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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM



VIET-NAM'S FIGHT

AGAINST

FASCISM

(1940-1945)



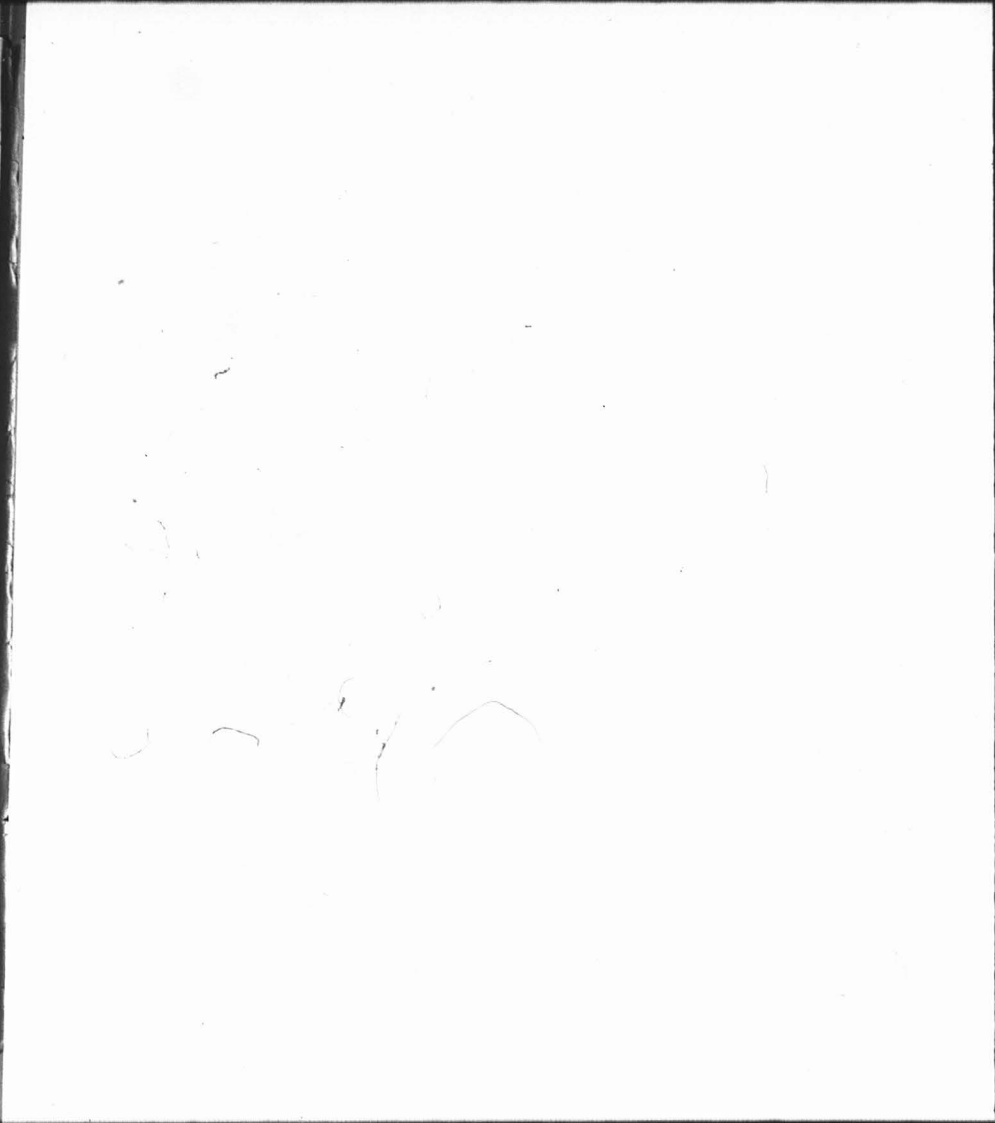
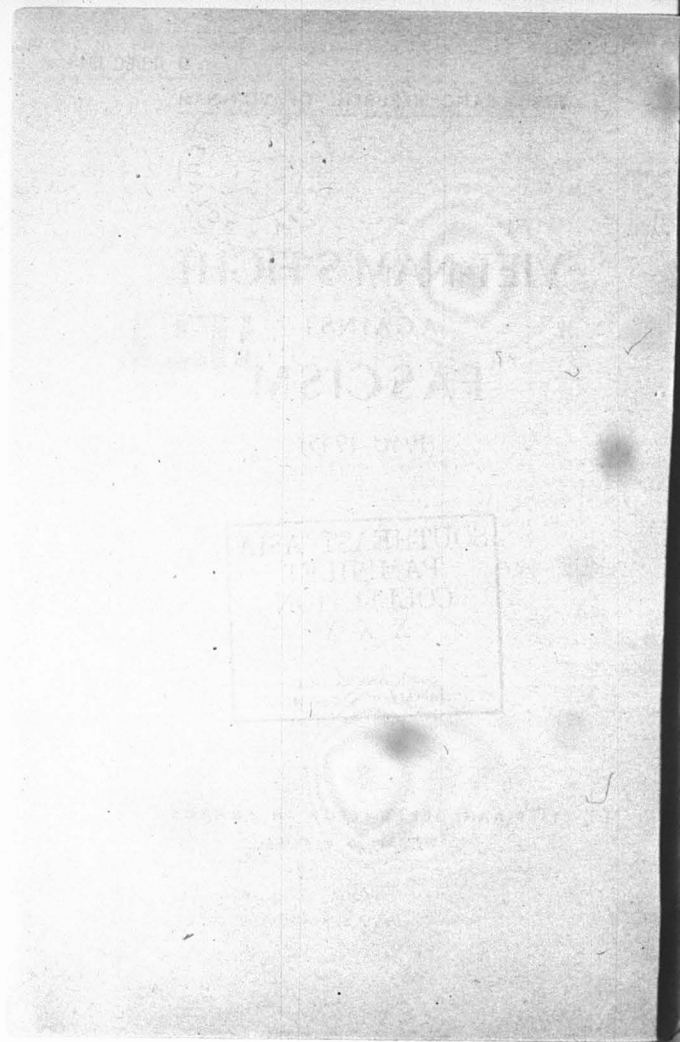
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VIET-NAM DELEGATION IN FRANCE
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CONTENTS

I. General aspect of the Vietnamese anti-fascist movement.....	1
1) Main features of the anti-fascist fight.....	1
2) Brief historical outline of the anti-fascist fight.....	2
II. Methods of fight employed by the « League for the Independence of Viet Nam » against Japanese Armies.....	7
1) Fight against total occupation of the land and for economic non-co-operation with the enemy.....	7
2) Fight against the requisition of food supplies, the imposition of taxes and the calling up of coolies and soldiers....	8
3) Fight against Japanese terrorism	9
4) Gradual liberation of Vietnamese territories.....	10
5) Refusal to partake in sham independence set up by the Japanese	11
6) Co-operation with the Allies	14
7) Armed Insurrection	14
III. Testimony on the Vietnamese Anti-Fascist Movement.....	17
IV. Vietnamese Attempts to establish a common anti-fascist front	23
1) Appeals to the French in Indochina.....	23
2) French colonialists' collaboration with Japan.....	26
Some aspects of Vichy-Japanese collaboration.....	29
1) French colonialists collaborated directly with Japan from the military angle.....	29
2) French colonialists led an active anti-Allied and pro-fascist campaign	31
3) Large scale economic co-operation between French colonialists and Japan: French troops maintained at the expense of the Vietnamese people.....	32
4) French colonialists set up a regime of terror and take repressive measures against anti-fascist movements.....	33
5) French colonialists sacrificed the territorial integrity of the Indochinese Union in favour of the fascist powers.....	38
6) French colonialists, who put up no opposition to the Japanese invasion of Indochina, failed to defend the latter against the coup de force of March 9th, 1945.....	38

I. - GENERAL ASPECT OF THE VIETNAMESE ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENT

1) MAIN FEATURES OF THE ANTI-FASCIST FIGHT

One feature stands out above all others in the history of Viet Nam during the Japanese occupation, namely the emergence and amazing growth of the Vietnamese anti-Fascist movement, the Viet Minh.

One would rather have expected that in 1940 the Vietnamese, long oppressed under the French Colonial regime, would have sought above all to take advantage of France's collapse to throw off the detested yoke. Did not the insidious and persistent Japanese propaganda present the Empire of the Rising Sun to these subjected people of Asia as the one great hope of deliverance and the promise of future « co-prosperity » ? No wonder the Colonialists were already shaking in their shoes.

As soon, however, as the Japanese armies had penetrated their land, it was against them that the Vietnamese at once rebelled; against them and against the French colonial administration which had submitted to Vichy and which, out of cowardice, let them settle as masters in Viet Nam.

What is the explanation of this behaviour? It is that the Vietnamese, whose political maturity no one will question, will not tolerate domination of any kind; that, under the guidance of the champion of their liberty, Ho Chi Minh, they have never lost faith in the democratic spirit of the French people; and, drawing a distinction between Republican France and Colonial France, they have continued to hope that, out of the Japan-Vichy conflict, would be born, sooner or later, a lasting friendship between Viet Nam and France, to the mutual benefit of both countries concerned.

Colonial France's reply to this was to send troops to battle with the Vietnamese anti-Fascist patriots. There was no alternative for Viet Nam than to react accordingly.

Full details are not yet available of the Vietnamese resistance against the twofold Fascism of Japan and Vichy. The Vietnamese Government had hardly begun to collect up the documents which over and over again had been scattered during its struggle against the French and Japanese imperialists, when, once more, war com-

mitted them to a state of neglect, destruction and nothingness. Besides, the history of such a fight — above all a war of attrition — is bound to be patchy and confused. Such has always been the main feature of « maquis » warfare, be it in France, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Russia, China, Indonesia or Viet Nam.

2) BRIEF HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE ANTI-FASCIST FIGHT

Military operations against the Japanese and their French auxiliaries began with the Japanese invasion of Viet Nam in 1940. French colonialists, once the « Great Scare of Langson » was over, also offered their assistance to the Japanese, the better to win the good grace of the new masters of Indochina. They put themselves at their disposal in the attempt to wipe out the « Vietnamese Army of Liberation ».

1. — 1940

THE LANGSON (BAC-BO) INSURRECTION

Vietnamese nationalist forces, headed by some experienced political fighters, were quick to organise and arm themselves with food and health services, and, not without recklessness, launched in October 1940 (a bare few weeks after the Japanese entry) a violent offensive against Langson, already in Japanese hands. The Tho population from the Cao Bang and Langson regions joined the partisans, dragging along with them the Tho riflemen deserters who had been part of the French garrison in its retreat before Japanese armoured divisions.

An agreement between the French Colonial Administration and the Japanese resulted in the latter, with the consent of the disarrayed French military forces, getting control of Haiphong and the Tonkin district without striking a single blow. On October 15th, the Japanese assented to French offers of collaboration against Vietnamese anti-Fascists, and allowed the French to relieve them at Langson as from December 1st, 1940. Even before the agreed date, they allowed them to occupy Loc Binh and That Khe. The Revolutionaries immediately launched their offensive, and when, after hard-fought battles, the Vietnamese armies were beaten around the last-named sectors, the French asked permission of the Japanese to send their troops to help suppress the Langson uprising and thus fulfil the undertaking of the colonial authorities to ensure their establishment in Indochina. Four French battalions, among them one from the Foreign Legion, were forthwith despatched to Langson where, in the most brutal way, they brought the « slatterns » to their senses.

