

FAR EASTERN SURVEY

American Institute of Pacific Relations

THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE TO SOUTH VIET NAM

by Roy Jumper

July 20, 1956, marked the second anniversary of the Geneva Agreements which brought about an armistice in the conflict in the three Indo-China states of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos. This date also signalled the deadline for holding the scheduled national elections intended to end the partition of Viet Nam which was divided along the 17th parallel at the Geneva Conference. The Viet Minh Communist regime, whose military might was concentrated in the Northern part of the country, agreed in 1954 to halt the hostilities. Confident of the continued support of the Southern peasantry, the Viet Minh believed that with two years of Franco-Vietnamese fumbling the South would become Communist by default. Political conditions in the South during the first year, characterized by civil strife and administrative ineffectiveness, seemed at first to bear out the Communists' assumption.¹

Then in the summer of 1955 the Republican regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem, rejoicing in its civil war victory in Saigon over the forces of the Binh Xuyen Sect, picked up the Red challenge and began to fight for its political life. For the first time political leaders in the South were willing personally to denounce Ho Chi Minh, long-time leader of the fight against the French and now President of the Communist Government of North Viet Nam. "Off with the head of Ho Chi Minh," cried government organized demonstrators in the streets of Saigon, while Republican generals began to talk of a march northward to liberate their compatriots from Communist rule.

But the Republican regime has much work to do if it expects to meet and overcome the challenge of the Communists. In an effort to show strength, Ngo Dinh Diem's government unfortunately has begun to employ on occasion the methods of rule of the very system that it opposes. At the same time, it has not yet effected the social and economic reforms so necessary to counter the Communist movement. The government of South Viet Nam, despite its demonstrated ability to repress the military-religious Sects, still faces a real threat from the Communists who continue to have considerable strength among some sections of the Southern people, especially the peasantry.

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¹ Published primary sources on current developments are limited. Very useful, however, are the Interim Reports of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Viet Nam, U. K. Command Papers 9461, 9499, 9654, 9706, London, 1955-1956. See also Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indo-China, Stanford, 1954 (and the supplement, From Geneva to Bandung, 1955) and Bernard B. Fall, The Viet-Minh Regime, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954, and his two articles in Pacific Affairs, "Indo-China Since Geneva" (March 1955) and "The Political-Religious Sects of Viet Nam" (September 1955).

When the French made their peace at Geneva, Viet Minh troops occupied a number of pockets below the 17th parallel, and in areas where the Communists had no army their influence was strongly felt by the aggressive activities of their political leaders of "cadres" (called Can Bo).² While French and National Vietnamese forces controlled the cities and big towns, the countryside, except for those areas held by the military-religious Sects, was largely under the sway of the Viet Minh. In addition, the rural districts of Tan An, Go Vap and Duc Hoa, near Saigon, provided convenient bases from which Communist agents could operate inside the city.

Following the armistice, the Viet Minh leaders ostensibly withdrew their troops from the South. Actually, however, many soldiers were left behind while young military and political recruits were sent north for training. Some of those who went north--their group is called Tap Ket--later returned disguised as refugees. Others infiltrated back through Laos and along the Mekong River. By late 1955, several old Viet Minh units (such as the 307th, 310th and 313th battalions) were reported in operation on the side of the military-religious Sects, who were then carrying on a guerrilla war against the Republican Army of Ngo Dinh Diem. Up to the present, however, Viet Minh troops have been used in the South largely for prestige purposes, giving moral and technical support to the Sects, and have not been in pursuit of immediate military victory.

Despite these military operations, Viet Minh activity in the South is primarily political, not military. In this respect the Communists are following an old Vietnamese maxim: first win the people, next the supply routes and only then attack the forts. To win the people and thereby open the supply routes, the Viet Minh Can Bo utilize two types of political weapons, leadership and terror.

The Communist revolution in the North was not based upon the proletariat but on the leader, who more often than not was an "educated" man. It was only after the Communists were in a position to educate in their own style that they could dip into the ranks of the ignorant for leader recruits. Consequently, in its present campaign to maintain peasant backing, the Viet Minh picked the peasant youth, call thanh nien nong thon, to lead its fight. These youth, not the young intellectuals of the city, were chosen because they were of the peasantry and therefore understood it, and being only half-educated they served as ideal recruits for Communist manipulation.

