

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

Unforgettable Days

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Foreign Languages Publishing House

Hanoi — 1975

Printed in the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam



Publisher's Note

From August 1945 to December 1946, from the victory of the General Insurrection to the start of the resistance to French colonial aggression, Viet Nam went through a crucial period, one that was extremely complex and at times critical.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, one of the main organizers and leaders of the Insurrection, recounted here the events of that historic period. From the whole picture there emerges the vivid and fascinating image of President Ho Chi Minh. These "Unforgettable Days" are

indispensable to those who wish to go back to the source of present-day Viet Nam.

Part One

"...The revolutionary boat is gliding forward through the reefs..."

(Directive of the Standing Bureau of the Central Committee of the Party, March 9, 1946).

I

Back at Hanoi, we lived in Hang Ngang Street. The City Party Committee had arranged for us to take lodgings with the family of a sympathizer. Presently we learned that Uncle Ho was coming. A few days earlier, a Liberation Army platoon of the Quang Trung detachment which was doing combat duty in Thai Nguyen, had been ordered to go back immediately to Tan Trao to escort him. The comrade who brought us the news said that on the way Uncle Ho had sometimes had to be carried on a litter. We guessed that he was still in very poor health, for usually he would refuse to trouble anyone, even when he was tired or sick.

The situation was tense. My comrades were very glad to hear the news. It had been decided that Comrade Tho would go and meet Uncle Ho in the guerilla base, but there was no need now, Comrade Ninh and I were to go and meet him in Phu Gia.

Our car quickly drove out of the city, along the familiar dyke bordered with guava trees. Red flags fluttered in villages around the West Lake. This reminded me of the days when we were on our way to meet Uncle Ho at Deo Gie, as he was coming to Tan Trao from Cao Bang; a few days later Tan Trao became the seat of revolutionary power.

There had been days of great joy in his revolutionary life as he wandered around the world. There was the day when he found the way to national liberation while reading Lenin's *Thesis on the National and Colonial Problem*. There was the day when the French Communist Party, of which he was a member, was founded in 1920. And the historic day of February 3, 1930, when the Indochinese Communist Party was founded...

And now another day of great joy was coming to him, to the Vietnamese revolution.

Not long before we had been sitting up all night beside Uncle Ho's bamboo bed in a small bamboo hut, when he was seriously sick in Tan Trao. Only in such moments could we fully realize his ardent longing for the nation's independence and freedom. It not only underlay his advice on the work of

cadres, on how to sustain the revolutionary movement, when he said that "we must win back independence and freedom, even if we have to burn down the whole of the Truong Son range". It was clearly apparent also in each of his gestures, in the look in his eyes wherever he recovered between two fits of fever and in his struggle against his grave illness as he fought over every second and minute for the sake of the revolution.

At the call of the Party and Uncle Ho, our whole nation from North to South had been rising up like surging waves during the last few days. In Hanoi, the revolutionary masses had stormed Bac Bo Palace (the Governor's Office) by rushing the iron fence. Crowds of people, old and young, men and women, had demonstrated in closed ranks in front of the civil guards' barracks, braving Japanese tanks and guns. Japanese tanks, machine-guns and bayonets were forced to retreat, and the Japanese had to hand over the munitions stores belonging to the civil guards stationed there. News of victorious uprisings came from various regions...

We came into Ga village.

Uncle Ho was staying in a small but tidy house. As we entered, we saw him sitting and chatting with an old man, his host.

Not long before, when he was living in Viet Bac, he had appeared to ordinary eyes as an old man of the Nung minority. Today, he had become an old peasant of the lowlands, quite at ease in his brown peasant pyjamas. He still looked rather thin, with protruding cheek-bones. Blue veins were clearly visible on his forehead and temples. But with his large forehead, his black beard, and especially his bright eyes, a surprising moral strength seemed to radiate from his slender body. Anyway, he looked much better than he had during the Tan Trao conference.

As we came into the house the host greeted us, then tactfully withdrew.

Uncle Ho smiled at us, saying, "Now, you are looking like real city men."

We eagerly told him about the revolutionary situation in Hanoi and the provinces. He listened to us quietly. It was his manner to remain calm in moments of joy or sadness.

We informed him of the Party Bureau's desire to arrange the Government's inauguration at an early date. According to the decision of the National Conference held at Tan Trao, the National Liberation Committee, of which he was the Chairman, was to become the Provisional Government.

With some amusement, he asked, "And so, I am to be President?"

In fact, a very glorious but also very critical period had begun in the nation's history. Uncle Ho had accepted a difficult mission, that of steering the new boat – the newly-established Vietnamese state – through dangerous reefs. How he received this task from history and from the people was stated in this answer he was to give foreign pressmen three months later: "I have no desire for either fame or riches. I have to assume the work of President because my people have entrusted it to me. I am like a soldier going to the front at the nation's order."

II

We returned to Hang Ngang Street for further preparations, while comrade Truong Chinh, who had joined us later, was to stay till the afternoon and accompany Uncle Ho on his journey.

It was the first time for Uncle Ho to come to Hanoi. It has taken him more than thirty-five years to reach Hanoi from the small thatched house in Kim Lien village three hundred kilometres away.

The path he had followed had been different from that of any other Vietnamese patriot before him.

He had wandered alone in various regions of the globe. At that time capitalism, reaching its highest stage of development, had become extremely vicious. It tried to blur the dividing line between the good and the bad. It distorted all the genuine moral values which mankind had achieved so far. It was hiding the lights of justice and freedom.

He had wandered in days of darkness when European and Asian skies were covered with the dark clouds of imperialist wars.

The world was sinking into disorder and sufferings; imperialism was committing crime upon crime. At a time when it was hard to tell the true from the false, he quickly saw the light of the truth. He came to Leninism. He found in Lenin's doctrine "the sun which brings the radiant source of life." He saw in Lenin's banner "the symbol of faith and the torch of hope." Thus, fifty years ago, the great Vietnamese patriot had found in Marxism-Leninism the only way to liberation, the "Revolutionary Way", for our people and their fellow-sufferers – the peoples oppressed by imperialism. Now a great change had taken place in national life.

A few days before, Hanoi still looked like a product of the corrupt colonial regime during the war. The whole city was feverish with black-market activities. Life was precarious. There were not enough dust-carts to carry those who had died from starvation to the outskirts of the city where they were thrown into common graves. At the city gates, large numbers of starving people were pouring in from the countryside. They staggered about as lifeless as withered leaves in winter. A light push by a policeman might send someone down never to rise again.

In addition to that, in August the water had risen in every river. The flood had destroyed the dykes left uncared for by the colonial rulers and six of the delta provinces, the granary of northern Viet Nam, were inundated. Cholera was spreading. Many calamities simultaneously occurred, all due to the colonial regime.

The economic profiteers were joined by numerous political opportunists who turned out to shout "Long live Viet Nam's independence" and "Long live Great Japan." Instead of truncheon-carrying French policemen, one could see Japanese gendarmes with long swords plodding on the pavements in their heavy boots.