Fighting spread to the neighbouring districts, Dong Dang and Cho Van in particular, and soon reached the mountain ranges of

Dong Trien and Cai Kinh. Odds against the Vietnamese were three to one, and despite their heroism and guerrilla experience, by the end of December 1940 the Fascist army was in a strong position. Tran Tung Lap, soul of the revolution, was taken prisoner and executed on December 28th, 1940. Brutal reprisals took place.

The Colonialists were overjoyed. « We may truly claim », wrote R. BAUCHAR (*Rafales sur l'Indochine*, p. 67), « that, even with numerically superior forces, the illustrious Colonel Gallieni of 1895 did not reach the dizzy heights of success achieved by our leaders of 1940. What reason is there for this brilliant outcome?— Simply that, in place of ponies and coolies as in Gallieni's time, we had radio communications, lorries, aircraft (we may mention here the food-dropping expedition of the aircraft Potez 25), as against an enemy who had none of these and whose experience in jungle warfare insufficiently compensated for this lack. »

THE DO-LUONG (TRUONG-BO) INSURRECTION, AND THE MY-THO (NAM-BO) INSURRECTION

The checks to the uprising of Langson did not discourage the Vietnamese anti-Fascist patriots, and taking advantage of the fact that the French feared an invasion of Indochina by the Chinese who were fighting Japan, and had despatched French troops from all parts to the frontier, the revolutionaries called on the people throughout the country to revolt. Important movements took place in North Annam, especially at Do Luong; but most important of all was the insurrection which broke out after November 20th in Cochinchina. Several districts rid themselves of Fascist control, above all My Tho, to the boundary of the Plaine des Jones, and further north towards Hiep Hoa. At Cau Lanh, for the first time, they hoisted the red flag with the gold star.

But the revolutionary movement lacked organisation and cohesion. The Fascists triumphed, but at the price of a bitter fight.

« The entire Foreign Legion battalion, a Tonkinese company, two artillery units, one mechanised unit, and the Navy were diverted simultaneously towards the Northern region of My Tho, where they instituted a thorough search, arresting any doubtful characters and shooting those who attempted to resist or flee. Aerial bombardment was carried out against the hotbeds of resistance, which after four days were reduced almost to nothing. The police sorted out the suspects, and the ring-leaders were shot. The district was calm, and the troops free to pass on to fresh feats at Cambodia.

The colonialists admitted that by reason of their great fear they were unusually harsh. « We were cruel; the threat of Siam haunted us, but above all we had to show off our strength before those who remained loyal to us and those who might seek to take advantage of our reversals. » (R. BAUCHAR, p. 71.)

CREATION OF THE « LEAGUE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF VIET NAM »

Having learnt a bitter lesson, the Vietnamese nationalists realised the necessity of a strong military organisation before pitting their forces against the powerful Fascists. Closely united under their unparalleled league for independence, the Viet Minh (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh); they firmly installed themselves at a number of points in the high Tonkinese region — Tuyen Quang, Phu Tho, Bac Giang, and above all Cao Bang and Bac Son Dinh Ca.

It was in the mountainous district of Cao Bang that the nationalist movement first took root after the 1940 reprisals. Those who had escaped from Lang Son and My Tho gathered together there around their leader Ho Chi Minh, now known only under the nickname « Venerable Father ». Until November 1942, they devoted their efforts to concentrating the anti-fascist influences in that region which had already, time and time again, served as a sanctuary for guerrillas. From Cho Bang, from where, either by force or persuasion, the Viet Minh had eradicated all fascist and colonial elements, the revolutionaries directed a movement for the occupation of Bac Son Dinh Ca, preparing thus their march against the South.

This expansion of the anti-imperialist movement towards the central region, even more than that towards the plains of the Tonkinese delta, was essentially the work of a young dynamic leader, Mr. Vo Nguyen Giap, one-time professor of history in a private school in Hanoi. To him the « Venerable Father » entrusted the task of co-ordinating the work of the leaders sent to zones selected as action bases and of ensuring liaison between the zones.

Until the summer harvest of 1943 the patriots, in accordance with the advice given by Ho Chi Minh, restricted their activities to the job of organising and preparing, from the political rather than military view-point. Order for insurrection was not to be given until the end of 1943. This is not to say that they did not have to hold out during this time. Many were the bloody fights against the Fascists who were seeking to destroy them. One in particular took place in the Ngan Son mountain range, in the province of Bac Kan, a bitter encounter between nationalist and fascist troops, in the course of which the leader of the Bac Son stronghold and the military instructor from the same zone perished.

At the end of 1943, the Fascists forestalled the uprising by launching a full-scale offensive against Vietnamese nationalists, and there followed a several months « terror régime », of which many « suspects » were victims. The Bac Son anti-fascist stronghold, fearing surprise tactics, sent scouts on ahead, and the resistants fought desperately at Vu Nhai and Ding Ca; the attempt was drowned in blood.

FIRST SUCCESSES OF THE LEAGUE FOR INDEPENDENCE

The patriots were far from being discouraged by this setback. The agility of their withdrawal from the heavy offensive had prevented them from complete annihilation. With great energy, the leaders of the « League » set about reconstructing their forces, and in a short time their activities were extended beyond the network to a vast region at the foot of Tam Dao, with Thai Nguyen at the centre, of which they got control, and they installed themselves at the mouth of the delta where nuclei of resistance had already been established by the Underground. Emissaries despatched to the South spread news of the action throughout the country, in particular in Nghe An and Quang Ngai. The network of Cochinchina itself, hard hit by the 1940-41 reprisals, and closely watched by a strong Franco-Japanese police, was given new life, thanks to the efforts of certain leaders.

The Congress of July 1944 decided to get into action. After two months' military preparation, the order for general uprising, postponed the previous year, was to be given in September, after the harvest was over. But the « Venerable Father », to whom the resolution of the Congress was submitted, did not give his approval, considering the general uprising untimely, and advised more cautious military methods, a war of pestering and ambushing. The « Army of Liberation » was born, but was commanded to scatter itself in order to operate simultaneously in several places, as « franc-tireurs ». And so the plan of action was to break down the power of the enemy by a war of attrition, where guerrillas would operate and the enemy, without being engaged in pitched battle, would not be left in peace.

Six months of guerrilla warfare was long enough to harry the Fascists and cause them to be gravely disturbed. With less means at their disposal, the Vietnamese were the victors in every encounter, attacking only in chosen places and at chosen times, after minute preparation. The O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Service) soon knew of the Viet Minh League, and American parachute-droppings increased their confidence and their means of action. It was this success by the Viet Minh above all else that caused the Japanese Commander to overthrow the French régime on March 9th, 1945, and to offer independence to Viet Nam, hoping thereby to win over the nationalists to the Japanese cause.

TRIUMPH OF THE VIET MINH

The resistants did not want the nominal independence offered them by the Japanese. Were they not anti-fascist as well as patriots? The reply of the Central Committee of the League was their declaration of March 12th, 1945, to intensify military operations. The once short-lived resistance became daily more forceful and magnificent, and on June 4th Mr. Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the official

establishment of a « liberated area » 40 miles from Hanoi, where a politically independent régime was set up. And in this area the patriots gathered up the remnants of the French colonial army in retreat. The Viet Minh proposed to those who but a short while ago had been pursuing them, to fight side by side against the Japanese. Some courageous soldiers accepted, but the greater part preferred to avail themselves of this chance to escape to China — such was the case of Major Reul's « group », and that of Colonel Seguin's.

The Japanese, however, seeing the futility of attempting to decoy the Nationalists by false promises, turned to the use of force. But all their onslaughts were stubbornly repulsed, that of mid-May being a particularly disastrous effort as far as the Japanese occupation army was concerned.

Enthusiasm rose in the hearts of the patriots after their tremendous victory, and the « Venerable Father » commanded his « children » to see the attack through. It was a triumphal march. Vo Nguyen Giap's troops seized first of all some town centres which they had already been blockading for several months — Bac Kan, Cho Chu, Dinh Ca, etc., and Pho Binh Gia, Bac Giang, Yen The, Fort Met, Tri Cu, Vinh Yen, all in turn fell to their power. When they took the Tam Dao fort, they set free a number of French people who had been holidaying in the neighbourhood when the « coup de force » of March 9th had caught them unawares. Soon after, Tuyen Quang, Yen Binh and Luc An Chau also fell.

At 11 p.m., the night of August 13th, 1945, delegates from the country and also several from foreign bases (Siam, Laos and China) gathered together at Tan Trao, G.H.Q. of the League, and decided to declare general insurrection and to set about fighting for Hanoi and the larger towns. On the next day, the pro-Japanese Government, called upon to surrender, capitulated. On the 16th, a Vietnamese-American detachment left the G.H.Q. en route for the capital. On the 19th, Thai-Nguyen town was taken by assault.

Mr. Tran Huy Lieu went to Hué to negotiate the abdication of Emperor Bao Dai, and Hué hoisted the red flag with the golden star. Cochinchina was freed before the end of August.

On the 25th, the Republic was proclaimed. On the 29th, the IVth Group of the « Liberation Army » advanced into Hanoi. President Ho Chi Minh, accompanied by members of the Provisional Government, entered the capital of Viet Nam.

II. - METHODS OF FIGHT EMPLOYED BY THE « LEAGUE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF VIET-NAM » AGAINST JAPANESE ARMIES

Sabotage, counter-propaganda, help to the Allies, armed fight — the « League for the Independence of Viet Nam » scorned no medium to hamper military operations of the Japanese.

1) FIGHT AGAINST TOTAL OCCUPATION OF THE LAND AND FOR ECONOMIC NON-CO-OPERATION WITH THE ENEMY

Appeal by the « League for the Independence of Viet Nam »

« Fellow countrymen!

Japanese Fascists continue to plunder our country; they have just laid hands on 600 mau (1) of rice, belonging to villages of the province of Phuoc Yen.

Thousands of homeless families wander aimlessly around the countryside.

Thousands of peasants have been scattered from their villages and homes. The Japanese have taken possession of gardens and rice plantations.

Fellow countrymen, this is your lot!

Don't waste your time futilely, bewailing. All of you, arm yourselves with staffs, sticks, scythes, and waylay the Japanese bandits who seek to seize your rice fields and homes.

Where the Japanese are, there the bombs fall. Rid yourselves of these dangerous neighbours; chase the unwanted hosts from your villages.

Fellow countrymen, you who live side by side with the Japanese, hide your rice, pigs and poultry securely, lest they should steal them from you.

Our blood is seething!
Our stomachs are starved!
Our goods are looted!
Our homesides are destroyed!

(1) Third of a hectare.

The Japanese are responsible for these calamities, and the only way to save our lives is to exert ourselves to scare away the Japanese birds of prey.

Let us snatch back our land from the Japanese Fascists.

Long live Vietnamese Independence! »

Extracts from reports sent to the Central Committee from the League for the Independence of Viet Nam.

— In obedience to Japanese orders, the French ordered the inhabitants of the village of Kha Do (in the Phug-Yen province) to destroy their maize plantations and to plant in their place flax. On April 16th, 1944, the Sous-Prefet of Kim Anh, escorted by ten soldiers, went to the village and forced the inhabitants to root out their whole maize crop. The peasants, armed with staffs, sticks and scythes, steadfastly held out, and against their opposition the Sous-Prefet changed his tactics; instead of threats, he began to plead. But of no avail. The villagers would not give way, and the mandarin had to withdraw discreetly.

— In November 1944, a Japanese, accompanied by two policemen, visited the village of Tho Phu, intending to seize the rice fields there. Every single inhabitant rushed out and was ready to fight. The robber was forced to flee for his life.

