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Addressee:

Enclosed please find a preliminary draft of "The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered" by D. Gareth Porter, Research Associate of the Cornell International Relations of East Asia Project (IREA).

In view of the statements and charges regarding the "bloodbath" (e.g., President Nixon's July 27 news conference) the contents of Mr. Porter's documented analysis deserve immediate, widespread public attention. For this reason, advanced copies of it are being released simultaneously to press, radio, television and members of Congress.

Inquiries for Mr. Porter, or additional copies of his study, which will be published by IREA later this month, should be addressed to:

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THE MYTH OF THE BLOODBATH:
NORTH VIETNAM'S LAND REFORM RECONSIDERED

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INTRODUCTION

American intervention in Vietnam has been justified increasingly in recent years by portraying the North Vietnamese leaders as ideological fanatics who would carry out a massive "bloodbath" against former foes if allowed to gain power in South Vietnam. In particular, this argument, which has been promoted in a series of Presidential speeches, draws on allegations concerning the North Vietnamese land reform program which was carried out from 1953 to 1956. The essence of these allegations is that the land reform was a deliberate reign of terror aimed at eliminating whole economic classes and that tens or even hundreds of thousands of innocent people were killed.

This view of land reform has been broadly accepted by American scholars and public alike as an established fact. Yet there has never been a careful study of the land reform which makes use of all the available documentation. Instead, opinions about the North Vietnamese leadership and the land reform have been formed on the basis of propaganda and careless scholarship. Fictions about the land reform in the North have been repeated and amplified year after year, shaping American perceptions of and responses to the Vietnamese revolution. U. S. policymakers, journalists and academics continue to view the D. R. V.'s leaders through this distorted lens as bloodthirsty and fanatical rather than as responding rationally to complex problems and real conditions.

If U. S. policy is to be based on a realistic assessment of the Vietnamese revolution instead of a caricature of it, a necessary first step must be to set aside the popular notion of the

land reform as a "bloodbath". It is hoped that this essay may serve not only to unravel a central myth about the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, but also to reveal some of the "scratches on our minds" which underlie American policy in Vietnam.

CHAPTER I

THE LITERATURE OF THE LAND REFORM

While the U. S. government has made the myth of the blood-bath in North Vietnam an important weapon in its propaganda arsenal, the myth could not have received wide acceptance without a body of literature which supports it.¹ The specifics of the argument will be examined in detail in later sections, but it is important to note at the outset the intellectual background of the myth, which goes a long way in explaining its genesis and development.

The literature on North Vietnam's land reform is, first of all, a reflection of the low level of American scholarship on Vietnam in general and North Vietnam in particular. After more than twenty years of heavy involvement in Vietnam's destiny and more than ten years of warfare against Vietnamese revolutionaries, there is still no respectable body of scholarly work on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. For many years, the late Bernard Fall was virtually the only academic specialist on Vietnam who

¹The secondary sources referring to the North Vietnamese land reform which will be cited in this study are the following: Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, vol. II. Vietnam at War (New York: Praeger, 1967); George Carver, "The Faceless Viet Cong", Foreign Affairs, vol. 44 (April 1966); Bernard Fall, The Viet Minh Regime, revised and enlarged edition, (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1956); Fall, The Two Vietnams (New York: Praeger, 1963); J. Price Gittinger, "Communist Land Policy in North Vietnam", Far Eastern Survey, August 1959; P. J. Honey, Communism in North Vietnam (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963); Honey, North Vietnam Today (New York: Praeger, 1962).

More recently, two staff members of the Rand Corporation have referred to the land reform in the context of discussing the subject of political reprisals; see Stephen T. Hosmer, Viet Cong Repression and its Implications for the Future (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1970, pp. 46-98, and Anita Lauve Nutt, On the Question of Communist Reprisals in Vietnam, Rand Corporation, P-4416

was independent of the U. S. government, and he commanded correspondingly great attention and respect for his views. But Fall's analysis of the D. R. V.'s land reform was limited severely by his failure to consult authoritative French sources on landholding in Tonkin as well as by his inability to read Vietnamese.

Like other authors who wrote about North Vietnam's land reform, Fall was unable to do research in the original Vietnamese sources, particularly the Lao Dong Party's official organ Nhan Dan (The People). In trying to analyze a government and society on which virtually no journalistic or other non-official sources of information were available, this handicap was critical. For it meant that important documents were either not read at all or were obtained in summary translation from the U. S. or South Vietnamese governments. And those documents could have been distorted in the process of selection, translation and summarization so as to influence substantially the interpretation of developments in the North. This is precisely what happened in the case of certain documents used by American authors to characterize the land reform as an ideologically-motivated "bloodbath".

An even more significant consequence of the generally low level of knowledge of the D. R. V. even among those considered specialists and the dearth of information available to them was that they made it possible for a Vietnamese claiming to have personal knowledge of the D. R. V. to have an extraordinarily great influence on the interpretations of specialists as well as general public. Thus the individual who has probably done the most to shape American attitudes toward the land reform is a native of

The American literature on the North Vietnamese land reform has relied heavily on his book, From Colonialism to Communism, as a primary source.² Its influence derives from his claim to have authoritative, first hand knowledge of the land reform campaign down to April 1955, when he left North Vietnam for Saigon. He makes frequent assertions implying detailed and intimate knowledge of Lao Dong party policy. Indeed, a CIA official, George Carver, who recommends the book to the public, refers to Hoang Van Chi as a "former Viet Minh cadre".³ But in fact he was never a party member and, by his own account, he was only a teacher in a pre-college school in Thanh Hoa province from 1950 to 1955.⁴ Thus he was not connected either with the Viet Minh government or the Lao Dong party during the entire period of the land reform--a fact which appears nowhere in the book.

Moreover, Mr. Chi was himself a relatively wealthy landowner, having inherited 20 acres from his parents.⁵ As will be shown below, this constituted a large landholding in the North Vietnamese context. His account of the land reform, therefore, is far from being objective and dispassionate. His antagonism to the

²Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism (New York: Praeger, 1964).

³Carver, op. cit., p. 355. Carver's attempt to promote Hoang Van Chi's account of the land reform is especially significant in that Carver tried to conceal his own affiliation with the U. S. government in writing the article. The fact that Carver was a CIA official was revealed only later by Senator J. William Fulbright.

⁴See the interview with Hoang Van Chi published in the Agency for International Development's in-house newsletter, Front Lines, February 24, 1972.

⁵Interview with Hoang Van Chi, AID Washington Training Center, May 26, 1972.

D. R. V. and to agrarian revolution led him, as we shall see, to make a number of assertions of fact where he actually lacked first-hand information.

Equally important in assessing his credentials as a primary source on the land reform is the fact of his direct involvement with Vietnamese and American propaganda organs after his arrival in South Vietnam in 1955. Mr. Chi worked for the Saigon government's Ministry of Information for some eight months in 1955 and 1956 and as a translator for the U. S. Information Agency.⁶ In 1958, Diem's Ministry of Information partially subsidized the publication of his book, The New Class in North Vietnam,⁷ in which he first presented his account of the North Vietnamese land reform.⁸

In 1960, Hoang Van Chi received a grant from the Congress for Cultural Freedom to spend a year in Paris writing a book which would reach American and European audiences with his attack on the D. R. V. land reform. For many years, the Central Intelligence Agency channeled funds to the Congress for Cultural Freedom as part of its global program of supporting anti-Communist intellectual groups.⁹ U. S. I. A. subsidized the publication in 1964 of From Colonialism to Communism, as later admitted by U. S. I. A. Director Leonard Marks in September 1966.¹⁰ Hoang Van Chi then

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hoang Van Chi, The New Class in North Vietnam (Saigon: Cong Dan, 1958).

⁸ Interview with Hoang Van Chi.

⁹ See New York Times, April 27, 1966.

¹⁰ Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2

came to the U. S. to work for the U. S. I. A., and he now lectures at A. I. D.'s Washington Training Center.¹¹

It is thus no accident that Hoang Van Chi's account of the land reform has been used in U. S. propaganda against North Vietnam. For it was American money which made possible both the writing and the publication of his book, which has been a very successful long-term investment in the development of American public opinion about the D. R. V.

Although other authors have contributed to the making of the "bloodbath" myth by abusing important documentary evidence, it is Hoang Van Chi who has committed the most serious and most numerous offenses in this regard. His account is based on a series of falsehoods, non-existent documents and slanted translations which leave no doubt that his purpose was propaganda rather than accurate history. Much of the analysis which follows will therefore deal with Mr. Chi's assertions and the documentation used to support them.

One of the common characteristics of the literature of the land reform in North Vietnam is the denial of its economic and social rationale. Any objective analysis of the land reform must, however, begin with the question of why the leaders of the D. R. V. carried out radical land reform. It is to this question that we now turn.

¹¹Front Lines, February 24, 1972.

CHAPTER II

WHY LAND REFORM?

The land reform in North Vietnam is commonly portrayed as an essentially political campaign carried out to fulfill abstract ideological requirements which conflicted with the real needs of Vietnamese society.¹ But none of the analyses of the land reform which have put forward this argument deal thoroughly or objectively with the social, economic and political conditions in Vietnam at the end of the French colonial period. The decision to carry out land reform cannot be properly understood apart from the land tenure system of North Vietnam and the political and military requirements of the struggle for independence.

Colonial Tonkin and Northern Annam, which together constitute the present territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, have been treated by the literature on the land reform as regions of small farmers owning the land they tilled, with little tenancy or inequality of landownership. This view seriously misrepresents the well-documented realities of the land tenure system in the North during the colonial period. The Red River area had an extraordinarily high ratio of population to land, and while most peasants

¹The land reform program is sometimes confused with the later phase of North Vietnamese agricultural policy in which co-operatives were established; hence the alleged "bloodbath" may be associated in some minds with the later "collectivization" program in the rural areas. But that phase did not begin until November 1958, nearly two and a half years after the end of the land reform process. The allegations of a "bloodbath," therefore, have nothing to do with the "collectivization" of agriculture. In contrast to the land reform, the campaign to establish co-operatives was gradual and noncoercive. This analysis concerns only the land reform program which began in 1953 and was completed in 1956.

did own some land, they owned so little that they were forced to work on additional land belonging to someone else.