If the Vietnamese people have a "bamboo civilization," then the nature of Communist leadership in Viet Nam can best be described by comparing it with the bamboo tree. The leader is like the bamboo roots, while his "followers" are like the mass of leafage on the plant. The foliage of the plant may be clipped with each season, but the roots remain and give forth new bamboo shoots with the coming of the rains.

The Viet Minh leader had three types of functions, direction, control and public relations. In carrying out these functions among a people long accustomed only

²The material on Communist operations is based upon interviews in South Viet Nam with ex-members of the Viet Minh and refugees from the North.

to fear of their masters, he mixes cleverly terror with charity. By living an exemplary life, the leader wins friends and influences people around him. Unlike many of his counterparts in the southern Republican regime, he foregoes the fashionable white sharkskin suit for black calico or khaki, the French cooking for the traditional bowl of rice.

The Viet Minh leader is also ruthless, terror being an important element in his strategy. He makes use of several weapons of fear: terror of the individual and terror of the group. The terror directed against the individual comes in two forms: the "receive only" type and the "receive and do" type. When the "receive only" type is used, a person is only the recipient of the action; he contributes nothing. The result in Viet-Nam has been a liberal number of public executions (beheading being not uncommon), assassinations, taking of hostages, poisoning, blackmail and threats.

When the "receive and do" type of terror is used, a person is first "convinced" by force and then required to make a personal contribution to the Communist cause. Two techniques are followed here. First, there is "improvement through self-education and confession" (chinh-huan). This measure is employed, for example, against a landlord who is forced to examine his past acts in the light of current Communist doctrine and then to declare himself guilty of belonging to the capitalist class. Afterwards he must make a public confession. A second technique is called "make yourself miserable in the eyes of the masses" (to-kho). Here a landlord is selected for "breaking down" and then accused of having committed crimes against the peasants.

There is also violent and non-violent terror directed against the group. The violent type is usually sabotage and involves the setting off of plastic bombs and grenade tossing (both are old favorites in Saigon). The non-violent type includes the organization of "stay at home days," "no market days," and "group abstention from Republican-sponsored agricultural reform measures." During election campaigns the Viet Minh try to embarrass governmental favorites by reporting on their social status, finances and ambitions.

In the field of public relations, the Viet Minh agents make expert use of propaganda. To rally the population against the French was no great problem for the Viet Minh; to keep it united against a now independent Republican government required a renewed effort. Therefore, in 1955 the Viet Minh opened a new master political organization, styled the Fatherland Front (Mat Tran To Quoc), the objectives of which are to work for national unification and to combat what is labeled American imperialism in the South. The Fatherland Front replaced the Lien Viet which served as a cover for the activities of the Communist Party.

In addition to making use of radio (voice and morse code) services, Viet Minh agents circulate a daily paper, the Fight (Dau Tranh). Theatrical performances -- Viet Nam is a land where the rich patronize the movies and leave the traditional theater for the enjoyment of the poor -- are vehicles of expression for Communist-inspired skits, sometimes even entire plays. Special songs and dances have been written to appeal to young people. In the villages, as in the slum sections of Saigon, Viet Minh agents masquerading as blind men can be heard singing such ditties as: "When one is not a member of the Party he is a lost sheep, his life is sad and dull. The Government needs the Party, the Party needs the People and

all must work together to be happy."

The Communist appeal is something more than a clever mixing of terror and propaganda. The Viet Minh enjoys tremendous prestige from its leadership in the long struggle for independence from the French. To various social groupings--peasants, intellectuals, government employees, soldiers and urban workers--the Viet Minh offers special reasons for support. The attraction of members of these groups to the Viet Minh is not only economic but also emotional and psychological.

Communist Appeals to Peasants

The Communist challenge in South Viet Nam represents above all an appeal to the peasants who account for about 90 percent of the population.³ To understand Communist strength among the peasantry requires, first, a review of the agricultural structure of the country and, second, an analysis of the underdeveloped character of rural administration.

Three categories of peasants may be distinguished. First, there are the farm laborers who possess no more than the physical energy that supports them. Tenants have little more: they may own a few tools, sometimes even a buffalo for plowing. A third type is the small owner, who, though he may own a couple of acres, considers himself virtually landless. Quite probably he has a family of eight to feed and must hire himself out for field work at about ten cents a day (at the open exchange rate). His meager existence is made worse by the widespread practice of selling in advance--if for no other reason than to provide resources for much-loved gambling games--his rice crop at about half its value.

