

# Casualties of a Continuing War: Indochina Today

**DR. ARMANDO MALAY, JR.** (UP Asian Center): The crisis facing socialism today makes me a bit uneasy. On one hand, I can understand the side of the Soviet Union, or to be more precise, the side of the so-called reformers. On the other hand, I can also see why Fidel Castro does not like what he sees in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In Vietnam, a debate like the one in the Soviet Union is already going on. The question of *glasnost* and *perestroika* has definitely not been settled yet, but it seems that the debate is going on a fifty-fifty basis.

For the time being, the so-called conservatives are numerically on the decline in the leadership, but they still have a strong say. At the back of their minds, as this debate goes on all over the world, is something like this: "Why were we fighting the bloodiest war in history, against the biggest superpower on earth, only to feel pressured today to join the perestroika bandwagon?" Definitely these people are programmed to see that what is happening in the Soviet Union is slowly but steadily edging towards, at the very least, a mixed economy. The Vietnamese seem to feel that this is the price they paid for having fought the biggest capitalist power on earth, not only in terms of casualties, but even in terms of the embargo.

Indeed, one cannot win a revolution and expect the capitalist countries to be lenient. They would tighten the screws, like they did with Cuba, Vietnam, and Nicaragua. In effect, the hardliners of the Vietnamese leadership accept this as part of the price. Call them Stalinists if you want, but this is the behavior that I expected them to exhibit. I never expected the Vietnamese to be softliners.

At a meeting of the top theoreticians of the party in Hanoi last year, I brought up the question of Stalin. In reply, they said, "Stalin, for us, was not a bad guy. Where would the world have been if there was no Stalin during the Second World War, during the anti-fascist struggle? When Stalin was still alive, at least the Soviet Union was helping us." Besides, "the debate that went on in the Soviet Union after the speech of Khrushchev renouncing the crimes of Stalin in 1956 was their own internal matter. We didn't have to take sides on that." Later, at the Museum of the Army, I saw a picture of one party congress which had portraits of Marx, Lenin, and Engels. Below them were crudely blackened faces of Stalin and Mao. Thus, Stalin may be revered by some as a hero, but at the same time, there is also the desire to follow the official line in the Soviet Union which is not to mention Stalin at all, although if it is absolutely necessary, only in a negative light.

When the past is slowly shattered like this, the debate, I'm afraid, will not stop with Stalin. Lenin is already being questioned. Maybe even Marx will end up like this. This is Gorbachev's big gamble. Having started these reforms, he must go on. It is like he is on a high wire riding

a bike where he cannot stop and has to go on until he reaches the other side. And I'm afraid that the other side is gone. Gorbachev's chief economic adviser, Albakin (whom the former has recently attacked as being too pessimistic about perestroika but whom he appointed as vice prime minister last year), said within 24 hours of his appointment that the Soviet Union has only two years within which to accomplish its reforms; otherwise, total economic collapse will occur. Six months have already passed. Albakin was recently quoted as saying that they even have to go further and have a stock or commodities exchange. Of course, one cannot open a stock exchange and then tell people not to be evil capitalists. One way or another, speculation will enter the scene together with all the negative things that we associate with capitalism.

All this is in the minds of the Vietnamese. This is why there is this debate in which, I feel, the so-called conservatives are still prevailing, at least for the time being. This is the same pattern we see in Cuba. And it is because these were the people at the forefront of the international struggle against capitalism who are now being pressured.

Who is calling the shots? Who is defining the rules of the game these days? People like Fidel Castro are looking like dinosaurs. One of these days they will have to go, but for the time being they think they are right. Indeed, I wonder who is really right?

**MR. PETER LIMQUECO** (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*): After having fought the two strongest imperialist powers, France and the US, the Communist Party of Vietnam has the exclusive claim to patriotism. When the Vietnamese leadership, with all the mistakes they have committed in the last 10 years, says that all those they opposed were reactionaries, no Vietnamese can question that. It is not like in Eastern Europe where people who were in power for the last 20 years ended up being corrupt, and merely followed the orders of the pope in Moscow.