According to French geographer Pierre Gourou, about 62 percent of the farming families owned less than one acre, while 20% owned less than one-half acre.² As Gourou pointed out in 1936, the owners of such minute plots "cannot live on their property and must hire themselves out, or else rent farms".³ And by the same token the farmer with even a few hectares of land inevitably became a landlord, renting it out to a number of small tenants. "In Tonking", Gourou said, "the description 'large property' must be given to farmlands of truly unimpressive size (from 3.6 hectares!)"⁴ According to Yves Henry, there were some 21,000 landowners with between 3.6 and 18 hectares, while 1,000 more owned more than 18 hectares.⁵ But these figures certainly underestimated the number of large and middle landowners. Many of them, especially government officials, successfully hid their wealth by various devices, including the dispersal of plots among several villages and false land title registration under the names of their tenants.⁶

²Pierre Gourou, Land Utilization in French Indochina, translation of L'Utilization du sol en Indochine Francaise, (New York, 1945) Part II, pp. 276 ff. cited in Erich H. Jacoby, Agrarian Unrest in Southeast Asia, 2nd ed. (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 157.

³Gourou, The Peasants of the Tonkin Delta (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1955), p. 280.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Yves Henry, Economie Agricole de L'Indochine (Hanoi: Gouvernement Genereale de 'Indochine, 1932), pp. 108 and 110.

⁶See Pham Cao Duong, Thuc Trang cua Gioi Nong Dan Viet Nam duoi Thoi Phap Thuoc (The True Situation of the Vietnamese Peasants under French Rule) (Hanoi: Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2 1965), pp. 104-5.

Gourou estimated that 90 percent of the landowners (not taking into account the families without any land at all) owned only 36.6% of the total cultivated land area in Tonkin, while 10% of the landowners controlled 43.2% of it.⁷ And data collected by the D. R. V. on all of the 3653 villages which went through land reform confirm Gourou's estimates.⁸ As of 1945, according to these figures, 89% of the rural population, comprising landless laborers, poor peasants and middle peasants, owned only 40% of the cultivated land. The poor peasants and landless laborers, who represented 60% of the population, owned only 10 percent of the land. At the same time, the 2.5% of the rural families who lived by renting out land, owned 24.5% of the land outright and controlled much more indirectly. Although in theory the needs of the landless and landpoor were supposed to be assuaged by a share of communal lands, which constituted an estimated 25% of the total cultivated farm land in the North, the reality was that these lands were usually monopolized by local notables, who exploited them for their own profit.⁹

These statistics convey the picture of a social and economic structure which kept the majority of poor peasants in permanent economic bondage to the landlord and on the margin of survival. Rents usually ranged from 50 to 75% of total yields. Constantly in debt to his landlord or another usurer and often forced to

⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

⁸ Tran Phuong, ed., Cach Mang Ruong Dat (Agrarian Revolution in Vietnam), Hanoi: Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1968), table no. 8, p. 14.

⁹ See Henry, op. cit., p. 112; Pham Cao Duong, op. cit., pp. 74-83; Nguyen Huu Khang, La Commune Annamite (Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1946), p. 54. For specific cases of such exploitation of communal lands by local notables under the French see the richly detailed study by Tran Hoa Chanh and Vo Nguyen Giap, first published in 1937. Van De Dar Cay (The Peasant Problem), (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1959), second printing pp. 122-3.

beg enough rice to feed his family from one day to the next, the poor peasant was completely at the mercy of the landlord. When famine struck after flood or drought, it was the poor peasants who were most likely to starve.¹⁰

The revolution of August 1945 and the war of resistance against the French which followed did not fundamentally alter the land tenure system of North Vietnam, despite the fact that many large landowners who worked for the French had their land confiscated and redistributed. By 1953, according to a D. R. V. survey of 93 villages and 31 hamlets in 16 provinces, landlords still controlled 17% of the cultivated land while the poor peasants still controlled only 18% of the land.¹¹ Although the D. R. V. introduced limited reforms aimed at reducing the rents from the former 50 to 70% of the crop to 25% and reducing the interest on loans to poor peasants, compliance by the landlords was limited, even in areas which had long been liberated.

The reasons for the failure of these partial reforms were both political and economic. With the emphasis during the resistance on the need to maintain tight unity of all social strata to oppose the French, peasants frequently were not informed by local cadres of their new rights or of the necessity to struggle for them.¹² In fact, the official Lao Dong Party organ made it clear

¹⁰ See Ngo Vinh Long, Before the August Revolution, The Living Conditions of the Vietnamese Peasant under French Colonialism (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), see also Pham Cao Duong, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹¹ Tran Phuong, loc. cit.

¹² Le Hoai Tuyen, "Complete the Reduction of Rents, Carry out the Reduction of Debts", Su That (The Truth), no. 135, June 15, 1950, in Quoc Khang Chien Than Thanh cua Nhan Dan Viet Nam (The Magnificent Resistance War of the Vietnamese People), (Hanoi: Su That, 1950), Vol. II, p. 391.

that, although peasants should demand their rights, the method to be used was negotiation with the landlord, not coercion.¹³ As one article in a party organ put it, "If the peasants are not tactful, it will harm the spirit of unity of the resistance".¹⁴ With the peasants thus discouraged from taking direct action against them, many landowners simply used their much greater economic power to intimidate tenants who might hesitate to pay the rent demanded of them. This was done by refusing to rent a buffalo or loan paddy to the tenant when they were urgently needed or by threatening to throw uncooperative tenants off the land in favor of more submissive ones.¹⁵ Since tenants could not afford to run these risks, the early reform decrees probably did not help most of the poor peasants to any significant extent. The realization by the party leadership that little progress had been made in rent reduction is indicated by a 1950 article in a party organ which asked, "What has the August Revolution brought for the peasants?" and answered, "Very little".¹⁶

D. R. V. leaders felt that this situation could not be allowed to continue. For it was the poor and landless peasants who constituted the bulk of the recruits for the People's Army as the war entered its final stage; it was they who had made the heaviest sacrifice in lives to challenge the French presence.

¹³Tran Phuong, "The Land Reform", Pages of History, 1945-54, Vietnamese Studies, No. 7, 1966, p. 187.

¹⁴"Improving the Life of the Peasants". Sinh Hoat Noi Bo (Internal Activities), No. 7, April 1948, in Quoc Khang Chien, Vol. II, p. 34.

¹⁵Le Hoai Tuyen, op. cit., p. 392.

¹⁶Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2
Ibid.

General Vo Nguyen Giap had an urgent need to continue the rapid buildup of his army for the major battles which still lay ahead in the North. As Ho Chi Minh declared to the National Assembly in December 1953:

The more the Resistance War develops the more manpower and wealth it requires. It is the peasants who have contributed the main force of the resistance. We must liberate them from the feudal yoke and ensure the conditions for them to develop their potentiality in order to be able to mobilize this huge force in the service of the resistance until final victory.¹⁷

Thus it was the urgent need to mobilize the poor peasants for a final push to victory over the French which determined the precise timing of the beginning of the land reform. But it is clear that a radical agrarian reform would ultimately have been necessary in any case. For the land tenure system in North Vietnam was not only economically regressive and an obstacle to increased production but prevented the poor peasants who comprised the majority of the population from achieving the status and dignity promised by the Vietnamese Revolution.

But those writers who have portrayed the land reform as economically and socially unnecessary and as the product of the ideological fanaticism of the Vietnamese leaders have brushed aside the social and economic conditions which made it imperative.¹⁸ From his first study of the D. R. V. until his death in 1967,

¹⁷ Quoted in Doan Trong Truyen and Pham Phan Vinh, Building an Independent National Economy in Vietnam (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1964), p. 120.

¹⁸ The only exception to this generalization is the detailed study by Christine Pelzer White, Land Reform in North Vietnam, Agency for International Development Spring Review, Country Paper, June 1970.

Bernard Fall argued consistently that the land reform was unnecessary and therefore a doctrinaire political exercise. His unwavering disapproval of the land reform was based on the erroneous assumption that the problem of inequality of land ownership was "acute" in South Vietnam but not in the North.¹⁹ In his first analysis of the land reform, Fall asserted that 98.7% of the "total farm land area" in Tonkin was "tilled by owners"--a statement which would lead one to believe that only 1.3% of the farm land was worked by tenant farmers.²⁰ If true, it would indeed have made Tonkin's landholding system almost ideal. But the source from which he took the figure warned that 98.7% referred not to the percentage of farming units tilled by the owner (much less the "total farm land area" tilled by their owners) but to the percentage of landowners who did not rent out all their land.²¹ In other words 1.3% of all those who owned land were landlords whose only income was from renting it to others. Fall's statement completely misrepresented the real situation, which was that the majority of the peasants either owned no land or so little that they had to rent additional land from a landlord to survive. Yet the statement that 98.7% of the land was owned by those who tilled it was later used by the Saigon government in attacking the North Vietnamese land reform as economically needless.²²

¹⁹ Bernard Fall, The Viet Minh Regime, p. 118.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The Agriculture of French Indochina, U. S. Department of Agriculture, August 1950 (mimeo), p. 11. Despite this caveat, the same source nevertheless ventures the opinion that Tonkin could be considered as a country of "small peasants who till their own land"--a completely misleading representation of the land tenure system.

²² See Land Reform Failures in Communist North Vietnam, Special Edition, Review Horizons (Saigon, n.d.), p. 6

Fall should have been aware of the very high proportion of the landowners who did not own enough land to support their families, for he mentioned in the same study the fact that 61 percent of the landowners held less than one acre--an amount which his own calculations showed to be too small to support an average-sized peasant family of five.²³ Yet, as late as 1963, he was still asserting that in Tonkin, more than 98 percent of the tilled land was owned by small-holders and concluding that, "To speak of 'land reform' is farcical".²⁴

Hoang Van Chi, dismissing the need for radical land redistribution, cites figures from Henry showing that 91 percent of the landowners held less than 5 hectares in pre-revolutionary Tonkin.²⁵ His purpose is obviously to portray North Vietnam as a region of small-landowners. But this figure also misleads the reader, since it does not say anything about the landless and landpoor peasants who made up the majority of the population. In this manner, statistical data has been misused to make the distribution of land in the North appear more equitable.