This was a sad time, not only for Hanoi but for our whole people.

Then, the victory of the Soviet Red Army, which routed the Japanese Kwantung Army in mid-August, provided our nation with a great opportunity.

The revolution broke out like a whirlwind.

Within only a few days, much of the shame and suffering caused by slavery was swept away.

The revolution's power of revival was extraordinary. One day before, the whole city had been paralyzed by famine, epidemics and terror. Now, life was seething in every street and lane. Thousands upon thousands of people were marching in the streets with the force of surging waves.

The people's revolutionary power had just been established. Most people did not know yet who were the representatives of this new power. But a new order, a revolutionary order, was set up by the people themselves. Robbery and stealing virtually disappeared. Beggars could be seen nowhere. Trade activities, which had been the main ones in the city, made room for a new kind of activity – revolutionary activity.

A cyclist would stop at a street corner and shout in his megaphone, "Fellow citizens, please assemble at X for a rally." Without knowing who he was, people carried his message while other ordinary citizens disseminated the request through their own megaphones. Everybody stopped work, and went off en masse. Within a few moments, thousands and thousands of people would be present at the meeting place, ready to do anything for the sake of the revolution.

The atmosphere was one of purity and excitement in Hanoi. Revolutionary songs resounded from morning till night:

"The Viet Minh army is marching,

All of one mind, to save the country..."

Golden-starred red flags appeared ever more numerous and more splendid, fluttering in the wind and colouring scarlet the houses and streets. The revolution was really a festive day for the oppressed.

Uncle Ho arrived at night fall. We saw emotion on his face as we came out to meet him.

He was now in Hanoi, which was to become a few days later the capital of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, the first people's democratic State in South East Asia. However, the people of Hanoi were not yet able to share our joy of welcoming him. Even the driver did not know. After a few days, this man requested leave to go to Thai Nguyen and fetch his father so that on the coming Independence Day he could see our new President. Only on that day at the big rally in Ba Dinh Square did he realize that President Ho Chi Minh was just the old man he had brought back from Ga village in his car.

III

At the Potsdam Conference held in late July that year, the Allied Powers had decided to divide Indochina into two zones for the disarming of Japanese troops after the surrender of Japan. This disarming was to be done by the British army south of the 16th parallel, and by Chiang Kai-shek's army north of the 16th parallel. Of course our people were not consulted on that important matter. Under American pressure, the French were left out of the operation.

Chiang's men had not yet come when we saw some French officers with the American mission who had arrived in Hanoi by plane on the afternoon of August 22.

The French officers were taken by the Japanese to the "Metropole" Hotel where many French nationals were still staying. When our people saw French uniforms, they immediately held a protest meeting in front of the hotel. They came in greater and greater numbers. In defiance of the bayonets of Japanese sentries, they broke through the barricades. In face of the indignation of the masses, Japanese gendarmes hurriedly escorted the officers back to the former Governor-General's palace, then the headquarters of the Japanese army.

Months earlier, when in the guerilla bases, we had heard of a statement by De Gaulle on a new status for "French Indochina".

According to this statement, Indochina was to become a Federation of five different "States" (besides Laos and Cambodia, Viet Nam was to be divided into three countries: Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina). Those States would enjoy so-called "internal autonomy". The federation would have a federal government headed by a "Governor-General" representing France and having both executive and legislative powers. Through this statement, we knew that the colonialist policy of French imperialism had remained unchanged.

As soon as they heard that the Japanese Emperor was going to capitulate, the French government had become active. Many groups of French officers, administrators and intelligence men in China, Ceylon and Madagascar were ordered into Indochina and parachuted down on various places in the North, the South and the Central regions. Others landed from the sea. These people were unaware of the deep changes that had taken place here during the past few months. Many tried to get in touch with former mandarins and village notables in order to show them their papers. Most of them were caught by our men, others were captured by the Japanese.

Soon after we returned to Hanoi, we learned that right after the Japanese surrender, the French government had ordered the French expeditionary force in the Far East, which had been set up for some time, to be sent urgently to Indochina. Leclerc, a well-known general in the fight for the liberation of France, was appointed commander-in-chief. Admiral d'Argenlieu, an unfrocked priest and de Gaulle's confidential agent, was appointed High Commissioner. Warships from what had remained of the French fleet after World War Two were heading for Indochina. From the other face of the globe, guns were pointing at the revolution.

The appearance of a mission of a dozen French officers in Hanoi was a matter of great concern for Uncle Ho and my comrades. How could they arrive here even before Chiang's troops? What was the attitude of the Allies, especially of the Americans and the Chiang clique toward the Indochinese problem? That was what we wanted to know.

As a delegation from the people's administration, we came to see the American mission. At the meeting, we were assured that the disarming of

the Japanese north of the 16th parallel was still to be carried out by Chiang Kai-shek's troops. We also noticed that the Americans and the French in Hanoi seemed to dislike each other. While the French were frantically trying to return to Indochina, the American officer by the name of Patty, for some reason we didn't know, showed sympathy for the Viet Minh's anti-Japanese struggle.

The revolutionary upsurge of the whole people from North to South had put the defeated Japanese in a quandary. Our attacks in Viet Bac and other regions forced them to reconsider their position. If they fought against the insurrection, what would be their fate after they were disarmed by the Allies? They realized that they would gain nothing if they prevented the revolution from spreading.

In Hue, on August 23, fifteen thousand people in the city and the suburbs staged a show of strength in the streets. The Insurrectionary Committee sent Bao Dai a letter demanding his abdication. The insurgent armed forces occupied public offices and hunted down the traitors. In face of the great pressure exerted by the revolution, Bao Dai declared that he was ready to leave the throne.

On August 25, the insurrection broke out in most of the provinces in Nam Bo. Eighty thousand people demonstrated in Saigon-Cholon. The imperial envoy sent by Bao Dai a few days earlier had to resign. In face of the strength of the masses, the Japanese troops, which numbered scores of thousands, had to look the other way.

Comrades Tran Huy Lieu, Nguyen Luong Bang and Cu Huy Can were sent to Hue. On August 30, the Main Gate of the imperial city was opened wide to welcome the revolutionary delegation. Bao Dai read his abdication edict and handed over his seal and sword, becoming just an ordinary citizen of a free country. Thousands and thousands of people witnessed with joy the last moments of the Nguyen dynasty.

Thus, under the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party, which then had a membership of about five thousand, the Viet Minh Front, enjoying the support of the entire people, had won a great victory in the general insurrection sweeping the country. The August Revolution was gloriously

successful. Within only ten days, the revolutionary power was established over the whole country. The eighty-year-long colonial rule and the thousand-year-old feudal system had collapsed. The yellow flag with the broken stripes, a product of the short-lived Japanese rule, was cast off. It quickly slipped out of the people's memory without leaving a trace.

