

We squatted on the floor, the lucky ones having a pillar behind them to rest against.

We sat pressed close to each other, and the atmosphere in the room became unbreathable because of the loathsome smell emitted from the 600 human bodies which in the heart of the Summer had not been bathed for 20 days.

In front of us was a raised platform on which the « teaching-team » stood, and all around us were policemen armed with musketoons. Outside, the village-guards patrolled incessantly with naked swords in hand.

A lecturer recited his harangue for two hours. He spoke about the cunningness and the craft known to be frequently used by landowners, said he, to exploit more efficiently the laborious peasants. He stated them one by one, following some ready-made classification. In the end he arrived at a conclusion full of magnanimity. « My friends! he said, our peasant comrades have been very kind to allow you to come here in order to become re-educated and changed. You must perform your duties in a worthy manner by doing everything possible to pay them the debts they ask you. I sincerely advise you too, to confess all the crimes you have committed. Confessed fault is half forgiven, and if you heed my advise you may receive indulgence from the Party and the Government !»

We called him « Mr the Good » because he seemed

to be very kind, he called us his « friends », and he promised us very enviable things such as our return home, freedom of work and a quiet life, His only condition was to settle our debts toward peasants and to be sincere in confessions.

But « Mr. the Good » had not yet finished getting down from the platform and disappeared behind the curtain of sentries before « Mr. the Wicked » (1) took his place at the tribune. Without any sort of preamble, he inveighed : « Open your eyes widely to listen to what I say ! »...« That dirty beast who is sleeping, stand up and quickly ! » He vociferated for two hours, and finally when he was breathless he stopped and concluded his speech by a last threat : « Tomorrow you will be escorted to the village next to this one to witness the execution of some obstinate landowners who refuse to pay their debts. So take care ! Write to your wives or children, reveal to them the spot where you have hidden your treasure and tell them to bring it to the Peasants Association Board. Otherwise, you'll have your brains blown out ».

With this warning the meeting was closed, and we went back to our group to prepare our auto-criticism.

A member of the « Agrarian Reform Army » recal-

Note.— (1) Vietnamese pagodas are usually guarded at the entrance by two statues of mandarins, a civilian one with white face and a military one with red face, standing opposite each other under the arch of the main porch. People, by ignorance, call them . « Mr the Good », and « Mr the Wicked ».

led for us the recommendations of the two lecturers. He cried loudly banging on the table. The reaction to this speech was an utter paralysed silence. All of us felt, as in the fable, like the lamb in front of the wolf.

Some of the landowners were pointed out to make orally and publicaly their confessions. They made obvious efforts to attribute to themselves horrible and unbelievable crimes; all of them had a certain air of repentance. Some one had even tried to weep, but tears did not come to him, his lachrymal glands probably have been withered and atrophied by too much sleeplessness. That session lasted from mid-day to 6 p. m. We called it the « oral examination. » We reserved the « paperwork » for the next session because we had that night to draw up on paper our repertory of crimes and offences.

Some wrote very quickly, completing page after page. Others, on the contrary, bit the tip of their penholders. Everybody nevertheless kept, quiet, making a supreme effort to make up crimes in sufficient quantity, just to fill up the four chapters already stipulated. They were :

- Exploitation of the peasants
- Beating the peasants
- Rapes of country-women
- Sabotage of the Resistance and spying for enemies.

It was told that we had to hand over our copies at midnight. A relief cadre looked over all the copies, then suddenly flew into a passion, called us recalcitrants because, he said, among the 30 copies he could not find in any of them a single crime that was not already revealed in the previous «oral examination». In one stroke he tore up all the 30 copies and ordered us to begin again. And the 30 heads were bent once more again in front of the 30 oil lamps, and at midnight the 30 persons perspired profusely because all of them felt that Damocles' sword was hung above their head. They wished that the Devil himself would appear and help them to draw up their confessions. Their hope of seeing again their family was gradually vanishing as the night quickly passed.