Still another peasant type calls for attention: the workers on the rubber plantations. Shortly after World War I the rubber plantations began large-scale operations in the sparsely settled areas of the South, much of the labor was recruited in the overcrowded North, often by force and trickery. Mistreatment of these workers was considered an injustice by the Vietnamese who sometimes say that beneath every sap cup on a rubber tree lies the grave of a coolie. Apart from abuse at the hands of the owners, the work itself is a grueling one for the rice cultivator who is accustomed to long siestas and almost complete rest during the long rainy season. Though working conditions on the plantations improved as independence approached, the treatment received would still be considered as peonage in the United States.

To describe the peasant gives only part of the picture. His politics can best be understood when he is considered beside his agrarian adversary, the landlord. Landlordism is a key characteristic of the agricultural picture in Southern Viet Nam. Unlike those in Northern and Central Viet Nam, many holdings in the South are especially large. The great majority of the Southern peasants are in fact landless, and about 45 percent of the holdings are over 125 acres. This restriction of land ownership is simple to explain. Fields in the Southern provinces are new in comparison with those in the North and Center: much of the land was cleared out of the jungle and swamps by French colonial enterprise and distributed to the favored few, both Vietnamese and French. The depression of the 1930's,

³The author travelled in the regions of Southern and Central Viet Nam and had an opportunity to talk with a number of peasants and local officials, especially in the provinces of Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, My Tho, Cholon and Baria.

along with prevailing usury practices, narrowed the circle of owners. In many areas absentee ownership is the rule rather than the exception. Especially since the beginning of strife dating from the outbreak of World War II, owners have preferred the safety of Saigon or Paris and, when that was impossible, lived in the provincial towns under the protection of the army.

What brought landlordism into the political arena was the long absence of the owners, during which the tenants cultivated the land, received titles of ownership from the shadow Viet Minh government and, in some cases, actually began to pay their taxes to the Communist treasury. Since the Geneva armistice, the landlords have tried to re-establish control over the land. They have the legal backing of the Republican government which does not recognize the Viet Minh titles. The landlords do not want reform--the very word imparts the notion of taking something away from them--and want to return to the prewar custom by which they alone decided the amount of the rent.

Equally important as grist for the Communist mill is the underdeveloped character of rural administration in the Southern zone.⁴ The Republican regime has inherited a colonial bureaucratic structure that began at the top in Saigon and ended at the district level of administration. Even before the French conquest there was an absence of state authority in the village; the power of the Emperor stopped at its surrounding bamboo hedge. Village councils were selected by co-option on the basis of age, education and property. The Emperor, like the French later, was interested in the villages mainly for the taxes collected there. When the rebellion against the French began, the village was a natural institution for Viet Minh subversion. In many areas the only real government on the local level was the Viet Minh committee in the village.

Another factor behind the slow pace of reform measures is the negative attitude of public officials. Many of the officials, even members of President Diem's cabinet, are themselves large landowners. At best district officials make only a faint-hearted attempt to put land reform decrees into effect. The peasants in turn have little regard for the district administrators who have long been considered as tax collectors and not servants of the people, as "yes men" of the French and not Vietnamese patriots.

Republican reform measures have therefore been limited ones providing for rent reduction and small loans and have fallen short of meeting peasant desires for land. The reforms were worked out by United States aid experts (most of whom unfortunately had little particular knowledge about Viet Nam) and then urged upon unsympathetic officials. Projects to clear swamp land in Cao San, yet to be completed, are designed to provide homesteads for some of the refugees from the North, who intensify (but are not a part of) the basic agricultural problem in the South--a greater distribution of land.

⁴ On the structure of the administrative system, see Walter R. Sharp, "Some Observations on Public Administration in Indo-China," Public Administration Review, Winter, 1954. Another helpful source is the unpublished manuscript by Le Van An, Organisation Politique et Administrative du Viet-Nam, Saigon, 1955.

