

Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955–56

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Hungarian archival documents suggest that although the North Vietnamese regime did not execute as many persons during its land reform campaign as its foreign critics claimed, it had to cope with serious political and socioeconomic discontent in the first post-liberation years. The various difficulties that generated this discontent were partly rooted in the legacy of French rule and the abrupt partition of the country, but DRV policies were not blameless either. Almost every major stratum and group of northern society had some grievances, and the gradual exacerbation of domestic tension probably played a more important role in the introduction of “corrections” by the North Vietnamese leadership in the fall of 1956 than external influences. While Hanoi’s land reform conceptions had been inspired both by Chinese and East European models, the radical revision of the land reform campaign had relatively little to do with the contemporaneous liberalization of Soviet and Chinese internal policies. In fact, at first the VWP leaders proved quite reluctant to follow the example of the Communist giants in the field of political liberalization. The Hungarian documents also reveal that the execution of the land reform as well as the treatment of private entrepreneurs and “old” officials was strongly influenced by the regime’s changing evaluation of the prospects of national unification. Unification plans could either harden or soften the government’s internal policies. While numerous authors claimed that the North Vietnamese leaders never expected the 1956 elections to take place, it seems that many domestic measures that the regime took in 1954–55 were motivated by the intention of facilitating a peaceful electoral victory.

Thanks to the works of Edwin E. Moise, Georges Boudarel, Neil L. Jamieson, and others, certain negative effects of early North Vietnamese domestic policies are already well known.¹ These authors described the 1955–56 agrarian reform campaign and the curtailment of intellectual freedom in great detail, and carefully compared North Vietnamese policies with Chinese communist measures. Nevertheless, the topic certainly deserves further research. For instance, precise

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data about the number of victims are still scarce, which sometimes hinders the interpretation of these dramatic events and leads to controversies. As late as 1999, Jean-Louis Margolin wrote in his contribution to *The Black Book of Communism* that 'there were probably some 50,000 executions in the countryside' in the course of the land reform campaign² – a debated number whose origin can be traced to works that had been published decades ago and influenced by the atmosphere of the Cold War.

Due to the increasing accessibility of Vietnamese archival sources, more and more Vietnamese documents related to this era are available for research, and hopefully the aforementioned debates and controversies will be concluded in a relatively short time. Nonetheless, East European archival documents may also be useful and important to some extent, for the East European diplomats accredited to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) were often given confidential information by the North Vietnamese foreign ministry and the leadership of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP). Since in the 1950s the North Vietnamese cadres had little reason to expect that the data given to the 'fraternal' diplomats would ever become accessible to a wider audience, they often spoke with remarkable frankness. Thus these East European sources may help fill a few gaps in the literature that covers the political, social and economic situation which existed in North Vietnam in the mid-1950s.

The Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Országos Levéltár, MOL) contain a great amount of recently declassified top secret and administrative documents that were prepared by the officials of the Hungarian foreign ministry in the 1945–89 period. In comparison with Russian, Chinese or Romanian archives, access to these sources is quite easy. Of the diplomatic papers related to post-1945 Vietnamese history, it is only the documents dealing with Hungarian military assistance to Hanoi that have remained substantially unaffected by the declassification process. With regard to North Vietnamese domestic policies, it is the top secret reports written by the Hungarian embassy to Hanoi that are the most valuable, since the so-called party documents, which were previously stored in the archives of the Hungarian communist party, usually cover diplomatic and military issues.

Here, one has to admit that the Hungarian diplomats were not as well-informed as their Soviet and Chinese counterparts. For instance, in January 1956 the Hungarian embassy reported that the 'strictly confidential' information it had received about the planned budget expenditures of the DRV did not include any figure for military expenditures.³ Still, the data the Hungarian diplomats got about the North Vietnamese political and social situation sometimes proved more detailed or precise than the ones to be found in the existing western literature on the subject. Their reports include useful pieces of information about the number of persons who were executed, imprisoned, expelled from the VWP and the Youth League, or otherwise persecuted in 1955–56. Actually, the DRV authorities' willingness to provide the 'fraternal' diplomats with such data reveals a lot about Hanoi's foreign relations as well, for the North Korean or Albanian cadres seem to have been much more reluctant to discuss party affairs with the Hungarians. 'It is customary in Korea that they speak

little about the party in the presence of foreigners', the Hungarian ambassador in P'yongyang noted in December 1954.⁴

Following the example of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, Hungary established diplomatic relations with the DRV on 3 February 1950, but the Franco-Vietnamese War prevented the setting up of a Hungarian embassy in Hanoi until January 1955. Thus in the 1950–54 period the Hungarian foreign ministry did not receive a regular flow of information about the events in Vietnam but had to rely on the reports of those Hungarians who occasionally met DRV diplomats in Moscow and Beijing. As a consequence, Hungarian archival documents contain few, if any, precise data about pre-1954 Vietnamese communist policies, such as the first wave of agrarian reform and the 1952 *chinh huan* campaign.⁵

Nevertheless, in some cases the Hungarian diplomats accredited to the USSR and the PRC did collect valuable pieces of information. For instance, on 10 May 1950 the Hungarian embassy in Moscow informed the Hungarian foreign ministry about a recent lecture that a certain Comrade Podkopaev (presumably an influential official of the Soviet foreign ministry) had given on the situation in Vietnam. Podkopaev noted that of the Soviet cadres dealing with Vietnamese issues, many had failed to understand the correctness of the dissolution of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1945. These cadres went so far as to make comparisons with the 'deviation' of Earl Browder, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States, who in 1944 dissolved the CPUSA for tactical reasons. Although Podkopaev stressed that Ho Chi Minh's familiarity with the theory of Marxism-Leninism was a guarantee against a similar deviation, his lecture was followed by an unusually heated debate, which revealed the persistence of Soviet doubts about the Viet Minh. It seems that Ho Chi Minh's secret meeting with Stalin in February 1950⁶ failed to dispel such doubts entirely. The author of the report, József Marjai, pointed out that the Vietnamese leaders indeed refrained from carrying out an agrarian reform on the grounds that they needed the support of every social group in their struggle against the French. Still, he was of the opinion that the Viet Minh had largely managed to satisfy the peasants' demands for land by redistributing communal lands.⁷

On 1 September 1953 Károly Csatorday, the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Beijing, reported that he had recently discussed Vietnamese issues with a Vietnamese colonel named Le Van. Csatorday noted that the VWP leaders followed the Chinese example in their policy towards ethnic minorities, and therefore they exempted the landlords of such groups from their land reform law.⁸ On 14 January 1954, however, he drew attention to the fact that the Vietnamese leaders, eager to crush the influence of the pro-French tribal elites, intended to extend their land reform campaign to the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. This idea, he stressed, stood in a sharp contrast with contemporaneous CCP practices.⁹ Interestingly, a third report, written by József Kállai (the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Hanoi) on 17 June 1955, shows a return to the 1953 standpoint. Kállai stated that in the minority regions the agrarian reform would not be carried out as early as in the provinces dominated by *kinh* population. It was only the strategically important

areas along the railroad line between Hanoi and China that proved an exception to this rule, for there the tribes, having cooperated with the French during the war, were still hostile towards the DRV regime, and Hanoi wanted to break the influence of their traditional rulers.¹⁰

The repeatedly changing approach of the VWP may have reflected debates between the Chinese and Vietnamese communist leaders. Noteworthy, on 2 November 1954 Csatorday, having conversed with various DRV diplomats on the situation in Vietnam, reported that the VWP leaders intended to extend their land reform campaign to the newly liberated areas, but 'while during the liberation struggles they used the Chinese method and brought the landlords to people's courts or subjected them to the judgement of the people, by now they have already adopted a different method. They confiscate the landlords' holdings in a much more flexible way, with great circumspection and without making too much noise'. Protest meetings were to be stopped, and landlords were to be allowed to donate their land to the state so as to escape outright expropriation (a change also noted by Moise).¹¹

Other documents similarly indicate that the VWP leadership was aware of that CCP methods were not necessarily universally applicable, which may imply that the ultra-leftist repressive measures taken in 1955–56 were not completely predestined and inevitable. On 4 July 1955 Hungarian diplomats visited the editorial office of *Nhan Dan*, the national party newspaper. Nguyen Thanh Le, the editor of international news, told them that henceforth the paper would pay increased attention to the agricultural and military policies of the East European communist regimes. This step, he said, was motivated by the central importance of such issues in the DRV.¹²

At the 8th CC plenum of the VWP CC, held on 13–20 August 1955, the North Vietnamese leaders resolved to prefer the partial unification of the country to a risky attempt to achieve complete unification on communist terms (a decision also mentioned by Gaiduk¹³). Therefore Hanoi proposed the temporary preservation of both governments and an agrarian reform accompanied by the financial compensation of southern landowners. Interestingly enough, the southern land reform was to be patterned after East European (above all, Polish) models, rather than Chinese ones.¹⁴ That is, the VWP leadership showed a considerable interest in East European practices. This interest seems to have been largely overlooked by earlier analysts of North Vietnamese policies, who concentrated on Chinese ideological influence. For instance, Qiang Zhai stresses that 'in the immediate post-Geneva period, Hanoi looked primarily to Beijing for models of development'.¹⁵

Later, when the 'errors' of the 1955–56 land reform campaign had become all too obvious, certain North Vietnamese critics of the campaign also blamed these blunders on CCP influence. On 13 June 1957 Duong Duc Hien, the first secretary of the quasi-satellite Democratic Party (DP), frankly told Hungarian chargé d'affaires Dénes Felkai that in his view, the whole conception of the land reform campaign had been fundamentally wrong. This opinion radically differed from the government's official explanation, which claimed that only the actual execution of the campaign had proven

faulty. The land reform, Hien went on, should have been modelled upon East European, rather than Chinese, examples.¹⁶ On 20 October 1958 a Hungarian diplomat named József Kertész visited Tran Quynh, the deputy director of the Party College. The Party College, Quynh said, came to the conclusion that the 'errors' of the land reform campaign had been rooted in 'subjectivism' and 'dogmatism'. Namely, the VWP mechanically adopted the Chinese guideline that landlords constituted 5% of the rural population, though this did not always correspond to the facts.¹⁷