The idea that the land tenure system in North Vietnam was one of contented small landowners was eagerly seized upon by official American spokesmen to discredit the North Vietnamese

²³ Fall, loc. cit. Even this statistic was used by another writer hostile to the land reform to show that there were few landlords to be confiscated in the North. Joseph Buttinger writes that "more than 60 percent of all land was in the hands of peasants owning around one acre", a statement which was wrong on two counts: first the statistic cited by Fall does not refer to land area but to landowners, and secondly, it specifically states that 61 percent of them owned less than one acre, not "around" one acre. Buttinger seems to have been unaware of the economic significance of a plot of less than one acre. See Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam, A Dragon Embattled, Vol. II. Vietnam at War (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 912

²⁴ Bernard Fall, "A 'Straight Zigzag': The Road to Socialism in North Vietnam", Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2 Barnett, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 216.

²⁵ Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, p. 149

land reform. The CIA's George Carver, in a 1966 essay in Foreign Affairs, wrote, "Though there were inequities in land ownership in North Vietnam, the Red River delta had the most extensive pattern of private ownership to be found anywhere in Asia."²⁶ This "extensive pattern of private ownership" did not, of course, insure that the peasants had sufficient food for subsistence, nor did it prevent the exploitation of peasant labor through oppressive tenancy arrangements. But Carver was either unaware of the basic data on the landowning system in the North or choose to ignore it. This misleading statement was only the prelude to his conclusion that the rationale for the land reform was "rooted in the dogmatic fanaticism of the Vietnamese Communist leadership".

The same authors who have attempted to portray the land tenure system in North Vietnam in such a way as to deny the need for land reform have also attempted to minimize the actual economic benefits which the poor peasants derived from the reform. Here again, it was Fall who took the greatest pains to prove the point with statistical evidence, and again that evidence was seriously abused.

Scorning the results of the land reform as "economically absurd", Fall argued that the resulting parcels of land were hopelessly inadequate. According to official D. R. V. statistics which he used in The Two Viet-Nams, the average share of land distributed to agricultural workers, poor peasants and some middle peasants was about one acre, which increased the total holding of the average poor peasant family of five to 1.75 acres and that of the average agricultural laborer's family to 1.80 acres.²⁷ Fall

²⁶ Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2 "The Faceless Viet Cons", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 44, No. 3 (April 1966), p. 353.

²⁷ The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Praeger 1964) p. 159.

asserts that at least one hectare (2.47 acres) was required by an average family for subsistence farming, without explaining how he reached this conclusion.²⁸ It appears that his 2.47-acre minimum derives from the figure of 800 grams of rice per day per person, which he had cited elsewhere as the minimum necessary for adequate nutrition.²⁹

But an investigation of the data on rice consumption in Vietnam reveals that this standard was quite extravagant: the average rice consumption per person per day in the much wealthier Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam, according to an official survey in 1959, was only about 470 grams per day.³⁰ Another survey of six different South Vietnamese provinces and Saigon carried out at about the same time discovered that the province with the highest average daily consumption of rice per person was Phong Dinh, with 472 grams, while the poorest provinces had an average of less than 400 grams.³¹ These figures compel us to look more closely at the alleged inadequacy of the plots distributed under the land reform program in the North.

As of 1960, just over half of the cultivated rice land in North Vietnam produced two crops annually. However, even those parcels which grew only one crop per year appear to have been

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Fall, The Viet Minh Regime, p. 116.

³⁰ Republic of Vietnam Nutritional Survey, October-December 1959. U. S. Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defense, Saigon, July 1960. Cited in Timothy Hallinan, Economic Prospects of the Republic of Vietnam, Rand Corporation Paper, P-4225, November 1969, p. 8.

³¹ Enquete sur la Consommation du Riz et des Conditions Sanitaires, Institute de la Statistique, Republic of Vietnam, August 1963, Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2

capable of producing enough rice to feed each family member as well as the average Mekong Delta peasant--even using an extremely conservative estimate of paddy production per acre.

The average per acre rice production in the 1956, 1957 and 1958, according to official D. R. V. statistics, was 752,729 and 828 kilos respectively.³² But even if we take a figure as low as 600 kilos of paddy as the annual production of one acre, we find that 1.75 acres would produce 1050 kilos of paddy per year, or 2875 grams per day. After subtracting twenty percent for loss of weight in the milling process, the 1.75 acres would provide roughly 2300 grams per day, or 460 grams for each member of an average peasant family of five.

The real meaning of this statistic can best be understood by comparing it not with Fall's arbitrary requirement of 800 grams of rice per day but with the 264 grams which Yves Henry's more detailed study reported as the average daily consumption of rice per person in Tonkin in 1932.³³ Since there had been no increase in the productivity of riceland in the two decades which preceded the land reform, it is likely that this figure represented the approximate level of consumption for the majority of peasants when the land reform program began. In dismissing the land reform program as "economically absurd", Fall simply ignored the evidence of a fundamental improvement in the nutrition of the average poor peasant family. In fact, it would appear that after

³²Agricultural Economy of North Vietnam, Economic Research Service, Foreign Regional Analysis Division, U. S. Department of Agriculture (Washington, D. C., 1965), p. 19.

³³Henry, op. cit., p. 334.

the land reform North Vietnamese peasants were at least as well fed as peasants in the much more fertile Mekong Delta, where the exploitative land tenure system had not yet been abolished.

A careful examination of the available data concerning the land tenure system in North Vietnam before the land reform as well as the actual economic benefits derived from the reform by the peasants indicates that there were sound social and economic reasons for a radical redistribution of land by the D. R. V. The land reform cannot be accurately portrayed, therefore, as merely the product of abstract ideology or as an "excuse" for the liquidation of social and political opponents.

CHAPTER III

LAND REFORM POLICIES: MYTHICAL AND REAL

Secondary sources which have portrayed the North Vietnamese land reform as an ideologically-inspired campaign of mass murder have based their case almost entirely on Hoang Van Chi's supposedly authoritative account. An examination of the truth or falsity of the "bloodbath" allegation, must begin, therefore, with Hoang Van Chi's description of the objectives and methods of the land reform.

That description can be briefly summarized in three basic assertions: 1) the Vietnamese Communist leaders, following the lead of their Communist mentors, used land reform as a means of physically liquidating the landlord and rich peasant classes; 2) in order to insure the completeness of the liquidation, they established arbitrary quotas of landlords to be discovered and executed in each village; 3) the murder and terror required to accomplish the task went so far as to engulf party members, resistance veterans and innocent people, with the result that tens or even hundreds of thousands of people were killed in a massive "bloodbath".

The central allegation in Chi's account is that the aim of D. R. V. leaders was the "liquidation of the defenseless landowning class".¹ In support of this charge, Chi quotes what he calls the famous slogan" of the Lao Dong Party regarding rural classes: "Depend completely on the poor and landless peasants, unite with the middle level peasants, seek an understanding with the rich peasants and liquidate the landlords."² The slogan in question

¹ Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, p. 158.

² Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2

was indeed "famous," since it represented the general policy of the party during the land reform, which every cadre was expected to understand thoroughly. But Mr. Chi misquotes the slogan and in the process completely misrepresents the D. R. V.'s policy toward the landlord class. The slogan actually said, "abolish the feudal regime of land ownership in a manner that is discriminating, methodical and under sound leadership".³ There was, in fact, no slogan calling on the people to "liquidate landlords".

This egregious misquotation puts in sharp relief Hoang Van Chi's attempt to distort the real objectives of the land reform, which were to abolish the hold of landlords over peasants and bring about a more equitable sharing of North Vietnam's agricultural resources. Although Hoang Van Chi's account puts great emphasis on the public denunciation and trial of landlords, it falsely portrays their actual function in the context of the D. R. V.'s basic policy toward the landlords.

Contrary to Mr. Chi's allegations, only those landlords who had committed serious crimes were to be publicly denounced by local peasants and put on trial. At the very beginning of the land reform process, in 1953, when peasants were first encouraged to denounce landlords who had committed crimes, Nhan Dan emphasized the need to avoid any indiscriminate attack on landowners. "The object of the struggle is not all the landowners but only those who refuse to abide by the policy, who refuse to reduce

³See the communique of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, October 29, 1956. The slogan "Overthrow the reactionary traitors and cruel notables" was also used until after the Geneva Agreement, but this is quite different from "Liquidate the landlords". See Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, pp. 115 and 141.

rents and debts", it stated. Those who essentially abided by the law, it added, "even though they have a few shortcomings", would be "pardoned".⁴

The August 1953 resolution of the Lao Dong Party Political Bureau, which set forth the political line to be followed during the land reform program, also makes clear the fundamental importance attached by the Viet Minh leaders to distinguishing among different kinds of landowners in order to avoid needlessly alienating those who had supported the resistance. "We must pay attention to distinctions in our actions regarding landowners," it stated, "fundamentally dividing the landowning class and patronizing in the correct manner those who have participated in the resistance, because the fewer enemies we have, the better."⁵

Policies toward the landlord class were to be based on a three-fold distinction, depending on both the past political attitudes and behavior of the landlord and whether or not he resisted the land reform program. Those who had actively participated in the struggle against the French were to be considered "resistance landowners" and were to receive special consideration and compensation in the redistribution of their excess land. Those who were not active in the Viet Minh but who did not resist the D. R. V.'s laws and had committed no serious offenses against peasants were to be classified as "ordinary landowners". They were to retain a piece of land to till themselves and could change their class status after three to five years of honest labor.⁶

⁴Nhan Dan, June 1-5, 1953, in Quoc Khang Chien, pp. 57-58.

⁵Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 144.

⁶Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2
Ibid., p. 158.