IV

Our host in Hang Ngang Street reserved the first floor of his house for us. Uncle Ho was offered the second floor for greater quietness. But he did not like to live alone, so he lived together with us. He had decided that Comrade Dong and Comrade Hoan were to stay back in Tan Trao for a certain period. For the servants and neighbours, we were just "gentlemen coming from the village for a visit." Comrade Ninh, who wore a beard as he was too lazy to shave, also passed for an "old gentleman".

The room in which we lived used to be a dining and sitting room, so there were no desks. Uncle Ho worked at the large dining table. His type-writer was placed on a small, square table, covered with a green cloth, in one corner.

After work, each of us managed to find a place to rest. One day on a divan, another on a few benches put together. Uncle Ho rested on a collapsible canvas bed which he had found folded up in a corner.

On the very day he arrived, the first detachments of Chiang's troops – the scouts and the forward elements – had made their appearance in Hanoi. From the balcony, we kept seeing groups coming in one after another.

It was hard to believe they were a victorious army. The soldiers' faces were pale and haggard. Their yellowish uniforms were tattered and dirty. They carried shoulder poles with baskets of odds and ends; some were followed by their women and children. Many plodded heavily on legs swollen with beriberi. They were like dirty stains on the city from which the foul traces of colonialism had only just been swept away. They looked even more wretched than when we had seen them in Kunming and Kweilin five years earlier.

Uncle Ho chaired the first meeting of the Party Bureau in Hanoi. Though the revolution had triumphed in most of the provinces the central revolutionary power had not yet been established. The internal and international situation called for prompt action. The Bureau felt that it was important to make public the list of members of the Provisional Government and hold the inauguration ceremony at an early date. All this should be done before the bulk of Chiang's army had arrived.

Instructions were given to authorities in the northern provinces to delay the movement of Chiang's troops for as long as possible, under the pretext of shortage of means of transport due to the flood.

A number of Liberation Army detachments in Thai Nguyen had been ordered urgently to come to Hanoi but their arrival had been delayed due to the flood which had destroyed many sections of the roads. People's power had been established in Hanoi for over a week, yet the revolutionary armed forces consisted only of self-defence units and a number of civil guards who had just joined the revolution. That was also a matter of concern.

Early on the morning of August 26, we were informed that two detachments of the Liberation Army had reached Gia Lam. Comrades Nguyen Khang and Vuong Thua Vu started off to meet them. Only after some hard negotiations did the Japanese agree to let them come into Hanoi.

The military band played revolutionary marches as our troops crossed Long Bien Bridge. Our soldiers, their guns cocked, marched in Indian file along both sides of the road.

The presence in Hanoi of battle-tested revolutionary forces inspired enthusiasm among the people. A military review with the participation of Liberation troops and self-defence units was held at the square in front on the Municipal Theatre, filling all present with joy and confidence.

On the 28th, the list of members of the Provisional Government was released to the Hanoi press. The composition of the government was in line with the Viet Minh Front's policy of broad unity among the various sections of the population in the work of rebuilding the country.

The day before, Uncle Ho had met the Ministers in the Provisional Government at Bac Bao Palace. Mr. Nguyen Van To, Minister of Social Welfare, later recounted how he saw an old man in brown shorts, wearing a khaki sun-helmet in poor shape, standing in the reception room leaning on a walking stick. The old man greeted him with a smile. It was only a few minutes later that he realized that the old man was Ho Chi Minh himself.

The Party Bureau had decided that the day the Provisional Government was inaugurated would also be the occasion for the official proclamation of independence and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. In addition to the government's line and policies, it was necessary to prepare the wording of the oath to be taken at the ceremony. Uncle Ho discussed with the Bureau a task of great importance to be undertaken at once: the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.

In a poorly lighted small room at the back of the big house, which stood in one of thirty-six ancient streets of Hanoi, Uncle Ho was at work, now writing, now typing.

The family servants did not know what the bright-eyed old man, wearing an unbuttoned faded brown coat and smoking cigarettes, was doing there with such great concentration. Each time they asked him if he wanted anything, he would turn round, smile and say a few words to them. And each time he would say he didn't want anything. They did not know that they were witnessing a historic moment.

One morning, Uncle Ho and Comrade Truong Chinh called us in. The historic Declaration had been finished. Uncle Ho read it to us so that it could be approved by the collective. As he recalled later, those were the happiest moments in his life.

Twenty-six years before, he had come to the Versailles Peace Conference with a list of the most urgent demands concerning the living conditions and democratic liberties of the colonial peoples. None of those modest demands were accepted by the imperialists. He realized that one could not pin any hopes on the kind-heartedness of the capitalists. One could only rely on the struggle and the forces of the people.

Now on behalf of the whole nation he was gathering the fruits of eighty years of struggle.

We could see the joy beaming on his still fallow face.

V

The Second of September, 1945.

Hanoi was bedecked with red bunting. A world of flags, lanterns and flowers. Fluttering red flags adorned the roofs, the trees and the lakes.

Streamers were hung across the streets and roads, bearing slogans in Vietnamese, French, English, Chinese and Russian: "Viet Nam for the Vietnamese", "Down with French Colonialism", "Independence or Death", "Support the Provisional Government", "Support President Ho Chi Minh", "Welcome to the Allied Mission", etc.

Factories and shops, big and small, were closed down. Markets were deserted. All trade and industrial activities in the city were suspended. The whole city, old and young, men and women took to the streets. Everyone felt that they should attend the first great festival of the nation.

Multi-coloured streams of people flowed to Ba Dinh Square from all directions.

Workers in white shirts and blue trousers came in ranks, full of strength and confidence. Today ordinary working people arrived at the festival with the dignified bearing of masters of their own country and their own destinies.

Hundreds of thousands of peasants came from the city suburbs. People's militiamen carried quarterstaves, swords or scimitars. Some even carried old-style bronze clubs and long-handled swords taken from the armouries of temples. Among the women peasants in their festive dresses, some were clad in old-fashioned robes, yellow turbans and bright-green sashes. Never before had peasants from the poor villages around Hanoi walked into the city with such pride.

Old men wore solemn faces with young girls were radiant in their colourful dresses.

Most lively were the children. From this day on, they were the young masters of an independent country. They marched in step with the whistle blows of their leaders, singing revolutionary songs.

Buddhist bonzes and Catholic priests also came from their monasteries to attend the great national festival.

The autumn sun was shining brightly on that day when Ba Dinh Square made history. The guard of honour stood at attention around the newly-erected rostrum. The Liberation Army fighters, who had followed the Military Order № 1 of the Insurrection Committee a few days earlier to march south and "attack the important towns and cities held by the enemy" were now standing side by side with the self-defence units of the workers, youth and labouring people of the capital to defend the Provisional Government.

After long years of exile and wandering in the world, sentenced to death by the French imperialists, subjected to all sorts of privations and hardships in dozens of jails, Uncle Ho was now back and making his first appearance before a million of his countrymen. Not long before, this had been only a dream.

