

Vietnam's Reconstruction

The announcement that a socialist country was willing to accept foreign private investment has roused much interest in both the socialist and non-socialist world. The March issue of the Economic Review recorded this announcement and some immediate reactions towards this step. A Canadian research associate in Anthropology of the University of British Columbia, Kathleen Gough, who spent ten days in Hanoi and other provinces as a guest of the Women's Union of Vietnam has made some sensitive observations on the country's post-war reconstruction drive. In an interview with Hoang Tung, a member of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party and editor of the daily newspaper Nhan Dan, she states that she heard from an authoritative source about the process of socialist construction in Vietnam and about the Vietnamese stand on certain ideological issues in the socialist world. Hoang spoke freely and shed light on the Vietnamese effort to carve out their own path to socialism. The following extracts which are a rough translation of the interview, as given by her interpreter, give a closer insight into the path a United Vietnam is now taking.

Gough: I have read that Vietnam is willing to accept aid and even foreign private investment from some of the capitalist industrial states. If this is so, can it be done while safeguarding socialist construction?

Hoang: Our main purpose is to rely on ourselves and build our own economy. Secondly we rely on support from the socialist countries, and thirdly on support from international friends like you. No, don't laugh, your gift was small but you have a large heart. We also plan to broaden our trade with the capitalist countries on the principles of mutual respect, mutual interest and sovereignty. Of course, according to our custom, we will allow foreign investment in our country. For example oil countries like Canada can invest here if they wish. This does not affect the socialist character of our construction. It simply means that at the beginning, we did not have enough money to invest in all fields of our economy. So we would like to sell some raw material in order to obtain a deposit of capital for the building industry. If we had the money, we would extract all our oil ourselves and sell some of that, but we haven't, so we shall allow them to invest here instead. Nevertheless, the extraction of oil will be done mainly by ourselves.

Gough: There seem to be several levels of wages in the industries and agricultural co-operatives in Vietnam, and I understand that bonuses are paid to workers who achieve higher production. While I see the justice of this, isn't there a danger that it will undermine cooperation and mutual aid? In general, where do you stand in the controversy between the USSR and China on the question of material incentives?

Hoang: Our productivity is still very low and is mainly in handicrafts and agriculture. Our standard of living is still low. Communism has two different stages of development as Marx said: the first is the lower stage. Because our productive force is still low, we cannot realize the principle of "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". That is an

ideal that we eventually aim to achieve: to fulfil our capacity for production, and to meet all the needs of our citizens. In our present conditions, we try to encourage those workers who reach higher production so that production in general is enhanced. It involves a unity of the material and the spiritual factors. At the present stage, people's capabilities are different, so wages must be different. We must use wages to give justice to those who produce more. It is unjust, for example, if a steel worker enjoys only the same income as a peasant. There is a difference between unskilled and skilled labour, and between mechanical and non-mechanical work. There is also a difference between manual work and brain work. If we tried to fulfil Marx's ultimate goal now, it would be Utopian and reactionary.

Nevertheless, we must draw lessons from experience; the differences must not be too large. It is wrong if there is a difference of a hundred times between the highest and the lowest. At the same time it is wrong if an unskilled worker with lower productivity and a skilled worker with higher productivity are paid the same or with only a little difference. There must be a larger difference.

Along with the policy of payments according to productivity, we must of course establish common welfare programmes—canteens, kindergartens, creches, pensions, hospitals—all necessary welfare programmes in the cultural and economic realms. Socialism involves not only payments for production, but also cultural and spiritual life and welfare.

On the way to socialism and communism, no country is always right. Each sometimes makes mistakes and must correct them. Nothing is stable: there must be changes, because it is a new path, and we must learn from others' experience as well as from our own, from our work, and from reality. We must always be correcting ourselves. The road from socialism to communism is rough and uneven. It is not all plain sailing.

Gough: What is the rôle of the market in the Vietnamese economy, and of profit-making on the part of individual enterprises? What does Comrade Le Duan mean when he says, "We must attach importance to both use-value and value and make a judicious application of the law of value"? (Report at the first session of the National Assembly of Vietnam, quoted in Vietnam Special Issue, July 1976).

Hoang: In the first stage of socialism there are differences in workers' productivity and in their wages. That is why the market still exists. Only when we accomplish communism can we abandon the use of wages and of the market. Even in socialism there are two kinds of property ownerships, public and private. In socialist countries use-value is more important to meet the requirements of the people, whereas in capitalist countries the aim is to make profits, and that is why 'value' is more important to them. But the problem of value remains, even in socialist countries, because value is the measure of management standards. If we do not use it in the enterprises they will invest more and produce little. In socialist societies there still remain some kind of goods to be sold on the market, but in order to serve the needs of the people, not in order to make private profits.

Gough: Is land reform being carried out in South Vietnam? What are its prospects?

Hoang: In South Vietnam the main problem of land reform has already been solved, because in the course of the revolution against the French colonialist we divided the land and gave it to the peasants. During the second war, the US imperialists were willing to let landlords take back the land but because of the peasant struggle they could not succeed, and the peasants forced the landlords to return it. And the other side was afraid that if this was not allowed the peasants would support the communists. Now there remain only a few big landlord's estates; we will abolish them in the next few months. Collectivization in South Vietnam has not yet started, but we have tested the ground in a few places, and the state will create co-operatives in order to mechanize and do irrigation work. In South Vietnam it is also possible to set up new and larger state farms, as we have much virgin land to cultivate.