The Vietnamese, despite the fact that they needed aid from the Soviet Union, had their differences with the latter. In 1946, Vietnam declared independence and set up the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), but it was not until 1953 that the Soviet Union recognized the DRV. So, from the very beginning, there were already differences between Vietnam and the Soviet Union on many questions. Because the country was very poor, however, Vietnam needed aid in terms of arms from the Soviet Union and China, and had to do a balancing act between the two powers in order to survive.

There is the other question of reforms now taking place in Eastern Europe. As early as 1986, reforms have already been undertaken in Vietnam. People who were not members of the Communist Party were being drawn into the advisory committee of the top leadership. Some of them were even elected to the parliament.

The parliament of Vietnam in the last few years has not been a showcase where nobody argues against anybody. Lively debates go on in parliament. To cite an example, there now sits in parliament an economic adviser who worked for nine years in the IMF and the World Bank as a senior official. He went back to Vietnam and became minister of finance and later acting-prime minister of south Vietnam under the Americans. Today, as a member of parliament, he is one of those advocating market-type reforms in Vietnam, an open-door policy towards foreign investments, and the establishment of a stock market in south Vietnam. I believe that a stock market is the worst thing about capitalism, but according to him, their country needs everything.

Incidentally, I find it very strange to call somebody "conservative" in such a socialist country as Vietnam. These people defend the rights and subsidies of workers in order to maintain their



standard of living. They advocate more state control. To call them conservative is, indeed, strange.

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN** (University of Amsterdam): I have been visiting Vietnam since 1979 and I can say that there has been a big difference between the years before 1986 and after. Before 1986, the countryside suffered from many problems. Poverty increased because of external factors, but mainly due to several internal problems. According to a publication circulated among cadres, the Americans, and then later the Chinese, were blamed for all the bad things that happened in Vietnam. After 1986, however, the poor state of agriculture was attributed to mismanagement, corrupt cadres and -- even the Vietnamese use the term -- conservative party leaders. ("Conservative" in Vietnam refers to people who stick to their privileges. Although I admit that they defend the subsidies for the few workers of Vietnam, as most Vietnamese are peasants, they also defend these for themselves. One should see the party bosses' houses and villas.)

In 1988, I visited Vietnam's remote areas. The problem there was that the reforms went too slowly. People could not invest their money on long-term projects. Instead, they used it to remodel their houses and buy beer. In that sense, there is a lot of "boom" activities in Vietnam. In general, however, the phase of *doi moi* or "new thinking" is proceeding too slowly. I think that is the danger Vietnam faces as of the moment.

**MR. TOM FAWTHROP** (Eastern Horizon Television): Cambodia has been extraordinarily isolated from the rest of the world since 1975, an isolation imposed by the Pol Pot regime. They did not want outsiders, foreigners, or flights into the country. Only China was allowed to fly into Phnom Penh. Since 1979, it was almost a paradox that the new government, variously known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) or the Heng Samrin Government, has been trying to establish relationships with all countries. The West and ASEAN countries have imposed a systematic boycott of trade, aid, and every kind of communication, an economic blockade perhaps without precedent in international history. One UN official (who was in charge of the emergency operations for Cambodia from 1979 to 1981 when it was liberated from the Pol Pot regime) said that, in his years of dealing with famine and emergency situations, he had never experienced such a combined effort to sabotage aid being brought into the country. Since 1975, the United States, one of the major donors of all UN agencies, has tried to restrict to an absolute minimum any kind of aid to Vietnam. There was, however, no problem with the aid being brought to the refugees on the Thai border or people coming out to the West. Media coverage by the western press has also been biased against refugees from Cambodia into Vietnam, in contrast to reports on refugees going to pro-western countries like Thailand.

The reason offered for this massive boycott is that Vietnam is an expansionist power. It has been argued that the Vietnamese, not content with defeating the US, also had to swallow Laos and eventually Cambodia. While it is true in Cambodian history that Vietnam has swallowed parts of Cambodia, it is also true that Thailand invaded Cambodia on several occasions so that Cambodians have always harbored historical fears towards its two neighbors. During the current period, however, there has been great emphasis on the fact that all Vietnamese motives towards Cambodia had always been and will always be perfidious. No reference has been made whatsoever to the possibilities that the Thais may have their own ambitions towards Cambodia as exemplified by their consistent support for one of the most murderous regimes in history, the Khmer Rouge. It continues to enjoy the hospitality of Thailand both in terms of arms supply from China and rest and recreation in Thai refugee camps.