The principal measure of the land reform program provided for rentals by written contract at a rate of from fifteen to twenty-five percent of the major crop, with owners of the poorer land being compensated at the former rate.⁵ The tenants, however, are not concerned primarily with the size of the rent but rather with ownership of the fields they work, irrigation and fertilizer. The landowners, on the other hand, are interested in having the government compel the tenants to respect the rent contracts and open a National Bank of Agriculture to extend farm loans. Delegates to the National Landowners Congress in Saigon complained in July 1956 that a number of landowners had been murdered by ungovernable tenants and asked for police protection in rural areas.

At the same time that the Republican regime has failed to take sufficiently vigorous action to reform the agricultural system, it has turned to military and political measures in order to maintain control over the peasantry. Special armed guards, the Dan Ve Doan and the Bao An Doan, and civil propaganda teams have been sent into the villages. The armed guards are organized into small units and scattered across the rural districts. They, along with the Republican Army, have been ordered to "suppress" Communist elements in the villages. Yet a military chief of province with 9,000 soldiers, in addition to the police and armed guards, claims that he still does not have effective control over his territory.

The civil propaganda teams, called Cong Dan Vu, are manned by young, anti-Communist militants. That some of their number have been assassinated is evidence of their effectiveness. Their work is hampered, however, by the fact that most of them are refugees and are in fact strangers to the local population. Working under a Commissioner of Civic Action in Saigon, their operations have come into conflict with the work of the district officials who resent intrusion into what is considered their domain.

In December 1955, the Diem government decreed the "five family control law."⁶ The decree is the handiwork of the Secretary of Information, Tran Chanh Thanh, and represents little more than a copy of the system of collective control used by the Communist regime in North Viet Nam. A similar system was used centuries earlier in China. According to the law, village inhabitants are to be organized into groups of five families with the chiefs of the five families making up a cell directorate. Every member of the cell is assigned a specific function: security, health, taxes, business and education. One cell watches over the activities of another cell and reports on it to the village security unit. According to the law, not only are Communists and Communist sympathizers to be reported but also "lazy people, thieves and pirates." Within the family unit the chief has a long list of "state duties." To the cell directorate he is accountable for the acts of members of his family. He must report any visitors who come to his home and, as well, any "destructive activity" of his neighbors--meaning, anyone who works against the interests of the government. The "five family control law" is to be introduced gradually in all villages, beginning with several districts near Saigon.

⁵Ordinance No. 2, Cong Bao Viet Nam Cong Hoa, (Official Journal of Viet Nam), January 8, 1955.

⁶The author witnessed in December 1955, some of the pioneer efforts to put this law into effect. Documents related to the law have been assembled in Viet Nam Cong Hoa, Du An Cong Tac 6 Thang Cua, Saigon, 1955 (mimeographed).

Another area where the Communists work effectively is among the intellectuals and students.⁷ The Vietnamese intellectual is a natural joiner. He affiliates himself with a number of organizations which serve as social outlets and make possible the expression of notions long suppressed by the force of family and colonial institutions. The vulnerability of the intellectual to pro-Communist organizations may be illustrated by a review of the activities of two associations that mushroomed in Saigon in 1955 and by a glance at the political dissension among university students. First there was the case of the "Committee for the Defense of the Peace" which propagandized for unity with the North and for elections for all of Viet Nam in July 1956. The Republican government promptly labeled it a Communist-front organization and jailed its leaders. The list of those arrested included many prominent Saigon intellectuals--doctors, lawyers, government officials, engineers, professors and theatrical people. After the arrests, a petition signed by some 150 intellectuals, including the one-time Premier, General Nguyen Van Xuan, protested against the government's action. General Xuan then feigned illness until he could arrange an escape, not to Hanoi but to Paris.

Another organization was the "Committee to Safe-guard the Life and Property of the People." It came into existence in 1955 during the brief civil war in Saigon. The Committee maintained that it was providing relief to the victims of the fighting, but the Republican government arrested its leaders and charged them with being Communist agents who, acting under the cloak of a relief committee, were spreading "false rumors against the government." One of the men arrested--a rich pharmacist who later confided to friends that he bought his way out of prison--claimed that the authorities moved against his organization because it, not the government, was doing effective relief work and the government was jealous. It is quite likely that there were Communist agents in this association, as well as in every other association in Saigon. But there were non-Communists in it too, including students who donated their labor to rebuild homes.

The significant point is that organizations with noble sounding names can come into existence quickly and win the sympathy and support of large numbers of intellectuals. Whether individual members are Communist or not, their association can be exploited for Communist benefit. Then when the government suppresses them, non-Communist members say that they are needlessly being oppressed by the authorities.