It was four o'clock in the morning when we, for the fourth time handed our copies, and then, extremely anxious, we sat waiting for the result. A cadre who came and took the place of the previous one seemed to be less wicked this time. When he read the copies he looked obviously satisfied. Better still he took interest in one of them and as if he would like to congratulate the author of that master-piece, and openly praise his «surrendering-spirit», he read it in a loud voice. When he had finished reading the four or five pages full of unedited crimes, he called the author of so much devilish mischiefs and asked him :

— Nieng, tell me how many ricefield you have.

Nieng with folded arms answered very politely :

— Sir, I never had an acre.

— You're lying. Beware of doing so !

— Sir, I dare not tell a lie. For three generations we have never had any ricefields in our family.

The cadre seemed to be perplexed. He ordered Nieng's record shown, then turned it over and nodded his assent. He went on :

— And what are you doing to earn your living ?

— Sir, I was a geomancer before the Revolution, and after the Democratic Republic was proclaimed I became a tavernkeeper. My tavern is in the very center of Hau-hien street, and it is known by every cadre of the whole district.

— And what did your father do ?

— Sir, my father was a « medecin-man ».

— And your grandfather ?

— Sir, my grandfather taught chinese classics.

— So, it's right. Confucianism, quackery, geomancy and astrology are the four accomplices of feudalism. You were for three generations servants of the exploiting classes.

Nieng came back to his place, and the cadre put his copy in his leather portfolio.

The next morning, I happened to sit close to Nieng. I asked him :

— Do you know the reason why you are classed as landowner ?

— My wife was married, replied Nieng, by a previous marriage to a chinese and learned from him the art of cooking frog meat, so our tavern was a well frequented spot because of her famons dish. But other tavern-keepers became jealous and alleging that in former times, landowners in my village frequently came in our restaurant to taste our frog dish, they reported that I used to keep company with the landowners ; that I was intimate with them and therefore had a « landowner's spirit ».

A young man sitting next to Nieng asked him :

— In fact, have you really committed the heinous crime you have confessed ?

Nieng, shocked, answered fastly :

— How could I? You don't yet understand that when you are obliged to confess crimes, while you never have had any, you must invent them somehow. Otherwise, you'll be classed as « recalcitrant » and that will be the end of you. They will shoot you. Besides, it is always wiser to invent one's crimes for then you know where you stand. On the other hand, if you leave to the cadre the care of making gratuitously for you that effort of imagination they would have another grudge against you, and you would never know to what limit they might go.

I then asked him :

— But how do you proceed in order to be able to invent such things which appear at the same time likely and absurd ?

— I have not invented them myself, I was only inspired by some anecdotes in Chinese History from the feudal epochs that my grandfather had told me when he was still alive, and that I suddenly remembered. For example, when I said that I had compelled my servant to eat excrements, I was inspired by that story of the King of Yue who, kept prisoner by the king of Wou, tasted his enemy's bowel's motion under the pretext of giving him an unfailling pronostication of his sickness but with a secret intention of conquering his whole confidence in order to prepare an escape and future revenge.

Some weeks later, I was told that Nieng had appeared before the people's tribunal to answer to the crimes he had himself invented. He received some indulgence because he was only sentenced to 10 years of hard labour, and had only three quarters of his wealth confiscated.

But unfortunately, Nieng's initiative had had disastrous effects upon others because since then, in every village, there was always at least one « landlord » who was denounced as having compelled some peasant to eat some excrements, the nature of the excrements only

varied.

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This was also my case.

When I stood motionless before the whole population of my village with folded arms and bent head to listen to the chairman of the meeting who gave a summary of all the crimes I was accused to have committed, some of the Nieng's invented category, I was not very surprised. But many Vietnamese did not understand anything about that irony of fate and did not know why Ho-chi-Minh had punished them for some crimes committed 20 centuries before by some ancestors of Mao-tse-Tung.

The sin was not even original for them.