If we really look at what has been happening in Cambodia since 1979, it is very hard to see exactly what the argument is about if the great fear is the consolidation of the Marxist-Leninist



regime. Almost since the PRK was proclaimed in 1979, the first priority has not been to bring a different kind of socialism in place of Pol Pot's "socialism", but it was simply a question of survival. Here was a country which has been brought back to year zero. There was no normal means of supply for anything. Everything had been dependent on the Pol Pot command economy based on agriculture and forced labor collectives in the countryside. The towns were empty except for a few administrative cadres needed to serve the regime itself. This meant that with the liberation of the people from the tyranny of the Pol Pot regime, the country was to be in chaos for several months (I use "liberation" because virtually all Cambodians of all political persuasions, except the Khmer Rouge, do so). People were searching for relatives among the survivors.

The main objective, then, for the government was to return the country to nothing more than normal, meaning pre-1975 times - a combination of the Lon Nol and Sihanouk periods in which they had such things as money, which was abolished under Pol Pot. It is a strange kind of Marxist-Leninist regime which restores money. Hun Sen also restored private property. Permission to open shops and restaurants and to trade in the markets has been given to everyone. In fact, the prime economic factor in Cambodia is the private sector. It is the dynamic sector of the economy. The state has always been too weak to be a dominant force in Cambodia. Today, there is still a mixed economy and the role of the private sector has been officially legalized. Land reform has been implemented, which increased the ownership rights of the peasantry, and people now have a right to own their houses.

Thus, despite all the reports from the Bangkok media about the Khmer Rouge attacking towns and letting off rockets, there are signs that most people of Cambodia continue to see this government as one which is sensitive to the population's desire to be secure. The government gives the people a sense of personal stake in that country, which is very far removed from the original Soviet model of a heavily state-controlled economy. My point, however, is not to judge whether this is a capitalist, a mixed capitalist, semi-feudal or just a survival economy, but that Cambodia has survived and it is the present leadership which has helped to steer that country through extraordinary obstacles. It is still empowered despite the US and China doing everything they can to bring it down. Therefore, much of the hysteria about a Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist satellite state in Cambodia has, from the very beginning, been a kind of hogwash in an attempt to persuade other countries who know nothing about Cambodia not to recognize the government in Phnom Penh.

## DISCUSSION

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN:** What strikes me about Cambodia is that, with all the cliches about Buddhism and non-violence in mainland Southeast Asia, it has become one of the most violent countries in the last 10 to 15 years. It was not just the Pol Pot period which was so violent. The Lon Nol period was as violent, perhaps not in terms of numbers, but in the way Khmers were killing Khmers with the help of the Americans. And the same happened before the French intervention.

If the different factions, including the Khmer Rouge, do not reconcile, then the future of Cambodia is doomed. I am not defending any of the factions, but I believe that Sihanouk is pleading for the participation of the Khmer Rouge in the government under the motto "if you can't beat them, join them". The Khmer Rouge is one of the big threats at the moment; if they are left out, they will continue to endanger the future. We must find a solution that includes the Khmer Rouge, as the Heng Samrin government did in 1979. One should never forget that Hun Sen and Heng Samrin were Khmer Rouge leaders; they were responsible for at least two



years of the Rouge before they fled to Hanoi. So in that sense, this kind of reconciliation is needed at the moment.

**MR. TOM FAWTHROP:** Hun Sen was never at any time in any position of command responsibility in the Khmer Rouge. While he was Eastern Region Commander, he was no more than a commander of a military unit. Anyone who says so has not advanced one iota of evidence. With Hun Sen rising in the popularity stakes, he threatens to put even Sihanouk into oblivion. Nor is there any documented evidence against Heng Samrin. Those who orchestrated the killing fields were a clearly defined clique of eight to 12 people around Pol Pot, one of whom, Khieu Samphan, appeared in the diplomatic arena for the Khmer Rouge. During the Pol Pot regime, he took over the position of Sihanouk as the President of the National Assembly, who is being presented as the nice face of the Khmer Rouge.