— The Colonial Administration wanted to raze to the ground the pagodas and cemeteries of two villages, Y Bich and Doc Lien (in the province of Thanh Hoa), to make way for salt marshes. Over 400 inhabitants, armed with staffs, sticks and scythes, gathered together at these sites and prevented the French from committing the crime. The French didn't dare face the angry mobs, and took refuge in retreat.

Etc., etc., etc...

2) FIGHT AGAINST THE REQUISITION OF FOOD SUPPLIES, THE IMPOSITION OF TAXES AND THE CALLING UP OF COOLIES AND SOLDIERS

It is a well known fact that the requisition of paddies and food stocks by the Japanese army caused grave shortages in Indochina, in particular in North Viet Nam, where, at the end of 1945, two million human beings died of hunger.

Summons by the League for the Independence of Viet Nam

« Fellow countrymen!

Japanese bandits are still commandeering paddy, and levying taxes, while millions of our compatriots are dying of hunger. They are

still using force to recruit soldiers and coolies, while thousands of our people are being bombed.

Fellow countrymen!

Learn together the following dicta, and put them into practice by every means at your disposal :

- Not a grain of paddy for the Japanese;
- Not a cent of tax for the Japanese;
- Not a single coolie for the Japanese;
- Not a single soldier for the Japanese armies. »

The inhabitants rose unanimously to the fight. The peasants were not content with stopping the Japanese from laying hands on the paddy. Often they didn't hesitate to seize the paddy that the Japanese had stolen from their neighbours. From March 9th, 1945, the confiscation of paddy by villagers grew to immense proportions. Thousands of people forced their way into paddy stores and distributed the grain among the population.

In the same way, refusal to pay taxes became widespread. Chiefs who received taxation demands from the authorities took no notice of them; or, if there were some who tried to levy taxes, the inhabitants turned a deaf ear towards them or molested them.

Some Japanese went back to the villages to recruit coolies and soldiers. As soon as the inhabitant were warned, they deserted their villages and scattered among the fields, far from sight of the unwelcome visitors. In other places, the peasants posted themselves on the roadsides and attacked the recruiters on their arrival.

3) FIGHT AGAINST JAPANESE TERRORISM

The Japanese reacted vigorously, against the campaign of non-co-operation organised by the population against them. In the course of July 1945, in Hanoi alone, they arrested about 1,700 young men and girls. Many young girls were outraged and killed. A number of victims succumbed after having been tortured. Ten young men were massacred in cold blood, in a hospital.

Frequently, the Japanese disguised themselves as peasants in order to spy on the Viet Minh in the provinces. They used children to undermine the opposition. But it was rare that these activities escaped the watchful eye of the revolutionary organisations. Disguised as Tho peasants, the Japs hid themselves in the bush. But, unable to speak the local language, they were soon detected, arrested and shot.

In order to defend themselves from infiltration by the Japanese and their agents into liberated territory, the chiefs of the League for Independence advised the population in the following circular:

Circular by the Commander in Chief of the Army of Liberation

« 1. Spies are often lurking among the revolutionaries in disguise. Furthermore, young men attempting to penetrate the forward zones have to carry letters of introduction from Viet Minh organisations.

2. Before allowing troops in, villagers should satisfy themselves as to their origin, for it is not infrequent for the Japanese to dress themselves in brown like our peasants, carry the Viet Minh flag, and greet the inhabitants with smiling faces. »

The French paratroop G. de Chezal, whose friend Boitard put him in touch with the Vietnamese resistants, was astonished at the detailed organisation of the Maquis, and at their thorough equipment against all unwanted intruders. Any one of them, Vietnamese, French or American, who wanted to take part in their tough, adventurous life, was put to a severe test.

4) GRADUAL LIBERATION OF VIETNAMESE TERRITORIES AND PROGRESSIVE ORGANISATION OF FREED ZONES

Realising that the liberation of the Vietnamese people could only be brought about by the people themselves, and that only by armed insurrection could the Japanese fascist domination be overthrown, the Viet Minh started to make preparations patiently and methodically, allowing no difficulty to thwart it.

Once they had small groups of partisans operating from the bush in the frontier provinces, the revolutionaries began from 1944 to form a Peoples Army, and long before March 9th 1945 they had got possession of seven provinces in North Viet Nam. This vast region became thus the centre of anti-Japanese resistance, which, like a rising tide, began to make inroads into the whole country. Japanese attacks against this stronghold were futile, and served only to raise high the prestige of the Viet Minh in the eyes of the people, who warmly acknowledged it as the unique resistance force and the sole author of its deliverance.

The seven provinces of Northern Viet Nam which were officially set up in the liberated zone on June 4th, 1945, were Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Bac Giang, Lang Son and Ha Giang. These regions were placed under the authority of revolutionary committees chosen by the people. Once established the liberated regions strove to put under way a vast economic, political, social and cultural programme, comprising the 10 following points :

Programme for the Liberated Regions

1. Liquidation of Japanese Forces;
2. Confiscation of traitors' property;
3. Universal suffrage and democratic liberties to be granted to the people;
4. Mobilisation of the population to sustain the partisan fight and to take part in the anti-Japanese Army of Liberation;
5. Clearance of uncultivated land and encouragement of production;
6. Application of social laws, help for the bombed-out;
7. Distribution of communal land, reduction of land rents, reduction of rates of interest;
8. Abolition of all existing taxes and rentals; application of a progressive and moderate tax on the revenue;
9. Elimination of illiteracy;
10. Equality of race and sex.

In the liberated regions, life was in full swing. The whole population, men, women and children, was organised. Apart from the military campaign which, naturally, predominated, attention was turned once more, as indicated in the programme, to increasing production, thereby to have to hand sufficient resources to carry out the long-term war and to be able to sustain the eventual Japanese blockade. But even in the days of grave difficulties it is a remarkable fact that the Viet Minh authorities attached particular importance to raising the intellectual level of the people. This it is which marks them out as trustees of a power genuinely democratic. One other fact is worthy of mention — despite the reticence of liberation, division of duties was surprisingly clear-cut. The following are examples of the tasks assigned to women as being most suited to their capabilities :

1. Participation in Self-defence detachments;
2. Collection of money and food stuffs for the use of the Army of Liberation;
3. Scrapping of rice and gathering of vegetables for the troops;
4. Care of the sick and wounded;
5. Sewing, making up and mending clothes, etc...

5) REFUSAL TO PARTAKE IN THE SHAM INDEPENDENCE SET UP BY THE JAPANESE

Eventually the Japanese Fascists recognised the independence of Viet Nam, just as the Viet Minh had foretold long before the events of March 9th, 1945, and placed a pro-Japanese team at the

head of the « National Government » in the same fashion as they had done in the Philippines, in Burma, Nankin, etc... But before Japanese Fascism could make headway in Indochina, the Viet Minh had already warned the people of Viet Nam. Already on March 15th and 16th, 1944, pamphlets had been distributed throughout the country, especially in Tonkin and northern Annam, and the Viet Minh had organised countless meetings denouncing the manoeuvres of the Japanese who might be thinking of setting up a puppet Government.

Summons by the League for the Independence of Viet Nam

« Japanese planes are dropping a number of pamphlets signed by the puppet Government, calling upon « our brothers of the Viet Minh » to co-operate with the puppet Government traitors. Our answer is clear. We are no brothers to them. We are fighters for the independence of our country, determined to oust the puppets and traitors, the Japanese Fascists, from our land. »

It was a straightforward reply. J. M. HERTZICH himself recognised that it was absolutely free from any taint of Japanese collaboration. (*Doc Lap*, p. 107.) (See also *The Economist* of August 30th, 1947.) We can also read in the *Témoignage sur l'Indochine* published by the Groupe de Français d'Indochine :

« The Japanese wanted nothing more than to replace their own imperialism for that of the French. The Vietnamese wanted to rid themselves of all imperialism, whose ever might be. »

In March 1945, the Japanese, masters of the country, stated that they would hand back power to the traditional Annamite authorities with Bao Dai at their head. This « independent » Government, backward and reactionary, was actually concerned only with satisfying the needs of the Japanese Army. Not one Vietnamese was taken in, not even the paid Japanese agents.

For their part, the Vietnamese, guided by the Viet Minh, the courage and foresight of whose chiefs they had long since appreciated, got ready to overthrow this old-fashioned Government which was totally unsuited to the new spirit of Viet Nam and its people.

Success came at the end of August 1945, at the time of the Japanese capitulation. At the call of Ho Chi Minh, who had been fighting against the Japanese for four years, the people rose up and overthrew the pro-Japanese Annamite régime whose power was derived solely from the Japanese themselves.

The new Viet Minh régime owed nothing to foreign power. Its authority was drawn from the people of Viet Nam alone.

And this is the essential political fact which is most frequently ignored or passed over in silence, namely the victory of the Vietnamese revolution over a foreign régime, over an authority with no popular support...

The coming to power by the Viet Minh was, relatively, so easy

an operation, that people looked for some sign of Japanese aiding and abetting.

But the Japanese knew well the strength and all-embracing quality of the movement, and were under no illusion as regards the Annamite régime they had upheld, and the downfall of which they had just witnessed. They knew well, too, the prestige and cohesion the Viet Minh front inspired, and its resistance power which they had so often put to the test.

Lastly, they knew just what the Viet Minh thought of them... The former had affirmed its anti-Japanese stand since 1941, as is demonstrated in this « Summons to the French of Indochina » of July 23rd, 1941 :

« We stretch out our hand in friendship to all Gaullist people, patriots and anti-Fascist French of Indochina, and we put forward to them proposals for an alliance against Japanese Fascism. »

Instructions of the Vietnamese High Command to Regional Commanders of the Army of Liberation

« There are two circumstances in which we shall be called upon to co-operate with the Allied Forces :

1. When Allied troops can penetrate our territory in the coastal regions with their Navy, in the frontier regions with their land forces, or in the delta with their parachutists, we must immediately establish liaison with them in the districts where we are most numerous, and eventually set up a joint action, without stopping for a moment to harrass the Japanese;

— In the districts where we have less means at our disposal, we must organise bands of scouts and liaison parties to help the Allies, still continuing to send out sufficient troops to keep up the fight on their sides.

2. Where the Allies are not making direct attack on the enemy, we should nevertheless be prepared to welcome their troops and at the same time inform the public of the imminent collapse of Japanese Fascism. Everyone must be prepared for the general insurrection.

Steps to be taken in these circumstances :

- Attack isolated Japanese detachments;
- Cut telephone and telegraph wires;
- Destroy bridges, communications and war plants;
- Collect information on enemy movements to give to the Allies and our own authorities;
- Do everything else possible to help the Allied offensive which cannot be delayed any longer. »

6) CO-OPERATION WITH THE ALLIES

Although the Viet Minh were alone in organising the anti-Japanese resistance, they knew well that Japanese Fascism could not be wiped out of Indochina without joint action by the people of Indochina and the Allied forces. Accordingly, they took steps to prepare for parachutists and to facilitate the landing of Allied troops.

*Circular by the League for the Independence of Viet Nam,
concerning help to Allied airmen dropped by parachute upon
Vietnamese territory*

« Airmen belonging to armies fighting against Fascism are our allies, who may happen to land by parachute upon our country.

Where allied airmen land, the people and members of fighting organisations are to act in the following ways :

1. Put the airmen in safe places;
2. House and feed them properly — all expenditure will be refunded eventually by the Central Authority;
3. Lend them Vietnamese clothing;
4. Let the Central Authority know of their presence immediately;
5. It is strictly forbidden to accept arms, gifts or money from the airmen.

All who help the airmen will be rewarded.