The name of Ho Chi Minh was soon to be known all over the world and surrounded with the legendary anecdotes which often accompany great men. But on that day, his name was still unfamiliar to his people. Few of them knew that he was none other than the famous Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Here is how President Ho Chi Minh, the head of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, appeared for the first time before his people as a great leader.

He was a thin old man with a broad forehead, bright eyes and a sparse beard, wearing an old hat, a high-collared khaki jacket and white rubber sandals.

A couple days before, the problem had arisen as to what he should wear for the occasion. He eventually chose the khaki suit. During the next twenty-four years as President, on great national days as on visits to foreign countries, he always appeared in this simple, unchanging attire: a plain suit, without any decorations, as on that occasion when he first stood before his people.

The "old man" had a lively gait, which rather surprised some people at that time. They did not find in the President the stately bearing of "high-born" people. His voice carried the accent of a rural area in Nghe An province.

Such was the way he appeared before a million of his countrymen.

His speech was quiet, warm, articulate and clear. There was none of the eloquence so often heard on solemn occasions. But its very simplicity suggested deep feelings and determination. Everything he said was full of vitality; every sentence, every word went straight to people's hearts.

In the middle of the Declaration of Independence Uncle Ho stopped and asked suddenly, "Do you hear me distinctly, fellow countrymen?"

A million voices thundered in reply, "Yes!"

From that moment on, he and the sea of people were merged into one.

That was the Declaration of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, which had just won back independence after a national struggle lasting eighty years. It was also the heartfelt and touching declaration of the most conscious vanguard of the most revolutionary class, many of whose sons, absolutely loyal to the interests of the class and the nation, had fearlessly faced the guillotine or the firing squad, shouting: "Long live the independence of Viet Nam" while they tore away their blindfolds.

The ceremony concluded with the oath of independence:

"We, the entire Vietnamese people, swear to give resolute and wholehearted support to the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and President Ho Chi Minh.

"We swear to join the Government in safeguarding the full independence of the Fatherland, to oppose any scheme of aggression, even at the cost of our lives.

"If the French should invade our country once more, we swear that we will neither serve in their army, work for them, sell them food nor act as guides for them!"

One million people took the oath with one voice – a voice which expressed the resolve of the whole people to carry out what President Ho had just read in the conclusion of the Declaration:

"Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and has in fact before been a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence."

The *Indictment of French Colonization* had been written thirty years before. But only now was the French colonial regime being brought to public trial by the entire Vietnamese people.

A new page of history had been turned. A new era had begun: that of Independence, Freedom and Happiness.

The map of the world would have to be redrawn, for a new State had been born: the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

Together with the general uprising which had taken place during the latter part of August, Independence Day, September 2nd, was a day of extremely great significance in the nation's political and spiritual life.

Uncle Ho's concern of thirty years before – "Poor Indochina! You will perish if your senile youth do not come back to life soon." – need no longer weigh on his mind. The whole nation had come back to life.

Independence and freedom had come to every citizen. Everyone could realize their sacred value and knew his responsibility to defend them.

Innumerable difficulties lay ahead. But for the imperialists who wanted to restore their lost paradise things would not be so easy either.

VI

A great difficulty facing our Party at that time was how to deal with the Allied troops who were coming in to disarm the Japanese army. It was reported that Chiang Kai-shek would send a very large army into the North. Basing itself on the resolution of the Party's National Conference at Tan Trao, the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee had discussed the tactics to use when dealing with Chiang's men.

We were well aware of the Kuomintang's designs. They were implacable enemies of the revolution. We had to be vigilant and guard against any attempt by them to overthrow us and replace us by their agents. However we had to seek a compromise with them, move skilfully and avoid clashes. The new revolutionary power needed time to build up and strengthen its forces. The slogan set forth was "Chinese and Vietnamese are friends.

It was not at all easy to implement this policy towards the Chiang clique. Educated by the Party, our people had long been aware that our real friends were the Chinese Red Army. Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang troops were the enemy of the Chinese people and revolution. They were also the enemy of the Vietnamese people and revolution and our people had a deep hatred for them. Chiang's army was also well known for its piratical character. It was certain that after entering our country they would commit acts that might provoke indignation and clashes. The Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee had to send envoys to the northern provinces to help the local leaders explain the Party's views to the cadres and people before the arrival of the Chiang troops.

After the capitulation of the Japanese, Ha Ung Kham (Ho Yin Chin) Chief of Staff of the Chinese Kuomintang Army, a notorious anti-Communist, urged Lu Han to bring his troops into North Viet Nam as soon as possible. The plan for the entry of Chinese troops into Viet Nam had been prepared long before. The Kuomintang militarists had believed that it would be a very good opportunity for them to annex North Viet Nam and had expected

that at least they would be able to establish a puppet administration north of the 16th parallel which would obey their orders.

They had got ready the cards in their hand, consisting in their Vietnamese agents in China, such as Nguyen Hai Than, Vu Hong Khanh, Nguyen Tuong Tam, etc. Those belong to two organizations: the Viet Nam Cach Mang Dong Minh Hoi (Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance) and the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Viet Nam Nationalist Party). They had been living in exile for a long time and did not possess any links with the revolutionary movement in the country. They styled themselves Vietnamese patriots devoted to nationalism, but were in fact a group of reactionaries trying to feather their own nests by relying on the Chinese Kuomintang and the Chiang troops. As the latter marched into Viet Nam from two directions, they followed them in two groups.

Because of sloppy organization, insufficient transport means, absence of logistical units, and the press-ganging which accompanied their march, the Chiang troops were moving at a slow pace.

From Yunnan, the 93rd corps of Lu Han's First Army was to follow the Red River up to Hanoi but by the end of August they had only reached Lao Cai. From Kwangsi the 62nd corps of the Kuomintang central troops, headed by General Tieu Van (Siao Wen) was to reach Hanoi through Lang Son and Cao Bang provinces but they crossed the border only in early September.

Two other corps, the 52nd of the Chiang central troops and the 60th of the Yunnan forces would follow and go to Haiphong, Vinh and Da Nang.

All told, 180,000 Chiang troops were to enter North Viet Nam. The Yunnan forces were disease-ridden and poorly trained. The Central troops were stronger and better organized. All four corps were put under the command of General Lu Han. Tieu Van, one of Truong Phat Khue's (Chang Fa Kwei) assistants, a veteran Viet Nam watcher, was entrusted by the Kuomintang militarists with political manipulation in North Viet Nam. It was at Lang Son on his arrival with the 62nd corps that Nguyen Hai Than learnt that the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam had made its appearance before a million people in Hanoi. The command of the 62nd

corps wanted to disarm our armed forces in Lang Son and Cao Bang but the latter wouldn't let them. Then they ordered their troops to occupy the Liberation Army's barracks while followers of the Revolutionary Alliance (Viet Nam Cach Mang Dong Minh Hoi) backed by the Chiang troops, occupied the offices of the provincial People's Committee.