INTERVIEW OF Mr. HOANGVANCHI

VIETNAM NATIONAL BROADCASTING SERVICE AUGUST 17, 1955,

Announcer : Ladies and Gentlemen, The Voice of Vietnam is introducing Mr. HOANG-VAN-CHI to you. Mr. CHI is now in front of our microphone. He is going to tell you his impressions of what he has seen in the communist-controlled zone. Mr. CHI, how long have you lived in the communist zone ?

Answer : If you mean North Vietnam, I have always lived there, ever since I was a child. But I did not live only in the communist zone. As a member of the socialist Party, I joined the Popular Front in 1936, and ever since, worked side by side with the communists. In 1941 the Vietminh league was created, and I used to belong to it; thus, I participated in the Resistance till the Geneva agreements.

Question : In the Vietminh league, have you had any particular civilian or military position ?

Answer : Yey, at first, I was a military physician during the Resistance against the Japanese. In 1945, under the Ho-chi-Minh government, I was appointed Director of the National Mint, then, Director of a specialized factory for making bank-notes paper, then technical adviser in the Armament and Ammunitions Division and finally, analytic chemistry teacher in the Pharmaceutical School.

Question : So then, you have seen the government's

and also the party's ways and methods. I would like to ask you now your impressions during those 15 years you have lived with the Vietminh.

Answer : To answer your question, I would like to make a reference to the wellknown book by H.G. Wells «The Time Machine».

When I left the communist regime, I had the same impression as that engineer must have had when he got out of the underground who he had seen the activities of a mankind brought back to the first ages. As he had done, I came back to the open air to find myself confronted with unworried and somehow indolent men who were unaware of the dangers which were threatening them. As he had done I lived a life which seems to me unreal now. It was wrapped in an everlasting darkness, since all signs of life faded away in daylight and the night brought back an intense activity, with its crowd of mysteries and awes.

Question : And what do you think of the present situation north of the 17th parallel ? Is Hanoi's government really a democratic government, as it stated ?

Answer : It's Terror, I tell you. There is no such thing as terrorist democracy. This regime is democratic only by name.

Question : Do you mean that that government rules only by terrorism ? There must be, however, some kind of justice like in all countries ?

Answer : I'll answer you by an example. The popular tribunals met and rendered their sentences at nightfall, but during that very afternoon before the judgement, the village guards would dig tombs for those who were to appear at night, before the tribunal.

Question : Such procedures should stir up discontentment among the people. Is there any such feeling ? Is it expressed by any acts or attitudes ?

Answer : Discontentment cannot be denied, as a great number of suicides showed it. Here is a fact : my cousin and his wife hanged themselves with the same rope, leaving behind their four children. I am happy to have been able to take the latter with me down here. That is only one example among many others. During these past two years, in just one province — the province of Thanh Hoa, one may say that suicides amount to more than one thousand.

Question : I think you have witnessed many cruel activities. Could you give us some facts ?

Answer : As a matter of fact, I could tell you several. For now I'll tell you only three. The first one is a row of 200 political prisoners I saw on the road dragging their feet chained one to the other. It was deeply printed in my memory for my ears heard them before my eyes saw them. I'll always remember the ominous sound of the chains. Another fact : I saw the Viet-Minh burning the fingers of people they wanted to get confes-

sions from. I have seen them shaving women's heads for that purpose. This would mean nothing to those who know not Vietnamese customs. For us, it is a ghastly barbarous practice. Many other torturing procedures were used and I might tell you more facts I have witnessed. But the list would be too long.

Question : I think it is rather hard for you to recall these memories. I have to ask you another question : could you talk about the economic situation ? Is it true that all social classes must pay heavy taxes ?

Answer : The entire population without exception is impoverished. Ho-Chi-Minh's government enforces one rule : Starve the people in order to enslave them more surely.

Question : What is the fate the communist regime is reserving to the intellectuals ?