To argue that we must include the Khmer Rouge in the government, because they will do nothing but mayhem if we don't, seems to be correct. On what moral basis, however, does one include in a coalition government a regime which has a similar record as the Nazis of the Second World War? Just how many people in the European world after 1945 will uphold a post-war German government which included one or two faces of the Nazi regime? No one can name a single moderate Khmer Rouge leader, or a Khmer Rouge figure who has criticized Pol Pot or who has shown remorse or apologized for the killing fields. In that situation, how could you possibly put Hun Sen and others who are not responsible for the killing fields on an equal footing as Pol Pot and the architects of the killing fields? Why should the survivors of the killing fields, who went through hellfire and torture, accept or have any more confidence on the current government in Phnom Penh if this is done? If there's one thing going for Hun Sen, it is not Marxism or socialism, but the fact that he has kept the Khmer Rouge out, whereas everybody else is trying to put them in. This is what makes Hun Sen the most popular Khmer leader today.

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN:** I think that Hun Sen was not in the inner circle of the Pol Pot faction, as the party at that time was very factionalized. I am not saying that we should bring back Pol Pot and the like. What I fear is warlordism in Cambodia, which could go on in the next five to six years if there is no intervening power to split those factions or initiate a reconciliation.

**DR. ARMANDO MALAY, JR.:** It would be useful to remember that the Khmer Rouge are not actually Marxists. In fact, I would really like to see one document that identifies them as such. Western media always makes it a point to call them "the Marxist Khmer Rouge". In fact, in fairness to the Khmer Rouge, they have never made a big thing out of being Marxist. The Hun Sen regime that is in power is neither making a big thing out of its being socialist or Marxist. It just runs on a platform of trying to keep the Khmer Rouge out, which happens to be a very popular platform. I suppose that 99.99 percent of the people do not really care as long as they are left in peace, and have food and jobs.

**QUESTION:** How did the groups of Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan justify the killing fields? What was the ideological basis for this "project"?

**MR. PETER LIMQUECO:** As mentioned earlier, there are several factions within the Khmer Rouge, one of which I call the Sorbonne faction, composed of those who studied in Paris and got their PhDs at Sorbonne. They tried to apply what they learned in Paris. This faction can be divided into two groups. One was composed of people who were all killed by Pol Pot and the other was led by Khieu Samphan who was supposed to have mapped out the economic program. They provided the ideological belief that the only good Cambodian is the peasant and that is

one of their reasons for emptying the urban areas of people. They never trusted anybody who was not dark or wore glasses or was educated. The brutality of the Khmer Rouge, however, cannot be separated from the experience of American bombings which targetted the countryside where the recruits of the Khmer Rouge came from.

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN:** The only explanation I have is that they tried to launch a kind of Cultural Revolution or Great Leap Forward. A colleague of mine has called it ultra-nationalism or supra-nationalism. We should also be aware that Pol Pot and his associates were communists, but their communism had a tinge of Maoism.

**QUESTION:** What was the Khmer Rouge trying to "leap forward to"? What kind of development did they envision for Cambodia?

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN:** I think they wanted to create a kind of utopia, but the leap was to go back to the countryside because for centuries, there had been contradictions between cities and the countryside. Since colonial times, the city was seen as a foreign part of the country, mostly inhabited by the Chinese or Sino-Khmers or Vietnamese taken in by the French or the French themselves. After the French, the Khmer elite was a big part of the city so it was always seen by the Khmer peasant as a strange place. So what Pol Pot did was to try to go back to the countryside and build an egalitarian state based mainly on agriculture. They tried to manage irrigation and leap forward with production, but they stumbled.

The cultural revolution part was the ideology. They were building a kind of nationalism which was strange. Their national anthem at that time, for example, called for the blood of the Khmer to be spilled on the ricefields, etc. I cannot but conclude that it must have had an element of Maoism.