To avoid major clashes, the Administrative Committee, mass organizations and armed forces of Lang Son province moved out to the surrounding areas. The people immediately carried out the slogan: "Empty houses and empty gardens". Lang Son town was deserted.

Unable to muster enough people to hold even a small rally for Nguyen Thai Than, the Revolutionary Alliance gang had leaflets printed and scattered all over the empty town of Lang Son protesting against the Viet Minh's establishment of the provisional Government and making 13 charges against the Ho Chi Minh Government.

Meanwhile the Nationalist Party headed by Vu Hong Khanh and Nguyen Tuong Tam were following the 93rd corps into Viet Nam. Relying on the Chiang troops they attempted to overthrow the people's power in the localities they passed through. They set up offices, assembled reactionaries and harassed, looted and murdered the people. Long Van's (Lung Yun) undisciplined troops were no different from their henchmen and acted like bandits.

Clashes between our armed forces and the Chiang troops took place in some regions where the necessary instructions from the Government had not yet been received.

In order to avoid such confrontations with the Chiang troops, administrative offices and army units were ordered to move out of some towns and provincial capitals in the border regions and along the Lao Cai – Hanoi railways.

In the first half of September nearly 200,000 Chiang troops swept over the North like a plague. With them were their agents, mad with frustration at the failure of their schemes. Faced with powerful revolutionary forces and a State with a firm political basis and wholehearted popular support these

henchmen of the Kuomintang became even more brazen and exposed themselves all the more as traitors with no roots in the nation and dependent on foreign reactionary troops.

On September 11, General Lu Han flew to Hanoi.

A few days later long communiqués appeared everywhere. The Kuomintang troops acted as they had come to a country without any administration. They arrogated to themselves the right to keep order in the capital. They fixed the exchange rates of the Kuomintang banknotes which had long ago lost all value. They even made announcements on traffic regulations.

A few days after Lu Han's arrival, Alessandri also arrived in Hanoi. How did this general, the former commander of the French Foreign Legionaries in Tonkin, who had fled with his troops to Kunming following the Japanese coup of March 9, manage to turn up here? On this score Chiang-French collusion needed to be elucidated.

VII

On the morning of September 3, the day following the presentation ceremony, the Provisional Government met for the first time.

The meeting took place in the former French Résident Supérieur for Tonkin, an impressive building with a green-painted iron fence. On this occasion, the gate under the archway stood wide open to welcome the people's representatives. Two weeks earlier, the people of Hanoi, up in arms, had crowded in front of it; despite the guards' guns, an old worker had clambered over the fence and onto the roof, pulled down the three-striped puppet flag and hoisted the golden star on a red field of the revolution.

The conference room on the first floor was bare. No flowers on the table. The representatives of the new regime realized that the task they were tackling was by no means easy. Never did Lenin's teaching seem so meaningful: "It is difficult to seize power, but still more difficult to keep it."

Eighty years of French domination had ruthlessly ground down our labouring people. During the years of the Second World War, another

ferocious imperialism, that of the Japanese, had joined the French in exploiting us and both had vied with each other in bleeding our people white. More than one million peasants had died of starvation amidst their lush green ricefields. Nearly a million more died after the harvest. Then floods had come and we were again faced with the threat of starvation. The peasants, who had found new life through the miraculous power of their reconquered freedom and independence, could not endure indefinitely on an empty stomach.

The legacy left by the colonialists was pitiful: a few empty buildings, but neither rice nor money. Pitiful was also the cultural inheritance: a 90% illiteracy rate, the result of an obscurantist policy more concerned with building prisons than schools.

However, worse was yet to come. Foreign troops were pouring in from all directions. Some came from nearby, others from faraway places. They differed by the colour of their skins and their languages, but they shared a common eagerness to conquer our country and drive us back to slavery.

Punctual as ever, President Ho entered from an adjoining room.

"Good morning, dear elders, dear friends."

His cordial greetings at once made everyone feel at home.

Uncle Ho wore a pair of indigo-dyed canvas shoes he had brought with him from the highlands. They had been offered him by some Nung people who had sewn them themselves. He was to wear them on many occasions, even when receiving foreign guests. Uncle Ho briskly went to the table and with a wave of his arm, invited the representatives to sit down.

There was no opening speech. Uncle Ho drew from his pocket a slip of paper on which had put down a few notes. Breaking with formality he went straight to the heart of the matter.

"Dear elders, dear friends,

"After eighty years of oppression, exploitation and obscurantism by the French colonialists, none of us has acquired any administrative skill. But we should not let this worry us. We shall learn while working. Mistakes may happen but we'll correct them. We will have the courage to do it.

"Thanks to our deep love for the Fatherland and the people, I am sure that we shall succeed.

"What are our most pressing problems at the moment? In my opinion there are six of them...

With a straight forward simplicity, Uncle Ho laid before the Council of Ministers the most urgent future tasks:

"1. Launch a production drive in order to fight famine. While waiting for the maize and sweet potato crop to be brought in in three or four months' time, start a food-collecting campaign. Everyone will fast once every ten days and the rice saved will be distributed to the poor;

"2. Launch a fight against illiteracy;

"3. Hold general elections with universal suffrage as soon as possible, so as to enable the people to exercise their democratic liberties;

"4. Start a movement for industry, thrift, integrity and uprightness in order to eradicate the bad habits and practices left by colonialism;

"5. Immediately abolish poll-tax, market tax and ferry tax; strictly forbid opium smoking;

"6. Proclaim freedom of religious beliefs and unity between non-Catholics and Catholics."

It took the President half an hour to expound all these questions. The difficult and complex problems left by 80 years of French domination, matters of vital importance to the nation, were briefly and clearly dealt with by Uncle Ho, who pointed out the direction to follow and occasionally the

practical measures to be put into effect. Those who had had the chance of working with him before at once recognized his familiar style.

After discussing the questions raised by Uncle Ho, all the ministers gave their enthusiastic approval. Many of the ideas put forward by him at the very first meeting of the Provisional Government have remained major Party and State policies to this day.

The meeting went on until the end of the morning. The atmosphere of simplicity and cordiality pervading it deeply impressed all those who were meeting Uncle Ho for the first time.

A few days later Uncle Ho wrote a letter addressed to all our people: "From January to July this year, two million of our people died of starvation in Bac Bo. The floods have further aggravated the population's misery. When having our meals, we feel sad at heart, thinking of those who are hungry. Therefore I propose that every one of us throughout the country, myself in the first place, fast once every ten days, that is three times a month. The rice saved (one tinfoil per head per meal) will be distributed to the poor."

He wrote these lines to the peasants: "Plentiful food means strong armies. Hard work wards off famine. Let not an inch of land lie fallow, and we shall succeed on these two counts. Our present slogan is: 'Intensify production, immediately and ever more'. That is an effective way of preserving our liberty and independence."