Answer : Most often, the intellectuals come from lower bourgeoisie, a class at which, the communist regime is striking the hardest. To quote a personal example, as a professor in the Pharmaceutic School, I used to receive 600 gr of rice per hour of teaching. As a rule, the civil servants got paid from 45 to 10 kilos of rice per month, which is about 200 to 400 Indochina piasters. In general the treatment of an intellectual is lower than that of a worker. Here is what a dean of a school confessed to me : « I do not feel the necessity of giving to my son the education that I possess ».

I do not want to describe to you all the vexations, suspicions, contempts that intellectuals have to suffer.

Question : I think these figures mean a lot — thank you Mr. CHI for all the evidences you gave us. But I want to ask you a last question. From you what have endured, what you have seen, what conclusion are you drawing?

Answer : I want only to tell you my belief that men of good will and specially the small bourgeoisie of all the world must unite together to stop this growing barbarism. In my opinion there lies the historical duty which is falling upon them today.

Announcer : Thank you very much Mr. CHI. I hope that your advice will be understood by our listeners. I want to insist, dear listeners, upon the value of Mr. CHI's declaration. He has spent 15 years of his life among the Communists. He held important positions. He has seen. He has heard. He has observed. May his voice be heard.

INTERVIEW OF MR. HOANGVANCHI
VIETNAM NATIONAL BROADCASTING SERVICE, JULY 30, 1955.

Announcer : Ladies and gentlemen. I have next to me Mr. Hoang van Chi. I don't think it necessary for me to introduce him to you, since Mr. Chi is not unknown to the listeners of The Voice of Viet-Nam. A few days ago, in fact, Mr. Chi, who has just returned from the communist zone, where he spent many long years, has been good enough to impart to us, before this very same microphone, a few of his impressions. In particular, he revealed a few facts of which he was himself an eye-witness.

As elections seem to be the talk of the moment, I will to-night ask Mr. Chi to give us his opinions on the question that is familiar to him.

In don't think I am wrong, Mr. Chi, in saying that you were in the communist zone when the elections of 1946 took place?

Answer : That is perfectly exact. The elections to the National Assembly took place in the month of January 1946 and I was then in the province of Thanh-Hoa.

Question : Well. Could you tell us how the elections were organized in that province.

Answer : It was quite simple. 16 representatives had to be

elected for the whole province. The candidates put up by the government were listed, or rather their names were put down in 3 separated lists, the total of which amounted exactly to the number of the deputies to be elected.

Question : Were the candidates elected for the whole province or for each separated district?

Answer : For the whole of the province, which happens to be as large as Switzerland. That means that it was practically impossible for the voters in many villages to know the candidates for whom they were asked to vote. Then there were candidates out of the blue that the government had elected at Thanh-Hoa because the population was found to be more docile than elsewhere. Such was the case of Bao-Bai, for example, who had only lived in the province during his few months of detention, but who nevertheless, looked upon it as his native province because his 17th ancestor had lived there in the 17th century.

Question : Were there no other candidates than the ones presented by the government ?

Answer : First of all, intelligent people kept away from the running so not to participate in the farce and become the laughing stock of respectable people.

The government however succeeded in fooling a few credulous people and pressed them to add their names to make it appear that voters had the opportunity of choo-

sing between alternatives. These unwilling candidates only obtained a very few votes, as you may well imagine. The most brilliant of the lot, an old retired professor obtained 500 votes. His students had all voted to him. The others are less lucky. They obtained 200, 100, or less than 100 votes. How could the populace both literate and illiterate possibly get to know the candidates they had to vote for, when there was not a single newspaper in the whole province, and when electoral propaganda could only be carried on by word of mouth.

Question : But in that case why did the government present 3 lists ?

Answer : This grouping of official candidates into 3 separated lists is merely a blind. In fact, the 3 lists were merely 3 parts of one whole, since, as I have said, the total number of the candidates corresponds exactly to the seats in the province. The 3 lists had been called respectively : list A, list B, list C. In that way, voters, when coming to the voting bureau had only to say : A, B, C, and the trick was done.

Question : The vote was not secret then ?