A final category of landowners was reserved for "traitors," "reactionaries," and "dishonest and wicked notables"--those who had committed more serious crimes. As a pamphlet issued in 1954 by the National Peasants' Association explained "A severe punishment is reserved for traitors, criminals, notorious citizens hated by local people, and reactionary elements who try to destroy our resistance and land reform movements." Those who received hard labor sentences of more than five years, it said, would not receive any land, but their families were entitled to enough land for subsistence provided they were not accomplices in the landowner's crimes.⁷

The sentences which could be meted out to landowners who violated various laws in connection with the rent reduction and land reform campaigns were fixed by Decree number 151 of April 12, 1953. Lesser offenses, such as demanding illegal rent or attempting to disperse land to evade the new law, were liable to punishments ranging from a warning to imprisonment up to one year. The destruction by a landowner of his own property "for the purpose of injuring the peasants or sabotaging production" was considered more serious and was punishable by imprisonment for a term from one to five years. Those actions aiming at disrupting the land reform through bribery, threats, rumors or other means were punishable by prison terms of from three to ten years. And the most serious crimes, punishable by prison terms ranging from ten

⁷Lay Ruong Cua Ai? Chia Ruong Cho Ai? (Whose Land Will Be Taken? To Whom Will It Be Given?), National Peasants' Liaison Committee, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Hanoi, 1954. Translated in Planning for Land Reform, Translation Series No. 21, Institute of Advanced Projects, East-West Center, Honolulu, 1967, p. 52.

years to life or by death sentence, included "organizing armed bands and directing them in agreement with the imperialists and puppet administration in order to commit acts of violence; attempts upon the lives of peasants and experienced workers; arson and destruction of dwellings, warehouses, foodstuffs, crops, or irrigation works; instigation or direction of disorders."⁸

After the restoration of peace in 1954, in conformity with the Geneva Agreement's provision forbidding reprisals, the slogan "Overthrow traitors, reactionaries, and dishonest and wicked notables" was replaced by the slogan "Overthrow dishonest and cruel notables." The procedures in the mass mobilization campaign were also changed to forbid any general accusations of political crimes and to allow only civil and criminal charges to be brought against landlords.⁹

Far from assuming all landlords to be guilty of some crime, the party's expectation clearly was that the vast majority of them would be classified as "ordinary" landowners and would therefore be able to redeem themselves through labor on their own land. As

⁸The complete text of the decree may be found in M. A. Gel'fer, Criminal Legislation in Foreign Socialist States (State Publishing House of Juridical Literature, 1957), pp. 88-89. Translated by Joint Publications Research Service, December 5, 1958 (DC-408).

⁹Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, pp. 129-130. Anita Lauve Nutt of the RAND Corporation has argued that the land reform program was merely a cover for political reprisals against those who had worked for the French. On the Question of Communist Reprisals in Vietnam, RAND Corporation P-4416, August 1970, p. 4. But like Hoang Van Chi and Bernard Fall, she seriously distorts a major document of the land reform. She asserts that the Population Classification Decree of 1953 "clearly indicated that all 'wicked landowners' who had to be eliminated were also 'traitors', i.e., French collaborators." The reader will find no such indication in the decree, which is published in full in Fall, The Viet Minh Regime, Appendix IV, pp. 172-78.

the same government pamphlet explained, "The reason we give land to landlords is to open the way for them to work for a living and to reform. This is the humane policy of our government."¹⁰ This basic policy, widely publicized in the Lao Dong party organs throughout the land reform, is far removed from the bloodthirsty objectives attributed to the party by Hoang Van Chi and others.

One of the standard allegations about the land reform, found in a number of sources, is that the D. R. V.'s leaders established in advance a "quota" of landlords to be denounced and executed in each village, which put pressure on cadres to "discover" landlords to be punished even where none in fact existed. The story first appeared in a July 1957 Time magazine article which clearly reflected the work of official propagandists in Saigon. Dramatically entitled, "Land of the Mourning Widows", it described how the land reform had turned into a "bloodbath" because "the prestige of each Communist cadre was made dependent on the number of landlords sent to the gallows".¹¹

It seems to be more than coincidence that at about the same time as the Time article appeared, Hoang Van Chi was working on a book, published in January 1958, in which he claimed that the Lao Dong Party Central Committee had established a quota of five death sentences in every hamlet in North Vietnam. He further asserted that Chinese advisers not only had "taught the peasants how to classify the population" but had also controlled the whole land reform "point by point".¹²

¹⁰ Lay Ruong Cua Ai?, loc. cit.

¹¹ Time, July 1, 1957, p. 27.

¹² Approved For Release 2003/12/02: CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2
Hoang Van Chi, The New Class in North Vietnam, pp. 5-7.

In his later book, Mr. Chi carried the story further, and in the process, contradicted his earlier version. Chinese advisers, he alleged, had insisted on a second classification of population, after the first one did not produce enough landowners to cull them. The result, he claimed, was that five times more landlords were found in each village, and that the Central Committee then gave orders for an increase in death sentences from one to five per village.¹³ Since the Vietnamese village is made up of several hamlets, this revised version of the "quota" allegation represented a significant retreat from his earlier claim that the quota was set at five per hamlet.

Hoang Van Chi's unsubstantiated account of landlord quotas was quickly picked up and presented as fact by other propagandists working to discredit the North Vietnamese leadership as blood-thirsty and dogmatic. Even before Mr. Chi's book was published in the U. S., a certain William Kaye, identified only as a "specialist in Asian and Communist agrarian problems"--the usual words used to conceal the identity of U. S. intelligence analysts--wrote, "A predetermined number of landlords had to be found in each village, even if they did not, in fact, exist."¹⁴ The CIA's George Carver similarly charged that "each land reform team had a pre-assigned quota of death sentences and hard labor imprisonments to mete out and these quotas were seldom underfulfilled".¹⁵

¹³ Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, p. 166.

¹⁴ William Kaye, "A Bowl of Rice Divided: The Economy of North Vietnam", in Honey (ed.), North Vietnam Today, p. 107.

¹⁵ Carver, op. cit., p. 353.

A more important voice in swaying American public opinion was that of Bernard Fall. Apparently drawing upon Hoang Van Chi's account, he wrote, in The Two Viet-Nams, "Local party officials began to deliver veritable quotas of landlords and rich peasants, even in areas where the difference between the largest and smallest village plots was a quarter of an acre".¹⁶ Thus the legend of the "landlord quotas" was well on its way to becoming history.

Scholarly objectivity, however, surely required more evidence than Hoang Van Chi's undocumented account before presenting the landlord quota story as fact. No one who was familiar with the concepts and methods employed by the Lao Dong Party or had studied the basic party and government documents of the land reform period could have seriously entertained the notion that Hanoi would call for the classification, arrest or execution of an arbitrarily high number of people.

In fact, the most comprehensive account of the land reform program available provides detailed evidence that the Party's policy was precisely the opposite of that attributed to it by Mr. Chi. Far from having demanded a "quota" of "dishonest and wicked notables" to be executed in each village, the party leadership acted at the beginning of the campaign to limit the number of landlords which could be brought before the public for denunciation and trial in any one village. The reason for this action, according to this account, was that during the preliminary phase

¹⁶Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 155. Although Fall did not cite any source for his "landlord quota" charge in this popular American work, he had cited Mr. Chi's The New Class in North Vietnam as a primary source on the land reform in North Vietnam in earlier work in French. See Fall, Le Viet Minh (Paris: Librarie Armand Colin, 1960), p. 291, note. 35.

of the rent reduction campaign, carried out in a few selected villages in 1953, the peasants were denouncing on the average from 10 to 15 landlords for crimes in each village.¹⁷

Fearing that the denunciation of this many landlords in the villages would complicate and lengthen the land reform campaign and arouse unnecessary opposition among potential allies in the landlord class, the Political Bureau decided in August 1953, to "narrow the attack". During the second phase of the rent reduction campaign the land reform cadres were ordered to bring only those landlords with the most serious or the most numerous charges against them before these public denunciation sessions. Specifically, each village was permitted to bring no more than three landlords before such denunciation sessions.¹⁸ The other landlords accused of crimes were to be allowed to undergo self-criticism before the Province Administrative Committee and then to admit their mistakes before the village Congress of Peasants Representatives, which would then demand that the landlords make restitution for any wrongs done to peasants.

As a result of this procedure, according to this D. R. V. account, each village in which the rent reduction campaign was carried out had an average of 2.1 landowners publicly denounced and tried. An average of 3.8 others were brought before the Congress

¹⁷ Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 125.

¹⁸ Ibid. Only those villages which had a population of more than 10,000 people were allowed to bring four or five landlords before public denunciation sessions. (The average population of a village in North Vietnam is approximately 3,000 people.)

of Farmers Representatives on lesser charges.¹⁹ In 1875 villages the number of landowners tried for serious crimes was 3938 or 8.8 percent of the total number of those classified as landowners.²⁰

But, as we have already seen, only those crimes involving conspiring with the "imperialists and puppet administration," attempts on the lives of peasants or cadres or destruction of public or peasants' property were punishable by prison terms longer than ten years. And the figures released by the D. R. V. after the completion of the 1953-54 phase of the land reform in August 1954 show that death sentences represented under ten percent of the total number of sentences handed down by the land reform courts. The statistics for 836 villages which had gone through the process of mass mobilization for land reform showed that a total of about 1350 landowners had been denounced for their crimes of whom 135 had been given death sentences, while about 1,200 were given prison terms.²¹

The story of "landlord quotas", therefore, is contradicted by the official documentary evidence concerning both the procedures

¹⁹Ibid., p. 126. The figure of 2.1 public denunciations for the average village during the mass mobilization for rent reduction is consistent with figures for several provinces published at the time. In Thanh Hoa province, where Hoang Van Chi was teaching school in 1954, it was reported that in 78 villages a total of 187 "dishonest and wicked notables" had been denounced for their crimes", while in Nghe An and Ha Tinh, a total of 189 landowners were denounced publicly. Dividing the total numbers of landlords denounced by the number of villages, we get averages of 2.4 per village in Thanh Hoa and 2.2 per villages in Nghe An and Ha Tinh. Nhan Dan, April 1-3, 1954 and August 1-3, 1954.

²⁰Tran Phuong, loc cit.

²¹Radio Hanoi, August 25, 1954, cited in J. Price Gittinger, "Communist Land Reform in North Vietnam", p. 116. Nhan Dan, August 13-18, 1954, reported figures of 1,215 landowners denounced publicly in 826 villages.

for handling these landowners accused of crimes, and the actual number of landlords tried, sentenced and executed.