These observations were certainly justified, since Hanoi's awareness of the existence of alternative methods did not prevent the regime from patterning the northern land reform campaign upon Chinese models. At the CC plenum held on 3–12 March 1955, the VWP leaders declared that the land reform had to be completed in the whole of North Vietnam by the time of the 1956 all-Vietnam elections. Rightist deviations, the CC resolved, were far more dangerous than leftist ones. This increasingly confrontational approach may have been at least partly motivated by the worsening political situation in South Vietnam. Remarkably, the moderate policies announced in the autumn of 1954 were based on an optimistic assessment of the state of affairs in the South. In contrast, in March 1955 the CC concluded that due to Washington's growing interference in South Vietnamese politics, the international situation had become much more tense than it had been in mid-1954. As the CC put it, 'South Vietnam can be regained only by the strengthening of North Vietnam'. That is, the land reform was to play a central role in the reinforcement of VWP control over the northern population. Qiang Zhai comes to a similar conclusion in his analysis of the land reform campaign.¹⁸

The significance of the political context is also demonstrated by several additional facts. As noted before, the 1955–56 campaign was not to involve ethnic minorities, but Hanoi made exceptions with those tribal groups that lived in strategically important areas and that the regime considered disloyal. Describing the Viet Minh's pre-1954 land reform programme, Ngoc-Luu Nguyen notes that 'after the birth of the Bao Dai administration, the landlord class began to be seen as the obstacle to the DRV's policies. . . . the timing of the harsh attack on this class in the second half of 1953 certainly had a connection with the Bao Dai administration's land reform policy'.¹⁹

In any case, the contradiction between Hanoi's declared intention to achieve a peaceful electoral victory in 1956 and the actual harshness of the land reform campaign confused many North Vietnamese cadres. Some officials, anxious not to violate the Geneva agreements that prohibited the prosecution of ex-collaborators, were reluctant to organize protest meetings against 'counter-revolutionary elements'. Others, having heard that Hanoi had promised not to treat southern landlords too harshly, questioned the necessity of persecuting northern landowners.²⁰ In 1956, certain dissident North Vietnamese intellectuals declared that the 'construction of socialism' should be postponed until national unification. They thought that if the North became too 'red', this would hinder the unification of the country.²¹

In fact, the severity of the land reform campaign did undermine the credibility of Hanoi's arguments against the brutal anti-communist policies pursued by South

Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Namely, it enabled Saigon to send a high number of complaints to the ICC about the public trials of northern landlords and to accuse the DRV of violating the Geneva agreements.²² Although the VWP leaders pledged to forgive the former soldiers and officials of the Bao Dai regime for having served the French, the violence of the land reform terrified the ‘puppets’. Many ex-collaborators concluded that the elimination of the landlords would be followed by the persecution of ‘puppets’, and a substantial number of them committed suicide out of fear.²³

Nonetheless, the preparations for the 1956 elections did soften the dictatorship’s policies to a certain extent. Direct state control over economic and cultural life seems to have been achieved relatively slowly and gradually. For example, in 1957 the private sector’s share of industrial production was still as high as 63.3%. The overwhelming majority of such entrepreneurs were actually craftsmen, of whom only 12% belonged to cooperatives at that time. The government’s interference in the distribution of raw materials made their independence more and more precarious, however.²⁴ While the state strictly controlled foreign trade, its direct participation in internal trade was quite limited for the time being, particularly in the newly liberated areas. For instance, there were only two state-owned textile shops in Hanoi. Many private merchants were of southern origin, and the VWP leadership, anxious not to alienate public opinion in the South, decided to tolerate their activity, at least temporarily.²⁵

As late as early 1959 there were 299 printing shops, 214 publishing houses and 37 cinemas (mostly small-scale enterprises) in private hands. While later in that year the VWP launched a nationalization drive, in January 1960 Hungarian chargé d’affaires László Kovács stressed that Hanoi still preferred the slow economic strangulation of private enterprises to outright expropriation, since ‘the abrupt elimination of this commercial mentality would generate great discontent both in the North and in the South, and it would also greatly hinder . . . the unification of the country.’²⁶

In January 1955 the top officials of the Hanoi city council told Kállai that the continued employment of ‘old’ officials constituted a serious financial burden for them, because these persons earned as much as before 1954. This meant that their salaries were often five times as high as the ones received by ‘new’, pro-Viet Minh cadres. However, Kállai noted, ‘for the sake of winning the elections to be held in the spring of 1956, at present they do not intend to dismiss those elements who have become superfluous but are not openly hostile.’²⁷ This policy was also aimed at reducing the emigration of trained personnel. In June 1957 Felkai was told that those physicians who had been ‘inherited’ from the French still got salaries up to 800,000 Đông per month, whereas those who had participated in the Resistance earned 40–80,000 Đông.²⁸

All in all, however, this rather temporary and superficial moderation could not offset the negative effects of the land reform campaign. Actually, some aspects of the land reform were by no means compatible with the conception of peaceful unification. For instance, the regime seized the lands of those who had moved to South Vietnam after 1954, and in some cases it extended this policy even to the latter’s relatives who

themselves did not leave the DRV. Thus even if the reunification of the country was achieved, these emigrants would not be able to return to their homes, Hungarian chargé d'affaires László Gyáros noted in August 1956.²⁹ Due to the campaign against 'counter-revolutionaries', northerners were increasingly afraid of maintaining commercial or other contacts with the South. As a consequence, the value of trade between the two zones dropped from 4,282 million Đông in 1955 to 680 million Đông in 1956. Following the 'correction' of the 'errors', in 1957 the volume of trade grew to 1,336 million Đông. This growth indicated that the previous decline had not resulted solely from the obstructive policies of the South Vietnamese regime.³⁰

The Hungarian documents do not contain data about the victims of each land reform wave, but they do include some informative figures that reveal the scope of the terror. For instance, by December 1955 the rent-reduction campaign had involved 7,775,386 people in 1,875 *xa* (administrative villages). Of the 44,444 'landlords' identified by the land reform cadres, 3,939 were tried publicly; of the latter, 1,175 were executed. The second stage of the campaign (the land reform proper) had involved 4,079,000 persons in 1,594 *xa* by December 1955, of whom 18,738 were 'revealed' as 'landlords who had managed to disguise themselves as rich or middle peasants during the rent reductions'. These 'revelations' led to 3,312 public trials and 162 executions. The stage that took place early in 1956 may have claimed more lives than the previous ones, since it proved particularly intense. That intensity can be gauged from the fact that this part of the campaign was carried out by an unprecedentedly high number of cadres (over 32,000 persons).³¹

Still, these data seem to refute those statements which estimate the total number of victims at 50,000 (or even higher). Instead, they support the claims of Moise, who concluded that 'the total number of people executed during the land reform was probably on the rough order of 5,000 and almost certainly between 3,000 and 15,000'.³² One may also take into consideration that by September 1957 as many as 23,748 political prisoners had been released ('of whom most were innocent'),³³ and in all probability the number of imprisoned persons substantially exceeded that of the executed.

Actually, the figures (a minimum of 1,337 executions and 23,748 imprisonments) were by no means low, at least by East European standards. In Hungary, approximately 500 persons (including pro-Nazi war criminals) were executed for political reasons in the 1945–56 period; in Czechoslovakia, 178 between October 1948 and the end of 1952; in Romania, 137 from 1945 to 1964; and in Poland, some 2,500 between 1944 and 1953 (of whom the overwhelming majority lost their lives during the civil war of 1944–48, and only 20 died in the 1950–53 period). In Hungary the number of political prisoners stood at 7,093 in 1953, while Czechoslovak jails held some 25,000 'politicals' in 1949.³⁴

On the other hand, the percentage of executed victims seems to have been significantly lower in the DRV than in the PRC. On 6 February 1954, at the 7th session of the CCP CC, Liu Shaoqi declared that the Chinese authorities had executed 710,000 'counter-revolutionary elements', such as landlords, since 1949. This

figure did not include the two million-plus ‘bandits’ who had been liquidated in the same period. (If the number of North Vietnamese victims had been as high as 50,000, then the Chinese and North Vietnamese percentages would have been quite similar.) Liu went on to say that as many as 1.29 million persons had been imprisoned since 1949, of whom 840,000 were still in jail early in 1954.³⁵ Thus the percentage of Chinese and North Vietnamese political prisoners did not differ as much as the percentage of executions.

Other data also confirm the extensiveness of the repressive measures the North Vietnamese dictatorship took in 1955–56. By September 1957 the VWP leadership had re-examined the social classification of the rural population in 2,033 villages, and concluded that of the 66,113 families who had been declared landlords, 34,844 were reclassified as middle peasants in the course of the ‘corrections’. Of the 14,908 landowners who had been declared ‘criminals’, 3,932 remained on the blacklist. Of the 195 coastal villages, 154 had been involved in the land reform. In these villages as many as 70% of the families were wrongly classified, since the local socioeconomic conditions proved substantially different from the ones characteristic of the plains. For instance, the scarcity of arable land induced the land reform cadres to seize and distribute fishing boats. In the Viet Bac Autonomous Region, 393 villages were involved in the ‘corrections’ by September 1957. Of the 2,245 families that had been declared landlords in the latter areas, only 384 remained in that category.³⁶

The high number of ‘wrong’ classifications seems to have been rooted in various factors. For example, many landowners, terrified by the oncoming campaign, fled to Hanoi and other cities. Their disappearance often aggravated the situation in the villages, since the land reform cadres, eager to fill their quotas, started to look for anyone who could be branded as an ‘agent left behind by the escaped landlords.’³⁷ Persons who had employed agricultural workers or rented out their land were automatically declared landlords, even if their sons served in the Viet Minh forces or had died in the struggle against the French and thus they would not have been able to till their land without the assistance of a tenant or a labourer.

During the ‘corrections’ the Hungarians were told that:

the groups of the land reform cadres ... had discussed the correct guidelines they received from the Central Land Reform Committee with the county and district land reform committees, and so when they arrived in the villages, they already had ‘schedules’ and concrete instructions: what percentage of the population in the village in question should be declared exploitative landlords; of the latter, how many should be tried and sentenced; how many hectares of land should be confiscated and distributed, etc.³⁸

True, this interpretation does not explain the events in their entirety. Still, if one analyzes the abovementioned data about the pre-1956 land reform waves, it appears that the number of trials per *xa* was almost the same (about 2.1) during the rent-reduction campaign and the land reform proper. In contrast, the percentage of ‘revealed’ and executed landlords did not remain constant. A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that the VWP leaders (and their Chinese advisers) may have

regarded the staging of trials in every community and the involvement of the whole local population in the 'struggle meetings' as the most important element of the campaign against 'class enemies'. That is, they may have laid an even greater stress on the political mobilization of the masses than on the elimination of real and potential opponents.