**QUESTION:** While the Pol Pot team was carrying out this "project", what were the reactions of the People's Republic of China, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam?

**MR. PETER LIMQUECO:** During the killings, the Chinese were silent. In fact, many Chinese were also killed by the Pol Pot forces. There were sizeable Chinese communities in Cambodia based in the urban areas that were wiped out, but the Chinese kept quiet about this. The Russians have always been late in their reactions to developments in the world. When Sihanouk was toppled down, they maintained their embassy in Phnom Penh under Lon Nol, so when the Khmer Rouge came into power, they were not allowed to have an embassy in Phnom Penh.

Vietnam had an embassy at the time the Khmer Rouge came to power. Six months later, there were already skirmishes at the border. The Khmer Rouge attacked an island held by the Vietnamese and then the villages on the border. There were constant attacks on the Mekong; at the same time the Khmer Rouge were attacking villages inside Thailand, with the cooperation of the Thai Communist Party, which was based inside Cambodia. So there were killings on both sides of the Cambodian border. The Vietnamese were silent about this until late 1977 when they allowed Western journalists to cover all the destruction in that area; around 1978, they started releasing information on what was happening on the border.

**QUESTION:** How about the allegation of Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge that Vietnamese soldiers are still in Cambodia in Cambodian military uniforms?

**MR. TOM FAWTHROP:** We read a lot about this, but we don't find any information to support it. Reports like this betray a lack of genuinely impartial journalism.



**QUESTION:** What do you think about the initiatives of Indonesia in trying to resolve the conflict, specifically in the Jakarta Informal Meetings and the Paris talks?

**DR. ARMANDO MALAY, JR.:** Indonesia is one of the ASEAN countries friendly to Vietnam and which, coincidentally, is suspicious of Chinese motives. This is why Indonesia is at the forefront of ASEAN's attempt to achieve peace in Kampuchea. It was also on Indonesian initiative that the Jakarta Informal Meetings, or JIM cocktail parties, were organized. No definite proposals have been presented, but they serve as a venue for people to get together and talk about the problem. I think the Indonesian initiative has the backing of Malaysia and, to a certain extent, also of Thailand. The only hardliner seems to be Singapore. The Philippines is, as usual, fence-sitting and keeping its options open.

Anyway, the trend in ASEAN is for more friendly relations with Vietnam, especially now that Vietnam has complied with its promise to pull out all its troops from Cambodia. An objective of this is to lessen hostility with Vietnam so foreign investors can come in and take advantage of the foreign investments law Vietnam passed three or four years ago. Thailand is getting the most out of increased friendly ties among the ASEAN, maybe because of proximity, but also because the Thai government has a more enlightened approach towards Vietnam, which is to forget the hostility of the past, and just do business together. The Vietnamese also need foreign exchange and an opening since it has become so isolated. Therefore, it welcomes this opportunity, but correspondingly, the Philippines is not taking advantage of it.

**MR. TOM FAWTHROP:** I would say that Indonesia's role was very positive. In Jakarta, they seemed to be successful in getting people to agree that when Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia, external forces would stop supplying arms to the Khmer factions fighting the Phnom Penh government, leading to a ceasefire. When Vietnam did withdraw its troops in September last year, all the ASEAN countries conveniently forgot the agreement made in Jakarta. Even Indonesia itself made no effort during the Paris peace talks, which should have been the forum to formalize this; instead, Indonesia went along with the hardline ASEAN position decided upon at the Brunei ASEAN Foreign Ministers summit that laid down the precept of what they called a comprehensive settlement, which must include the Khmer Rouge in a four-party government. No more reference was made to the plan to link Vietnam's withdrawal to a cessation of aid to the guerilla forces. Cessation of aid depended upon Phnom Penh capitulating to the Khmer Rouge. So this was a return to a hardline position.

Among the ASEAN countries, Singapore is the only hardline member, as Prof. Malay mentioned. Indonesia prefers a general reconciliation. Brunei and the Philippines don't seem to know what's happening anyway. Thailand is split in the middle: the Thai Prime Minister wants to recognize the government in Cambodia, but is checkmated by his very conservative foreign minister, who is an ASEAN hardliner, and the more or less right-wing military. In a way that should cancel Thailand so that leaves Singapore. The great big mystery is why Singapore's line prevailed over everyone even in Paris.