7) ARMED INSURRECTION

« They pestered the Japanese who passed along the highways and who were surveying those of Cao Bang in great numbers. They blocked their lines of communication and burnt bridges. Open attacks were launched at Tuyen Quang, where two Japanese officers were slain on market day... and at Hanoi where a militia-woman stationed near the Bridge of Rapids mowed down five Japs with her tommygun.

As well as these spectacular deeds, countless patrols were set upon, countless convoys destroyed.

Obviously, our echelon was not made up solely of some ten young intellectuals, one of whom, Tice, had written a thesis on Knowledge. Not far off was the active echelon, to which Boitard alone was admitted, and where the men who fought were inspired by two significant words: Doc Lap...

The whole lot was controlled by the Supreme echelon, from where commands were issued, and to where fighting accounts, telephone messages and subversive movements were reported. »

In these worlds, M. G. de CHEZAL, French Gaullist who had applied to join the Vietnamese Maquis, described the daily happenings and

strong organisation of the anti-Fascist resistants of the League for the Independence of Viet Nam. (*Cf Parachuté en Indochine.*)

As soon as the League was in a position to progress from defensive action to one of harrassing the enemy, and thence to one of direct attack, it published proclamation after proclamation urging the populace to support its military campaign. Here are the terms of some of them, warmly received by the peasants, undeniably poetic, and in parts set to verse and music to speed up the circulation :

*Proclamations by the League for the Independence of Viet Nam
November 1944*

« Fellow countrymen!

American and Chinese troops are on the point of landing. Japanese and French fascists will not hesitate to grapple with each other. This is our hour of liberation; get ready your guns and sabres!

Let us chase out the Japanese aggressors and the French Fascists, and our glory shall shine throughout the world! »

June 6th 1945.

« Fellow countrymen!

Japanese Fascists have overcome the French Fascists solely to get a hand on Indochina, and with no thought to saving us. The puppet Government is nothing but an instrument of oppression and exploitation of the people, to the benefit of the Japs.

But the Japanese Fascists won't last long. The Allies are now defeating them on all Far Eastern fronts, and it won't be long before they penetrate Indochina and wipe out the Japs.

Under our national flag, partisans are fighting victoriously in the Northern provinces. A powerful anti-Japanese national movement for liberation has gathered together millions of combatants under the banner of the League for the Independence of Viet Nam.

Fellow countrymen!

Take your stand beneath the red flag with the gold star!
The hour of insurrection will shortly sound.

Be ready to make use of your arms.

Let us pursue the Japanese Fascists from Indochina!

Chastise all traitors, Vietnamese, Chinese or French!

Let us set up the popular revolutionary Government.

Long live the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam! »

When the hour of offensive arrived, higher authorities of the « Anti-Fascist League » issued this Order of the Day, to incite the people to march on enemy positions, towards victory :

*Order of the Day by the « Provisional Committee for Liberated Zones »
to all Commanders, political leaders and fighters in the Army
of Liberation*

« The hour of direct attack has come. Now at last our fight for national independence will reach a victorious conclusion.

Comrades! Keep calm, and take all necessary steps to put into effect the following directives :

1. Begin by attacking towns;
2. Cut off the enemy in all lines of retreat;
3. Before attacking, send out ultimatums to Japanese detachments and don't attack unless they refuse to give themselves up;
4. You must take care to abide by the laws of war, and must treat well all soldiers and officers who give themselves up;
5. People's Committees and the population must co-operate with the troops. The Army must be ready to fight for power;
6. Speed up the work of organising the masses where hard encounters may be expected;
7. Do not forget that in view of the complexity of the situation internationally, we must remain vigilant even after the Japanese surrender.

Comrades!

If we are to benefit from this opportunity to win independence for Viet Nam, you must carry out the above instructions to the full, with courage, forthrightness and diligence.

- Death to the Japanese Fascists!
- Long live the power of the people!
- Long live Vietnamese Independence!
- Long live the Vietnamese Army of Liberation! »

III. - TESTIMONY ON THE VIETNAMESE ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENT

From 1944 onwards, the new name « League for the Independence of Viet Nam » (Viet Minh) was on the lips of everyone throughout the world. The head of the League, President Ho Chi Minh, became one of the best-known international figures. A synopsis of the evidence published by the Paris Bureau of our Information Service in May 1947 will help give an insight into the prestige that surrounds his name and the popularity he enjoys among the people.

We also give evidence not only concerning the President himself, but as well concerning the anti-fascist resistance, which was the result of his work.

Samedi Soir, 13-6-46. — When the Japanese appeared in Indochina in 1940, Ho Chi Minh issued a proclamation stirring up the people of Viet Nam to take up arms to drive out the French who « had violated their treaties » and the Japanese Fascists.

Jeunesse, 15-8-46. — Viet Nam acquired her freedom in fighting the Japanese and the Vichy French who had surrendered Indochina to the forces of the Empire of the Rising Sun. (O. ROSENFELD.)

La Marseillaise, 15-5-46. — The youth of Viet Nam fought against the Japanese for a cause which is also our own.

While French high officials were being good little Petainists, the Vietnamese fought with rare courage against Japanese Fascism, under the leadership of President Ho, now President of the Republic of Viet Nam. (Bernard DRANBER.)

The National Herald spoke of the League which was the all-party national front, and which was preparing to form a Provisional Government with the aim of helping the allies in their forthcoming offensive. The Viet Minh, it wrote, consisted of 50,000 members, and was the most powerful organisation in Viet Nam.

Foreign Policy Reports, 15-5-45, wrote that the resistance movement began immediately after the arrival of the Japanese in the country. In 1941, the Viet Minh was set up by the nationalists, and it seemed to be the first real coalition of all nationalist elements.

North American Newspaper Alliance, 12-1-47. — Mr. Harold ISAACS described how the Vietnamese régime was created by heads of the secret resistance movement which had grown up during the war against Japan. Long before Ho Chi Minh had become President of the new Republic, he had led the guerrilla warfare. France had

tried to make out that the Vietnamese Government was a Japanese creation — hardly a charge to come from a country whose representatives in Indochina had capitulated before the Japanese in 1940 and 1941, without a single encounter, and who had helped the Japanese to establish a base there from which they invaded the Philippines and South East Asia after Pearl Harbour. French administrators remained docile puppets of the Japanese until the Spring of 1945, a few months before the end of the war. The Vietnamese nationalists were alone in setting up a resistance against foreign masters, French as well as Japanese. At almost the last minute, the Japanese tried to form a puppet government in Viet Nam; but with the Japanese collapse the patriots came out into the open, and formed their national Government which was proclaimed at Hanoi on September 2nd.

France au Combat, 16-1-47. An anti-fascist resistance front was being set up in Northern Tonkin, called the Viet Minh. At the fall of the Japs the Viet Minh, who held the whole North, threw its weight against Hanoi; where it seized power on August 20th 1945, and on Hue, where it brought about the abdication of Bao Dai... (Stéphane PIZELLA.)

La Vie de la Nation, 23-6-46. — On the days following the triumph of democratic forces over Fascism, all people were filled with the joys of freedom that this victory heralded. The natives, who had been called upon to suffer tremendous efforts and sacrifices in the defence of a democracy so recently granted them, realised how great a danger had thus been averted in the collapse of Fascist forces.

But they were convinced at the same time that they hadn't fought and won only to facilitate the return of colonial oppression, and that they too had the right to benefit from the annihilation of fascist forces.

Under them Viet Nam, numbering some 20 million people, their freedom and social emancipation assured, affirmed through its victory over Vichy reaction and the Japanese, its right to live like a free nation. (J. DRESCH.)

Le Republicain (Perpignan), 21-7-46. — ...Holding steadfastly to its historic watchword: « Against international Fascism and for the liberty of all peoples. » Viet Nam ranges itself on the side of democratic forces in the great struggle for survival. (Report of Proceedings of a Conference given by L. Ph. PINOT, former F.F.I. Commander.)

Ici Paris Hebdo, 11-6-46. — The war came. The Japanese occupied Indochina peacefully. But, from October 1940, the first anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out in the country. There were riots in seven districts, directed against both the men of Vichy and the men of Tokio. Some months later, in 1941, the Viet Minh was set up. Its aim is to liberate Indochina from the Japanese invader and to help the Allies by sabotage and by inciting the civil population to disobedience... Ho Chi Minh is the soul of this underground fight.

La Défense, 10-5-46. — Fascist forces set in motion the great war against democratic peoples. After the end of 1940, Indochina was invaded by Japanese troops. The French Government in Indochina, whose duty it was to defend the country against all external aggression, capitulated. Decoux, the Governor General, became a servant of the Japanese. It was the Vietnamese who raised the standard in the anti-Fascist struggle. They called upon free French people to fight the common battle. Decoux and his agents replied in the form of terrible reprisals. But these only helped our people to strengthen themselves in the fight for national liberation.

Soon after, Fascism was overcome in Europe. In the Pacific, the Japanese were in difficulties. Then came the coup de force of March 9th.

This was the opportunity the Vietnamese had awaited to address their ultimate call to the French. But these gave themselves up to the Japanese or fled to China. Alone in the face of the enemy, and under the direction of the Viet Minh League, the Vietnamese rose up for the decisive phase of the Resistance. News of the Japanese surrender of March 15th 1945 was the signal for the final struggle. The victorious insurrection placed power in the hands of the people. Emperor Bao Dai abdicated.

The Republic was proclaimed and the patriot leader Ho Chi Minh acclaimed President of the Republic by the entire Vietnamese people.

France Nouvelle, 8-6-46. — The history of Viet Nam is as old as that of India or Persia. This country's love of liberty has never diminished.

On the eve of the world war, Japan represented to the subjected people of the South East the one hope of deliverance from an unending European domination, and many were the sympathies they held towards that country with whom they had common bonds of history, race and civilization.

But it was against Japan that the Vietnamese were going to fight, recognising as they did, at the decisive moment, who were their principal enemies.

With astonishing perspicacity, the great patriot Ho Chi Minh, whom the French police had been chasing for the last 30 years, emerged from his hiding and made proposals to the French in Indochina for a common anti-Fascist front. The colonial administration's reply was to send troops out against Vietnamese patriots. Thus Viet Nam came to fight the Japanese Fascists on one front and the Vichy collaborators on the other. The historic declaration of the League for the Independence of Viet Nam reveals even more clearly the unworthy stand taken up by the Vichyists who were representing fighting France.

« Against international Fascism and for the freedom of all peoples. Viet Nam ranges itself on the side of democratic forces in the great struggle for survival. »

Lacking both munitions and arms, the partisans held in check the proud army of Tenno during the bloody encounters at Do Luong.

Bai Say, and Bac Son. The whole of this resistance was the work of the Viet Minh.

On March 9th 1945, the harrassed Japs granted Viet Nam her independence. The Viet Minh forcefully rejected it and got ready for insurrection.

On August 18th, the National Liberation Committee installed itself at Hanoi amidst wild popular enthusiasm and in face of the powerless Japanese, having first swept away the puppet Government of Tran Trong Kim.

The Republic of Viet Nam was proclaimed; and it is an indisputable fact that it was through fighting the Japanese that Viet Nam won her independence.

Since the outbreak of hostilities she has been on the side of the democratic nations and held back Japanese divisions which might have been employed on the Chinese and Burmese fronts.

