

COMMENTARY.

8th JULY 1978.

The Anniversary of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Voice One:

A week ago today the people of Vietnam celebrated the second anniversary of the reunification of their country and the founding of the socialist republic of Vietnam. This event brought to a close over a century of fierce national and social struggles. It was the culmination of a process set in motion a century ago when France invaded, occupied and colonized Vietnam and other countries of Indo-China.

Voice Two:

The name of Vietnam in our day came to symbolise all that is noble in the human spirit. It became a shining example of human courage and the indomitable determination of its people to achieve freedom and independence, for as one of her noblest son's, Ho Chi Minh said:

" Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom".

No people have demonstrated the truth of this statement more clearly than the Vietnamese. From the first years after the French colonialist established themselves on Vietnamese soil, the people of Vietnam pursued a relentless struggle to free their country from foreign control and domination which culminated in the great victory of May 1975.

Voice One:

The colonization of Vietnam began like that of many other countries in Africa, Asia and South America. French imperialist agents forced the king of Vietnam to grant them special concessions in the country towards 1858. In April of 1882, using the protection of these so-called 'interests' as a pretext, the French imperialist army, under the command of Henri Riviere captured Hanoi, one of Vietnam's leading cities. The occupation of Hanoi was the signal for the commencement of the armed resistance that culminated in the victory of 1975.

Voice Two:

Led by their traditional leaders, the king, the mandarins and the nobles, the people of Vietnam fought back gallantly in defence of their country and their freedom. Their military forces drove fear into the hearts of the colonialists. The French colonialist military historian Pallu de la Barriere complained bitterly:

Voice Three:

"The fact is that the resistance centre is everywhere, subdivided ad infinitum, nearly as many times as there are living Vietnamese. It would be more exact to consider every peasant who was fastening a sheaf of rice plants as a centre of resistance".

Voice One:

In spite of the courage displayed by the Vietnamese fighters the French imperialists managed to overcome the resistance. Rebellion and revolt simmered in the more distant provinces, but French military control was imposed on most of the country. The imperialists acted quickly to firm up their victory. They bought off the traditional leaders, the mandarins, the nobles and rich landowners by agreeing to protect their positions. They put them in charge of tax collection, the maintenance of law and order and the drafting of forced labour for the construction of roads and railways. Others who were willing to collaborate with the colonial regime were also handsomely rewarded. The interpreters, the clerks, the civil servants and even informers were given land taken from the peasants by force; they were allowed to become middlemen for French business interests in Vietnam and sometimes start business in their own right.

Voice Two:

Using the most brutal methods the French colonialists forced peasants off the land to work in the enterprises they set up in Vietnam. Poor farmers were evicted from the best land to make way for rubber plantations. To make a living they had to become workers on lands that had formerly been theirs. In the ports and the towns, French colonial importers built warehouses to help carry off the colonial plunder to France and other parts of Europe. In this way, French colonialism brought into being the Vietnamese working class, who were destined to play the leading role both in the national liberation struggle and in the construction of the new socialist society.

Voice One:

Colonial exploitation, intermittent revolts and their suppression devastated the countryside. In Europe too France was confronted with problems. As the leading imperialist powers of the day jockeyed

for position in the race for spheres of influence and colonies, international tensions rose. Finally in 1914, World War broke out and two blocs of imperialist powers, on the one hand Britain, allied with France and Tsarist Russia, and on the other, Germany allied with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Turkey, fought for control over the division of the world.

Voice Two:

In order to fight the war the imperialist powers used both the working people of their countries and the colonial peoples. The exploitation of the colonies intensified. Vietnam was forced to supply fifty thousand troops and forty nine thousand workers to shore up French imperialism. To crown all these, years 1914 to 1917 were years of agricultural calamity in Vietnam. The rice crop fell, there was drought and floods which left millions destitute. Nor did the woes visited upon the country end with the war. Though one of the victors the war had taken its toll of France. Thousands of men died on the battlefield and in the trenches. The country faced economic collapse as the value of the French Franc declined on the world market. To rebuild France, the exploitation of the colonies was intensified. More investments were made in Vietnam and other colonial possessions in order to take advantage of the cheap labour available there.

Voice One:

During these years of hardship the Vietnamese people had not stood by idly. In 1909 an uprising broke out in Hoa Binh, in the next two years a second major revolt occurred in Ha Giang. Both were ruthlessly suppressed. In 1919 a nationwide boycott of French goods was organised. Among the Vietnamese workers transported to work in France too there were stirrings. Among these thousands was a young Vietnamese patriot by the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc. Later in his life he assumed the name by which he became famous, Ho Chi Minh.

Voice Two:

During his stay in Europe, Nguyen Ai Quoc worked as a dish-washer, a cook, a seaman and a domestic servant. He joined and became an active member of the French trade unions and the Socialist Party. He also took advantage of the thousands of colonial people living in

France to establish contact with other Asians, Africans and South Americans who like himself had seen their countries colonised by France. Through these contacts he helped found the League of Colonial Peoples which united all the nations under French colonial domination. He became the editor of an agitational newspaper 'The Pariah' which devoted its pages to the anti-colonial struggle. At the end of the war in 1918 when the victors and vanquished met in Versailles to redivide the world, among the delegations which included one from the African National Congress that presented petitions demanding an end to colonial slavery, was a Vietnamese delegation led by Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Voice One:

Like the ANC delegation, the Vietnamese came away empty handed. In spite of the intransigence of the imperialists the world had changed since 1914. In November 1917, the workers and peasants of Russia, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, had risen in revolt and established the world's first workers state. With one stroke one sixth of the world's surface was taken out of the imperialist sphere and on it rose a government dedicated to the total destruction of imperialism, colonialism and the exploitation of man by man. Two years thereafter in 1919, the Bolshevik Party was instrumental in the formation of the Communist International to unite and coordinate the activities of the various workers' parties.