As Moise and Boudarel pointed out,³⁹ the land reform was accompanied by a two-stage party purge. At first it was the 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' who lost their membership cards. Then the land reform cadres began to denounce those members who disagreed with their harsh methods. Party members who proved unwilling to classify peasants whose land did not exceed 1–2 hectares as landlords, or refused to declare patriotic landowners 'enemies of the revolution', were branded as 'rightists' or 'agents of the enemy'. In May 1957 Truong Chinh frankly told Felkai that as many as 80,000 persons had been expelled from the VWP in the course of the land reform, 'of whom, 60% were innocent'. The significance of that figure can be gauged from the fact that in November 1955 there were only 324,000 VWP members in the DRV, of whom 97,000 served in the army. On 25 November 1955 Deputy Premier Nguyen Duy Trinh informed the Hungarian diplomats that, by that time, 46,600 party members had been disciplined during the campaign, of whom 32,200 were expelled from the VWP. Of these 46,600 persons, 2,600 were secretaries of basic party organizations or members of local party committees. In fact, by mid-1956 the land reform campaign had resulted in the dissolution of approximately 80% of village party organizations and district party committees.

Worse still, the admission of new members failed to keep pace with the expulsion of old ones. By November 1955, only 10,501 new members had been admitted to the VWP, of whom 41% were agricultural labourers, 58% poor peasants, and 0.11% middle peasants. Taking into consideration that of the 227,000 non-military party members registered in November 1955, 88,300 were poor peasants and agricultural workers, while the number of middle peasants still stood at 108,000, it is clear that the new principles of admission deprived the VWP of a large number of potential supporters. As Gyáros put it, 'the majority of old party members had been summarily expelled from the party, many of them were brought to trial and sentenced to imprisonment, and a few of them were even condemned to death'.⁴⁰

The purge did not remain confined to the VWP. As a consequence of the land reform campaign, 50,000 persons had been 'unjustly' expelled from the Youth League. Since most Youth League members were young peasants (in 1958 industrial workers, soldiers, and university students constituted only 4%, 5%, and 0.2% of the membership respectively), the expulsions probably weakened this important mass organization to a substantial extent.⁴¹

The campaign also resulted in the dissolution of the rural organizations of the quasi-satellite Democratic Party. Unlike the Vietnamese Socialist Party or the satellite parties set up in the PRC, in the pre-1954 period the DP had a substantial following outside intellectual circles, even in the countryside. In November 1952 the DRV embassy in Moscow claimed, probably with some exaggeration, that the DP and the

Socialist Party had 300,000 and 7,000 members respectively. In contrast, in 1962 the membership of the DP did not exceed 1,500. During the 'correction' of the 'errors', the DP wanted to re-establish its rural organizations, but the VWP leadership did not give its consent to the idea.⁴²

Theoretically, the regime could also rely on the Patriotic Front, but this institution, whose social role was very limited anyway, had no organizations in the villages. 'This way the Vietnamese comrades deprived themselves of an important tool with which they could have mobilized and educated the broad peasant masses', Felkai remarked.⁴³ In sum, the attack that the VWP leaders and the land reform cadres launched on the rural organizations of the party, the Youth League and the DP seriously undermined the regime's hold over the countryside.

At that time the North Vietnamese leadership could hardly afford to weaken its rural organizations, for it had just begun to extend its control to the urban population. As late as mid-1958 Nguyen Tho, the deputy chairman of the Organizational Committee of the VWP CC, told the Hungarian diplomats that 'the majority of workers are from the newly liberated areas, and thus their class consciousness is still low'. On 21 April 1959 Pham Van Dong admitted to a Hungarian party and government delegation that 'the party is still very weak in the cities'.⁴⁴ Of the 227,000 non-military VWP members registered in November 1955, a mere 6,000 (2.6%) were industrial workers and miners.⁴⁵ In February 1955 there were just 8,000 party members in Hanoi, a city of 400,000 inhabitants.⁴⁶ Of the 9,000 miners who worked in the coal mines of Hong Gai early in 1957, only 366 had a party card. On 25 March 1955 Hoang Quoc Viet told Kállai that during the Franco-Vietnamese War, 'the mining area had been full of informers, and the owners of the mine spent a lot of money on the support of yellow trade unions'. Due to intense repression, he went on, only a few hundred miners had joined the party and the 'red' unions. Remarkably, in 1958 the VWP leaders still complained that 'the French had left many agents behind' in Hong Gai. This statement may have been partly motivated by the fact that a large percentage of the miners were Catholic.⁴⁷

Moreover, economic conditions in the cities proved by no means favourable, which made the regime's situation even more difficult.⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the economy of northern Vietnam was badly hit both by the long and immensely destructive Franco-Vietnamese War and by the conclusion of the Geneva agreements. The war caused a considerable reduction of rice production, hindered trade between French-controlled and 'liberated' areas, and left irrigation systems seriously damaged. As if this had not been disastrous enough, in 1954 Vietnam was troubled both by extensive floods and scarce rainfall. As a consequence, a serious famine occurred in Central Vietnam and the Red River Delta. By the end of 1954, over 12,000 persons had starved to death, or died for related reasons, in these areas. At its peak, in the spring of 1955, the famine affected approximately one million people, mostly Catholic villagers.⁴⁹ The land reform also produced a negative effect on the food supply of the urban population, since it deprived customers of the rice previously marketed by landowners and well-to-do peasants. Although the 'fraternal' countries provided the DRV with emergency

food shipments, rice had to be rationed in the major cities and industrial areas from February 1955 on.⁵⁰

In January 1955 Minister of Industry and Trade Phan Anh told Kállai that in the Viet Minh's 'revolutionary bases', where the sale of essential consumer goods was under state control, prices were still higher and goods more scarce than in the recently liberated areas. During the Franco-Vietnamese War, the Viet Minh at first strove to block the food supply of the French-controlled regions by obstructing any kind of trade between the 'liberated' and the occupied areas. This policy proved unsuccessful, and it also became obvious that the small-scale industries operating in the 'liberated' regions were incapable of producing enough strategic and consumer goods for the Viet Minh. Thus in 1948 the Viet Minh leadership resolved to encourage trade relations between occupied and 'liberated' areas, primarily with the aim of importing essential goods from the French-held zones. This decision was certainly beneficial, but the 'liberated' areas constantly suffered from a trade deficit. For instance, in 1954 the value of Viet Minh imports exceeded 23,000 million *Đong*, whereas its exports remained below 13,000 million *Đong*.⁵¹ That is, the economic situation in the 'liberated' areas was still quite bleak when the war finally came to an end, and a quick recovery seemed rather unlikely.

At first the newly liberated urban centres did not suffer from a comparable scarcity of goods. On the contrary, the liberation of Hanoi led to a temporary boom in commerce, since the new authorities encouraged local merchants to import various goods from Haiphong and other areas that were still under French control.⁵² Nonetheless, trade with France and southern Vietnam underwent a rapid decline after the conclusion of the Geneva agreements. The Franco-DRV commercial agreement signed in 1955 scheduled a trade of 2,000 million francs, which was only one-thirtieth of the pre-liberation trade. This soon produced an adverse effect on urban economic life. In the colonial era, the northern part of Vietnam imported almost as much goods as the southern region, but its share of Vietnamese exports was incomparably lower, and a large part of the rice consumed in the North had to be imported from the South. Since France did its best to exclude foreign goods from Indochinese markets, many Vietnamese craftsmen and merchants were highly dependent on the import of raw materials and finished products from the metropolitan country. Thus North Vietnam was hardly prepared for a drastic reduction of commerce with France and South Vietnam.⁵³

Early in 1955 the shops in Hanoi still had a substantial amount of French-made goods, but the decline of imports from France resulted in a growing shortage of commodities, which in turn caused a price rise. With the exception of essential consumer goods like rice, salt, fish, vegetables, and cheap textiles, prices had risen by 150–200% in the previous two months, the Hungarians reported in January 1955. A European-style suit made of French fabric, whose price had been 120,000 *Đong* in January 1955, cost as much as 220,000 *Đong* in December.⁵⁴

From October 1955 on, an increasing amount of Chinese, Soviet and East European goods was available in the shops, but consumers often remained

dissatisfied. Unfortunately, the quality of Chinese-made products, which constituted the bulk of such consumer goods, often proved inferior to that of French-made ones. (Limited Vietnamese demand for Chinese-made consumer goods played an important role in that in 1954 the value of Vietnamese imports from the PRC was only 22,000 million yuan, while that of Vietnamese exports to China reached 100,000 million yuan.⁵⁵) In any case, in 1956 consumer goods made up barely 20% of the economic aid received from the communist countries, since Hanoi focused on the import of machines and other equipment necessary for industrialization.

To a certain extent the regime actually welcomed price rises, for it wanted to stimulate the production of local small-scale industry. Before 1954, the development of this sector had faced serious obstacles both in the French-held zones (where it was hindered by the import of duty-free French-made goods) and in the 'liberated areas' (where it suffered from the extreme shortage of raw materials). Still, the production of handicrafts kept growing throughout the Franco-Vietnamese War and the post-1954 years. According to official figures, in northern Vietnam the number of artisans rose from 157,215 in 1941 to almost 600,000 in 1957. Due to the encouragement they got from the Viet Minh, these entrepreneurs may have been less critical of the new authorities than heavily taxed private merchants, but the shortage of raw materials remained a grave problem.⁵⁶

For instance, Phan Anh told Kállai in January 1955 that the government was increasingly incapable of supplying weavers with cotton. Since the Diem regime prevented the export of sugarcane from South Vietnam to the DRV, North Vietnam could not supply itself with domestically produced sugar either. In any case, the northern authorities were not interested in assisting every branch of small-scale industry. They imposed heavy taxes on 'luxury goods' so as to force their manufacturers to make essential consumer goods instead. Due to these tax increases, the price of wristwatches, silk, wine, and tinned food had risen by over 200% in the previous two months, Phan Anh declared.⁵⁷

The rise of prices had various negative consequences. First of all, it offset the positive effect of the wage increases announced on 1 September 1955. Second, it generated inflation, which in turn influenced the regime's wage policy. Inflation peaked after mid-1956, when the value of the *Đong* decreased by at least 50% between October 1956 and March 1957, but already before that date the threat of inflation induced the government to keep wages quite low. Third, the price problem resulted in an exodus of rural craftsmen to the cities. These people, unlike urban dwellers, were not given rice on ration, and thus they had to pay two or three times as much for rice as their urban counterparts. Not surprisingly, many of them decided to move to the cities, all the more so because the purchasing power of the peasantry remained very low.⁵⁸