The whole time the Vietnamese resistance was in contact with the Allied Command, to whom they gave all information concerning enemy moves. »

Les Etoiles, 18-6-46. — We have not forgotten that there a people, equal to the people of France, fought grimly against war and treason. These people, like our own, experienced massacres, deportations, and death camps. The broiling Poulo-Condor, infected with yellow fever, was no less vile than the Ravensbruck, Auschwitz and Mauthausen concentration camps. Coolies and intellectuals, resisters from the delta or the mountains, tortured individuals with yellow faces — their courage, will to win, and their proud love of liberty, were as great as those of us at home who gave their lives for the cause of mankind.

But what is not generally realised is that the Vietnamese people suffered more than the French, for to invasion and brutal oppression was added the long-drawn-out and merciless torture of starvation.

2,000,000 dead in the first months of 1945. Did France know the like? (François CORRÈZE.)

Franc-Tireur, 6-7-46. — On March 9th 1945, after a carefully prepared coup de force, the Japanese High Command put an end to the Vichy Government of Admiral Decoux, which had lasted over five years. The Japanese took over the direct administration of Indochina, and established in each country of the Union governments on whose support it could count. During this time, the Vietnamese Independence group, the Viet Minh, founded in 1941 to fight against Japanese colonialism, continued its underground activities, whilst the remnants of the French army took refuge on Chinese soil.

But when, in August 1945, Japanese power crumbled, the Viet Minh resolved to take over by force the administration of Vietnamese countries, and on September 2nd 1945 President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of Viet Nam.

Fraternité. — Under him (Ho Chi Minh), the entire Viet Nam rose to the call of the country, and patriotic organisations comprising

the whole people without distinction of class, religion or race raised high the standard of national liberation. His main achievement in this work of organising the people was the League for the Independence of Viet Nam, in short, Viet Minh, which merged all the organisations fighting for the independence of the country into a wide national front. This splendid achievement of national unity, we are proud to say, is unique in the world; and yet it has a simple principle: « The Vietnamese love their Fatherland and desire its independence. It is up to the patriots to organise and throw themselves into the fight. » That is what our leader told us at the end of 1940, after the capitulation of Langson, when the Japanese intended to use the whole of Indochina as their springboard in the impending Pacific war. We understood him well, and we set to work; and, in a short while, the Viet Minh became the countersign and warcry of the Vietnamese people in their struggle against Japanese Fascism and the pro-Japanese Decoux administration. (D. T.)

La Rue, 9-8-46. — As soon as the first Japanese troops landed, the League for the Independence of Viet Nam, or Viet Minh, was founded, comprising all democratic forces of the country, in order to:

1. Fight Japanese and French Fascist forces, and eventually to bring about the independence of Viet Nam under the sign of democracy;

2. Render assistance to the United Nations in the fight against world Fascism.

In Tonkin, after the shameful surrender of General Sabatier's force in face of Japanese troops during the events of March 9th 1945, the Viet Minh made great efforts to draw French democratic elements to its side in the fight against Japanese militarism. But apart from a few officers and soldiers who fell in wholeheartedly, the majority of French troops fled to China once they had been disarmed by Vietnamese partisans. Armed with these spoils, Vietnamese troops were able to attack the Japanese army and to free a quarter of their land, before the Japanese downfall.

In Annam, after March 9th, the revolutionary forces rose up on all sides, and harrassed the Japanese troops.

Finally, in Cochinchina, they succeeded in collecting the scanty arms remaining after the French scuttle, and in organising an anti-fascist revolutionary youth movement, cradle of the future movements of workers, peasants and fighters. At the same time as carrying on numerous acts of sabotage against the Japanese Army, they established direct contact with the North in order to secure material help and to provide assistance to the Allies in the event of a landing or of parachute droppings.

Thus while the famous « sphere of co-prosperity » of a Great Oriental Asia petered out, a network of provincial committees was set up and preparations set on foot for the insurrection of August 1945.

J.-M. HERTRICH, « *Doc Lap* », Paris 1946:

« The Viet Minh party is thus free from any taint of collaboration

with the Japs. It was unfortunate that the revolutionaries who made up the party had to accept within their ranks some pro-Japanese elements, as the Dai Viet party in North Tonkin and the Caoaists in Cochinchina.

Mountain folk of all races and guerrillas of the Viet Minh threw in all their forces against the Japanese and spread high hopes of revolution as they carried their message of freedom to Asiatic peoples. French and American paratroops went about in the mountainous regions in contact from time to time with both French columns and Viet Minh groups. They lived in caves, fighting a malaria more deadly even than the Japs.

At last, on August 25th the Republic was proclaimed... a Government of national union. »

P. Mus, « *Le Viet Nam chez lui* », Paris 1946 :

« Without spending too much time enumerating the various parties, I should like to remind you that between 1941 and 1942 there were various divergent elements in China and under Chinese patronage. Each had its leaders and its special programme. But all were united against the common enemy at Lieou Teheou, in August 1942, which Conference gave birth to the League of Revolutionary Organisations, the Viet Nam Cach Minh Dong Minh Hoi, directed primarily against the Japanese and secondly against their accomplices, French « Fascists » who, in Indochina, sprang from the Vichy régime. »

IV. - VIETNAMESE ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH A COMMON ANTI-FASCIST FRONT, AND ATTITUDE TAKEN UP BY THE FRENCH IN INDOCHINA

1) APPEALS TO THE FRENCH IN INDOCHINA

« Turning a blind eye on the past, the political, religious, cultural, co-operative, or purely friendly groups united in the League for the Independence of Viet Nam (the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, or Viet Minh), put forward proposals to the French in Indochina to set up with them a common anti-fascist front. Very few have responded to the appeal. Sympathisers of democratic ideals do not abound in the world of colonialists. The Viet Minh and its leader well knew this, but hoped that, after seeing the sufferings of France under defeat, some sparks of conscience would have been awakened.

Vain hope! Having let Indochina fall to the Japanese, the French colonialists, paying regard only to their own safety and personal interests, are now collaborating with troops of the occupation. From day to day they awaited the meeting of Axis troops through the U.S.S.R. or China. The Army, administration, and business circles alike, turned a deaf ear to the invitations of the Vietnamese resistance.

Vietnamese patriots thus found themselves alone, fighting on two fronts against Japanese militarism and Vichy colonialism. With Allied help they nevertheless achieved victory over their twofold adversary in August 1945.

A poor response was elicited by these reiterated appeals. Very poor, alas, because the French in Indochina who were unwilling to serve the Japanese Fascists contented themselves in general with passive resistance. Very few decided to set out for China or the Vietnamese highlands to take an active part in the struggle.

This has been reported with regret, and not without some uneasy feeling, by Professor J.-M. HERTRICH :

« In the meantime, a handful of sincere men, (not more than one hundred all over Indochina), managed to help the Allies. A planter received a transmitter from some friends in Singapore with whom he had been in contact. Some trader in Hanoi had met an American

who is now in China at the head of the secret underground network. Some friends gathered together and exchanged information. When Allied aircraft were forced down in the wilderness, they would go for the survivors to help them back to the Chinese border. The same help was extended to prisoners of war who had escaped.

As for the followers of Decoux, their frame of mind was well known. Highly sensitive women wept in thinking of the handsome German officers falling on the battlefields. It was rather a matter of pride among the officers of the D.C.A. to have shot down American planes. « It's so much like shooting pigeons, my dear »... And they willingly accepted a good lunch with Jap officers. After all, were they not the conquerors of Singapore ? »

(« Doc Lap », p. 56-57.)

From 1941 to 1945, the Vietnamese resistance incessantly made appeals to French patriots and anti-Fascists in Indochina, and put forward proposals of alliance against Japanese Fascism.

Similar appeals were renewed many times, particularly in 1944, to the official French resistance in Cochinchina as in Tonkin, but they were always disregarded by the Decoux Administration. Didn't they come from an anti-Fascist organisation ?

« Full blame must be laid on the short-sighted policy of the French authorities of the time, because it is easy to assess from the strength of the Viet Minh resistance, just how much heroism and combined force of French and Vietnamese fighters could have been used against the Japanese on March 9th, 1945... »

Victor LEJEUNE and Louis REVOL for the North zone,
André CANAC and Guy ROLLAND for the South zone.

(Extract from « *Témoignage sur l'Indochine par des Français d'Indochine* », Paris, 1946.)

We give here the text of one among several appeals made by the Vietnamese anti-Fascist resistance:

« Join our camp to throw off our common bondage!

To French soldiers and legionaries!

To the French in Indochina, loyal to France!

The Japanese have carried on the Pacific war, so as to accomplish their plan of looting! »

We subjected people of Indochina regard ourselves as part of the international anti-fascist front, and we warmly invite you to join in our side. Haven't we a common enemy to fight? Isn't Indochina being exploited and oppressed by the French-Japanese fascists? Wasn't she betrayed by French Hitlerites like Pétain who are the real authors of the June defeat? Nothing could be more reasonable than that we should unite against the common Fascist enemy. Exploited classes and subjected peoples of the world, we have indeed a high duty to unite in our efforts to save humanity from the horrors of Fascism and to put an end to a war of atrocities.

People say we are ill-disposed towards you, and as proof relate the story of Langson. But the injustices committed against certain French soldiers in the administrative centre of Langson in 1940 (the perpetrators of which, paid agents of the Japanese, cynically called themselves « League for the Restoration of Viet Nam — Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh ») were a kind of reaction to the detested French oppression which had been measured out in the name of French imperialism. These injustices were provoked elsewhere by the Japanese militarists themselves, who wanted to throw the French imperialists into complete chaos, with the intent to snatch « privileges » in Indochina.

For us, oppressed peoples, our enemy is not France, your mother, but the French Fascists, traitors of their country, executioners of our people. That is why we are ready to co-operate with all the French in Indochina, both civil and military, who are sincere in their desire to fight with us against the fascist Franco-Japanese military. For we well understand that they hate the latter as we do and that they are moving steadily towards a situation in which they will have no alternative but to be sympathetic to the cause of Indochinese revolution.

French soldiers and legionaries!

Refuse to shoot against the subjected peoples of Indochina, who fight only for national freedom, for their right to live. Refuse to shoot the Annamites who fight beneath the flag of the League for the Independence of Viet Nam (Viet Minh).

French soldiers and legionaries! French of Indochina, loyal towards French democracy! The people of France have suffered too much, as we, physically and morally. The day is not far off when they will rise up and spit out their hate and misery in the faces of their oppressors and traitors.

In the Pacific, Japan has achieved no more than temporary or local victories. And, despite the claims of its lying propaganda, the Tchung King Autumn counter-offensive and the naval encounters at Salomon were crowned with success. As soon as the democratic forces begin to reform and co-ordinate their troops, the Japanese army will be routed. The fate of the Pacific is being played out in Europe. If the aggressor bloc in the Orient breaks up, the Japanese Fascist beast will be slain. The future is in the hands of democracy, not of Fascism.

French soldiers and legionaries! Grandsons of the supporters of the Commune, great Grandsons of the 1789 revolutionaries! Be worthy of your ancestors. The time is ripe. Organise yourselves! Arm yourselves for the fight! Help us throw off the common yoke! Turn your forces against the Japanese who oppress us, and the Fascist French who shame you!

Come over to the side of our people! Let the anti-Fascist, anti-Japanese Franco-Vietnamese front be formed on Indochinese territory!

« Down with the Japanese military cliques!

Down with Hitlerism!

Down with the French Fascists!

Long live French freedom!
Long live the international anti-fascist front!
Long live Indochinese freedom!
Long live the independence of people!

October 10th, 1942.