Hoang Van Chi's effort to portray the "quotas" as a result of Chinese Communist direction of the program must be seen in the context of the propaganda campaign carried out by the Diem government's psychological warfare organs during this period. Diem wanted to convince his own people and the American public that North Vietnam had fallen under the control of the Chinese Communists, hoping to exploit politically the animosity toward the Chinese prevalent in both countries. As early as August 1954, the newly-created Diem regime was already broadcasting a wholly fabricated story of 50,000 Communist Chinese troops in North Vietnam, along with Chinese advisers who, in the words of the anonymous scriptwriter, "demanded grand receptions with beautiful young girls to entertain them, rice and meat of quality, and so forth".²² The same broadcast linked the supposed Chinese menace to North Vietnam with the land reform program, citing reports of 5,000 Chinese administrative cadre preparing to go to Vietnam to train Viet Minh land reform teams.

But in 1956, Saigon's propaganda began claiming that the Chinese advisers were actually running the North Vietnamese government. In August 1956, Diem's embassy in Washington carried an article in its weekly bulletin, News From Viet-Nam, which claimed reports by refugees from the North of great resentment on the part of North Vietnamese people toward the "bellicose, arrogant attitude of Red Chinese cadres who are entering North Vietnam in

²² Saigon Radio, August 6, 1954.

great numbers to take up important government and economic positions".²³
Thus Hoang Van Chi's first published account of the land reform, written in 1957, put the Chinese advisers in charge of the program from the beginning and controlling it "point by point", and not merely training Viet Minh cadres.²⁴

Hoang Van Chi's account of Chinese supervision over the land reform was promoted enthusiastically by certain American and British authors interested in portraying the D. R. V. as being under Chinese influence. The mysterious William Kaye, for example, wrote that the landlords were tried "under the watchful eye of Chinese advisers".²⁵ P. J. Honey, the British specialist on Vietnam who had introduced Hoang Van Chi's book to American readers, asserted that "each of the agrarian reform teams were (sic) advised and supervised by Chinese instructors".²⁶ George Carver of the CIA repeated the argument, although with some qualification, stating that "some" of the land reform teams "almost certainly had Chinese advisers".²⁷ By that time, American propagandists were giving greater emphasis to the theme of supposed Chinese influence over the D. R. V., but even Carver apparently felt that Hoang Van Chi's allegation of the Chinese "point by point" control of the land reform program was going too far.

²³ News From Viet-Nam, August 4, 1956.

²⁴ Cf. note 12.

²⁵ Kaye, loc. cit.

²⁶ P. J. Honey, Communism in North Vietnam, p. 12.

²⁷ Carver, loc. cit.

Another class said to have been included in the D. R. V.'s
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plan for liquidation is the rich peasant class. According to
Hoang Van Chi, this was accomplished simply by classifying all
rich peasants and even "strong middle level peasants" as "land-
lords".²⁸ Bernard Fall made the same charge, writing that rich
peasants, to whom he referred as "kulaks", were "disposed of in
the usual way through land reform tribunals".²⁹

The assertion that rich peasants as well as landlords were
targetted for liquidation again misrepresents basic D. R. V.
policies toward the wealthier strata of the rural population.
During the resistance against the French, the rich peasants, like
elements of the landlord class, were viewed by the party leader-
ship as basically "anti-imperialist" and were thus allies of the
party within the "National United Front".³⁰ But there was a
second reason for a conciliatory policy towards the rich peasant
class, even during the land reform campaign. For the rich peasants
were, in Marxist-Leninist terms, essentially "capitalist" rather
than "feudal" in character, since they exploited other peasants
primarily by hiring their labor rather than renting land to them.³¹
For both of these reasons, therefore, the rich peasants were not
a target of the land reform campaign.

²⁸ Chi, From Communism to Colonialism, p. 166.

²⁹ Fall, "A 'Straight Zigzag'", p. 217.

³⁰ A major party document dated 1948, described the party's
policy toward rural classes during the resistance with the follow-
ing slogan: "Rely on the middle poor peasants, unite with the
rich peasants, isolate the landowners and oppose the French imper-
ialists". See "Tinh Hinh va Nhiem Vu De Cuong Dua Ra Dai Hoi Toan
Quoc" (Situation and Tasks to be Presented to the National Congress),
in Documents on Vietnamese Communism, Wason Film, 2584, Cornell
University Library.

³¹ Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, pp. 142-3; Tran
Phuong, "The Land Reform Campaign", Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2 Dan,
September 11-15, 1953, in Quoc Khang Chien, p. 121.

On the contrary the policy during the land reform was summarized by the slogan "ally with the rich peasant". Even though some rich peasants had collaborated with the French, and like landlords, had abused poor peasants in the past, the Party Central Committee ordered that no rich peasants be brought before the public to be denounced. Again the purpose was to "narrow the struggle" and to concentrate exclusively on the "dishonest and wicked notables" of the landlord class.³² No land belonging to rich peasants was to be confiscated unless it was rented out to poor peasant while the hiring of labor was to be allowed to continue. Moreover, rich peasants were to be allowed to vote and to be elected to village people's councils.³³

Hoang Van Chi's final charge about the land reform program is that it was accompanied by a "deliberate excess of terror" which would "annihilate" any adverse reaction.³⁴ As evidence of this intention, Mr. Chi alleges the land reform campaign used the slogan "Better kill ten innocent people than let one enemy escape".³⁵ This alleged slogan, which bears no resemblance to any public statement by the D. R. V. or the Lao Dong Party, was first published in 1957, not in Hanoi, but in the official newspaper of Ngo Dinh Diem's National Revolutionary Movement, Cach Mang Quoc Gia.³⁶ It was said to have been quoted in a speech

³² Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 125.

³³ Ibid., p. 144; Nhan Dan, June 1-5, 1953, in Quoc Khang Chien, p. 58.

³⁴ Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, p. 211.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 167 and 213.

³⁶ Hoang Van Chi, The New Class in North Vietnam, p. 134.

delivered in Hanoi by Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Hanoi.

The authenticity of this document, however, is doubtful, for the evidence indicates that it was fabricated by the Saigon regime for psychological warfare purposes.³⁷ In publishing the text of the alleged speech in The New Class in North Vietnam, Hoang Van Chi explained that it "fell into the hands of a Vietnamese correspondent in Rangoon, who sent it to Saigon where it was published in full in many papers".³⁸ In response to questioning about this story, however, Mr. Chi admitted that he received his own original copy of the document not from a Vietnamese correspondent or a newspaper but from an official of the psychological warfare office of the Ministry of Information several months before it was ever published in the Saigon press.³⁹ In fact, the "document" appears to have been used with great effectiveness by Diem's psychological warfare specialists in selling Time magazine the idea that the

³⁷The fabrication of documents attributed to the Communists is normal practice in South Vietnam. In 1970, the Ministry of Information distributed a leaflet comparing land reform programs in North and South Vietnam which quoted Truong Chinh as saying over Hanoi Radio on October 30, 1956: "The total number of innocent people who were killed after each phase of denunciation was 200,000". Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Information, "Comparison of Land Reform Policies of South Vietnam and North Vietnam", December 1, 1970. (English translation by the Ministry). A check of Nhan Dan, Radio Hanoi and Vietnam News Agency confirms that no such statement was made.

³⁸Hoang Van Chi, loc. cit.

³⁹Interview with Hoang Van Chi, May 26, 1972. Tran Van Dinh, who was South Vietnamese Consul General in Rangoon in 1957 and is now living in Washington, D. C., says that the document originated in Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen's "Office of Social and Political Research", a cover for Diem's secret police and counterintelligence agency. According to Dinh, it was sent by Dr. Tuyen's office to all Embassies. Interview, Washington, D. C., April 27, 1972.

land reform was carried out with a "deliberate excess of terror". Time used the "better kill ten innocent" slogan and attributed it to Politbureau member Truong Chinh himself, apparently without checking on the quotation's origin.⁴⁰ Finally it found its way into official U. S. propaganda: the CIA's George Carver cited this alleged slogan as the one which guided the land reform program.⁴¹

Hoang Van Chi's portrayal of the land reform as a dogmatic plan to liquidate landlords by means of arbitrary quotas and a "deliberate excess of terror" thus completely misrepresents both the policies and procedures of the D. R. V. land reform program. The allegations which form the core of the myth of the "bloodbath" turn out upon investigation to be based on misquotation, a crucial document emanating from the Diem government rather than from Hanoi, and his own self-contradictory testimony.

None of these allegations is supported by a single authentic document. On the contrary, the documents which are available tell a completely different story. They show that the D. R. V. policy was to punish only those landlords who had committed the most serious crimes and to make it possible for the vast majority of the landlords to become productive citizens. They show that the death sentence was used in only a small fraction of the trials of "dishonest and cruel notables".

The land reform policy which thus emerges from the evidence is one characterized by caution, practicality and the desire to

⁴⁰ Time, July 1, 1957, p. 26.

⁴¹ Carver, op. cit., p. 355.

prevent unjust and needless loss of life or liberty. It must be considered a major failure of Western scholarship that the widely-used sources on the land reform fail to reflect this well-documented reality.

CHAPTER IV

ERRORS: MYTHICAL AND REAL

Hoang Van Chi has put great emphasis on the supposed public admissions by D. R. V. leaders and press of massive and indiscriminate executions during the land reform as irrefutable evidence that there was indeed a "bloodbath" in the North. He quotes from what he claims are D. R. V. documents which appear to make such admission, and Bernard Fall and J. Price Gittinger have cited other such documents in characterizing the land reform. These alleged admissions have played an important role in causing American readers to accept uncritically the "bloodbath" myth.

Mr. Chi and other authors have capitalized on the fact that, three months after the land reform was completed, the Lao Dong party leadership launched a major campaign for the "rectification of errors" committed during the land reform. That unprecedented campaign, which followed months of open criticism in Nhan Dan of the implementation of the land reform program in many areas, was begun with a series of statements by party and governmental leaders admitting that "serious mistakes" had been committed.

But it is important to examine carefully what the documents admitting these mistakes actually did say and what they did not say. For it will be seen that these statements do not confirm Hoang Van Chi's charges of indiscriminate killing of innocent people. Like his description of the party's policies regarding land reform, Mr. Chi's account of the admission of errors of the land reform systematically distorts key D. R. V. documents.