In early September, the Government promulgated a decree requiring all Vietnamese to learn to read and write the national script within a year. Uncle Ho called on all to fight illiteracy: "Let those who cannot yet read and write learn to do it. Let the wife learn from her husband. Let the younger brother learn from the elder. Let parents learn from their children. Let girls and women study harder."

In September, when the school year began, Uncle Ho urged the children to "work hard, behave well, obey their teachers and vie with one another in their studies."

September also saw the Mid-Autumn Festival, our children's day. On that occasion, the first such festival in independence, Uncle Ho sent the young ones a letter overflowing with happiness: "You are happy to have a full moon, cool breezes, beautiful cakes and blue autumn skies. You are happy, and so is Uncle Ho. Do you know why? Uncle Ho is happy, firstly because he loves you; secondly because, while last autumn our country was still oppressed and you were little slaves, this autumn our country has regained its freedom and you are the young masters of an independent country. (...) Next year we shall have a common festival for young and old. What do you think? I have no present for you this year, only my warmest kisses."

Naturally, the children did not know that for all the joy Uncle Ho expressed in his letter, he was beset by countless problems connected with State affairs.

VIII

Since he came to Hanoi, Uncle Ho had suffered no more fits of fever. But he was still very thin. The wrinkles on his forehead and at the corners of his eyes grew more numerous and deeper every day.

In Bac Bo Palace, every morning he got up at five o'clock and did exercises. He wrote a letter calling on all his fellow-countrymen to do physical exercises too. He ended with this line: "I myself do so every day."

At mealtimes, he ate in the dining-hall with us and the guards. We shared the same table and took the same food. One day taken up by some urgent business, he was late. We did not save his share of meat and vegetables for him, each thinking the others had done it. We all felt greatly concerned, but he cheerfully sat at table and simply ate his rice.

After lunch he usually took a fifteen-minute nap in an armchair in the sitting-room. Then he read newspapers and news bulletins.

When in the guerilla base, he used to go to bed early because there was no light. Now he sat up late. The guards often saw lights burning in his room up to a late hour as he read books and examined documents.

His working-day began with a brief meeting of the Party Bureau. He set great store by collective work. He told the Bureau members to come and see him every day at six before beginning their own work.

His day was usually very busy. Party and State affairs besieged him. He had to attend to everything: directing the fight against famine, against illiteracy, against foreign aggression; dealing with the enemy in the North, conducting the resistance in the South; internal affairs and foreign affairs.

The newly-established Government offices were rudimentary and needed some running in. Uncle Ho would listen directly to those in charge of various departments or coming from various regions, to learn about the state of affairs and discuss solutions. The cadres were small in number and inexperienced. Uncle Ho often typed his own letters and sent them out himself.

He wrote many letters, appeals and newspaper articles to explain the decisions and policies of the Provisional Government, exhorting the people from all walks of life to carry them out and to join patriotic organizations.

He stated his views in a practical, concise and concrete manner. His words were familiar, simple ones, which the people would use in their daily life. The only difference was the new content he put into them. But in spite of that newness the listeners found them easy to understand; they conformed to both reason and sentiment.

The things he asked his people to do were what he himself had been doing all his life. If there was anything new, he set an example by doing it himself. For instance, he called on the people to go without a meal once every ten days to help the hungry. Three times a month, when the fast-day came, he would take his share of rice and put it into the relief-box with his own hands. On one such day, he was invited to dinner by Tieu Van, the Chinese commander. When he was back, he was told that his share of rice had been put aside for relief. Nevertheless, he decided to skip a meal the next day.

For him, everything, big or small, had its importance. He used to advise the cadres "to set examples to the people", "to match words with deeds" and

"not to behave arrogantly like 'mandarins' of the revolution, whom the people will dislike, despise and not support."

Uncle Ho devoted a lot of time to visits, often unannounced, to various places. He visited a youth congress, the offices of the Hanoi Administrative Committee, the Viet Nam Politico-Military School, the Nam Dinh Textile Mill, he went to Bac Ninh, Thai Binh, etc. Those contacts allowed him not only to encourage and educate people, but also to get first-hand information about the life, thought and feelings of the population, and the cadres' style of work.

Every day, he received many guests.

Those guests were on various kinds. Generals of the Chiang army came to ask for rice, a lot of rice, for money, housing facilities, electric bulbs, sugar, and even opium, anything they had failed to plunder from our people.

Once it was just a Chiang company commander. He earnestly requested an audience with the President for a "special affair" which he refused to tell anyone else. It turned out to be just this: he wanted to sell a few hundred guns.

Sometimes the guests were members of the Allied missions, American or British. Those visits differed in purpose, but none was marked by goodwill.

Sometimes they were foreign journalists who wanted to learn about the Viet Minh movement, the lines and policies of our Government. Some of these were sham journalists who used interviews to probe our attitudes and collect intelligence.

But most numerous were the guests from inside the country: representatives of patriotic organizations, workers, peasants, youth and women, representatives of religious communities or business circles; public figures; a group of cadres and fighters from the South, who were moved to tears when they met Uncle Ho for the first time and told him of the feelings of the millions of our compatriots who were fighting there; a delegation of highland people, who had shared maize soup and bamboo shoots with revolutionary fighters in the Liberated Areas and were now visiting the

capital city for the first time. Once it was a bearded old man who wanted to "contribute a few ideas of national reconstruction, now that the country is independent". Sometimes, it was someone who just wanted to have a sight of Uncle Ho, under the pretext of seeking explanations on a point of policy.

Many a time he was late for dinner because of those guests. Finding him tired and too busy, we once suggested that he should cut down on interviews which were not really necessary. He said, "Our administration is newly established. The people and cadres want to know about many things. This is an occasion for us to explain the Government's decisions and policies to everyone. We should not let our compatriots feel that it is as difficult to meet members of our Government as it was to see a mandarin in former times."

The Liberation Army fighters on sentry duty and the drivers were given much care by Uncle Ho. For them, he was not only the President of the Republic, but a father. They all felt that what they did for him was so little in comparison with what he did for them.

Though very busy, Uncle Ho often found time to chat with them, inquiring about the quality of their meals or the situation of their families. He paid great attention to order and hygiene in the soldiers' quarters.

In the evening, as it was too hot in their rooms in the basement, Uncle Ho told the soldiers to spend the night in the empty office-rooms upstairs. One day, in his absence, two men had a wrestling match and broke the marble top of a table. The administrative officer angrily ordered all of them downstairs. When he returned Uncle Ho allowed them to come up again, and said:

"You are young soldiers and young men, you must play and exercise. Wrestling is a good sport. But for this, you must go out to some grassy plot of land, where you won't hurt yourselves when falling and won't damage public property. Well, don't do this again. When you hold a wrestling party in the garden, let me know. I'll come and watch."