2) FRENCH COLONIALISTS' COLLABORATION WITH JAPAN

The Economist, February 8th, 1947: In Indo-China the Japanese were content to maintain French authority intact until the spring of 1945...; by this time the Annamese revolutionary movement had become so closely associated with Chinese support that the Japanese could make no use of it, and all they could do was to proclaim the independence of the French-protected Kings of Annam, Cambodia and Luang Prabang and take over direct control themselves in Saigon and Hanoi... Only in Indo-China is nationalism fairly free from a pro-Japanese past, and that is because there it was the French rulers who co-operated with Japan, while the Annamese sought the protection of China.

The Economist, August 30th, 1947: Morally the French case was far weaker than the Dutch, for the « Vichy » administration in Indo-China had been collaborating with Japan up to March 1945, and the Viet Minh had been a resistance party supported by the Chinese and American authorities in Kunming.

Robert BARRAT, (« *Témoignage Chrétien* », 1st March, 1946) :

« French colonialists remained deaf to the repeated appeals by the League for the Independence of Viet Nam. The stand taken up by the greater part of the French administration under Japanese occupation was such that the leaders of the Annamese nationalist movement clearly revealed that France had implicitly renounced the Protectorate Treaty of 1883. »

« And besides », declared Mr. R. BAUCHAR in his book « *Rafales sur l'Indochine* », « the Japanese were so powerful. It was far better to co-operate with them than to fight them. » And because the French Administration « dared » to arrange for the placing of Japanese troops in Indochina instead of letting them do as they pleased, our author wrote... « Retrospectively, having witnessed the feats accomplished by the army and fleet of the Empire of the Rising Sun in 1942, everyone was astounded at our audacity! »

It was therefore on grounds of prudence that the French in Indochina refrained from responding to the appeals of the Vietnamese resistance. « The Americans dropped arms to the Viet Minh guerrillas stationed in the mountains, while the party increased its hold on the towns... How ridiculous! As if it could harm the Japanese, who could face up to the whole world! »

HOW THE COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION COLLABORATED WITH JAPAN

In September 1940 Marshal PÉTAIN declared:—

« After much reflection, I have ordered my Government to open up negotiations with Japan, so that we may avoid a war fatal to Indochina and may safeguard our essential rights. »

Having decided on a policy of collaboration with Japan, Admiral Decoux was charged with its execution. In obedience to Japanese injunctions, Vichy ordered the French High Command in Indochina to sign a series of military pacts ceding Indochina to the Japanese armed forces. Despite a statement of M. Baudoin, who attempted to minimise the importance of the French capitulation, Mr. Cordell Hull vigorously protested, on September 23rd.

The Vichy French attitude encouraged the Japanese in their ambitions. Having submitted to Japanese mediation in their quarrel with Siam, France began to impose ever-stricter military conditions. It is true that the French radio, which informed occupied France of the stages by which the Japanese steadily got hold of Indochina, continued to assert that this occupation « does not seek to damage the integrity of French sovereignty ». (May, July, December 1941, November 1942, March, August, November 1943, March, August 1944.)

« The official seizure of Indochina by the Japanese took place on the day following Pearl Harbour. The 9th December Agreement sanctioned it. But it had been prepared long since... »

Concession after concession led to the ultimatum of September 22nd 1940 and the Agreement of July 1941, which opened up Southern Indochina to Japanese troops. When Pétain came to power, General Catroux, who was then Governor General, went back to Europe and Admiral Decoux was sent to replace him. He is the most responsible for the present situation...

Such was Admiral Decoux's servility towards the Japanese that an official there at the time said of him: « When a Japanese asks for blotting paper, he sends him the desk and the armchair as well! »

The French in Saigon were so disgusted by this servile attitude, that Governor Rivoal couldn't hide his repugnance. Even the leader of the German mission, Colonel Neumann, found it so excessive that he hoped, by being merely friendly, to acquire for the Reich all that the French might have been able to make away with from the Japanese plunderings.

The « façade » of French administration continued under Decoux's Government, but in fact it was the Japanese who ruled and who made use of the riches of the country.

Some large scale French firms were able to provide great supplies of food to the Japanese, by means of which they gained millions of piastres and amassed enormous fortunes, for which they have not as yet been called to account.

In this way the French lost what little consideration the Annamites had for them.

Admiral Decoux complied with all the conditions exacted by the Japanese ultimatum, which demanded the control of banks and customs, and the disarmament of French troops. He also paid the 120 million piastres which the occupying forces called for quarterly. Decoux was for Indochina a reinforced Pétain.

If the Japanese got hold of Singapore as easily, they owed it to Decoux. For in effect it was he who ceded them the naval and air bases of Rach Gia and Ha Tien, in the Gulf of Siam, in 1940, from where the bomber squadrons of the Rising Sun took off. » (C. DELONG, *l'Ordre*, 26-27th January 1947.)

SOME ASPECTS OF VICHY-JAPANESE COLLABORATION

While the Japanese were enjoying their first successes in the Pacific — and while the democratic Parties of Viet Nam, united under the Viet-Minh, were incessantly calling upon the people to fight against Japanese Fascism — the French colonialists were becoming the handmaid of Japanese militarism. There are several sides to this Franco-Japanese « collaboration » :

1) FRENCH COLONIALISTS COLLABORATED DIRECTLY WITH JAPAN FROM THE MILITARY ANGLE

(Note : Texts on the « Seizure by Japan of French Indochina » can be found in number 78 of the « Notes documentaires et Etudes » (série coloniale IX), published by the French Ministry in Indochina, June 15th 1945. The text chiefly concerned with the military collaboration between French colonial authorities and the Japanese Army of Occupation is that of December 9th 1941.)

At Hanoi on December 9th 1941, a « local military agreement concerning the communal defence of French Indochina » was signed between Governor General Decoux on the one hand, and Major General Tyo, representing the Japanese Army, on the other. We give here the clauses of the agreement, signed on the day following Pearl Harbour :

General principles

1. The French authorities in Indochina will co-operate with all means at their disposal with the Japanese Army, in the defence of French Indochina, and in conformity with agreements between France and Japan.

2. Indochinese authorities guarantee public order throughout Indochinese territory for the duration of operations by the Japanese army, so as to safeguard the rear columns of the Japanese Army. Japanese troops, if need be, will co-operate in this field with Indochinese authorities.

3. Indochinese authorities offer the Japanese Army all facilities for troop movements, supplies, and for setting up military establishments.

4. The defence will be divided accordingly:
Japanese Army: Southern Indochina and, eventually, the other regions where the Army will be stationed.

Indochinese Army: Northern Indochina and other regions where Indochinese troops will be stationed. Should Japanese and Indochinese troops be stationed in the same sector, a special agreement will be made to govern details of common defence on the spot.

5. Separate agreements will regulate co-operation with regard to:

- Anti-aircraft defence;
- Coastal defence;
- Sea and air navigation;
- Means of transport;
- Communications;
- Use of equipment and manpower;
- Fight against espionage;
- News control.

Hanoi, December 9th, 1941.

Vice-Admiral DECOUX.

Major General TYO,

representing the C.L.C.,

Japanese Army.

Signed: TYO.

Here is another testimony we have got by chance: letter number 2345-DNI-2 from the Governor General to the Colonel Commanding the Air Force in Indochina:

« By letter no. 1416-3-S of July 1st 1942, you want to know what reply you should give should the Japanese Airforce ask you to build a stone-paved landing strip of a thousand to twelve hundred metres on the territory of Thai Hut, Son La, Phyl Tho and Ha Giang.

I beg to inform you that such a request must be met with « the broadest spirit of co-operation ». You would have to inform the interested parties of the necessary delays in carrying out the requested works and of our firm intention to do them ourselves. Should the military aviation deem it necessary itself to undertake the whole or a part of the works, we should take charge of the purchasing of the land and arrange for the hiring of manpower. »

J. M. HERTRICH (*Doc Lap*, p. 192). — The American attitude regarding the French may seem strange. We must admit that all the faults are not theirs!

During the worst period of the Decoux regime, some officers, especially among those who commanded our Anti-Aircraft units, did not hesitate to shoot at American planes. In official circles, it was said that some « performances » had been rewarded.

Worn out by the climate, depressed by Vichy and Decoux propaganda, too many officers were thinking only of their own safety and their personal interests. We may leave these confused cases to the Army to judge. But the Americans were entitled to be indignant. »

2) FRENCH COLONIALISTS LED AN ACTIVE ANTI-ALLIED AND PRO-FASCIST CAMPAIGN

Letter from Admiral Decoux, Governor General of Indochina, to the heads of the local administrations:

« I beg hereby to forward you the instructions necessary to the counteracting, by oral propaganda, of illusions created by Mr. Wallace's declarations in Chungking in the hearts of some Indochinese.

These instructions must be carried out by the Chiefs of Provinces among those who might have lent a heedful ear to Mr. Wallace's declarations.

Local departmental I.P.P. heads will be instructed in other respects, to publish articles, without detriment to Wallace's declarations, on the present U.S. policy towards the small countries. These articles will serve as basis for the oral propaganda referred to in our documentary. » (Paul Mus, *Le Viet Nam chez lui*.)

France, half the world away from Indochina, cannot be divided up into parts. She remains wholly consistent in her various expressions. Criticisms, of whatever sort, of the ideas imported by her, even when she herself seems to deny them, would only discredit herself.

Identification of the Marshal's wisdom with that of Confucius, was one of the favourite themes of the Saigon radio. A question then came to the minds of listeners: why have the French come to teach us, at great cost, something that Asia has had for more than two and a-half thousand years? The Vichy system condemns its own opponents. Now it is itself condemned; for the old scholars exterminated by us were familiar enough with the teaching of Confucius, and knew better than we the whys and wherefores.

And what propaganda being carried out simultaneously with repression! Suffice it for me to tell you that a version of the classical comparison between Pétain and Joan of Arc has been formulated for the Indochinese. « Joan of Arc was a great saint, who saved our Fatherland and chased out the English. The Marshal too is a very great saint, and we expect a dove to come out of his mouth, too, when he dies. »

About the same time, a teacher wrote to a newspaper editor: « If we want to check Gaullism and Communism, which are one, much blood must be shed; and if we are reluctant to shed blood, what would happen? » What effect do you imagine would be produced upon the Annamites by such appeals addressed to them? Another declaration from a teacher: « Some complain of Fascism, some of Hitlerism. But what then? We are no longer afraid of

words. These very régimes spring to a large extent from French ideas... »

Beyond the reservations of Franco-Japanese collaboration, we saw the much more dreadful shadow of Franco-Hitlerite colonialism spreading over Indochina. This has brought forth nefarious consequences, patently exposed before the eyes of a people who are fully competent to pass judgement upon us.

If, in putting ourselves in the place of the Indochinese, we reopen the file of collaboration, which we shut somewhat hurriedly a short while back, we shall not fail to discover a completely new cause for anxiety.

3) LARGE SCALE ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION BETWEEN FRENCH COLONIALISTS AND JAPAN : FRENCH TROOPS MAINTAINED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE VIET-NAMESE PEOPLE

1. Rice supply : As French colonial authorities used to raid the country, no precise figures are available. But as a result of requisitions of rice for the Japanese, 2,000,000 died of starvation at the beginning of 1945.

2. Raw materials : rubber, wolfram, coal, iron, tin, jute, linen, etc. Thousand of hectares of ricefields were despoiled for the Japanese capitalist companies (Taigou-Sen, Kabushiki-Kaisha, Mitsubishi Shoji, Kooso, Nichimen, Jitsugyô Matsuchi, Cici, etc.). The peasants were compelled to raise jute, linen and cotton in the stead of rice.