Voice Two:

Before 1914, the workers' parties had been united under the banner of the second international. When the war broke out, its leaders betrayed the solemn resolutions to oppose the war and the international broke up. When the Communist International was founded, many socialists debated whether to affiliate to it or remain with the moribund second international. At a meeting of the French Socialist Party where this question was debated, Nguyen Ai Quoc inquired:

"Which international supports the struggles of the colonial peoples?" "The Communist International, not the second international," someone answered. From that day onward, he became a dedicated follower of Lenin and a staunch partisan of the Communist movement.

Music - The International -

Voice One:

Voice One:

After leaving France, Nguyen Ai Quoc returned to Asia. In Vietnam, his own country, the French colonialists had put a price on his head. He stayed in Southern China to which many Vietnamese patriots travelled to discuss and plan with him. In 1925, he formed the Young Revolutionaries Association among Vietnamese working and studying in southern China. In that same year he published a book entitled "The Revolutionary Road" in which he laid down the principles that were to guide the Vietnamese national liberation movement. They may be summed up in three fundamental principles:

- (i) The Vietnamese revolution will be made by the worker and peasant masses who will provide its main forces;
- (ii) In order to achieve victory, the revolution must be led by a Marxist-Leninist Party;
- (iii) The Vietnamese revolution must be closely linked with the struggles of the other oppressed and exploited people of the world.

Voice Two:

On the basis of these three principles, a number of Vietnamese Marxists met in Kowloon, China, in 1930 to found the Indo-Chinese Communist Party which laid the two main strategic aims of the party as the regaining of national independence and the struggle against feudalism to give the land back to the peasants. From its inception the Indo-Chinese Communist Party strove to form a united front of all patriots to fight for national independence. It succeeded in this when the Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh or the Viet Minh was founded in 1941. Within its ranks the Viet Minh united the workers, peasants, the youth, the women and the patriotic intellectuals of Vietnam. Its key mobilising slogan became "land to the tiller".

Voice One:

When the Viet Minh was founded the people of Vietnam were faced with even graver problems. Since 1936 the Japanese imperialists had steadily increased their power in Asia first by invading and annexing Manchuria, the northern most province of China, then occupying the east coast of China. In 1941 they had launched an all out offensive and occupied large portions of China. Acting with the connivance of pro-fascist French colonial administrators, the Japanese imperialists also

occupied Vietnam, imposing the joint exploitation of French and Japanese imperialism on Vietnam.

The prices of basic food soared. The price of rice, the staple food of the Vietnamese rose ~~to~~ by 400%. In the countryside starvation was rife, in addition there was a scarcity of goods and in many rural areas people had nothing to wear except leaves. Faced with this ever deepening crisis the Viet Minh resolved to begin military operations to free Vietnam of imperialist domination. In all parts of the country preparations were made to launch combined mass and armed struggles. Guerilla units were trained and established in the rural areas. By 1943, the liberation movement had established a base area in Bac Son -Vu Nhai.

Voice two:

By 1944 liberated areas, in which neither the French nor the Japanese could enter, had been established in many provinces. As the Japanese imperialists were forced to fight on many fronts both in Vietnam and in other countries of Asia, they steadily lost ground. In 1945 the Viet Minh called for preparations for a general uprising. The peasants were instructed to seize the rice stores of the Japanese invaders. The guerrilla units were regrouped into companies and more areas were taken over by the liberation movement. In all these areas the Viet Minh, supported by the masses established organs of people's power. The land of collaborators and traitors was seized and given to the poor peasants, rents were reduced and the prices of basic foods were held under strict control. As the imminent collapse of Japanese imperialism became clearer more and more areas rose in revolt and set up people's power.

Voice One:

Aware that it was losing ground, the Japanese administration turned on its erstwhile French colonialist allies and March 1945 and tried to set up a puppet regime by restoring the emperor Bao Dai. Preparations for the general uprising went ahead as planned. From April guerrilla activities increased, peasants captured more and more rice stores from the Japanese and political agitation in the towns was stepped up. In the jails where hundreds of patriots had been held

by both the French and Japanese there were uprisings and the political prisoners freed themselves. In the villages and the towns the masses hunted down informers and traitors to punish them for their crimes. By June 1945, most of the provinces north of the Red River had been liberated. In August Nguyen Ai Quoc, now using the name Ho Chi Minh, sounded the clarion call for mass insurrection:

Voice Three:

"The decisive hour for the destiny of our nation has struck. Let all of us rise up and strive to liberate ourselves. Many peoples of the world are standing up to wrest back their independence. We must not lag behind. Forward under the banner of the Viet Minh! March courageously forward!"

Voice One:

From August 14th to the 16th, in every village, town and city of Vietnam the masses rose in revolt. They drove the Japanese and their puppets from the seats of power and established National Liberation Committees to govern. The insurrection was achieved by the careful coordination of mass action and armed actions. On September 2nd 1945, Ho Chi Minh solemnly declared the ^{independence} ~~independence~~ of Vietnam and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Music - Vietnamese Victory Song.