Student relationships at the University of Viet Nam in Saigon have been shattered by differences over the Communist problem. The point at issue is that refugee students want the University Student Association to take an active part in the government's anti-Communist struggle, while other students argue that the association should not become a political instrument. Southern intellectuals and students have never lived under an established Communist regime and tend to discount refugee accounts of oppression in the North. The result at the University is an almost complete separation of refugee from other students. With the backing of the government, including police protection during the balloting for Association officers in December 1955, the refugees now firmly control the Association.⁸

⁷The author had two or more conversations during the period December 1954-March 1956 with approximately 100 students, teachers and professors.

⁸After the first convention to elect officers broke up in dispute, Southern students as a rule boycotted the second meeting.

The Armed Forces

Soldiers of the Republican Army and workers in the cities are also highly susceptible to Communist infiltration.⁹ That the Army is a fertile ground for Viet Minh penetration is indicated by the setting up in the South of a special Communist propaganda agency, the Chinh My. The work of the Communists is facilitated by the fact that military life in Viet Nam is a professional one with strong venal overtones. In the South the soldier joins an army, whether it be Republican or Sect, for the meat and rice that is provided for himself and his family. His pay is bad and his life is hard. In the past, Vietnamese officers fought with the French for what they could individually get out of the relationship. As the French began to withdraw in 1955 these officers threw their support to President Diem during his fight with the Sects. As a rule their decisions to support Diem were made coldly on the basis of personal and private interest. They wanted to be on the winning side, and the Diem regime with its solid American financial backing appeared to be a better bet than did the Sects who could be expected to receive little support from the French.¹⁰

Military and political alignments in Viet Nam are, at best, temporary ones. In the past decade, the political winds have shifted many times. A given locality may have seen the troops of many sides--French, Japanese, British, Chinese, Viet Minh, Sect, Bao Dai and Diem. A military leader will seek the strongest side. When he changes from one side to the other it is called "rallying." It is done amidst much fanfare and speechmaking about the "just cause." The Vietnamese do not consider it unusual, nor do they mistake it for patriotism.

The Communists, employing a propaganda operation called Dan Van Chinh Van, also make an appeal to urban workers and low rank government employees.¹¹ Their low pay and poor living conditions, in striking contrast to those of Saigon's rich, provide a special opportunity for Viet Minh exploitation. Slum quarters in Saigon, such as Khanh Hoi and Vinh Hoi, are still without water and electricity. The extent of Viet Minh penetration of these groups is unknown, but on a number of occasions Communist agents have been arrested among members of labor organizations and the civil service.

The refugees from North Viet Nam are another group subject to the Communist appeal. They began to move South shortly after the signing of the Geneva armistice agreement. The French Army, by virtue of its occupation of the Northern delta country and the Haiphong port area, was in a position to arrange an evacuation program. And by the time that the port was finally handed over to the Communists in the spring of 1955, some 800,000 had taken advantage of French and United States' shipping facilities to withdraw to the South.

⁹The author talked with some 75 soldiers of the Republican Army, including both enlisted men and members of the officer corps.

¹⁰Following the Binh Auyen Sect Army attack upon the headquarters of the Republican Army in Saigon on March 29, 1955, senior officers of the Republican Army met and announced their full support for President Diem.

¹¹The author interviewed leaders in the Union of Vietnamese Christian Workers, the Union of Vietnamese Socialist Workers and the Saigon Dockers Union.

The refugee exodus has generally been considered as representing a rejection of Communist rule.¹² However, Vietnamese soldiers and their dependents who moved on the orders of the French high command actually accounted for about 200,000 of the refugees. An even larger bloc were poor and ignorant peasants, many of whom came from the two provinces of Phat Diem and Bui Chu where two Catholic bishops, Le Huu Tu and Pham Ngoc Chi, were virtual rulers. The desire for religious freedom was certainly an important factor behind the exodus, but another motivating force was the propaganda campaign conducted by French, Republican Vietnamese and Catholic authorities to induce the peasants to abandon their villages. In the provinces heavily populated by Catholics the priests were the real village leaders, and once the Church had decided to withdraw it was not difficult to sway the congregations. The peasants were promised "free" land and told that "God" had moved South. They were warned that the United States would drop the atomic bomb in North Viet Nam as it did in Japan during World War II. Those who had relatives among the evacuating soldiers were advised that reprisals by the Communists exodus and on a number of occasions resorted to force and violence to prevent departures is well known.