In mid-1956 the average monthly wage of a worker stood at 30–36,000 *Đong*, whereas minimal living expenses (rice, meat, vegetables, salt, firewood, clothing, and so on) were, according to official statistics, 25,411 *Đong* per month. Employees of those enterprises that remained operative after the withdrawal of the French

(e.g., the coal mines of Hong Gai and the electrical works of Yen Phu) received wages higher than the average. Cadres and ex-guerrillas earned less than 'old' officials, but they enjoyed certain privileges. For example, of the 5,000 workers employed in a textile factory in Nam Đĩnh, 450 were cadres and former members of the anti-French resistance movement, who had 110 children altogether. They got a monthly family allowance equivalent to the value of 20 kilograms of rice for each child. In contrast, the other 4,550 workers, who had 17,000 children altogether, received no family allowance.⁵⁹

Due to the scarcity of financial resources and other reasons, working conditions did not necessarily undergo a considerable improvement in the first post-liberation years. For instance, in late 1957 the Hungarian embassy reported that the workers of the Hong Gai coal mines had to get up four hours before the start of their working day in order to catch the buses that took them to their workplace. It happened quite frequently that they waited hours for the bus in vain, and eventually went home. Although the management had recently got hundreds of new trucks, many of these quickly became inoperable. The textile plant in Nam Đĩnh had no safety equipment under the French, and continued to operate without it after liberation. (On the other hand, the tea-processing factory in Phu Tho, constructed by the Soviets in 1955–57, did not lack such facilities.)⁶⁰ In the opinion of the Hungarian diplomats, in 1955 there was only one sphere in which the new regime managed to achieve a really dramatic improvement of conditions, and this was public health. According to official data, in 1955 the authorities trained 5,000 'health cadres' (including 100 physicians), four times as many as in 1954.⁶¹

A major motivation behind the regime's efforts to resuscitate small-scale industries was the aim of creating jobs for the unemployed.⁶² This concern about unemployment was by no means unjustified, since in 1954 there were as many as 100,000 jobless persons in the DRV, not counting the 100,000 South Vietnamese who had moved to the North after the conclusion of the Geneva agreements and who also badly needed the government's assistance. Since such a high rate of unemployment could easily lead to social and political tension, the regime had every reason to take that problem seriously.

Like so many other economic and social problems in the DRV, widespread unemployment was closely related to the changes brought about by the Geneva agreements. For example, Haiphong was badly affected by the departure of the French. The overwhelming majority of the 70 factories in the city, including a large cement factory that had employed 5,000 workers, closed down when their owners removed the machines and left for the South. The port, previously one of the busiest in Southeast Asia, became almost completely inactive. As a result, in this city of 200,000 inhabitants the number of unemployed persons stood at 30,000 in May 1955. The government also had to demobilize 50,000 soldiers in the wake of the armistice.⁶³

Although in September 1955 the VWP CC claimed to have created temporary jobs for 60,178 people by involving them in the reconstruction of the transport system and in the building of dikes, in August 1956 there were still as many as 30,000 unemployed

persons in Hanoi and Haiphong alone.⁶⁴ In July 1955 Tran Duy Hung, the head of the Administrative Committee of Hanoi, told Csatorday that the new authorities considered the establishment of bus service in Hanoi, but eventually decided not to go ahead, because such a measure would have made thousands of rickshawmen jobless. 'This would be a huge economic problem, and it would certainly produce a negative effect on the preparations for the elections', Hung stated.⁶⁵

The necessity to employ southern cadres compounded these difficulties. By and large, southerners enjoyed privileged treatment in North Vietnam. Many of them received high positions, even if they lacked the necessary qualifications. For instance, in mid-1957 as many as 70% of the cadres employed in the foreign ministry were of southern origin. When the Hungarians pointed out that many offices proved quite overstaffed because of the generous treatment of southerners, the cadres replied that 'these are southern comrades, we must take care of them'. Even so, in June 1957 Felkai reported that of the 130,000 state functionaries, 1,600 (mostly southerners) were dissatisfied with their posts and therefore they did not work.⁶⁶

In the spring of 1957 Bruno Urbanek, a Polish member of the International Control Commission (ICC), bluntly told Felkai that economic conditions were worse in the DRV than in South Vietnam. Moreover, the northern economy showed signs of a continuing decline. 'Wages are very low, and prices are increasing at a rapid pace', Urbanek declared.⁶⁷ This crisis should not be blamed on the DRV authorities alone, since, as we have seen, the lopsided economic structure created by French colonial rule, Vietnam's traumatic decolonization, and subsequent partition also played a major role in it. Still, North Vietnamese economic management was not blameless either, and in some cases the 'assistance' of Hanoi's aid donors (foreign economic aid constituted 35% and 41.1% of the incomes of the North Vietnamese budget in 1955 and 1956 respectively⁶⁸) also contributed to the difficulties.

For example, North Vietnamese forestry largely failed to take advantage of the country's valuable forests. 'Motivated by wrong political considerations, they do not make use of the scientific literature prepared by the French, which has collected a lot of useful information', Felkai reported. Of the 20 forestry engineers who lived in the DRV in 1957, only six worked in their profession, the others having been transferred to other fields of work. Furthermore, none of them was assigned to the mechanized lumbering enterprise that the government established with Soviet assistance. The Soviet experts, having gained their experiences in the vast forests of Siberia, set up a plant that needed a continuous supply of a large amount of lumber. Unfortunately, these requirements could not be met in the DRV where lumbering was done by mobilized peasants who felled trees in a rather indiscriminate and unsystematic way. Since the state paid only 24,000 Ðong for one cubic metre of wood, peasants preferred to sell the lumber to private merchants, who paid as much as 200,000 Ðong for it. What was sold to the state often proved of poor quality and hence unsuitable for export. As a consequence, in 1956 North Vietnamese lumber exports constituted barely 5% of the planned amount.⁶⁹

In the same year the regime paid 580 Ðong for a kilogram of pepper, 700 for raw jute, 3,600 for hemp and 660 for sesame. In contrast, the market price of this produce stood at 1,200–1,300, 1,200, 7,000 and 1,300 Ðong respectively. Not too surprisingly, in the first half of 1956 the state could purchase only 1% of the planned amount of pepper, 0.5% of jute, 20% of hemp and 5% of sesame. (With regard to some other products, the regime proved more successful, for it managed to get over 70% of the planned amount of maize and tea.)⁷⁰ The rapid establishment of work brigades probably also produced a negative effect on the peasantry's interest in production. This process started in 1955, and by 1956 as many as 60% of peasants had joined work brigades, which were composed of five to ten families. Many of them must have done so under duress, since in the period of 'corrections' over half of the work brigades had ceased to function by mid-1957.⁷¹

Two tea-processing plants and a factory producing tinned fish, whose construction had been completed in 1956, faced a serious shortage of raw materials, since the whole of North Vietnamese tea production proved insufficient to provide a single processing plant with tea, and the entire annual fish catch was consumed by the population, rather than sold to the cannery. The foreign agricultural experts sent to the DRV were often unfamiliar with local meteorological and soil conditions, and there was no North Vietnamese agronomist to warn them. For instance, they encouraged the North Vietnamese to plant cotton on mountainsides. Predictably, the monsoon rains washed away the plants root and branch, destroying the whole crop. Of the industrial crops with which the state farms experimented, only coffee thrived. Commenting on the tractors Hungary had sent to the DRV, Gyáros bitingly remarked that: 'it is an old saying that one does not look a gift-horse in the mouth, but I think that one should not have sent scrap-iron instead of tractors as a present . . . in Vietnam people would rather cultivate their land by buffalo-drawn wooden ploughs for another one hundred years than to order a single G-35 tractor.'⁷²

In addition to the political and economic problems that affected North Vietnamese society in general, certain religious and ethnic groups had special grievances. One of the ways their discontent manifested itself was in their reluctance to join the VWP. As late as January 1958 there was no party organization in 786 villages, most of which were inhabited either by Catholics or by ethnic minorities. (In some revolutionary bases, like Ha Tinh province, party members constituted up to 5.49% of the population, while in the newly liberated areas their percentage was about 1%.)⁷³

Due to their previous collaboration with the French, Catholics became the targets of intense harassment in 1954–55. In the early months of 1955, Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem and other high-ranking North Vietnamese officials told Kállai that local cadres had harassed Catholics in various ways. For instance, in certain areas they ordered Catholic priests to undergo Marxist-Leninist re-education courses, forced them to dismiss their bishop and elect another, and attempted to compel priests and nuns to marry. The party secretary of a Catholic village confiscated the robe of the local priest and had a new skirt made of it for his wife. Khiem, who seems to have been well-informed about the situation of the Catholic Church in the East European

'people's democracies', emphasized that in addition to the famine that ravaged war-torn Central Vietnam at that time, these atrocities played a major role in the massive emigration of northern Catholics to South Vietnam.⁷⁴

Anxious to curtail this loss of population, on 4 July 1955 the government issued a decree that explicitly forbade the infringement of religious liberty. Actually, the VWP leaders found the massive emigration of priests a considerable obstacle to their efforts to control the Catholic Church, rather than an advantageous development. Namely, the scarcity of clergymen hindered the dictatorship in cracking down on 'rebellious' priests, at least in the pre-1959 period. If the authorities removed a priest, it was by no means easy to find another with whom he could be replaced.⁷⁵

Despite Hanoi's attempts to prevent the exacerbation of the 'Catholic problem', the land reform campaign led to new attacks on Catholic priests. The persistence of Catholic discontent can be gauged from the protests that occurred late in 1956 in Quynh Luu, an area whose Catholic population had been forcibly prevented from emigration. The Quynh Luu protests involved several hundred peasants and generated substantial sympathy in the Catholic communities of the Red River Delta.⁷⁶ Having experienced these outbursts of Catholic anger, in 1957 the authorities did their best not to provoke that religious community. For instance, in July the Hungarian embassy noted that the government decided not to show a Soviet movie, since the film, which covered the 1905 Russian Revolution, depicted Father Gapon and his pious followers in a way that Vietnamese Christians would have considered insulting.⁷⁷