Well before the land reform was completed at the end of July 1956, the process of correcting the mistakes of the land reform was already begun, though in an unsystematic fashion.¹ Three months after the end of the land reform campaign, however, the party leadership decided that the correction of the errors had to be a top priority program, and that it had to be based on clear directives from the top. At the end of October 1956, therefore, the party Central Committee began the campaign for "rectification of errors" of the land reform, formally admitting the mistakes and placing primary responsibility for the errors on the officials assigned to supervise the whole process. As Nhan Dan editorialized, "The mistakes were due to shortcomings in leadership as a consequence of which a number of policies advocated either were not sufficiently concrete or were not carefully worked out." Because of "shortcomings in the guidance of the application of policies", it continued, there was "insufficient understanding of many policies of the Central Committee", and the land reform administration "formed a separate system with excessively broad powers".²

Responsibility for guidance and control of the land reform and the party reorganization which accompanied it fell upon certain members of the Central Committee, and as a result of the errors, those members were forced to step down from their positions. The Ministers of State for Agriculture and Interior, respectively, were forced to resign, and Truong Chinh, said by

¹ See for examples, Nhan Dan, June 29, 1956; August 20, 1956; August 24, 1956, September 6, 1956; September 8, 1956.

² Nhan Dan, October 30, 1956, carried by Vietnam News Agency, Hanoi Radio, October 30, 1956.

the Central Committee to bear overall responsibility for the mistakes as Secretary General of the Party, submitted his resignation after undertaking self-criticism before his colleagues.³

According to the party's own account, the failure of leadership had left the way open for the least politically conscious and least reliable elements of the poor peasant class to control the conduct of the land reform program in many villages. The cause of this development is easily explainable: throughout the resistance war the tendency of party cadres had been to compromise with the wealthier rural strata, even at the expense of the poor peasants' interests. When the rent reduction and land reform campaign began, therefore, land reform cadres were urged by the party to avoid this "right deviation".⁴ As a result, the cadres swung to the other extreme of "left deviation", giving complete freedom to the poorest peasants to satisfy their immediate economic and political interests, often at the expense not only of landowners but of rich and middle peasants, including resistance fighters and party members.⁵ The cadres were guilty of "following the masses", in the words of a later D. R. V. account, "rather than standing solidly on the position of the party."⁶

Often this meant that the land reform teams sent to the villages did not rely on local party cadres who had been trained during the resistance--even those from the poor peasant class--but

³ Ibid.

⁴ See for example, the article "Correct Mistakes of Rightist Thinking" in Nhan Dan, January 13, 1956.

⁵ Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 197.

⁶ Ibid.

turned instead to poor peasant elements who had previously been relatively inactive in the revolution.⁷ These peasants, given a significant political role in their villages for the first time, apparently abused it in a variety of ways: guidelines put out by the Central Committee for dealing with landowners, rich peasants and middle peasants were systematically violated; proper distinctions were not made among landowners on the basis of their political attitudes; rich peasants were treated as landowners, and middle peasants were discriminated against; crop areas and land yields were overestimated and peasants often classified in a higher social stratum than was justified. Poor peasants not only denounced landowners who had committed crimes against them but also unjustly classified landowners as "dishonest and wicked notables" in order to make more land available for distribution.⁸

Similar political tendencies created serious problems for a parallel effort to reorganize local party branches by taking in large numbers of poor peasants. Many of the older, better trained, party cadres were attacked by newcomers as reactionaries, forced out of the party and even jailed, with the result that some of the oldest party cells were left in disarray and some even dissolved completely.⁹

As if the combination of land reform and party reorganization were not enough, beginning in late 1955, the land reform cadres were also given the task of uncovering "counterrevolutionaries"

⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 190-191. Nhan Dan, August 24, 1956 and October 30, 1956.

⁹ Nhan Dan, July 2, 1956; October 7, 1956; November 22, 1956. Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, November 1, 1956.

in the villages. Convinced that the Diem regime and its American sponsors would try to leave espionage and sabotage organizations in the North after the departure of the French Union Forces, the Central Land Reform Committee decided in August 1955 to combine the land reform campaign with "repression of counterrevolutionaries".¹⁰ And this decision exacerbated the existing tendencies of the newly powerful groups in the villages to attack already established party members as well as ordinary citizens. As the Central Committee of the Party said in its communique, "Land reform cadres wrongly estimated the force of the enemy. Many of them failed to distinguish the stubborn reactions of the most refractory elements of the landlord class from the strained and intricate situation due to the bad application of the party's line and policies."¹¹ In other words, protests against abuses by the land reform cadres too often resulted in the protesters' being jailed merely on suspicion of being "counterrevolutionaries" or "saboteurs". By September 1956, the Central Committee realized that the combining of land reform and "repression of counterrevolutionaries" had been a major error which had increased the level of confusion and conflict in both land distribution and party reorganization.¹²

¹⁰Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 187. This campaign to uncover subversives in the newly liberated areas, while exaggerated and ultimately self-defeating, was based on real fears of sabotage of the land reform campaign by agents of the Diem government or the Americans. In March 1956, Nhan Dan reported that in Ha Dong province someone was "spreading the rumor that U. S.-Diem troops are about to come, and you'll have to move again, so the land reform is not final." Nhan Dan, March 2, 1956.

¹¹Communique of the Central Committee, October 29, 1956, Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, October 29, 1956.

¹²Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2
Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 188.

But although grievances caused by the errors of the land reform were widespread in the countryside, the only documented case of open violence against the D. R. V. which has been linked to the land reform program actually occurred more than three months after the land reform was completed. The violence involved four predominantly Catholic villages in Quynh Luu district, Nghe An province, in which violations of party policy respecting freedom of worship may have further strained already tense relations between the D. R. V. and Catholics.¹³ But there is solid evidence from International Control Commission reports on the district that, although there was probably widespread resentment among Catholics at having been prevented from emigrating to the South, there was no pattern of violence against Catholics during the period of the land reform. The I. C. C. reported in 1957 having received nearly 1,000 petitions from individuals in Quynh Luu who had applied unsuccessfully for permits to move to the South. But not one petition was received alleging political reprisals in the form of imprisonment or execution.¹⁴

¹³ Little reliable information is available concerning the so-called "Quynh Luu Revolt" of November 1956. The versions of the incident given by Fall and by the Diem government agree in emphasizing that the denial of permission to move to the South was a major factor in the revolt. See Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 156; News From Viet-Nam, December 1, 1956, p. 3. The D. R. V. version admits that "reactionaries" had "availed themselves of the mistakes committed in the Agrarian Reform in the Catholic compatriots area to arouse dissatisfaction among a number of compatriots" Vietnam News Agency, Radio Hanoi, November 16, 1956. The Diem government claimed that "several hundred" people were killed by government troops during the fighting, while the D. R. V. version claimed "a few" persons were killed or wounded. The truth is undoubtedly somewhere in between.

¹⁴ Eighth Interim Report of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam (Vietnam No. 1 [1958] Command Paper, 508) London: Great Britain Parliamentary Sessional Papers, XXX (1957/58), p. 8.
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The Party leadership clearly viewed the implementation of the land reform as an administrative disaster which had caused a serious political setback in the short term. It had seriously damaged many local party branches as well as harming the prestige of the party in general. But the admission of these errors and their consequences, embarrassing though it was, provides no support to the "bloodbath" myth. For the documents of the period contain no indication that the party had ever wavered from its original objectives, or that the execution or imprisonment of innocent people had been officially encouraged.

Moreover, although the D. R. V. government pledged to make full restitution in cases of unjust imprisonment or execution,¹⁵ there is no documentary evidence that there had been the kind of indiscriminate execution of innocent people so often alleged. Hoang Van Chi and others have not, in fact, used the actual texts of documents relating to the errors of the land reform campaign but have used instead gross mistranslations and misrepresentations of these documents.

The most serious case of such misrepresentation is Hoang Van Chi's translation of General Vo Nguyen Giap's speech of October 29, 1956, in which he discussed the resolution of the Tenth Central Committee Congress.¹⁶ This document is especially

¹⁵ See the statement by the D. R. V. government before the 6th Meeting of the National Assembly, Nhan Dan, January 4, 1957.

¹⁶ Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, pp. 209-210. Mr. Chi inaccurately refers to it as a speech read before the 10th Congress of the Central Committee. In fact, it was read before a public meeting of the citizens of Hanoi, according to the official text.

significant, because it was the first major discussion by a high party official of the mistakes committed during the land reform program. As translated by Hoang Van Chi, the most important passages in the speech, are those in which Giap appears to admit not only that the mistakes outlined above had been committed but that the use of terror, as well as torture and murder of innocent people, were normal practices which had simply been carried "too far" in the land reform.

According to Mr. Chi's translation, Giap said, "We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front, and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread". And in another passage, General Giap is quoted as saying, "Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganization". Mr. Chi's translations imply that the execution of innocent people was part of the plan, since the error is said to lie in executing "too many honest people." Likewise, the impression is conveyed that terror was tolerated, if not encouraged, but that it became "too widespread", going beyond the bounds set by the party leadership.

But a careful study of the original text of Giap's speech reveals that Mr. Chi's translation is one of his most flagrant abuses of documentary evidence. When translated accurately, what Giap said in the place cited by Mr. Chi was this: "We committed deviations in not emphasizing the necessity for caution and for avoiding the unjust disciplining of innocent

people. We attacked on too wide a front, and used excessive repressive measures on a wide scale."¹⁷ And the later passage, should have been translated, "Even coercion was used in order to carry out party reorganization".

Thus Mr. Chi's translation contains no less than eight significant mistranslations in three crucial sentences, which have the cumulative effect of substantially altering the meaning of Giap's statement. (See exhibit opposite) Giap is made to appear as admitting that the party had used murder and terror against innocent people in the implementation of land reform.¹⁸ This distortion by mistranslation has undoubtedly convinced those who could not translate the original Vietnamese text that the party did indeed use a "deliberate excess of terror". Hoang Van Chi's translation provided such good anti-Hanoi propaganda, in fact, that the Department of State, in drawing up its March 1966 legal brief to justify U. S. intervention in Vietnam, cited it as evidence that "Communist leaders were running a police state in which execution, terror and torture were commonplace" ¹⁹

In his attempt to find party documents showing evidence of mass executions of innocent people, Hoang Van Chi also quotes a

¹⁷The complete text of Giap's speech is published in Nhan Dan, October 31, 1956. The translation is my own, but has been checked with several Vietnamese for accuracy.