3. Cost of maintenance of Japanese troops. In a note from the Secretary General of the Governor General, J. Cousin, money « concessions » to the Japanese troops were given as follows :

1940	6,000,000.00 piastres
1941	58,000,000.00 piastres
1942	85,626,911.31 piastres
1943	117,227,319.07 piastres

Total at the end of 1943 . . . 266,854,230.38 piastres

(Note : Item of instalments made in 1943 :)

1st half year	44,852,191.64 piastres
2nd half year	31,600,407.75 piastres
Complementary allowances :	
November	20,387,359.84 piastres
December	20,387,359.84 piastres

Total 117,227,319.07 piastres

There is no information about the instalments for 1944 and 1945. However, on December 24th, 1943, the Japanese mission made a request for 316,000,000 piastres by the first of September 1944, and

the French agreed to a first payment of 18,000,000 piastres to be made in January, 1944.

(It is significant to point out that the budget of the Governor General for 1945 ran to 299,500,510 piastres — that is to say less than 25,000,000 per month — what the French paid to the Japanese represented four times the budget.)

Mme Andrée VIOLIS (*La Marseillaise*, December 19-25th, 1946). — Viet Nam was ruled by an oligarchy of big planters, rice growers, industrialists, traders, more or less bound by Trusts. They were always at one in sweating their 20 million employees, even resorting to forced labour. With a press on their payroll, and civil servants as their stooges, they were all-powerful.

During the Japanese occupation, these gentlemen indulged in Pétainism, and in trafficking with the Japanese, thus realising huge profits. Used not Admiral Decoux to say : « Economic questions are not my department » ? — a very facile way of shirking one's responsibilities. There were monopolies in ground nuts, fats, sugar, cereals. Everything was collected for the Japanese and the Trusts. Prices soared. The mass of the people lived in the most squalid misery. Many of them joined the Maquis, where some French followed them. But repression was brutal; overcrowded prisons, tortures, executions. The Police Force, or Forces rather — there were many competing in zeal — were overdutiful. Those were the days!

But suddenly the feast was disturbed. Successively, the advent of the New France, the Japanese collapse, the proclamation of the Vietnamese Republic. The oligarchy was uneasy. Should they pack up and quit, or at least give way?

4) FRENCH COLONIALISTS SET UP A REGIME OF TERROR AND TAKE REPRESSIVE MEASURES AGAINST ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENTS

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

« We, Emile Grandjean, Resident Superior in Tonkin, etc... »

Order all officers of the Judiciary Police to seize all over the territory of Tonkin, by ordinance of Police, all copies of the June 5th 1940 issue of the newspaper « Candide » and any other publication containing the apology of ex-General de Gaulle.

Hanoi, December 31st, 1940.

(Signed :) GRANDJEAN. »

Circular of August 22nd by the Governor General of Indochina to all heads of local Administrations, concerning Gaullist activities in Indochina :

« A powerful Anglo-Gaullist propaganda movement is now taking place, to rally the French to the other side of resistance and fighting organisations. Several broadcast « messages » have called upon the French to join the « Army of Insurrection » organised by General de Gaulle and the French Government fighting with the Allies.

At Kunming, on the borders of our land, a Gaullist branch organisation is exerting continual pressure on our countrymen living in Yunnan. Let me remind you of the instructions I have already given concerning the necessity of keeping revolutionary elements out of harm's way. All steps must be taken to ensure that members of the Gaullist organisations, which have been able to form in secret, shall be identified and arrested in the same way as foreign spies.

All means of external communication which they may employ must be minutely searched.

To this effect, you must strengthen measures already taken and see to it that every act of propaganda against the safety of the nation shall be immediately suppressed. I lay stress on the fact that the Japanese Information Service is particularly interested in Anglo-Gaullist propaganda activity in Indochina and that any failure on our part in the tracing and repression of these movements is liable to have far-reaching results.

(Signed :) DECOUX.

Hanoi, 2nd September 1947.
The Resident Superior at Tonkin, etc...
To the Mayors administering Hanoi, Hai Phong, the Resident Heads of Provinces, etc...

« All steps must be taken to place Gaullist elements out of harm's way. Measures already put in hand must be tightened.

I take this opportunity to point out that the Japanese Information Service is particularly interested in Anglo-Gaullist propaganda activity in Indochina and that any failure on our part in the tracing and repression of these movements is liable to have far-reaching results.

(Signed :) DELSALLE. »

Note by ARNOUX, chief of the Sureté, to his subordinate officers.

« ...I call on your sense of duty to see that everything possible shall be done in the present situation. It is of the utmost importance that the people should behave in a thoroughly respectful way towards the Japanese authorities. The interests of the Federation and of France are at stake. Any incident, thoughtless gesture, hasty word, however seemingly unimportant, could have grave consequences. »

February 15th, 1945.

From Admiral Decoux to the « Resident Superior » at Tonkin.

« The Resident Administrator at Langson has informed me that the French representative of the Frontier Police met his opposite number on the Chinese side and conversed in the presence of a Gaullist agent. I beg to inform you that I strictly forbid any contacts of this kind in the future. If the Gaullists penetrate into French territory, they will be arrested, and should they try to escape, we shall immediately open fire. »

TESTIMONY

Measures taken against French resistants

C. DELONG (L'Ordre, January 26-27th, 1947). — From Vichy to Saigon :

« In obedience to orders from Vichy, Admiral Decoux set up a régime of persecution of any pro-Republic elements. His orders were carried out by police officers, many of whom are still in their posts.

Such Gaullists as there were in Saigon were given the sack or interned. And all Annamites who were, or were suspected of being pro-Communist were brutally suppressed. People of Saigon still remember the execution of young Thi Minh, who walked to the block all dressed in white and vowed that one day his friends would avenge him.

Suspects were sent to the Poulo-Condor convict gaol or to concentration camps. Many, alas, were the French victims of the tyrannical force of Admiral Decoux. If all republican officials were recalled, the most resistant among them paid for their stand at the cost of their lives.

Names spring to the mind, such as Nicolau, Chief Engineer of Public Works in Cochinchina; Dr. Bocquet; Professor Uhry, father of the Socialist deputy who jumped out of the window on being arrested; like Brossolette. Then there was Béchamp, arrested at Fort Bayard, imprisoned first of all at Hanoi and then secretly despatched to Saigon. When he was dying he felt stifled in his cell, and asked permission of the Prison Director for his door to be open. Decoux ordered it to be shut and a guard to be placed in front of it. Dr. Béchamp died. And this is only one example among many.

It is thanks to Decoux that the French in Indochina were divided into two hostile camps, under the scornful gaze of the Annamites, who used to say : « The French are the hounds of the Japs and the Germans. »

Measures taken against Vietnamese resistants

P. Mus (Le Viet Nam chez lui) :

« We have never protected the Indochinese against occupation everywhere and always. And doesn't the fact that some French denounced even their own countrymen to the Japanese throw an inauspicious light upon the lot of the Indochinese? »

It was estimated that, on March 9th, we had from 8 to 10 million Indochinese political prisoners, mostly Annamites, in our prisons, concentration camps and labour camps. It is a great number. How had they been selected? Every Annamite had his own story to tell. Here, as a sample is a personal observation :

When we went back to Saigon, the first large neighbouring province with which we were concerned in October-November 1945 was My Tho. The first enquiries with which we were met were around

a great local personality called Minh. Surrounded by a contingent of attendants he had (we were told) sent many pro-French whose property had a great value, to their death. He could be taken as a typical refugee from Poulo-Condor — this, for those of you who don't already know, is the name of an island off the Cochinchinese coast where a political prison had been built, and of which, it seemed, we had just begun to make use. Sometimes we had had 'vastly to despatch to these prisons our enemies whom the Japanese had set free. But a distinction has to be made. For even if it were possible to get rid of them in this way, wouldn't we ourselves have to work? You must judge for yourselves later on. Minh certainly seemed to me to be a political prisoner who had escaped from Poulo-Condor where he had been confined after the 1941 uprisings in Cochinchina. But when we saw him in 1945, he seemed no more than 20 years old. We were far enough off to be completely mistaken. In order to judge so complicated a situation and a point of view that is not necessarily our own, thought must be paid to those ten thousand political internees and to the 16 year old youths who have been sent to convict prisons.

Less onerous from the physical angle, but with equally serious repercussions, were the measures taken against the Indochinese through the unreserved imposition of Vichy laws.

How can I avoid seeing in my mind's eye the face of a man towards whom I felt a sincere regard — Mr. Tran Trong Kim? Until, upon being called up, I went back to France in February 1940, to fight, I had spent many friendly vacations with this old teaching inspector, who for many years had been my father's colleague. The course of events had seen him first President of the Council of Government set up by the Japs. This honest, conscientious man was at one with the French school and his own. He was of the first generation to be thus allied to us in spirit, substituting for a strictly Chinese culture of the previous generation a modern culture impregnated with social and political ideas brought to it through the influence of France. Yet here were precisely that philosophy and these institutions that Marshal Pétain had established in France and that Admiral Decoux continued to uphold in Indochina, in no less stringent manner. Simultaneously with sending a youth of 16 years to a convict camp, they called back an elderly man, strengthened by long years of upright living. In this way, drawing upon all sources, one builds up a party against one's self.

Persecution of Vietnamese and French resisters

J. M. HERTRICH (*Doc Lap*). — Decoux took part in the rejoicings over the national revolution with deep satisfaction. Denunciations, bullying, summary judgements, imprisonments and refined torture, systematic propaganda, line-ups in the Fascist style — all these things were to be found; and it must be admitted that the whole of Indochina, comprising the rich or well-to-do, the promotion-seeking officials, and the naturally Fascist troops, followed to a man.

All this would have been very well had it not been the year 1945; a depressing year to think on as far as Admiral Decoux and his followers were concerned.

The Admiral's policy wasn't confined to the French; it held good for the Annamites too. Honours and preferences fell to the lot of any, bourgeois and nobility alike, who paid courtesy visits to the French H.Q. and bowed low before the authorities; you could even congratulate the Admiral on his pro-Annamite policy, if you didn't take into account the fate of any suspected of nationalism, Communism or revolutionary idealism. These the police were happy to deal with, and summary executions were by no means unusual.

G. de CHEZAL (*Parachuté en Indochine*). — Conversation between the witness and an Administrator named Philippon, head of the province of Bien Hoa (Nambo) :

« Old man Decoux, exclaimed Philippon, I had close relations with him. Above all, he is a vainglorious man, who claimed he played the satrape. Full of spite. You hear it said sometimes that he kept a tight hand on the Japanese, and it's true, if you refer solely to their provisions. Moreover, you couldn't find a worse Vichy supporter, nor anyone who carried out the Pétain-Laval orders more strictly — even though nothing compelled him to.

— He grew excited.

All that story-telling, patronising, and the rest of it! Still, that wasn't so bad. Worse, he it was who instigated the persecution of the Jews. It might have been more cruel, I agree, but how many had already been eliminated. And how many Freemasons? Even the best friends of France among the natives were scored off, such as the brave Tran Trong Kim, whom he blithely recalled from office. Even that is nothing — nothing more than a Maurras policy, mere Fascism. But, gentlemen, do you realise that, in October 1940, 800 Communists were shot?

— You exaggerate, said Rops.

— Exaggerate, Mr. Rops? I am in a better position than you to judge. For instance, they bound the private organs of the prisoners with wire connected to a generator!

Philippon folded his arms.

— Are you aware that at this very moment there are something like 10,000 political internees in concentration camps?

— Not really?

