (I learned later that some people do have exemption papers, though all exemption papers dating from before 1965 are void.) Some of the supervisors work overtime on machines.

The workforce has an eight-hour shift, with a 15 minute break for lunch. First shift starts at 5 a.m. ~~Most of the~~ Fifty percent of the workers come from the immediate neighborhood; the others are bussed in.

The Textile Workers Union is organized in the plant. (The union chairman in the shop told me that 40 percent of the workers are dues-paying members.) Some years ago, the union was "disrupted" but now each factory has its own union, each affiliated with the Confederation ~~Generale du Travail~~ Vietnamienne du Travail (CVT). The plant has written agreements with the union -- separate agreements on wages, working conditions, social security and grievances. The law requires that every shop have 6 personnel delegates (or shop stewards committee) elected by the employees. In the last election, there were 20 candidates, few of whom received an actual majority. Some union men ran and were elected, but the union apparently makes no drive to capture the posts. They hold office for one year. Where an issue concerns an individual, the personnel delegates handle the grievance; if the issue concerns all the employees, the union representatives act. The CVT does

not participate in the local negotiations, though the employees get some advice from headquarters.

In 1961, the workers at NAM-A struck because the company discharged three workers as unskilled and the union felt the workers ought to be retained. Thuc says he fired 30 apprentices during the strike. "I was angry, and I recognize that I was wrong. And the union recognizes that it was wrong too." The explanation for the dispute was that the union had a first contract and felt it had to show its strength, he added, and management also wanted to show firmness. After a three-week stoppage, the dispute was settled by giving the three workers six months in which to prove themselves; they failed and the company got them shifted to another firm where management also complained about them. The union now agrees that they were not competent.

There are annual negotiations. No general increase is given, but each worker is considered individually. This year this issue of pay increases has been settled. There must also be consideration of a cost-of-living increase, but this is yet to be discussed with the union. Thuc wishes his people were better trained to negotiate and had a better understanding of issues. He thinks CVT ought to train them.

month

The method of judging each worker is a highly formal system of merit rating. Each ~~week~~ the results of inspection are published on a bulletin board, rating each worker's output. The rating used to be done by the supervisors, but their tendency was to be subjective and to blame the worker when the problem might have been machine adjustment. Now the inspectors are drawn from the weavers. If the weavers complain about their ratings, the inspectors may be shifted. But generally the inspectors are impartial. (I watched a girl inspecting - flaws are easily discernible; the problem is whether the worker or the machine is at fault.) Frequently anonymous letters of complaint are received. The first two letters are ~~xx~~ ignored -- burned, says Thuc -- but on receipt of a third, he investigates. He gets 3 to 4 such letters a month. If he believes the inspector is at fault, he waits a month, then acts without acknowledging to the workers why an inspector is being transferred. He simply states the inspector is needed elsewhere because "face is important in ~~the Orient~~ Asia."

An innovation is the use of "comités d'entreprise" - supervisory conferences, we would call them. Participants are supervisors (contre-maitres), lead men (chefs d'équipe), personnel delegates and union representatives. The agenda, once a month includes: a report by the President on the state of the business; letters of complaint or approbation from customers; reports by the participants on their sections; problems raised by the personnel delegates. The meetings last 2-3 hours. Since 1957, this has been done. Many good suggestions are received, and the contributions are taken into account when year-end bonuses are given, but the bonuses are not assigned directly on the ~~xxxxx~~ basis of the ideas for fear that it might lead to arguments.

Bonus points are formally computed under four headings: (1) length of service; (2) attendance; (3) "technical faults" -- i.e., competence; (4) cooperativeness which includes the making of suggestions. Maximum bonus last year was 1/2 months pay; minimum five days pay. To be eligible for bonus, the employee must have been with the company at least one year.

A welfare fund (caisse de secours) has been in effect since 1957. It is financed by the sale of waste yarn, wooden packing, etc. The Board of Directors may vote to subsidize the fund from their own bonuses if the fund is low. The workers

themselves manage the fund. They elect a committee, but the cashier is now a company official. (20,000 piastres was once stolen and the company replaced the money; the only case in 8 years.) There are 5 on the committee. The person who sells the waste may spend two-three hours per week on the job. A weekly meeting for a half-hour is held ~~xxxxxx once a month xxxxxx~~ to consider disbursements on individual applications in the light of the current treasury.

Benefits are given for personal disasters caused by a death in the family, fire, flood, illness of a member of the family. Medical fees for workers are paid by the company but not medicines which may come from the caisse de secours. (Law requires medical care for employee himself.) Pregnant women may be helped, beyond the law's requirement of half-pay for one month, with 2 months leave.

A credit union was established in 1962. This was the second in the country, the first being at ESSO. More than 50 percent of the workers at NAM-A are in the credit union. The company offered to put up half of the initial capital at no interest, but the workers refused it, saying they preferred to handle it alone. Now the capital comes to 200,000 piastres (\$5,600)

I met the chairman of the union at ~~xxxxxx~~ a loom that was being adjusted. He said that CVT does not provide him with as much material as he would like to get. He has received some material from the AFL-CIO, translated by USIS. It was A-1, very good. He would like more, especially about the Textile Workers Union in America. TUC added that it would be helpful to his workers if USIS could provide material in Vietnamese on credit unions. (I spoke to Lindahl and Condon about this; they would like to know what's available in the U.S. and will see to the translation. Check with Tom Gardner and Marge Meisler.)

Thuc invited me to meet with the steering committee of the Vietnamese Employers Association.

The plant is located about 6 kilometers from Saigon. I asked if there had been V-C activity in the neighborhood. Yes. The V-C used to distribute tracts outside the plant, but now they were bold enough to distribute it inside the gates. He is investigating.

Today is the Buddhist "Wandering Souls Holiday" when the spirits of the unmourned dead wander about doing mischief. The pagodas are flying their flags. Women light fires and sprinkle some substance on it to keep the ghosts away.