Hoang: Actually, we cannot say that Vietnam is a socialist society. At present we cannot even say that it is a just society. I would like to talk about this a little, and so gradually lead into your questions. Vietnam is rather a special case.

We can divide the world into three categories of countries according to their productive forces. These forces include industrial power, tools, and human productivity. The first kind of country has the most developed industry, for example the USA, Canada, Japan and Western Europe.

Gough: What about the Soviet Union?

Hoang: Well, I am speaking only of the capitalist countries at present. At most, only about twenty capitalist countries fall into this first category.

The second kind has relatively developed industry, but its agriculture is backward

and not mechanized, and there have been no land reforms. India and Brazil would be examples. Spain, yes, though Spain has reached a rather high level. Mexico and Argentina are other examples. The problem is that they do not have much heavy industry, and they have dependent economies. In the third category there are the really backward, predominantly agricultural societies.

In the nineteenth century, Marx and the Marxists said socialism could develop only in the first category of states, not in the second or third. Yet in fact socialist movements did win revolutions in Russia and Eastern Europe, which then belonged to category two. In the states of the first category, the proletariat is strong and big, but not yet strong enough to overthrow the capitalist class. From 1917 until now, socialist movements have been victorious in, at best, some states of category two, but not of category one. The USSR was rather backward at the time of the revolution, but it was very large, and that was why it was able to stand firm and later to serve as a base for other countries in their revolutions. Therefore, it is a backbone for the socialist camp, and has helped in the setting up of the socialist system elsewhere. Socialism was thus able to spread from the second category of states to some of the third. The USSR also had the ability to build up a modern, large-scale industry. Now it is on the same level with the capitalist states which developed in the previous century and so creates a new balance between capitalist and socialist systems: both have modern industry.

At the same time, the capitalist system grows smaller in scope and is deeper in crisis. So socialism can develop in different kinds of countries; socialist movements have been victorious in backward countries like Angola, Cuba and Vietnam before the highly developed capitalist states. In Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia was highly developed but Roumania, Bulgaria and Albania were very backward. However, these countries were able to ally themselves against fascism and move to socialism. In Asia, Vietnam and Cambodia, also Mongolia and North Korea, were very backward but underwent socialist revolution.

Gough: What about China?

Hoang: Well, I would put China in the second category because it is so large. It was not very industrialized, but altogether it had a fair amount of industry. Again in Africa, we have three countries which have recently moved to socialism—Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique—which have different levels of development. Cuba was very backward industrially. So the starting point of socialism was in the second category of countries, moved to some of the third, but has not yet moved to the first category.

This means we have to decide whether Marx and Engels were right or wrong in their prediction. I think they were right, because true to their theory, socialism could not really be victorious in backward countries except in terms of political line—we cannot call it complete socialism. But if the proletariat took power in the USA or Canada, socialism could quickly be victorious because the material base is a ready aid.

In Vietnam, the working class was able to take power only through alliance with other classes and achieving solidarity with them. The working class was able to have this success because it had to fight against international capitalism from France, then from Japan, from France again and then from the USA, and it took power during terrible wars. This was done by overthrowing not only the feudal regime, but also the invading imperialists and international capital. After taking power, the working class had to return to the point of production and begin to develop heavy industry. That is why what we have is only the beginning of socialism. Industrialization is essential: we must be as industrialized as Canada. The difference is that the capitalists took hundreds of years to industrialize, but under socialism the time is shortened to about twenty-five years. With one socialist country already established which has a developed industry and science it creates favourable conditions for new socialist countries.

The biggest problem in Vietnam is industrial production. We have to develop the material base of a modern society. Until we obtain that we cannot have complete socialism; we can only build step by step. Our production is still small-scale and our people's life difficult. Only when we have a developed industry can the policies of socialism be realized. The task is new and difficult for us, beginning on the basis of a small-scale agricultural and not an industrial system.

Gough: Does struggle continue to exist in socialist societies? If so how should it be carried out in Vietnam?

Hoang: In socialist countries there is no struggle between classes as there is in capitalist countries. Of course there are always contradictions. They are like the contradictions between husband and wife—you have to struggle through them but they are not class conflicts. Of course they are bigger! There are conflicts or contradictions between different sections of the people, but they are not antagonistic contradictions.

Gough: Is there any difficulty about combining "normal relations between countries with different social systems" and "full support to the anti-imperialist movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America" (quotations from *Le Duan's Report to the first session of the National Assembly of Vietnam, 24 June 1976*) Are there guidelines for combining these two principles?

Hoang: There will be a difference in social systems for about a hundred years, we suppose—from 1917 to, say about 2017—because socialism cannot come everywhere at once. At the same time, there is no continual fighting. Peaceful co-existence is possible in some periods. For the socialist countries to have normal relations with the capitalist countries does not mean they will not help the revolutionaries in those countries. Therefore, the establishment of normal relations does not rest on the criterion of whether a country is socialist or not. But there is a limit to this. If a socialist country helps the socialist party in a particular capitalist country to overthrow the government, talk of peaceful co-existence is meaningless. And if it brings troops, it is certainly meaningless.