In the period of 'corrections', Buddhists also gave voice to their disagreement with the dictatorship's policies. 'In several places the Buddhist leaders behave in a hostile way', the Hungarians reported in mid-1957. The Buddhists tried to re-establish their organizations that had ceased to function during the Franco-Vietnamese War. These attempts were in vain, however. In any case, the VWP leaders did not view Buddhist discontent as a serious challenge, for Buddhist institutions were quite weak and lacked extensive international connections. Nor did they find it necessary to take strict measures against ancestor worship. As Đao Duy Ky, a departmental head of the ministry of information, told the Hungarians in mid-1955, in this particular case the regime confined its actions to the field of 'enlightening' propaganda, since ancestor worship, whose believers included certain cadres as well, was regarded as relatively 'harmless'.⁷⁸

Although Hanoi's minorities policy proved, by and large, more flexible and generous than the one pursued by the Diem regime, certain ethnic groups seem to have been dissatisfied with VWP rule. The communist diplomats who visited the area of Đien Bien Phu in December 1959 were told by the DRV authorities that the local Thai community, whose number stood at 14,000 (i.e. 64% of the local population), was hostile to the new regime. 'Here the Thais had privileges granted by the French, it is extremely difficult to re-educate them, they frequently do damage to military facilities and sabotage the various decrees', the VWP cadres complained. Worse still, they went on, the proximity of the Laotian-DRV border and the mountainous character of the area enabled the Thais to maintain contacts with Laotian anti-communists. Hanoi tried to cope with that problem by inducing demobilized soldiers

of *kinh* origin to settle in this region and encouraging urban *kinh* girls to marry the settlers.⁷⁹

In the province of Lao Cai a pro-French guerrilla force of 3,000 men, recruited from ethnic minorities, had fought against the Viet Minh during the Franco-Vietnamese War. In the wake of the Geneva agreements, additional troops were sent there, and by mid-1955 the regime had largely managed to suppress armed resistance.⁸⁰ In the border area of Mong Cai, located in the northeast of Quang Ninh province, 'the population did not welcome the Vietnamese administration', Felkai reported on 20 September 1957. 'There were demands for Chinese citizenship. All this caused a lot of difficulties.' For the time being, he noted, this region was administered by the central government, rather than by the provincial authorities, since Hanoi had not found yet a satisfactory solution for the problem.⁸¹

The regime, Csatorday wrote in October 1955, tried to 're-educate' those ethnic groups, such as the Man and the Hmong, who practised shifting cultivation or produced opium. While Hanoi's wish to protect the country's valuable forests and curb the production of opium was not unreasonable, its attempts to stamp out such deeply rooted customs must have generated discontent among the tribesmen affected by these policies.⁸² The new government could not place great trust in the Chinese minority either. In January 1955 the Chinese ambassador told Kállai that 'the agents of Jiang Jieshi exert an extremely strong influence' on Haiphong's 40,000 Chinese inhabitants. The ambassador went on to say that the Chinese minority in Vietnam had been, by and large, reluctant to join the anti-colonial resistance movement.⁸³

In my view, the gravity of the abovementioned political, social, and economic problems played a decisive role in that the North Vietnamese leadership initiated political 'corrections' in the last third of 1956. In a report written on 1 November, Gyáros bluntly declared that there were signs of 'a serious political and economic crisis' in the DRV. In his brief summary of the situation, he did not mince his words:

In the field of politics, these signs manifest themselves in the leftist-sectarian policy of the party, the absence of intra-party democracy, the frequent and serious violation of democratic rights, the serious errors committed during the execution of the land reform, the discontent and despair of writers, artists, and intellectuals in general . . . The wages earned by workers, employees, and cadres are low and insufficient for their livelihood. Even if the harvest is good, the peasants, no matter whether they had owned land [before the land reform] or newly received it, cannot earn a living because of the compulsory deliveries and taxes.⁸⁴

Gyáros' report clearly put the 10th plenum of the VWP CC, which lasted from 25 August to 7 October, into this political and socioeconomic context. He noted that the plenum had discussed not just the drastic re-examination of the land reform campaign but also the questions of democratic rights, legality, economic development, national unification, and the improvement of the living standards of workers, employees, and cadres.⁸⁵ The discussion of these various topics at this crucial plenum suggests that the VWP leaders perceived problems in several spheres of economic and political life, not only in the field of the land reform.

Commenting on the rapid increase of intellectual and political criticism, which appeared in the articles of *Nhan Van* and other publications, Felkai concluded that in late 1956, 'it was only the determined policy of the party and the government that prevented the outbreak of the storm'. That is, if the regime had not clamped down on its most vociferous critics at the end of 1956, the protests could have led to a political explosion. While the leadership's admittance of its 'errors' doubtlessly encouraged such criticism, the latter's intensity confirmed the magnitude of political discontent. For instance, many local party and trade union organs found the 'corrective' resolutions of the 10th CC plenum insufficient. They declared that Ho Viet Thang, a chief culprit of the land reform campaign whom the 10th plenum expelled from the CC and dismissed as deputy minister of agriculture, should have been subjected to a much more severe punishment. Similar scenes took place in January 1957, at the 6th session of the National Assembly, when the deputies sharply condemned the 'errors' of the campaign.⁸⁶

Apart from such domestic factors, Soviet de-Stalinization and Chinese 'corrections' may have also inspired the re-examination of the North Vietnamese land reform to some extent, but Hanoi's communist allies did not necessarily give the VWP leaders explicit instructions to revise their harsh domestic policies. After all, Mao's interest in political and cultural liberalization was temporary and lukewarm at best. Khrushchev took de-Stalinization more seriously, but the Kremlin was hardly capable of intervening in North Vietnam's internal affairs at will, and it actually tended to refrain from doing so.

During the Franco-Vietnamese War and also in the mid-1950s, the DRV received much more assistance from China than from the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ Thus it was hardly surprising that, as Kállai reported in March 1955, it was the PRC, rather than the USSR, that the VWP leaders regarded as North Vietnam's principal adviser and supporter. At the celebration of important events, it occurred quite frequently that of the 'fraternal' diplomatic representatives, only the Chinese ambassador was present. At the reception held to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the DRV and the communist countries, the Vietnamese officials asked only the Chinese ambassador to make a speech. Had Ho Chi Minh not personally corrected the 'forgetfulness' of the organizers by walking up to Soviet Ambassador Lavrishchev after the Chinese ambassador's speech and asking him to say a few words, the Soviets would not have been invited to speak at the celebration.⁸⁸ In the pre-1960 period, such a situation would have well-nigh unthinkable in any other country of the 'communist camp'. Not even the North Koreans, who obviously disliked Khrushchev's de-Stalinization drive, went so far as to give public preference to the Chinese embassy over the Soviet one.

Still, the absence of a really close relationship between Moscow and Hanoi, though it certainly reduced the VWP leaders' willingness to imitate Soviet practices and prevented the Kremlin from controlling North Vietnamese domestic policies, had certain beneficial effects as well. Namely, the DRV's sovereignty was not violated by the Soviets in the same way as in the countries that had to endure direct Soviet

domination at some time. Thus resentment against the USSR seems to have been less intense in North Vietnam than in North Korea and Mongolia.

Hanoi's unwillingness to adopt certain formal elements of Soviet de-Stalinization clearly revealed that Soviet political influence in the DRV remained relatively limited. For instance, the North Vietnamese leadership did not introduce the separation of party and state functions in the same way as the East European and Mongolian regimes did in the wake of Stalin's death. On 9 January 1956 Gyáros reported that every member of the VWP CC save Truong Chinh and Le Duan held at least one important state position.⁸⁹ This practice was essentially identical to Chinese administrative methods. Actually, in 1954 Mao openly contrasted the Chinese combination of party and state functions with 'the division of labour used in the Soviet Union.'⁹⁰ While the East European 'little Stalins' and Tsedenbal, the supreme leader of the Mongolian regime, were compelled by Moscow to renounce one of their positions (either the premiership or the post of first secretary) as early as 1953–54, Ho Chi Minh, who was both president of the republic and chairman of the party, did not follow suit. Nor did Mao and Kim Il Sung.⁹¹

The similarities of the North Vietnamese, Chinese, and North Korean regimes, and their difference from Eastern Europe and Mongolia, also became visible at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Of the East European 'little Stalins', even such diehard opponents of de-Stalinization as Albania's Enver Hoxha and Hungary's Mátyás Rákosi felt it necessary to participate in the congress. So did Tsedenbal, the Mongolian dictator. In contrast, the North Vietnamese, Chinese, and North Korean delegations were headed by Truong Chinh, Le Duc Tho, Deng Xiaoping, Zhu De, and Ch'oe Yong-gŏn respectively. Neither Ho Chi Minh nor Mao and Kim Il Sung were present.

High-level Soviet–DRV talks did not necessarily produce a considerable effect on North Vietnamese internal policies. Not long after the 20th Congress, on 2 April, a Soviet delegation headed by Anastas Mikoyan arrived in Hanoi. While Gaiduk puts Mikoyan's visit into the context of Soviet de-Stalinization,⁹² it is probable that this event was more closely related to the worsening situation in South Vietnam than to the 20th Congress. Mikoyan's visit seems to have differed from his later visits in Hungary (in July) and North Korea (in September), which were aimed at the 'disciplining' of Rákosi and Kim Il Sung. Namely, his trip to the DRV took place at the request of Ho Chi Minh. On 17 March Molotov told the 'fraternal' ambassadors accredited to the USSR that Ho had asked the Kremlin to send 'an economic and political leader of high standing to them in order to inspect their work and give them practical advice.'⁹³

The public speeches Ho Chi Minh and Mikoyan made on 3 April showed a strong concern about the situation in the South. Both speakers condemned Diem's repressive policies and his violation of the Geneva agreements. On 4 April, the Soviet delegation had a talk with the VWP leaders in the presidential palace at 9 p.m. This conversation seems to have dealt with the situation in South Vietnam and it must have been highly important, since after it Mikoyan met Polish Ambassador Michalowski, the head of the Polish section of the ICC, at midnight. No joint Soviet–DRV communiqué was published, which indicated disagreements between the Soviet and the North

Vietnamese standpoint.⁹⁴ The VWP leaders probably kept insisting on that during the coming Soviet–British talks, Moscow should propose the convening of a new international conference on the Vietnamese question. Such a conference, they hoped, might prevent the irreversible division of Vietnam even if the promised elections had to be postponed. The Soviets, however, failed to raise this issue during the talks that Gromyko, Khrushchev, and Bulganin had in Britain in April.⁹⁵