¹⁸When I interviewed Hoang Van Chi in May 1972, I questioned him about his inaccurate and misleading translation of several words. He defended his translations by saying, "I tried to convey the real meaning more than the literal translations". He asserted, moreover, that this was the practice followed by all Vietnamese working for the Voice of America in translating Communist documents.

¹⁹Department of State, Office of the Legal Adviser, "The Legality of United States Participation in the Defense of Vietnam", March 4, 1966 (mimeo), p. 33.

GIAP'S SPEECH ON LAND REFORM ERRORS

Mistranslations of Key Passages

<u>VIETNAMESE TEXT*</u>	<u>ACCURATE TRANSLATION</u>	<u>CHI'S TRANSLATION</u>
"(d) . . . đã phạm lệch lạc . . . "	"committed deviations . . . "	"we committed too many deviations . . . "
" . . . không nhân manh phải thận trọng, tránh . . . "	" . . . in not empha- sizing the necessity for caution and for avoiding . . . "	(Omitted)
" . . . xử trí oan những người ngay . . . "	" . . . the unjust dis- ciplining of innocent people . . . "	"and executed too many honest people . . . "
(not in original)	(not in original)	" . . . seeing enemies everywhere . . . "
" . . . dùng những biện pháp trấn áp quá đáng . . . "	" . . . used exces- sive repressive measures . . . "	" . . . resorted to terror . . . "
" . . . một cách phổ biến."	" . . . on a wide scale."	" . . . which became far too widespread."
"(h) . . . thậm chí dùng phương pháp truy bức . . . "	" . . . even coercive measures . . . "	" . . . worse still, torture . . . "
" . . . để làm công tác chỉnh đốn."	" . . . were used to carry out party re- organization."	" . . . came to be regarded as normal practice during party reorganization."

*from Nhan Dan, October 31, 1956.

Nhan Dan article as saying,

Nghe An is the province in which party organizations existed as early as 1930. But it is in the same province that the most serious mistakes have been made, and the greatest number of party members have been executed during the land reform.²⁰

But the only article in Nhan Dan which refers to land reform in Nghe An says merely that "serious mistakes" had been committed in Interzone Four which had caused "heavy losses and pain" to the party branches in that region. The article continued:

There are party branches established in 1930 in Nghe An and Ha Tinh, or challenged during the resistance in newly liberated villages in Quang Binh, or matured in the movement to serve the front lines in Thanh Hoa, which have been dissolved.²¹

Nowhere in this discussion of the mistakes committed in Nghe An and other provinces of Interzone Four--or in any other article of the period--is there any sentence remotely resembling the one quoted by Hoang Van Chi, nor is there any reference to executions of party members. One is forced to conclude, therefore, that Mr. Chi's quotation is fraudulent.

Other American scholars misrepresented the documents dealing with the correction of errors because they could not translate the documents themselves and relied on translations provided in Saigon. It is now apparent that from the 1956-57 period a number of the articles in Nhan Dan were seriously "doctored" in the process of translation and summarization by Vietnamese personnel.

²⁰ From Colonialism to Communism, p. 225.

²¹ Nhan Dan, November 22, 1956. There was no article even vaguely resembling the one described by Hoang Van Chi in the November 21 issue cited in his footnote.

Bernard Fall's brief account of the North Vietnamese land reform in The Two Viet-Nams is marred by his use of one such translation. He cites a Nhan Dan article which, in his words, "openly admitted that loyal party members, including UBKC [resistance committee] chairmen, had been executed and besmirched".²² But the text of the article to which he refers--a long, detailed and critical account of the implementation of land reform in To Hieu village, Ha Dong province--does not support this characterization.²³ It discusses the injustices done to many peasants, including party members and leaders, who were arrested on suspicion of sabotaging the land reform program, as well as other mistakes, but it makes no mention of executions of these persons. As for the local party secretary in To Hieu, (not the Chairman of the resistance committee as stated by Fall), he was indeed unjustly convicted of being a "dishonest and cruel notable", and of having led an "organization of saboteurs". But he was not executed. On the contrary, after it was discovered by higher officials that his arrest was a mistake he was elected to represent the village in the province conference on land reform.

The fact that the substance of this Nhan Dan article was completely misrepresented does not mean, of course, that no party member or resistance veteran was unjustly executed. But it is indicative of the way in which the popular image of the land reform has been shaped by nonexistent or distorted documents that this same article was later cited by historian Joseph Buttinger as

²²Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 158.

²³Nhan Dan, August 24, 1956.

evidence for his charge that the Lao Dong party did nothing to control the "murderous momentum" of the land reform program.²⁴

Another American source which has contributed to the "blood-bath" myth by distorting the documents of the "mistakes correction" campaign is the 1959 study by J. Price Gittinger, U. S. land reform adviser in Saigon at the time. Gittinger's article is often cited as an authoritative work on the North Vietnamese land reform because it cites numerous articles from Nhan Dan. But, like Bernard Fall, Gittinger could not read Vietnamese himself, and so he relied on the translations made available by the U. S. mission. Unfortunately, some of the reports from Nhan Dan which he uses to prove indiscriminate executions had been substantially altered in the translation.

The most serious of these cases involves an August 1957 article in Nhan Dan which according to Gittinger admits that "30 percent of the persons convicted as landlords were erroneously condemned".²⁵ As stated by Gittinger, the statement makes no sense, since individuals were not "convicted" or "condemned" solely because they were landlords, but only for having committed specific crimes. But the Nhan Dan article does not refer either to erroneous classifications or to erroneous convictions. What it says is, "The reclassification of those wrongly classified as landlords is being carried out rather fundamentally. Every village has corrected some mistakes. Some have corrected their mistakes relatively less, about thirty percent, while others have

²⁴ Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Political History (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 196.

²⁵ Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2
Gittinger, loc. cit.

corrected over fifty percent of them."²⁶ But like the story of "landlord quotas" this alleged 30% innocent victims of execution was to become part of the official "bloodbath" myth: William Kaye drew on Gittinger's citation to write in 1962, "Some years later it was admitted [by the D. R. V.] that nearly one-third of the persons tried and convicted as landlords had been condemned in error".²⁷

Still other frequently-cited "facts" about the correction of errors campaign also turn out, on closer examination, to be without foundation. According to Hoang Van Chi, in his September 1956 speech, General Giap referred to 12,000 party members wrongly imprisoned or sent to concentration camps in the course of the land reform, who would be released.²⁸ Carver cites the same figure and source.²⁹ But a careful reading of the original text reveals that Giap made no mention of the number of people unjustly jailed and about to be freed.

Coincidentally, George Chaffard reported that the D. R. V. Council of Ministers announced on November 1, 1956 the release of 12,000 civil and military detainees.³⁰ But, once again, a close reading of the lengthy government statement issued on that day discloses no mention of any such number.³¹ Time magazine carried

²⁶ Nhan Dan, August 13, 1957.

²⁷ Kaye, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁸ Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, p. 214.

²⁹ Carver, loc. cit.

³⁰ George Chaffard, Indochine, Dix Ans d'Independence (Paris: Calmann-Devy, 1964), p. 141.

³¹ Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000600010016-2
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statement on steps to be taken to correct errors committed in the land reform, see Nhan Dan, November 2, 1956.

yet a third version of the phantom 12,000 figure in July 1957: 12,000 "peasants", it reported, were about to be freed, but did not attribute the figure to any specific source.³² The same article included the undocumented and unsubstantiated statement that "some 15,000" people had been killed in error during the land reform, a figure which was then picked up by Gittinger in his 1959 article.³³ Journalist Tibor Mende evasively cited "estimates worthy of confidence" in claiming that from 12,000 to 15,000 persons were killed in error.³⁴ These recurring figures, no doubt come from some common source, but it certainly was not the Hanoi government.

³²Time, July 1, 1957, p. 27.

³³Ibid., Gittinger, op. cit., p. 118.

³⁴Tibor Mende, "Les Deux Vietnams: Laboratoires de l'Asie", Esprit (June 1957), p. 941.

CHAPTER V

THE "ESTIMATES": QUANTIFYING THE MYTH

By his systematic distortion of the basic facts of the land reform, Hoang Van Chi laid the basis for the public acceptance of certain irresponsible figures on the number of deaths caused by the land reform. These figures, for which neither concrete evidence nor explanation have ever been offered, were based in each case on wholly subjective judgment, false information and assumptions, or simple propaganda. Yet they represent virtually the only data available to most Americans on the D. R. V.'s land reform.

The most frequently used figure has been the one given by Bernard Fall, who wrote, "The best-educated guesses on the subject are that probably close to 50,000 North Vietnamese were executed in connection with the land reform and that at least twice as many were arrested and sent to forced labor camps".¹ Over the years, this 50,000 figure has taken on an authoritative aura which was wholly unwarranted. For it was strongly influenced by his erroneous assumption that the D. R. V. leaders had the objective of liquidating whole economic classes. It may not be merely coincidence, moreover, that if Time magazine's mythical 15,000 landowners killed in error were combined with Gittinger's mythical 30% of all landowners "erroneously condemned" one would come up with the figure of 50,000 dead--all based on fiction rather than fact.

¹Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 159.

Other estimates which have been put forward have been more consciously political in character. The figure of 100,000 was given by a French history teacher, Gerard Tongas, who remained in Hanoi after the Geneva Agreement. Tongas returned to Paris in 1959 to write a heavy-handed diatribe entitled, I Lived in the Communist Hell in North Vietnam and I Chose Freedom.² Like Hoang Van Chi, he makes no pretention of objectivity, nor does he claim to have made a serious study of the objectives and procedures of the land reform, which he calls a "vast and fantastic swindle".³ His information on the land reform appears to have been acquired from the francophile members of the Vietnamese bourgeoisie in Hanoi, who, according to Tongas, longed for the overthrow of the D. R. V. so that they could send their children to French schools.⁴ His claim of 100,000 deaths thus represents the figure circulated by those who still hoped for a return to the status quo of the colonial period.

But it remained for Hoang Van Chi himself to provide American propaganda on the land reform with its most shocking "estimate". After asserting that "nobody has been able to assess accurately the exact number of deaths" from the land reform,⁵ he

²Gerard Tongas, J'ai Vecu dans l'Enfer Communiste au Nord Vietnam et J'ai Choisi la Liberte (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Debresse, 1960).