— And another example. In this district alone, I have under my jurisdiction the Nui Bara camp, where they send the survivors of Poulo-Condor, to make sure of finishing them off. »

5) FRENCH COLONIALISTS SACRIFICED THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF THE INDOCHINESE UNION IN FAVOUR OF THE FASCIST POWERS

The colonial administration or, rather, the Indochinese Union, under Japanese pressure, was the price of the Japanese occupation of Thailand. Favourable reports came in of agreement with the Siamese; but the men of Vichy, in order to safeguard their own interests, were accommodating to the Japanese, who were counting upon Siamese support in their operations against India.

By the Convention of May 9th, 1941, signed at Tokio under Japanese pressure, Admiral Decoux ceded to Siam 70,000 square kilometres of territory inhabited by half a million people. Tens of thousands of tons of rice were thus missing from Indochinese reserves, as well as considerable quantities of fish from Tonle Sap. A France humiliated, who at the same time showed herself a nothing more than a simple Axis satellite.

Article 2. — The French Indochina-Thailand frontier shall be re-adjusted as follows : ...

Article 3. — The territories included in the present frontier between French Indochina and Thailand, and the new frontier line, defined in Article 2, shall be evacuated and ceded in accordance with the arrangements of the Protocol annexed to the present Convention (Annex I).

Article 10. — Any possible disagreement between the two contracting Powers concerning the interpretation or application of the stipulations of the present Convention shall be resolved in a friendly manner by diplomatic negotiations. If the problem cannot be solved thus, it shall be put to the mediation of the Japanese Government.

Drawn up in triplicate, in French, Japanese and Siamese, at Tokio. »

6) FRENCH COLONIALISTS, WHO PUT UP NO OPPOSITION TO THE JAPANESE INVASION OF INDOCHINA, FAILED TO DEFEND THE LATTER AGAINST THE COUP DE FORCE OF MARCH 9TH, 1945

Flight or capitulation — this is how the French colonial troops and authorities reacted. However, Japanese forces in Indochina were insignificant; approaching defeat kept them elsewhere.

« On March 9th, what had to happen, recounts Professor HERTSCH, happened! That is to say, in the face of increasing activity by the League for the Independence of Viet-Nam, and the liberation of France, French authorities in Indochina began at last to question Japanese victory and, going to the other extreme, began to lean toward Gaullism. One day, there will have to be a reckoning, and, since everyone was accomplice in the crime, everyone will be party to the great « renewal of goodness » — the Japanese are well aware

of this strange secret movement — they are preparing to put a brake on it. And, in turn, their preparations are well known to our security, who have warned the chiefs of staff. The head of this resistance in *extremis* is General Mordant. They tried to warn him, but no one took their information seriously. On the evening of March 7th, Captain Bouveret refused to wake up General Mordant « for such a trifle ». On the afternoon of March 8th, Lieutenant-Colonel Cavalin, brilliant aide to General Mordant, replied : « There's too much rumour going around about this coup de force for it to be true ». Nevertheless, on the 8th, the troops were confined to barracks. At 5 p.m., on the 9th, the order was countermanded, and the soldiers free until 11 p.m., without knowing why. By definition, the coup de force would begin that same day at 10 p.m., and General Mordant be captured like the others — without honour. » (*Doc Lap.*)

« The same reaction in Saigon, where Governor General Decoux was, as in Hanoi. M. A. GAUDEL, however indulgent towards French colonialism in Indochina, recognised the fact that the French authorities had put up no opposition to the Japanese, merely restricting themselves to naming the exigencies « unacceptable and dishonourable ».

The occupation of the Palace of the Governor General took place without bloodshed. At the same time, within Indochina, Japanese troops seized all administrative buildings, all radio stations, telephone and telegraph posts, as well as the banks and principal industrial establishments. They made attacks upon the police force and upon barracks, and then proceeded to arrest civil and military authorities. » (*L'Indochine française en face du Japon.*)

Except for a few Northern provinces which offered some resistance, elsewhere the Japanese disarmed the French in under 24 hours. The greater part of the French forces gave in even before they were attacked; among them was the Tuyen Quang garrison which counted some 2,000 men and had a magnificent stock of arms and ammunition. 500 Japanese took no more than half an hour to become masters of Tong, the most important strategic centre of Northern Viet Nam, where 7,000 French soldiers were massed. In Hanoi itself, French soldiers didn't resist for even two days.

Mr. HERTSCH recognised, however, that one of the Generals commanding in Indochina, Sabatier, took Japanese military preparations seriously and quit Hanoi in time.

« It was he who, in company with General Alessandri, led the save-yourself-if-you-can movement towards the Chinese border. Here again, I should like to express myself differently. Among these troops were defeated and dead men, heroes too. Few indeed, but there were some. But unfortunately my ears are still ringing with the talks I had with the Kunming people, soldiers, under-officers, observer-parachutists — and I can't speak otherwise. Let us bow

before the dead and salute the courageous, who themselves suffer in having lent a hand in so mistaken a direction.

For a moment, I thought of writing the story of the days following March 9th. I shan't do so: I hope it will never be done, inasmuch as I hope no one will retell the detailed story of Langson. Let us forget the men who have become blinded by too many years spent in the Colonies, too many amenities, and the demoralising propaganda of Vichy and Decoux. Above all, let them themselves forget! Don't let them flaunt their dead and isolated heroes, or make use of them to come back to France and take advantage of a credulity which until now nothing could prevent. They were the Admiral's men. Had they met a Gaullist during times of difficulty, they would have shot him. They are responsible for years in prison spent by men such as Labussiere, one of the few fighter pilots who shot down Japanese and Siamese aircraft and from the first sympathised with de Gaulle; Robert, brilliant officer of the « corps franc » who was also a Gaullist; and Boule, the first Gaullist envoy in Indochina.

Just lately, General Mordant was in Kunming. He was received at the French Mission by a group of officers, one of whom was named Captain Martin. This man refused to shake hands and said, looking the General straight in the face: « I am Labussiere, whom, in 1940, you condemned to five years imprisonment for trying to escape abroad! — Oh? Oh yes... Believe me, I am sorry for it! said the General, rather embarrassed. — No more than I am! » replied Labussiere. Is that the man who deserves to be fêted as the Great Resistor of Indochina?

At this time, French sovereignty no longer existed in Indochina. » (Doc Lap.)

A witness of the Japanese coup de force, Mr. R. Bauchar, holds that the French defeat was due above all to weakness and negligence. And in his opinion this failure was excusable as far as the might of the adversary was concerned.

« What troops! he wrote. In opposition to our riflemen of three or four years service and no real experience, they (the Japanese) were going to send out warriors from Manchuria who had victoriously traversed China. We can see them — stocky, square-shouldered, solid louts they are, obedient and decided beasts. They can sleep anywhere and eat enough to last for 3 days. They have experienced all forms of warfare and all schemes of battle, and in all climates. They are fully aware that no infantryman has ever been able to resist their nocturnal campaigns in the open countryside, and we haven't enough material force to intimidate them... »

Mr. R. BAUCHAR added:

« To give a true picture, we must also mention an undeniable fact which had a great influence throughout the country — the ever-present refuge way beyond the Chinese frontier — a refuge among the Allies.

For the Annamite and Southern troops, China, too far off, could only be a last resort. Their numbers had been diminished, and no one doubted that their fight would become what is called « un baroud d'honneur ». As for the troops in the North, the « call of China, of Chinese refuge » could hardly be despised... » (Rafales sur l'Indochine.)

The author of the document « The Japanese hold on French Indochina », published by the French Ministry of Information, concluded in these words: « The Vichyite leaders who, from capitulation to capitulation, finished up by leaving Indochina to the enemy, were for some time still left at their posts — the policy of collaboration with Japan was discharged with the same dishonour as the policy of collaboration with Germany.

On March 9th, 1945, Indochina was annexed by Japan and her collaborator-leaders arrested. She was going to be left to the mercy of her brutal, grasping occupants until the time of her liberation by France and the Allies. »

This appreciation drawn up by an office man who referred to original texts in order to study the facts, was similarly expressed by Mr. HERTRICH, a witness of events. He knew that the French in Indochina collaborated with the Fascists, knew too that the Vietnamese fought the Japanese and won their independence at the price of their blood. He knew how unprincipled the French reconquest was; and this disgusted him.

« The Annamites, despite all, had closely followed the evolution of democratic France. Perhaps they had pinned great hopes on it. They still admire the France of 1789. They are deeply versed in authors such as Rousseau or the Encyclopaedists.

Instead of that, what do we find? Over-prudent administrators, with limited powers, who offered Indochina, the statute of March 24th, the essence of indecision, vague precaution, and nebulousness.

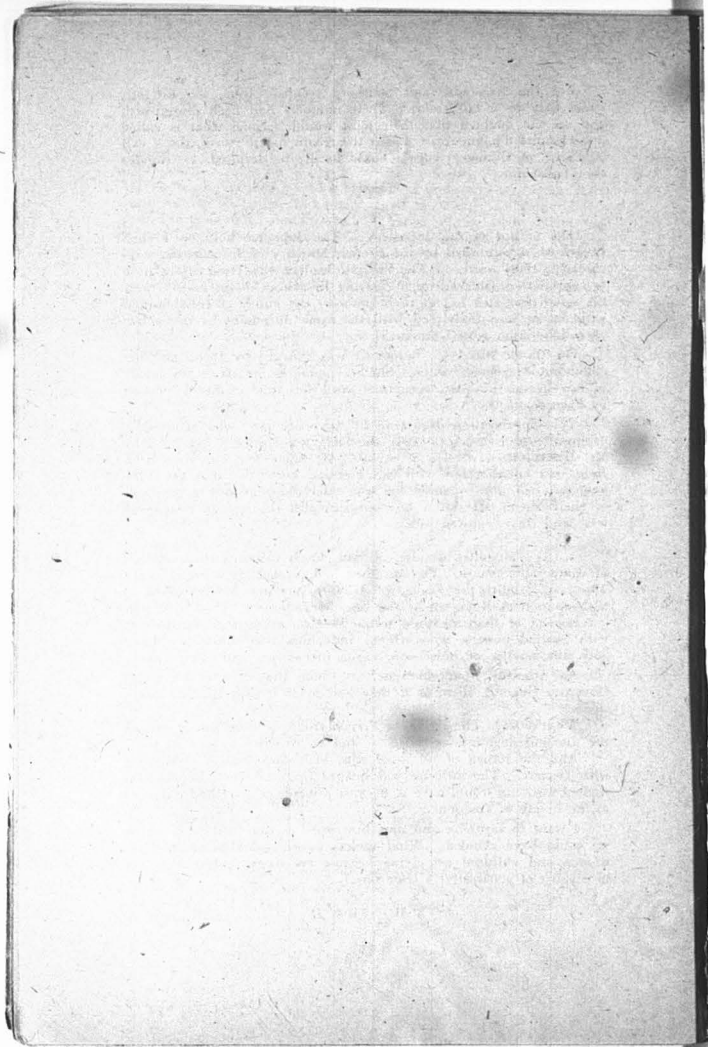
An Admiral — another one! — whom they first of all called Governor General, then, as if they had made a slip, High Commissioner.

What more? The arrival of French troops who became a menace the moment negotiations failed — and an effective menace at that!

And the return of all those who had compromised themselves with Decoux. The measure was heaped up — French imperialism wanted war, and would have it, because a whole country had quivered at the breath of freedom...

I want to say here and now how cruel is this futile war which we could have avoided. What useless massacres! How many men, women and children are dying because we haven't wanted to act in a spirit of generosity! » (Doc Lap.)

THE END



IMPRIMERIE
CENTRALE
COMMERCIALE
13, rue de la Grande-Batelière
— PARIS (IX^e) —
Jacques LONDON, Imprimeur