The driver was doing little reading. So whenever Uncle Ho found him idle, he would call him up, tell him to sit in the next room and give him some

books or newspapers to read. From time to time, he would pop in to check up on him. Once, he found the driver had dozed off, leaving the paper open on the table. He quietly went out. Later he told him: "At first, you don't understand much of what you're reading, so you get sleepy. But if you keep on reading, you will understand more and more of the stuff and interest will grow. Then you won't feel sleepy any more."

Winter came. Women's organizations in many places thought of warm clothes for Uncle Ho. Girls and women from Hanoi, Quang Yen and other towns came with thick woollen jackets for him. Each time, Uncle Ho would thank the women and tell them to take those clothes back to their places and give them to some of the oldest and poorest folks there.

One cold morning, a comrade came to work with him in a thin summer jacket. Uncle Ho went to fetch his own woollen jersey and gave it to him.

In Hanoi, in Bac Bo Palace, the President of the Republic lived as simple and frugal a life as when he was in the guerilla base.

IX

In Nam Bo, the situation had become tense since early September.

On September 2, over one million people in Saigon-Cho Lon demonstrated with flags and slogans in honour of Independence Day. French provocateurs fired at the demonstrators.

Four days later, the British mission came to Saigon. They ordered the Japanese to police the city and demanded that our armed forces should hand in their weapons. From the very beginning, the British betrayed themselves as interventionists.

The first English and Indian units of the 20th Division under the command of the British General Gracey landed from the air one after another.

On September 20, General Gracey issued his Communiqué No 1. He affirmed the British troops' right to ensure "order". He prohibited the carrying of arms and declared that offenders would be severely punished,

even shot. The British seized the prison and released all the Frenchmen who had been arrested when they had parachuted into Nam Bo after our general uprising. Fifteen hundred French legionaries of the 11th Colonial Infantry Regiment were taken out of Japanese POW camps and rearmed by the British.

Early on the morning of September 23, French troops of the 11th regiment and a unit of legionaries newly landed from France, supported by British and Japanese troops, came out into the streets. They attacked our police posts and killed civilians. Former colonial officials and French nationals were also armed. Colonial legionaries and French colonialists who had meekly surrendered to the Japanese only a few months earlier showed utmost savagery in massacring and illtreating unarmed civilians.

The great war of resistance of our nation against the French colonialist aggressors had broken out in Nam Bo.

The Southern people, who had held power for barely a month, were now rising up heroically to fight the enemy. They were the first citizens of this free country to shed their blood to implement the oath taken on Independence Day. The sacred fight of the South Vietnamese people, which has so far lasted a quarter of a century, began on that day.

On the afternoon of September 23, the Saigon people staged a general strike and opposed total non-cooperation to the French. All offices, business firms and factories were closed. Markets were deserted. Traffic in the streets came to a standstill. Barricades went up everywhere.

In an atmosphere of seething anger, self-defence units and the ordinary people of Saigon rushed to their combat positions, determined to fight back with all the weapons they had: pointed bamboo sticks, flintlocks, shotguns...

In Hanoi, during the whole of that day and far into the night, Uncle Ho and the Party Bureau followed the events in Nam Bo hour by hour. They received the first reports and issued the first orders of resistance to the Party organization and the people of Nam Bo.

From the 24th onward, many French-held factories and depots were attacked. Electricity and water supplies were cut. Self-defence units and workers' detachments raided the Tan Son Nhat airport, set ablaze French warships which had just arrived at Saigon port, stormed the central prison and freed people detained by the enemy.

On September 26, in their combat positions in the city, the Saigon fighters and people heard the stirring words of President Ho broadcast from Hanoi over the Voice of Viet Nam.

"I, and the people of our whole country have faith in the firm patriotism of our Nam Bo countrymen.

"...We would rather die than live in slavery!

"I am sure, and so are our Nam Bo compatriots, that the Government and the people in the whole country will wholeheartedly support the fighters and the people who are making a sacrifice and struggling for the defence of national independence.

"...We are bound to win, because we have the united strength of our entire people. We are bound to win because our struggle is a just one."

The fight to defend Saigon assumed a new significance. Soon a slogan was put forth: "Let's fight to defend Ho Chi Minh city!", and it rapidly showed in the determination and action of each person. It was in the hearts and actions of our fighters and people on the Saigon-Cholon front that a new, glorious name was born for the city: Ho Chi Minh City.

Early in October, units of the French 9th Colonial Infantry Regiment continued to arrive by sea. On October 5, when General Leclerc came to Saigon the fighting had temporarily subsided as the French and British colonialists, to buy time while they waited for reinforcements, asked to meet our representatives for negotiations. Following the arrival of Leclerc, an armoured squadron belonging to the French 2nd Armoured Division landed on Saigon. The colonialists resumed hostilities and tried to occupy some areas around the city.

The Party Central Committee decided to send reinforcements to the South to help the Nam Bo fighters and people win the first victories for the resistance.

Southbound detachments were rapidly organized. Many units of the Liberation Army and some of the best commanders were ordered to go South. Many teams of cadres were also sent.

Our Party's policy was to apply strict guerilla tactics, in order to frustrate the enemy's plan for a "quick fight and a quick victory."

Parallel with the sending of reinforcements to the South a vigorous nationwide movement was launched to support the resistance in Nam Bo and to make active preparations to meet any enemy scheme to expand the war.

The whole country was looking toward Saigon. Everyone was determined to defend the Fatherland against aggression.

In Hanoi, during the last days of September, there were always large crowds in front of the public loudspeakers, listening to the news from the Nam Bo front.

The youth, eager to go south and fight the enemy, enthusiastically responded to the call-up. In some families, both father and son asked to join the army. Even Buddhist monks wanted to enlist. The Liberation Army's strength grew up very quickly.

From the coastal provinces of the northern delta to the highlands in the Viet Bac revolutionary base area, from Hanoi, the capital city of the newly-established Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, to Hue, the ancient imperial city of the Nguyen dynasty, enthusiastic fighters set out. In the North alone, many Liberation Army units left simultaneously.

The recent successes of the revolution gave a new look to the army units going south. They were no longer the poorly clad and barefooted guerillas ordered to march south on the day of the general uprising. The new administration and the people were taking great care of their sons who were heading for the front. They were equipped with the best weapons we had at

the time, with new outfits, shining gold stars on new caps, padded jackets, leather boots.

Crowds of people thronged the railway stations to see them off. The people in the northern and central regions of the country were contributing their own blood to the fight in the South, and sending their warmest feelings to the South through their departing sons.

The southward march for the defence of Nam Bo had begun with the participation of the whole nation. Rapid trains travelled day and night. The first southbound Liberation Army detachments arrived in good time and were entrusted with defending the northeast front of Saigon. The whole country was standing by the side of the people of Saigon and the South during those first days of national resistance.

With the support of the British, Indian and Japanese troops, the French colonialists planned to "pacify" Nam Bo within three weeks.

Although they had had no time for proper preparations, with the assistance of the people in other provinces of Nam Bo and the whole country, the Saigon fighters and people fought heroically and managed to pin down the enemy in the city for a whole month, inflicting heavy losses on him.