Moscow's uncooperativeness must have left the Vietnamese leaders deeply embittered. Although the 9th (extended) plenum of the VWP CC, held on 19–24 April, grudgingly accepted that certain countries might reach socialism in a peaceful way (as Khrushchev emphasized), it also made an unmistakable reference to Diem's dictatorship. 'It would be an error to ignore the fact that in those countries where the bourgeoisie has a strong military and police apparatus, it is ready to oppose any revolutionary movement even by force', the plenum's resolution stressed. The CC concluded that 'in these countries, armed struggle is inevitable'.⁹⁶

This militant approach, though it still remained on the verbal level, differed not only from the new line advocated by Khrushchev but also from China's current policies vis-à-vis Taiwan. Following the Bandung Conference, which had been held in April 1955, Chinese propaganda laid increasing emphasis on the peaceful 'liberation' of Taiwan and – temporarily – abandoned its call for a military solution. Beijing's 'peace offensive' reached a new peak in June 1956, from which one may draw the conclusion that the PRC was unlikely to welcome the renewal of armed struggle in Vietnam at that time.⁹⁷

On the other hand, the CCP leaders had no illusions about the prospects of peaceful unification either. On 18 May 1956 a Hungarian diplomat named József Száll was told by an assistant under-secretary of the Chinese foreign ministry that in the opinion of the Chinese government 'the resolutions of the Geneva agreements, i.e., the holding of free elections and the unification of the country, cannot be carried out for the time being'. He went on to say that, 'with knowledge of the situation in South Vietnam', it would take a long time to achieve these aims. For this reason, the assistant under-secretary stressed, 'it would have been unreasonable if any of the countries that had participated in the Geneva Conference, either the Soviet Union or China, had insisted on convening an international conference on the basis of the resolution passed in 1954'. The main aim to be achieved was preventing the renewal of hostilities between Saigon and Hanoi.⁹⁸

In other words, the communist giants proved unwilling to provide the DRV with the international support for which Ho Chi Minh seems to have asked Mikoyan in April. Instead, they were rather content with maintaining the status quo. Interestingly, one of the arguments with which the Chinese assistant under-secretary supported this standpoint was that 'the internal situation in North Vietnam has not become consolidated enough' for the time being.⁹⁹

In the light of the various economic, social and political problems with which the VWP leaders had to cope in 1955–56, this cautious approach was quite justified. On the other hand, Hanoi's failure to achieve the peaceful unification of the country also

contributed to the political discontent in the DRV, for it left the cadres of southern origin deeply disappointed. As early as August 1955, the VWP CC pointed out that southern cadres were becoming increasingly pessimistic, and regarded the programme of the Patriotic Front as ineffective. At the CC plenum held that month there were sharp debates between the proponents of peaceful unification and those who claimed that no repressive regime had ever been toppled in a peaceful way.¹⁰⁰ As Diem consolidated his power and began to persecute former Viet Minh members, the discontent of the southern cadres became even more intense. They had every reason to believe that time was working against them, and the longer Hanoi refrained from taking action, the more difficult it would be to overthrow Diem's dictatorship.

Southerners worried that the partition of Vietnam would be as final and unalterable as that of Germany and Korea, Felkai reported in July 1957. Dissatisfied with the northerners' calls for patience, they often walked out of party meetings if the latter dealt with the issue of national unification. A poem circulated by southerners mocked official propaganda in the following words: 'I will return to the South, wait for me, my wife. Wait for me at the door and hold the betel-grinder in your hand. By the time I return, my hair and beard will turn grey.' Southerners resented the fact that a party resolution, which had been passed in the wake of the Geneva agreements, authorized higher-ranking cadres to move to the North together with their families, but instructed many rank-and-file party members to leave their wives and children in the South (where the latter would soon face ruthless persecution). In addition, many peasants of southern origin were dissatisfied with their situation for economic reasons. Referring to the differences between the Mekong Delta's highly fertile soil and the less favourable conditions in North Vietnam, they asked: 'How do they [the VWP leaders] want to construct a stable basis in the North if the fields are so poor here?'¹⁰¹

As mentioned before, the VWP CC plenum held in April 1956 did not express a strong belief in the applicability of the new Soviet political line to the South Vietnamese situation. Nor did the plenum's resolution admit that the North Vietnamese leaders had made any serious political mistake. It merely stated that the practice of criticism and self-criticism had been superficial and unsystematic, which hindered the application of the principle of collective leadership. Since the CC plenum held in March 1955 also conceded that 'collective leadership, intra-party democracy, and individual responsibility was not always observed', the 1956 announcement did not constitute a dramatic break with previous practices.¹⁰² In contrast, in several East European countries, such as Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria, the 20th Congress produced a strong effect on the regimes' internal policies as early as March or April.

The session the Council of Ministers held on 12 May similarly concluded that the North Vietnamese economy had been doing quite well in the first quarter of 1956, living standards had risen, and the targets of the 1956 plan were certainly realistic. Those few 'errors' whose occurrence the government admitted, such as the problems of lumbering and livestock farming, were blamed on certain state institutions, rather than on the party organs.¹⁰³

Hanoi's major aid donors disagreed with this optimistic assessment, however. As noted by Qiang Zhai, in April 1956 Chinese Deputy Premier Chen Yun told the VWP leaders to concentrate on the development of agriculture and light industry.¹⁰⁴ In July Le Bang, an assistant under-secretary of the ministry of foreign trade, told Hungarian Commercial Counsellor Tibor Futó that the Soviet and Chinese experts had persuaded Hanoi to revise its Three-year Plan. Heavy industry, the experts stressed, was still too costly for the DRV, and thus the emphasis should be laid on the improvement of living standards. Although North Vietnam was rich in ores, the mining sector was not to be developed to full capacity. Instead, Le Bang went on, the DRV would actually import certain metals for one or two years, since their import was cheaper than the exploitation of local quarries. The government also cancelled the purchase of a new power plant, since it realized that the capacity of the existing power station in Haiphong was sufficient to provide the local cement factory with electricity.¹⁰⁵

Hanoi's initial unwillingness to revise its economic policies was accompanied by a similar reluctance to follow Moscow's example in the field of political liberalization. Actually, at first the VWP leaders seem to have been so worried about the possibility of increasing domestic criticism that they decided to tighten the screws, rather than loosening them. On 15 June the regime passed Law No. 267/SL, which threatened those who 'spread hostile rumours' with a jail term of five to twenty years.¹⁰⁶ The nature of this law indicates the leadership's awareness of the potential dangers of growing public discontent, while its timing suggests that Hanoi's failure to achieve the holding of all-Vietnam elections in July played an important role in the further curtailment of criticism. Since the re-examination of the land reform campaign also started in the summer, the VWP leadership had another good reason to worry about 'hostile rumours'.

While the North Vietnamese regime showed little willingness to initiate a Soviet-style political liberalization in the wake of the 20th CPSU Congress, its attitude to the 'fraternal' embassies did not become noticeably hostile or suspicious in the spring and summer of 1956. On the contrary, a Hungarian report written on 26 August contained an impressive amount of inside information about the DRV's internal difficulties, which the embassy received from Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem and Bui Cong Trung, the chairman of the National Economic Commission.¹⁰⁷

This amicability stood in marked contrast with the temporary tension that occurred in DRV–Hungarian relations in 1957 as a result of the Hungarian chargé d'affaires' tactless comments on North Vietnamese internal affairs. Namely, in October 1956 Gyáros sharply criticized the regime's policies in the presence of other communist diplomats, whereupon Hanoi had him and another Hungarian diplomat recalled. In July 1957 the new chargé d'affaires, Felkai, reported that North Vietnamese cadres often evaded the questions put by the Hungarian diplomats, and kept their distance from the latter. On 16 November he even felt compelled to lodge a complaint against Hanoi's various restrictive measures with Ung Van Khiem. He noted, among other things, that the Hungarian diplomats could not talk to any official or tour the

countryside without the permission of the foreign ministry.¹⁰⁸ These shifts in North Vietnamese behaviour suggest that in mid-1956 the Kremlin did not make any direct attempts at forcing Hanoi to soften its internal policies, since if it had tried to do so its interference would have probably evoked a hostile reaction much before the conflict with the Hungarian embassy.¹⁰⁹

Chinese influence, particularly in indirect form, may have played a more important role in the introduction of 'corrections' in the DRV than Soviet de-Stalinization, but the effect of Chinese policies should not be overestimated either. While on certain occasions Beijing did attempt to put pressure on Hanoi, these interventions were not necessarily aimed at shaping North Vietnamese internal policies. For instance, one of the issues on which the CCP leaders disagreed with their North Vietnamese comrades was the situation in Laos. On 3 September 1956, Sándor Józsa, a deputy departmental head in the Hungarian foreign ministry, informed the Hungarian embassy in Hanoi about the recent Sino-Laotian negotiations. He remarked that

in the opinion of the Chinese leaders, a completely democratic solution of the Pathet Lao question is not really possible under the present circumstances. For this reason, and also in order to avoid Laotian accusations, they recently proposed that Vietnam withdraw its troops and advisers from [the areas controlled by the] Pathet Lao. In the opinion of Chinese, the maintenance of the semi-independence of the Pathet Lao forces does not seem reasonable either, for this would hinder the establishment of good relations with Laos and reinforce American influence there.¹¹⁰

The fact that the CCP leadership introduced certain 'corrections' in May, June, and July 1956 probably created a favourable international atmosphere for the re-examination of North Vietnamese domestic policies. Still, it seems that Chinese and Vietnamese 'corrections' were not particularly similar to each other. For instance, in mid-1956 the Chinese regime started to encourage the children of 'bourgeois' families to apply for admission to the universities.¹¹¹ On 6 June Minister of Education Mao Dun told two Hungarian diplomats that since the previous campaigns had failed to 're-educate' the 'old' intelligentsia, the CCP leadership decided to organize free cultural and scientific debates in order to win the support of these intellectuals.¹¹² The government also resolved not to increase agricultural taxes in the following few years.¹¹³ The first conference of the Shanghai CCP organization, held on 11-26 July, concluded that due to the policies of the local party committee, the living standard of workers had declined in the 1953-56 period. The deputies also emphasized that there was a shortage of flats in Shanghai.¹¹⁴

The North Vietnamese regime seems not to have imitated these Chinese practices. The VWP leaders concentrated on the thorough re-examination of the land reform instead. To be sure, in 1948 the CCP had also 'corrected' the 'excesses' of its 1947 agrarian reform campaign, but its self-criticism proved much more limited than Hanoi's admittance of its errors.¹¹⁵ Thus the drastic revision of the North Vietnamese land reform was probably neither inspired nor encouraged by Beijing. Actually, 'Chinese leaders were disappointed and unhappy with Hanoi's decision to downplay class struggle in the wake of the land reform campaign', Qiang