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN:** Indonesians want to create camaraderie in the region because they are very afraid of China. This is why they have a long-lasting relationship with Hanoi at a time when one wonders how the communist party at Hanoi can have such warm relations with the generals in Jakarta. This is also the reason that they are trying to play that role in Phnom Penh, because they are very afraid of the influence of China. That is one of their motives for intervening in regional affairs.



**MR. PETER LIMQUECO:** One should be a little pessimistic about the role of ASEAN. After 20 years, ASEAN has not done anything in terms of economic and cultural cooperation, their purported objectives. The only thing that has kept ASEAN going in the last 20 years is the Cambodian question, which is a political issue. The Cambodian question, however, is fast being resolved. It has already been privately said in several Western countries that within a year, they might have to recognize the Hun Sen government. I think that the simplest thing to do is to continue and enforce the agreement that was arrived at in Jakarta. While the earlier resolution talked about avoiding the return of the previous regime, the statement that came out during the Paris conference was dangerous because it completely omitted any reference to the Khmer Rouge, thereby legitimizing their return.

**QUESTION:** Our government has refused to recognize the Hun Sen government, but it felt no apprehension in recognizing very quickly the American puppet government in Panama. How does the Aquino government explain such apparently contradictory positions?

**DR. ARMANDO MALAY, JR.:** The tragedy at the Department of Foreign Affairs is that they don't have experts; worse, there is not much interest, particularly in places like Hanoi and Phnom Penh. Therefore, we cannot expect the same kind of diplomatic reporting and analysis that the developed countries have. Specifically, when it comes to our relations with Indochina, I don't think we are getting the best analysis, so we are not getting good inputs either into our decision-making processes.

**MR. PETER LIMQUECO:** In 1956, Sihanouk came for a state visit to the Philippines. Some people wanted him to say that Cambodia will give up neutrality and join SEATO which, of course, Sihanouk refused. So there were demonstrations in Manila attacking Sihanouk. In 1970, Sihanouk was toppled down by a US-inspired coup. The Philippines recognized Lon Nol, the coup leader, right away. When the Vietnamese came in and toppled down the Khmer Rouge, the Philippines issued denunciation after denunciation. A few months later, Indonesia annexed East Timor and the Philippines voted for the annexation of East Timor in the United Nations. So what is the basis of our foreign policy?

**QUESTION:** In Namibia, the United Nations sent a peace-keeping force to administer the country while a campaign and elections were held. Can the UN negotiate a similar agreement for Cambodia?

**MR. TOM FAWTHROP:** There is already a very strong move by Australia to draw up a very detailed and complex plan which has some similarities with the Namibia-UN solution, but will have other ingredients unique to Cambodia. Hun Sen has said that he does not only endorse such a UN role; he recognizes that it will be a bigger role than UN has played in any other country. The main features include the setting up of a UN interim authority in Cambodia which will have some executive power. That is the Australian part. The Hun Sen part is the mutual recognition of this UN body's authority by both the Khmer Rouge Coalition and the Hun Sen government over some territories of the latter. For the rest of the country the UN forces will recognize the de facto control of the Phnom Penh government which is, of course, a very interesting proposition because it will be the first time in 11 years that the UN has come close to recognizing de facto control of the Phnom Penh government. The third item proposed by Australia and agreed upon by Phnom Penh, as well as other countries, is the formation of a national council of prominent Khmer representatives from all factions, coming together as individuals and forming the supreme sovereign body of Cambodia until the end of the free elections. The supreme council is supposed to be the repository of sovereignty until such time when the elections are finished. At the same time, some sovereignty would be ceded to the UN



to carry out peace-keeping functions in Cambodia. Once the election results come in, all these bodies would cease to exist because it would be clear who the winner is.