³Ibid., p. 221.

⁴Ibid., p. 353. Not only is affinity for the French-speaking bourgeoisie but his undisguised contempt for non-francophile Vietnamese colored Tongas' attitude toward the D. R. V. Tongas once commented, "The cultural level of North Vietnam is undoubtedly one of the lowest imaginable". Tongas, "Indoctrination Replaces Education", in Honey (ed.), North Vietnam Today, p. 93.

⁵Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, p. 166.

casually refers in a later chapter to "the massacre of about 5 percent of the total population".⁶ Based on a total estimated population of about 13.5 million in 1956, this would have represented a total of 675,000 people.

Mr. Chi offers no justification for this allegation, but he suggests at one point that most of the deaths were those of children who starved "owing to the 'isolation policy'".⁷ This is yet another of the many wholly unsubstantiated charges put forth by Mr. Chi, for there was no such policy of isolating families, even of those landlords sentenced for serious crimes during the land reform. As the official party organ, Nhan Dan, stated in June 1956, ". . . if the family is one of a dishonest and wicked notable, who has been sentenced to imprisonment, there should be no contact with the person imprisoned, but there can be visits with the other members of the family."⁸ The picture of hundreds of thousands of innocent children being systematically starved to death is so absurd, in fact, that no secondary source has dared to use it. Yet it is mainly on the basis of Mr. Chi's totally unreliable account, the intention of which was plainly not historical accuracy but propaganda against the D. R. V., that the President of the United States himself has hold the American people

⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

⁸ Nhan Dan, August 6, 1956. This allegation is further contradicted by Hoang Van Chi's own admission, thirty pages later, that there were few landlord families who could not get money from friends or relatives who were tradesmen or officials. From Colonialism to Communism, p. 196.

that "a half a million, by conservative estimates, were murdered or otherwise exterminated by the North Vietnamese"⁹

As against the subjective "guesses" cited above, the statistics which have been published by the D. R. V., though admittedly incomplete, provide a better basis for estimating the number of executions. We have already mentioned the directive of the Lao Dong Political Bureau of August 1953 which limited the number of landlords who could be publicly denounced and tried in each village to a maximum of three. The average number of landlords denounced and tried per village in the 1875 villages covered by the rent reduction campaign was 2.1, according to the D. R. V. study, for a total of 3938.¹⁰ It has also been pointed out that a radio broadcast at the time reported 135 of the first 1350 landowners denounced and tried, or about 10%, received the death sentence. If this proportion were generally applied in all 1875 villages covered by the rent reduction campaign, the total number of death sentences would have been about 400.

In 1778 other villages, the land reform was carried out without the intervening phase of mass mobilization for rent reduction. No data is available from D. R. V. sources on the number of landlords sentenced in these villages or the proportion of these

⁹ President Nixon's Press Interview, April 16, 1971 (official White House text). President Nixon has escalated his own rhetoric on the "bloodbath" in North Vietnam, by multiplying the number of deaths, as the argument became increasingly crucial to the rationale for American policy in Vietnam. In 1969, he used Bernard Fall's figure of 50,000 deaths (President Nixon's Radio/TV address, November 3, 1969, official White House text). In 1971, he used the 500,000 figure cited above. But on July 27, 1972, the President reached a new level of rhetoric, declaring that more than one half million people were assassinated and another half a million died in "slave labor camps" in North Vietnam (New York Times, July 28, 1972). An inquiry to the National Security Council produced only a list of references of which Hoang Van Chi's "5 percent" figure was the only primary source. His own staff was thus unable to explain how he arrived at his new total of one million deaths from the North Vietnamese

¹⁰ See notes 19 and 20, Chapter III, p. 29.

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sentenced to death. The reform suggests that the most numerous mistakes of classification and of accusation were committed after June 1955 as the Party's supervision of land reform teams began to lag behind the pace of implementation in newly liberated areas.¹¹ It is worth noting, however, that even if the number of death sentences in these 1778 villages was three times more than the number of the first 1875, the total for the entire land reform would still have been less than 2,500. The available official documentation thus suggests from 800 to 2,500 executions during the land reform as a realistic estimate.

Further support for this estimate comes from a surprising source--an official document issued by the Diem government in July 1959. In its formal attack on the D. R. V. with regard to the Geneva Agreement, the Republic of Vietnam published figures which it claimed were the total number of sentences to death and hard labor for life in several provinces during North Vietnam's land reform. The figures were as follows:¹²

Phu Tho: 88 death sentences; 72 hard labor for life
Bac Giang: 54 death sentences; 27 hard labor for life
Thai Nguyen: 25 death sentences; 52 hard labor for life
Thanh Hoa: 98 death sentences; 134 hard labor for life

The totals for all of these four provinces, including Thanh Hoa, the most populous province in the North,¹³ were thus 265 death sentences and 275 sentences of hard labor for life, or an

¹¹Tran Phuong (ed.), Cach Mang Ruong Dat, p. 131.

¹²Violations of the Geneva Agreements by the Viet-Minh Communists, Ministry of Information, Republic of Vietnam (Saigon, July 1959), pp. 94-95.

¹³1960 Population Figures by Province (from Central Census Steering Committee, 1961), Nhan Dan, November 2, 1960 (translated by JPRS, 6570, January 13, 1961).

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average of 100 deaths in each province. If these figures were indicative of the situation in the other eighteen provinces affected by the land reform, the totals would have been in the neighborhood of 1,500 executions and 1,500 life sentences, totals which would be entirely consistent with the statistics released by Hanoi.

It is not possible to judge the authenticity of the figures released by the South Vietnamese government, since no source was cited. But it is striking that the Information Ministry of a government so obviously hostile to Hanoi as the Diem government would give such low figures which are so consistent with the D. R. V.'s figures and so inconsistent with the myth of the "bloodbath".

CONCLUSION

American attitudes toward the North Vietnamese land reform campaign in particular and the Vietnamese revolution in general have been formed in almost total ignorance of the actual historical record. The purpose of this analysis has been to show how that historical record has been systematically ignored or distorted in the sources available to the American public. The existing documentary evidence, however, indicates clearly that the objectives and policies, as well as the consequences of the land reform, were totally different from those portrayed by Hoang Van Chi and the secondary literature which has relied so heavily on his writing.

That evidence shows that, although the land reform program was marred by administrative failures, its aims were to liberate the poor peasants from the threat of famine and from their total subordination to the landlords. The main objective regarding the landlords was to transform them into productive citizens by their own labor, and not to liquidate them, as has so often been charged. The evidence further indicates that the land reform policies were conceived with the aim of minimizing injustice and unnecessary suffering and not, as has been alleged, to murder innocent people with a "deliberate excess of terror".

The benefits of the land reform to the poor peasants, who made up the majority of the rural population, were a substantial increase in food for subsistence and an improved social and political status in the villages. Hitherto powerless elements were encouraged for the first time to assert themselves, and although the short term consequences were widespread abuses and conflict,

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Even within the Lao Dong Party itself, the experiences of other nations suggests that bringing the poor peasants into the political process would be a positive development over the long run.

The determined propaganda attack against the land reform program launched in 1957 by the South Vietnamese government, with American support, succeeded in portraying it as an excuse for ideologically-inspired mass murder. The central figure in that attack was Hoang Van Chi, and by 1960, certain Americans had taken an active interest in helping his version of the land reform reach the American public. His account employed techniques which distinguished it from a legitimate historical study of the period. Where no evidence existed to support the "bloodbath" myth, it was created. Official documents were twisted to conform to the myth. Reports and statistics were quoted which did not in fact exist.

The American academic community did not have the resources to recognize Hoang Van Chi's writing as propaganda, while the official U. S. government community had an obvious interest in promoting it. As it became more deeply involved in the attempt to control events in Vietnam, the U. S. government found the myth of the "bloodbath" increasingly useful and finally almost necessary. By the late 1960's, having been repeated in so many different places, the myth of the "bloodbath" in North Vietnam had gained nearly universal acceptance. The President was then able to use it as a major rationale for maintaining the U. S. military presence in Vietnam.

Apart from the self-interest of officials and the incapacity of academics to do the necessary original research, however, it seems evident that the myth of the "bloodbath" in North Vietnam

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fit de
of Americans have been led to believe that revolutionaries guided by Marxist-Leninist concepts must be fanatical and cruel. The tendency of so many Americans to accept that stereotype in total ignorance of real nature of the Vietnamese revolution made it easy for the myth of the "bloodbath" to gain popular credence, and helped to stifle the search for truth. But that same stereotype which belittled the intelligence, the patriotism and the humanity of Vietnamese Communists also made it easier for Americans to assume that they were no match for our power and our techniques. It should now be clear that the U. S. can delay but cannot ultimately avoid coming to terms with the Vietnamese revolution. The abandonment of the crudely distorted portrayal of the Vietnamese Communists still prevalent in the U. S. should be the first step in that process.

1. The long-standing charge, most recently raised by President Nixon in his July 27 news conference, that the land reform carried out from 1953 to 1956 in North Vietnam was a "bloodbath", in which massive and indiscriminate killing of innocent people took place, is shown by careful investigation to be a myth.

2. This "bloodbath" myth is the result of a deliberate propaganda campaign by the South Vietnamese and U. S. governments to discredit the D. R. V. The central piece in that campaign has been a book by Hoang Van Chi, which has been the basis for the allegations made by President Nixon and others. Mr. Chi, who has been employed in the past by both the South Vietnamese Ministry of Information and the U. S. Information Agency, now works for AID.

3. The major allegations comprising the myth are: that the land reform was intended to liquidate whole social classes; that the D. R. V. assigned "quotas" of landlords to be executed in each village; that the D. R. V. used a "deliberate excess of terror"; and that hundreds of thousands of innocent people were killed. Close examination of these charges reveals that they are based on gross misquotation, fraudulent documentation, and Hoang Van Chi's own self-contradictory testimony.

4. The documentary evidence actually shows there was no D. R. V. policy of liquidating classes, no "landlord quotas", and no "deliberate excess of terror". The evidence also indicates that probably no more than 2500 landlords were sentenced to death --not "a minimum of 500,000" as asserted by President Nixon on July 27.