More for the intellectuals and property owners than for the peasants, who constituted the great majority of the refugees, the flight South represented a voluntary and a personal decision to reject Communism. Once the French Army was routed at Dien Bien Phu, the Viet Minh were no longer dependent upon so-called "bourgeois elements" who had cooperated in the struggle for independence and, consequently, began to suppress them. It is difficult to find a refugee student in Saigon who can not relate a tragic story of the execution of some member of his family, often a father or a brother. These refugees whose families have been broken by Viet Minh atrocities are imbued with deep feelings against the Communists. It was the refugee students who on July 20, 1955, sparked the Saigon riots that resulted in the sacking of the Majestic and Gallieni Hotels.¹³ For many of the refugee students, revenge against the Communists has become their first preoccupation in life.

The refugee group has been, politicall, both a strength and a weakness for the Southern government. During the critical months of fighting with the military-religious Sects, the refugees were a source of solid support for President Diem. In the battle of Saigon the role of the refugee Nung troops was especially important. Refugee intellectuals made themselves available to fill government posts at a time when many Southerners were hesitant to work for the Diem regime.¹⁴ Before Diem came to power, Nationalist governments dominated by the French lacked any show of popular support. The backing of the refugees helped the Diem regime to achieve an identity of its own, free from both French and Communist control.

The refugees also created political problems for the Southern government. Their reception by the Southern people was sometimes far from cordial. The apathy, sometimes outright hostility, of the Southerners reflects certain cultural and

¹²See, for example, the recent book by Thomas A. Dooley, Deliver Us From Evil, New York, 1956.

¹³There was substantial agreement among the refugee students that resort to violence was proper when in pursuit of a "just cause."

¹⁴In the National Assembly the refugees were allotted twelve out of a total of 123 seats, giving one representative to each of the twelve large camps. Viet Nam Press (the official government news agency) January 24, 1956.

environmental differences between the people of the two regions. The Northerners look more like the Chinese than do the Southern people who are, as a rule, darker and more akin to Indonesians and Cambodians. There is also a difference in dress, cooking and medicine. In language there are differences of tone, vocabulary and accent. The Northerners are outwardly more ambitious than the Southerners who harbor the fear that the economy and the government will eventually fall into the hands of the Northerners. Sheer survival in the over-crowded North necessitates hard labor, while in the South the peasant is sometimes considered by his Northern compatriots to be rather lazy. Already in Saigon markets, the stalls run by Northerners outsell those of the Southerners, and even in the dance halls refugee "taxi girls" easily outdo their Southern competitors.

At the outset family and village groups were kept intact and located in camps in the various provinces. Soon, however, many of the refugees began to drift back toward Saigon, and by early 1956 the number in the suburban province of Gia Dinh had swelled to more than 250,000, all seeking benefit from the prosperity and the security of the metropolis. Strangers in the South, the refugees are both restless and suspicious. Their morale is geared to government handouts and reaches its peak with each dole, only to fall quickly thereafter. They are the constant prey to the propaganda of Communist agents planted in their midst.

Particular conditions related to the administration of the refugee settlement and resettlement programs have the effect of reducing the group's potency as an anti-Communist force. Some camp sites were selected in haste and poorly planned. In some provinces refugees were brought in without prior notice being given to local officials. In others, twice as many refugees as had been planned for were settled. Most of the camps were located in the poorest of land, ruling out in advance self-support.

Division of control in the administration of the refugee program also contributed to the poor results. Civil officials, the Catholic clergy, the Republican Army and even the military-religious Sects, particularly the Cao Dai, have all participated in the operation. Most of the camps continue to be run by priests who are preoccupied with keeping the refugees as a unit and resist efforts to integrate them into the Southern community. Graft has appeared both in the central offices in Saigon and in the camps. A review of the Saigon press for the year 1955 reveals some 100 cases of known embezzlement of refugee funds. Nevertheless, to point out some of the shortcomings of the settlement program is neither to deny nor to belittle the hard work and earnestness of many of the officials concerned.