If the countries can agree on what functions the UN forces will assume, then the next point that would be automatically insisted upon by Hun Sen, Vietnam, the socialist countries, and possibly India, which recognize the Hun Sen government, is that some representatives of the latter must join the existing coalition inside the UN. Australia agrees that there must be a change in the Cambodians sitting at the UN as a corollary to the effective implementation of the mandate inside the country. A Soviet diplomat said that the Soviet Union is in favor of the plan, which is more complex than the Namibia formula, and the most expensive operation in UN history.

**QUESTION:** Are perestroika and glasnost possible in Cambodia and Vietnam?

**MR. TOM FAWTHROP:** Some westerners have speculated that the changes in Eastern Europe would mean a crisis in the future support of the Cambodian government because up to now, most of Cambodia's aid donors are the East European countries and the Soviet Union. One of the things, though, that people in Phnom Penh point out is that they are not really worried by the changes in Eastern Europe because they themselves instituted changes even before the Eastern Europeans did. They have been liberalizing trade and enlarging the private sector, especially in the last five or six years. Unlike in Vietnam where there is greater conflict within the leadership, the Cambodian leadership has been fairly united on the mixed economy scheme.

On the question of glasnost, it has been very easy to directly talk with Cambodians without any officials as go-betweens since Hun Sen became prime minister in 1985. In Sihanouk's time, there was some suspicion about the role of foreigners in the country. Local people were generally very wary of talking to visitors, unless there were official guides or translators around. These days, Cambodians will even invite you into their house to have dinner with them, which was virtually impossible some time ago.

More people are also openly voicing their discontent with the government. The sense of glasnost is alive in the towns, although I don't know how it is in the countryside where the threat of the Khmer Rouge is real. I don't think that the level of freedom is possible to maintain in those places.

**DR. JOHN KLEINEN:** The typical Vietnamese reaction is that, on one hand, they want *doi moi*, they want perestroika. Glasnost, though, is a different thing. On the other side there is the reaction of the old guards in Hanoi who are very reluctant to give in. This situation has already been going on since 1986.

The church in Vietnam, especially in the south, is becoming one of the biggest opposition groups. Before 1975, the Catholic church tried to keep out of politics. The church survived and after a long period, they are back in the political scene with a kind of a *modus vivendi vis-a-vis* Hanoi. They try to protect the people from the abuses of the government. They are now creating some sort of a social shield and Hanoi is giving in on that point. The official guidelines state that more seminaries can be opened, more bishops and priests nominated, and so on. It was only recently, though, that the church became known as an opposition group. Opposition is also being voiced out by intellectuals and writers.

**DR. ARMANDO MALAY, JR.:** The most organized opposition groups are found abroad, those that kept up with the "struggle". Whether they will go back to Vietnam to continue that struggle

and provide an alternative is problematic. They are already settled in more congenial countries like the US and Australia, and in Europe.

An ex-communist, Vo Nan Chi, one of the top economists of the communist regime sometime in the late seventies, fled Vietnam when he could no longer stand it and joined some hardline anti-communists in Singapore. He now lives in Paris. He is the kind of person who would most likely represent an alternative if something like what happened in Eastern Europe occurs in Vietnam. Whether exiles like him really want to go back is something else because that kind of opposition is not tolerated in Vietnam.

What I have been asking myself is whether the revolutions in Vietnam and in other places were premature. Were not the historical processes accelerated artificially to push a revolution that did not conform with how the original theoreticians envisaged it? The theory says that socialist revolution is not possible without first reaching the highest potential of capitalism's productive forces. In the Soviet Union, it was only in 1861 when the serfs were freed. And between 1861 and 1917, the capitalist process could not have reached such fantastic limits that the proletarian revolution was crying out to be achieved in 1917. Indeed, many were surprised. The social democrats (before that name was discredited) asked: "Why is Lenin doing this? He's got guts." Russia, at that time, was the last society they expected to mother a revolution. And it triumphed. The rest is history. The lesson was, if it happened in Russia, why not in other countries with the economic conditions of pre-1917 Russia, like Laos? Could you imagine Laos, however, with a proletariat? What warrants a socialist revolution in a society like Laos? It is difficult to imagine and yet it is there, proclaiming itself to be socialist. It has a communist party which allegedly is the advanced section of the proletariat. How come? This was never foreseen in the theory. So I am asking: weren't these revolutions premature?



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