Zhai points out. 'During his visit to Hanoi on 18-22 November 1956, Zhou Enlai insisted that the achievements of the land reform should be acknowledged and that mistakes were unavoidable'.¹¹⁶

Several authors, such as Boudarel and Bernard Fall, stressed that the intellectual debates that had taken place in the DRV in 1956 were in some way inspired by the Chinese Hundred Flowers Movement. This is certainly true in the sense that North Vietnamese writers were indeed familiar with Chinese cultural policies. Still, it is important to point out that the VWP leaders did not follow the example of their Chinese comrades who had initiated a controlled cultural liberalization *before* the emergence of an intellectual protest movement. As Fall himself put it, 'North Vietnam at first tried to ignore the sudden liberalization of its gigantic neighbor, just as de-Stalinization had, by and large, been ignored as long as possible'.¹¹⁷

This reluctance seems to have resulted from two main causes. First of all, the leadership probably distrusted a substantial part of the intelligentsia, which in turn disagreed with the regime's rigid cultural norms. In fact, signs of tension appeared almost immediately after the end of the Franco-Vietnamese War. As the Hungarian embassy reported on 1 March 1955, there were very few, if any, literary works that covered the postwar problems of everyday life. 'There are no songs about love, spring, and the beauty of life.' As a consequence, many people started to listen to Radio Saigon, whose 'light' cultural programmes they found more entertaining than the works produced in the North.¹¹⁸

To be sure, this interest in southern broadcasts did not necessarily reflect a political sympathy for the southern system, since the crude propaganda of the Diem regime had much less appeal to northern intellectuals than, say, BBC programmes.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, the search for alternative forms of entertainment revealed a dissatisfaction with Hanoi's cultural policies. In September 1957, Kertész pointed out that 'the people demand many folk-tales, legends, and easily understandable stories, but the number of such publications is very low'. In fact, the state-owned publishing houses published little else than textbooks, pedagogical works, and books about the land reform and the 'corrections'.¹²⁰

Intellectual discontent kept growing throughout the first half of 1956. The VWP leaders must have been aware of that, since they sought to avoid any public discussion during the evaluation of the works that had been nominated for literary prizes in 1955. This caution proved justified, because the prizes presented in April 1956 were awarded almost exclusively on the grounds of political usefulness, rather than on the basis of popularity.¹²¹ Another manifestation of the increasing intellectual and political tension was the so-called Tran Dan affair. An outspoken poet, Tran Dan was arrested early in 1956, but in May the authorities set him free.¹²² The Hungarian diplomats noted that it was the pressure of public opinion that compelled the regime to release the imprisoned poet.¹²³

The second reason for the absence of a government-inspired cultural 'thaw' was that in the second half of 1956 the VWP leadership was preoccupied with the re-examination of the land reform campaign. Although in June 1956 the leaders began

to realize that cultural policy should not be confined to literacy courses, in September and October they were so busy with the ‘correction’ of the ‘errors’ that they failed to pay sufficient attention to the various complaints of the intelligentsia. The 10th CC plenum, held between 25 August and 7 October, did not deal with cultural problems at all, though the land reform campaign had produced a negative effect on cultural life as well. For example, in certain areas over-zealous cadres banned every old song and poem on the grounds that these were ‘the products of feudalism’. The regime’s neglect of the intellectuals’ problems generated massive discontent and open protests among writers and artists, Gyáros reported in October. ‘Our Vietnamese writer-friends’, he went on, ‘emphasize that they do not need “hundred flowers” . . . let them be given only 25 or 20, without any “flowery” policy, and then they will create such a bustling cultural life that they will not have to be ashamed of it.’¹²⁴

The intellectuals eventually managed to draw the leadership’s attention to their complaints, and on 21–23 October a delegation composed of 40 writers and artists discussed the questions of intellectual freedom with Truong Chinh, Xuan Thuy, and To Huu. The first speaker was a young poet named Le Đat. Having condemned the imprisonment of Tran Dan, he went on to speak about the ordeals of Van Cao, a famous poet and composer. Van Cao, Le Đat said, had kept a holster in his home as a souvenir, but he was so afraid of a possible house search that he threw it into Lake Thien Quang.

Le Đat bluntly declared that the Union of Writers and Artists was headed by incompetent men, of whom he singled out To Huu and Hoai Thanh for criticism. In his opinion, To Huu considered writers and artists petty bourgeois elements, and regarded literature as a mere tool of politics. For instance, in 1950 To Huu compelled Nam Cao to write a work on the new rural taxation system, a topic with which the writer was by no means familiar. As a consequence, the hastily written work was very poor. Finally, Le Đat asked the CC to respect intellectual freedom, maintain a permanent contact with writers and artists, and encourage the top leaders of the Union of Writers and Artists to retire voluntarily. His standpoint was supported by the representatives of the dissident literary journal *Nhan Van*, the army’s literary journal, and the southerners. However, the southern delegate also launched an attack on *Nhan Van*, calling it ‘a mouthpiece of enemy propaganda’.

On the second day it was the artists’ turn to speak. On the third day, late at night, Truong Chinh finally declared that the intellectuals’ complaints were justified. Still, he instructed the participants not to publish anything about the debate in the press, which rather questioned the honesty of his promises. In any case, the Hungarian revolution of 23 October (and particularly the Soviet invasion of 4 November) put an end to North Vietnam’s short-lived intellectual ‘thaw’. The editors of *Nhan Van* intended to publish a special issue about the Hungarian events, whereupon the regime banned the paper, and adopted a tougher attitude toward intellectual dissidents.¹²⁵

However, the elimination of *Nhan Van* did not prevent North Vietnamese intellectuals from becoming familiar with the basic facts of the Hungarian political

upheaval. Thanks to the information they gained from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les temps modernes*, they knew a lot about the revolutionary activity of Hungarian writers like Tibor Déry. In June 1957 Duong Đuc Hien told Felkai that he had listened to the BBC broadcasts dealing with the Hungarian revolution, and he seems to have found this interpretation of the events more believable than the official North Vietnamese explanation. Anxious to combat this western influence, István Simon, an ideologically reliable Hungarian poet who visited the DRV in the autumn of 1957, tried to convince the Vietnamese writers that the majority of Hungarian writers supported János Kádár's Soviet-installed regime.¹²⁶ It is doubtful whether North Vietnamese intellectuals gave credence to Simon's words, but the steady intensification of political repression deprived them of any opportunity to express their disagreement. By 1958, the VWP leadership had silenced its critics, and largely managed to overcome the political and economic difficulties that had troubled the regime in 1955–57.

In the last analysis, one may come to the following conclusions.

First of all, the North Vietnamese regime, though its nationalist credentials were far more impressive than the political record of Ngo Đinh Diem, had to cope with serious political and socioeconomic discontent in the first post-liberation years. Its triumph over the French, which stood in a sharp contrast with Diem's *attentisme*, proved an invaluable asset in the political competition between Hanoi and Saigon, but it only partly compensated the various strata of northern society for the economic and other difficulties brought about by the abrupt partition of the country and by DRV policies. Peasants, workers, intellectuals, artisans, merchants, Catholics, and ethnic minorities all had their specific and concrete grievances, and if the new regime ignored or repressed their demands, it did so at a certain risk.

Second, the gradual exacerbation of domestic socioeconomic and political tension in 1954–56 seems to have played a more important role in the introduction of 'corrections' in the autumn of 1956 than external influences. While the steps of Moscow and Beijing often produced a strong effect on Hanoi's policies, the radical revision of the land reform had relatively little to do with the contemporaneous liberalization of Soviet and Chinese internal policies. In fact, at first the VWP leaders proved quite reluctant to follow the example of the communist giants in this particular field.

Third, the apparent absence of foreign involvement in North Vietnamese 'corrections' does not mean that Vietnamese communist domestic policies were generally isolated from the international scene. On the contrary, Hanoi's land reform conceptions were inspired both by Chinese and East European models. In addition, the actual execution of the land reform as well as the treatment of private entrepreneurs and 'old' officials was strongly influenced by the regime's changing evaluation of the prospects of national unification. Paradoxically, unification plans could either harden or soften the government's internal policies.

Fourth, the fact that the VWP leadership finally managed to overcome the economic and political crisis of 1955–57 may have been at least partly related to the diversity of potential domestic opposition. The interests and aims of the various social, religious,

and ethnic groups that disliked the regime's policies for some reason often strongly differed from each other. For instance, the non-Catholic *kinh* population was unlikely to cooperate either with the Catholic Church or with the ethnic minorities against the government. Of the dissident intellectuals who castigated the dictatorship's cultural policy, few, if any, were devout Catholics. The revolutionary veterans purged during the land reform had little reason to join forces with 'old' officials and former 'puppets', and so on. This diversity and conflict of interests became particularly obvious during the process of 'corrections', which pitted the beneficiaries and victims of the land reform against each other. Thanks to the timely re-examination of its 'errors' (and to the subsequent repressive measures), the regime, as Felkai put it, eventually succeeded in 'preventing the outbreak of the storm'.

Notes

- [1] See, among others, Boudarel, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam*; Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*; Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*. Another source on this period in North Vietnam is the recent work in French by Bertrand de Hartingh, *Entre le peuple et la Nation: La République démocratique du Viet Nam de 1953 à 1957*, Ecole française d'Extrême – Orient, Paris, 2003. De Hartingh makes use of the archives of the DRV National Assembly; he does not make any new estimates of executions.
- [2] Margolin, 'Vietnam and Laos', 567.
- [3] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 31 January 1956, XIX-J-1-j [Top Secret Documents] Vietnam 1945-1964 [henceforth VTS], 7. doboz, 23/b, 003064/1956.
- [4] Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 6 December 1954, XIX-J-1-j Korea 1945-1964, 12. doboz, 27/a, 001131/1955.
- [5] The *chinh huan* ('rectification') campaign, patterned upon CCP practices, affected primarily the armed forces and the party. Its purpose was to reinforce discipline and suppress any kind of 'deviation'.
- [6] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 5-6; Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars 1950-1975*, 17.
- [7] Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, 10 May 1950, XIX-J-1-k [Administrative Documents] Vietnam 1945-1964 [henceforth VA], 4. doboz, 11/f, 021738/1950.
- [8] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 1 September 1953, VA, 4. doboz, 11/f, 09959/1953.
- [9] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 14 January 1954, VA, 3. doboz, 5/c, 001161/1954.
- [10] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 17 June 1955, VA, 7. doboz, 22/a, 006099/1/1955.
- [11] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 2 November 1954, VA, 3. doboz, 5/c, 010989/1954; Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*, 196.
- [12] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 6 July 1955, VA, 5. doboz, 15/c, 007966/1955.
- [13] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 74-75.
- [14] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 7 September 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/1/1955.
- [15] Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 74.
- [16] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 13 June 1957, VTS, 5. doboz, 5/f, 003857/1957.
- [17] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 5 November 1958, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006489/1958.
- [18] Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 75.
- [19] Nguyen, *Peasants, Party and Revolution*, 260-265.
- [20] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 April 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 27 September 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/2/1955.