Answer : Don't forget that the rural population at that time, was practically illiterate. In each voting bureau, the bulletins were filled in by clerks according to instructions given by the voters or better still, without taking these instructions into account.

Question : Were there no abstentions for voting ?

Answer : That was out of the question. The proportion of the voters was 100 per cent. To that end, the authorities had thought out a very simple system. The voting card, duly stamped after having past the ballot-box, became a pass, and this document was indispensable for getting about, even from one village to another.

Question : I see, the system is as simple as ingenious. Actually the vote was compulsory ?

Answer : Exactly. So, on coming before the ballot-box, the voters, whom the propaganda agents had been carefully lecturing for the last fortnight, knew that he had to say : A, B, C. In exchange for which, he was given back his card duly stamped, and he had no trouble.

Question : What about the results of the elections ?

Answer : It was as may be imagined. If the results were to be shown by an algebraic curve, the latter would have the shape of an horizontal line corresponding to an almost unanimous vote for the 16 candidates of the government, then, on the 17th men, a vertical fall toward some number approaching zero.

Question : Your demonstration is very convincing, because mathematical. But could you tell us if all the candidates put up by the government are members of the Party ?

Answer : Only ten. They were members of the provincial committee of the Party. The other six had been elected for political convenience. They were Bao-Dai the fallen king who had become high counsellor to Ho-chi-

Minh, Dang-phuc-Thong, director of the railway service, Le-xuân-Ky, chief of the Thai tribes, Giac-Dan, the president of the Buddhist league, Tinh Hoa the president of the Catholic Youth, Nguyen-huu-Ngoc, number one landowner, and may I add this: Besides Bao-Dai, who was able to escape in time, and Dang-phuc-Thong, dead by consumption in 1952, the other four are now in prison or killed. So you understand why the land reform brought to North Viet-Nam by Chinese advisers has been unanimously voted through by the national Assembly for only communists of the purest orthodoxy are left, doubtfull sympathisers were eliminated in advance

Question : That is a very instructive experience. I would now like to ask your opinion on the general election in Vietnam, as provided for by the Geneva agreements.

Answer : Even under the strictest control, even with the surest guarantees of liberty of vote and of sincerity such election would have no meaning, and this for two reasons.

First of all, the control, however severe it might be, could not stop the voter's liberty from being tampered with even if it were only by economic pressure. To be able to eat, to have a piece of land to cultivate, to find work, it is necessary to belong to the organs of the Party. These organs are theoretically professional, but they are in fact political ones, that is to say communist, which hold the right of life and death. Whether it is to hire buffaloes or ploughing instruments, it must be done through them. Under those conditions there is no possibility of liberty. Whosoever does not accept

communist faith, renounces by that very act to work, food, life. Election under these conditions would be a dangerous bluff. Whatever we may do, the voters in the communist zone must vote, not according to their personal opinion, but according to the will of the government, that is to say the communist party.

Besides, in the communist zone, there are no other candidates, than those agreed to by Party. To find independent candidates, one must search them in the other world, or in the concentration-camps. All those who did not adopt communist ideals are categorically classified as landowners, no matter if they were landless, rich or poor, they were indicted before a sham of judgement, which they call the « people's tribunal », for imaginary crimes of common law, and sentenced to hard labour. Many of them are shot on the spot.

I insist on this fact, and I pray that the free world listen to what I reveal : Ho-chi.Minh, after the Geneva agreements, has and is continuing to suppress, by that method, all those who do not think in terms of communism, in order to be sure to win at elections.

Announcer : I thank you, Mr Hoang van Chi, for having let us know your opinion with a clearness which dispenses me from all commentary. I have but to hope that the testimony you have been good enough to bring to the listeners of the Voice of Vietnam will be heard by those who should hear it, and that the clearness of your arguments will convince them as it has certainly convinced all our listeners to-day.

Asian People's Anti-Comm. League

1) Nhan Van Affair

1/T.X.B — Jan. 1, 1956