Resettlement of the refugees in permanent units has only recently begun. The first project, calling for the eventual resettlement of about 100,000 refugees at Cai San in southwest Viet Nam provides an opportunity to improve the material well-being of some of the refugees. By August 1956, about 40,000 were transplanted to this area where the government is restoring rice lands abandoned during the war years. Each refugee family is allotted three hectares of land for rice cultivation and enough space for a small house and garden. Ownership of the land, according to present governmental rules, is being reserved to the prewar landowners who expect to benefit from rents collected from the refugees.¹⁵

¹⁵ Times of Viet Nam, August 25, 1956. The journal is an English language weekly published in Saigon under the direction of Nguyen M. Thai, a young official in the Department of Information, and an American, Gene Gregory.

The Cai San project is under the direction of Nguyen Van Thoi, now Secretary of the Department of Agricultural Reform and formerly a land office official during the final years of French control.

No Visible Enemy

One difficulty for the Diem regime in winning popular support is that it has not produced a "visible enemy" that the people hate. The Viet Minh revolution in Viet Nam was in essence a negative revolution--bringing together a people lacking many homogeneous qualities against a common enemy, the French. With the passing of the French the identification of that enemy is no longer clear. The absence of a political scapegoat presents a real problem for both regimes, Republican and Viet Minh. In place of the French, the Viet Minh has now turned its propaganda guns on the United States. But the fact that the "American enemy" is seldom seen (except in Saigon) limits, for the time being, the effectiveness of the new appeal.

The Republican regime in the South now tries to make the "new enemy." But the people have not yet experienced the brutality of Communist rule and remember the Viet Minh largely for its fight against the French. The Republican regime has in some respects adopted the methods of government used by its Communist neighbor in the North, these methods involving both a program of political education and reprisals against people accused of being Communist. The political education program includes regular classes and occasional mass meetings called to denounce the Communists. Public service employees, school teachers and students are required to attend. Leaders for the program were trained at a special propaganda school organized in Saigon in August 1955. In addition, public service employees have been grouped into political cells. Within an office, each employee is assigned a certain number of associates to watch over.

And like the Communists, the Republican regime resorts to a kind of "brain washing." At mass meetings Communists are ferreted out to be publicly "unmasked." They are given the choice of either confessing or facing denunciation by the assembled group. Victims are then sent to one of several camps for "re-education," one of these, Quan Tre, being about twelve miles from Saigon. Not only Communists but also captured members of the Sects are sent there for about three months of training. At the end of the training period those who are willing to repent are issued special identification cards and permitted to return to their homes.

Severe repression of Communists is also reported by villagers in some Southern areas. Civil justice, long discredited for its identification with French interests, has given way to rule by the military. In the absence of legal sanctions, measures intended to be used against Communists are employed to oppress members of nationalist political parties who dare oppose the Diem regime. In January 1956, President Diem decreed internment in "concentration camps" for any person whose activities were harmful to the "Government or the Army."¹⁵

The Viet Minh agents have lain low during the past two years in South Viet Nam. They waited expecting to win the South through the expected all-Viet Nam elections. If the elections are not held (and in view of recent Anglo-Soviet talks in London it appears that they will not), the Viet Minh may decide to resort to military force

¹⁵ Decree No. 5/BNV/CT, Cong Bao Viet Nam Cong Hoa, (Official Journal of Viet Nam), February 18, 1956.

to settle the issue. During the armistice period the Viet Minh has built up an army of 30 divisions. According to current estimates, it is now in the act of regrouping its forces into 25 "heavy" divisions, with more men and more weapons in division. The Republican Army has some sixteen divisions and lacks combat experience. Officials in Saigon say they must have military support from the United States in case hostilities occur.

Should its big brothers in Moscow and Peking not permit a military solution, the Viet Minh will no doubt increase its efforts to infiltrate and subvert South Viet Nam, in the hope that it would later collapse from within. The Communists can be expected to create, and aggravate, conflicts between the people--refugees versus Southerners, soldiers versus officers, district versus national officials, Buddhists versus Catholics and, most important of all peasants versus landlords. If the Republican regime is to stand against the Communist challenge it must do more to meet peasant demands for land. For the population as a whole, it must provide greater security without terror or abuse. The peasant in Viet Nam treasures the sanctity of his home equally as much as the farmer in Iowa. Force, in the long run, is no substitute for good government, whether the government be Communist or non-Communist.