- [21] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 3 August 1959, VTS, 8. doboz, 5/c, 005427/1959.
- [22] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 14 February 1956, VTS, 6. doboz, 11/f, 003056/1956.
- [23] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 17 June 1955, VA, 7. doboz, 22/a, 006099/1/1955.
- [24] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Annual Report, 29 January 1958, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 00907/1/1958.
- [25] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 8 May 1957, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/b, 002744/1957.
- [26] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 22 January 1960, VA, 5. doboz, 18/b, 001846/1960.
- [27] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 3 February 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/f, 004140/1955.
- [28] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 June 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 003854/1957.
- [29] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956.
- [30] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 29 January 1958, VTS, 6. doboz, 11/f, 00291/1/1958.
- [31] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 7 December 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 00419/1956.
- [32] Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*, 222.
- [33] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 September 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002745/1/1957.
- [34] On the East European situation, see, among others, Szalontai, 'The Dynamic of Repression'.
- [35] Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, no date, XIX-J-1-j [Top Secret Documents] China 1945-1964 [henceforth CTS], 17. doboz, 27/a, 00974/1954.
- [36] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 September 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002745/1/1957.
- [37] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 17 June 1955, VA, 7. doboz, 22/a, 006099/1/1955.
- [38] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956.
- [39] Boudarel, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam*, 186-193.
- [40] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 28 November 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/d, 00426/1956; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 29 May 1957, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/d, 003858/1957.
- [41] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 10 July 1958, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 00286/2/1958.
- [42] Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, Report, 9 December 1952, VA, 4. doboz, 11/f, 010329/8/1952; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 29 May 1957, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/d, 003858/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 13 June 1957, VTS, 5. doboz, 5/f, 003857/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 22 March 1962, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 004097/1962.
- [43] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 3 December 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 00285/1958.
- [44] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 9 July 1958, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 004887/1958; Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 23 May 1959, VTS, 2. doboz, 4/bc, 004110/1959.
- [45] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 28 November 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/d, 00426/1956.
- [46] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 21 February 1955, VA, 4. doboz, 15/b, 004128/1955.
- [47] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 April 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 18 June 1955, VTS, 1. doboz, 1/b, 006570/1955; Foreign Relations Department of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, Memorandum, 1 April 1959, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 003049/1959; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 5 June 1959, VTS, 8. doboz, 24/b, 004587/1959.
- [48] On North Vietnamese economic policies, see, among others, Fforde and Paine, *The Limits of National Liberation*; Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry*.
- [49] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 7 September 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/1/1955.
- [50] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Annual Report, 8 February 1956, VTS, 2. doboz, 5/a, 003065/1956.

- [51] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 January 1955, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/b, 004095/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 23 February 1955, VTS, 8. doboz, 25/c, 004141/1955.
- [52] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 23 February 1955, VTS, 8. doboz, 25/c, 004141/1955.
- [53] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 January 1955, VTS, 2. doboz, 5/a, 004089/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 15 October 1955, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/b, 009468/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Annual Report, 8 February 1956, VTS, 2. doboz, 5/a, 003065/1956.
- [54] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 January 1955, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/a, 004086/1955.
- [55] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 4 March 1955, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 004122/1955.
- [56] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 2 March 1958, VA, 7. doboz, 24/b, 1/38-21/1958.
- [57] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 January 1955, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/b, 004095/1955.
- [58] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 January 1955, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/b, 004113/1/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 23 February 1955, VTS, 8. doboz, 25/c, 004141/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 May 1955, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/b, 005998/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 15 March 1957, VTS, 1. doboz, 1/b, 001804/1-ig/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 13 June 1957, VTS, 5. doboz, 5/f, 003857/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 15 July 1957, VA, 3. doboz, 5/ca, 1/42-18/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 7 April 1958, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002331/1/1958.
- [59] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 3 June 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 005756/1956.
- [60] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 October 1957, VA, 7. doboz, 24/b, 1/38-6/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 November 1957, VA, 7. doboz, 24/b, 1/38-5/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 June 1959, VA, 7. doboz, 24/b, 1/38-12/1959.
- [61] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 10 April 1956, VA, 7. doboz, 22/a, 004459/1956.
- [62] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Annual Report, 8 February 1956, VTS, 2. doboz, 5/a, 003065/1956.
- [63] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 May 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/f, 006000/1955.
- [64] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 7 September 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/1/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956.
- [65] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 9 July 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/f, 004140/1955.
- [66] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 3 May 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002743/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 24 June 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 003853/1957.
- [67] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 1 May 1957, VTS, 6. doboz, 11/f, 002741/1957.
- [68] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 15 July 1957, VTS, 7. doboz, 24/b, 003855/1957.
- [69] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 19 April 1957, VA, 7. doboz, 22/a, 002742/1957.
- [70] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 5 November 1956, VTS, 8. doboz, 25/b, 007843/1956.
- [71] Hungarian Chamber of Commerce, Memorandum, October 1959, VTS, 8. doboz, 25/f, 002891/1960.
- [72] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956.
- [73] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 29 January 1958, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002331/1958.
- [74] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 January 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 004098/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 25 April 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/f, 006081/1955.
- [75] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 28 July 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 004098/2/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 24 September 1959, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 001750/1/1959.

- [76] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 8 May 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002745/1957. See also Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*, 194-195, 258-259.
- [77] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 July 1957, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 003859/1957.
- [78] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 28 July 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 004098/2/1955; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 July 1957, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 003859/1957.
- [79] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 5 January 1960, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 001844/1960.
- [80] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 23 April 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 006087/1955.
- [81] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 September 1957, VA, 3. doboz, 5/a, 1/42-26/1957.
- [82] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 5 October 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 009470/1955.
- [83] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 18 January 1955, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/f, 004104/1955.
- [84] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 1 November 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 005756/1/1956.
- [85] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 1 November 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 005756/1/1956.
- [86] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 8 May 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 002745/1957.
- [87] See, among others, Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 4-11; Qiang, *China and the Vietnam War*, 13-21, 71-73.
- [88] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 4 March 1955, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 004122/1955.
- [89] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 9 January 1956, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 003048/1956.
- [90] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 26 April 1955, CTS, 17. doboz, 27/a, 004044/2/1955.
- [91] In North Korea, Kim Il Sung's combination of party and state functions seems to have been exceptional. Apart from him, high-ranking cadres of the party apparatus did not hold comparable state positions simultaneously.
- [92] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 92.
- [93] Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, Report, 21 March 1956, XIX-J-1-j [Top Secret Documents] Soviet Union 1945-1964, 9. doboz, IV-138/1, 003508/1956.
- [94] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 10 April 1956, VTS, 5. doboz, 5/i, 004449/1956.
- [95] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 78-82.
- [96] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 10 May 1956, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 005742/1956. See also Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 93-94.
- [97] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 16 August 1956, CTS, 13. doboz, 11/f, 006693/1956.
- [98] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 24 May 1956, CTS, 7. doboz, 5/c, 005813/1956.
- [99] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 24 May 1956, CTS, 7. doboz, 5/c, 005813/1956.
- [100] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 27 September 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/2/1955.
- [101] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 July 1957, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 003859/1957.
- [102] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 10 May 1956, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 005742/1956; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 April 1955, VTS, 9. doboz, 27/a, 006076/1955.
- [103] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 May 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 005744/1956.
- [104] Qiang Zhai, 'Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict', 234.
- [105] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 6 August 1956, VTS, 1. doboz, 3/b, 007212/1956.
- [106] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 September 1972, VTS, 1972, 105. doboz, 162-27, 003385/1972.
- [107] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 26 August 1956, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/c, 007218/1956.
- [108] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 July 1957, VTS, 3. doboz, 5/a, 003859/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 16 November 1957, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/e, 00316/1958; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 8 February 1958, VTS, 4. doboz, 5/e, 00316/2/1958.
- [109] Remarkably, the deterioration of Soviet-DRV relations in 1963 immediately affected the East European embassies as well.

- [110] Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 3 September 1956, VTS, 5. doboz, 5/i, 006981/1956. See also Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 124-125.
- [111] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 8 June 1956, CTS, 7. doboz, 5/bc, 005769/1956.
- [112] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 7 June 1956, XIX-J-1-k [Administrative Documents] China 1945-1964 [henceforth CA], 12. doboz, 18/b, 005790/1956.
- [113] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 24 July 1956, CA, 17. doboz, 22/a, 006713/1/1956.
- [114] Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Report, 5 September 1956, CTS, 17. doboz, 27/a, 006695/2/1956.
- [115] Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*, 57-75.
- [116] Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 76.
- [117] Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams*, 188.
- [118] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 1 March 1955, VA, 5. doboz, 18/b, 004123/1955. On the first manifestations of literary dissidence in 1955, see Boudarel, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam*, 87-127.
- [119] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 3 August 1959, VTS, 8. doboz, 5/c, 005427/1959.
- [120] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 15 September 1957, VA, 3. doboz, 5/e, 1/42-28/1957.
- [121] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 29 March 1956, VA, 5. doboz, 18/b, 004455/1956. See also Boudarel, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam*, 233-235.
- [122] Boudarel, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam*, 46.
- [123] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 30 October 1956, VA, 6. doboz, 18/d, 007841/1956.
- [124] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 30 June 1956, VA, 5. doboz, 18/b, 007206/1956; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 30 October 1956, VA, 6. doboz, 18/d, 007841/1956; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 15 September 1957, VA, 3. doboz, 5/e, 1/42-28/1957.
- [125] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 18 November 1956, VA, 6. doboz, 18/d, 001014/1957. On the intellectual ferment in 1956, see, among others, Boudarel, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam*, 233-251; McHale, 'Vietnamese Marxism, Dissent, and the Politics of Postcolonial Memory', 14-18.
- [126] Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 13 June 1957, VTS, 5. doboz, 5/f, 003857/1957; Hungarian Embassy to the DRV, Report, 20 September 1957, VA, 6. doboz, 18/d, 004731/1957.

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