On October 25, a plenary conference of the Nam Bo Party organization was held in My Tho province. Comrades Ton Duc Thang, Le Duan and a number of others who had just got out of the prison island of Poulo Condore were present. It was an important conference. Comrade Hoang Quoc Viet, who had been sent to the South in mid-August by the Party Central Committee and the Viet Minh National Committee, also attended. The conference took many important decisions with a view to stepping up the southern people's resistance to aggression and strengthening the Party's leadership in the armed forces.

X

When the first blue-uniformed emissaries of Chiang Kai-shek arrived in Hanoi, they applied to us for permits to carry arms. The strict order maintained in the city had made a strong impression on them. Uncle Ho

was asked whether permits should be issued to them. He said, "Make a stamp and grant them the permits. It won't be long before they no longer need any papers from us."

Within a few days after his arrival, Lu Han asked us for a report on the strength and organization of our army. To conceal our forces, Uncle Ho instructed us to change the name of the Liberation Army into "National Defence Guard". The word "guard" would lead them to think of small regional units and make them relax their attention.

A number of army detachments were ordered to move out to the outskirts of Hanoi so as to avoid clashes with the Chiang troops. The soldiers on sentry duty at public offices were often faced with provocations from the Chiang troops, who sometimes tried to disarm them, which would result in an angry resistance. In the end, we managed to avoid incidents by posting our sentries inside the fences.

Late in September, Lu Han declared that there was no time limit for his troops' mission in Viet Nam. It was evident that they had not come here with the sole aim of disarming the Japanese.

Early in October, Ha Ung Kham (Ho Yin Chin) flew to Hanoi from Chungking in company with the US Army Commander in China.

The demonstration to welcome the Allied mission, in fact designed to show our strength, was held within only a few hours' notice. Yet it gathered some three hundred thousand people carrying large numbers of banners, flags and signs who marched past the former Governor General's palace in perfect order shouting slogans such as: "Viet Nam for the Vietnamese!", "Support the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam!", "Support the League for the Independence of Viet Nam!", "Support President Ho Chi Minh!"...

It was a rather unexpected kind of welcome. As he stood on the steps to acknowledge it, the Chief of the Chinese General Staff was wet with sweat.

Later on, it was learned that Ha Ung Kham had come to Hanoi with Chungking's plan to "destroy Communism and stop Ho". But once here, he

realized that with only two hundred thousand troops he could not carry out the plan immediately. He went back after a few days, leaving instructions to the Chiang generals in Hanoi.

Tieu Van (Siao Wen) set to work. He pressed for a government reshuffle, urging us to reserve many important portfolios and offices for the Viet Nam Nationalist Party and the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance.

Their agents found that they could not act in Hanoi the way they had acted in some of the border provinces. The first thing they did was set up their headquarters, fly their flag and win over reactionary elements among the feudal class, former mandarins and thugs. They seized the Ngu Xa quarter and declared it to be an "autonomous zone".

Nguyen Hai Than had his men distribute handbills and declare over loudspeakers that the Viet Minh had established dictatorial rule and had violated the agreements reached between various organizations in the Liu Chou.

Three years before, during a trip abroad to get in touch with the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, Uncle Ho had been arrested by the Kuomintang authorities. They dragged him from one prison to another – over thirty in all. The political organisations in the country launched a campaign for his release, but he was still kept in Liu Chou. He eventually found out why the Chiang clique has refused to release him. The fact was that in Liu Chou, there was a reactionary political party in the pay of the Kuomintang, named Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance, headed by Truong Boi Cong and Nguyen Hai Than. They alleged that he had been seeking to wreck their organization.

He was freed only after a fairly long time. He asked to be allowed to go home with some Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance members of his choice. Truong Phat Khue (Chang Fa Kuei, the Chinese commander – Ed.) agreed, but Truong Boi Cong and Nguyen Hai Than objected. So Uncle Ho went home alone.

Nguyen Hai Than declared that he had the support of the Chiang troops. If the present government was not re-organized, he threatened, he would

overthrow it by force. To show his strength, this former fortune-teller drove through the streets of Hanoi in a small car, with two men on the roof laying behind a light machine-gun, and two others sitting on the front fenders with submachine-guns under their arms.

The Nationalist Party's activities were somewhat more dangerous. With the help of the Chinese commander in Hanoi, they managed to get hold of a printing shop; then with a group of hired writers, they published the newspaper Viet Nam, which was followed by others such as Lien Hiep, Thiet Thuc... using brazen slanders and insolent allegations, they tried to stir up the people and set them against the leadership. They directed their attacks at the people's administration and at all the policies of the Viet Minh and the Government. They hung up a large loudspeaker in front of their newspaper office in Quan Thanh Street and broadcast their stuff all day long though no one would listen to them. Together with slanders and propaganda, they also committed criminal acts: murder, kidnapping and extortion of money.

Gradually the Americans came to realize we were not pro-Western "nationalists" as they had expected. US officers in Hanoi were ordered not to attend any meetings organized by the Viet Minh. Other Americans arrived, allegedly to interrogate Japanese prisoners of war and look for the bodies of Americans killed in the war. In fact they were trying to make a study of the political situation, natural resources, strategic routes, airfields and ports.

With the agreement of the Americans and the Chiang authorities, the French mission managed to set up an unofficial office in Hanoi. They met Nguyen Hai Than several times and sought contact with the Viet Nam Nationalist Party. They also tried to meet Vinh Thuy several times, but the latter avoided them out of wariness of us.

The Chiang troops were stationed in many places all over the city. They set up check-points inside the town and on streets leading out of the city. All motor-vehicles had to carry permits issued by them. They behaved as if they were an occupation force.

One day, I went to Ha Dong on some business. Although the windscreen of my car had a large permit on it bearing the large, red seal of the Chiang authorities, Chinese soldiers stopped us at Nga Tu So. They lifted up the seats and made a thorough search of the car. They found a pistol on my bodyguard. So the car was seized and we both were taken into a private house they had commandeered. In answer to their questions I told them that we worked at the Chinese-Viet Nam Liaison Mission.

Just then someone I knew passed by. He hurriedly went to inform our comrades at the Liaison Mission. We were released only after two hours.

Almost every night we received letters from the Chiang commanders, conveying either demands or intimidation.

Bac Bo Palace was no longer safe. Uncle Ho often had to change his place of residence and his travelling plans. One night he would spend at № 8 Bo Ho Street, another at a house in Buoi, and another still at a place near Nga Tu So. All those three houses were later destroyed during the war.

One evening, as his car left the Palace, his bodyguard informed him that an unknown car was trailing it. He told the driver, "Don't leave this quarter yet. Just go round the lake."

The car made a tour of the lake. The other car kept following it. Uncle Ho told the driver to take a sharp turn into a back street then to return to Bac Bo Palace.

The guards were astonished when they saw him back only a few minutes after he left. That night, Uncle Ho stayed in Bac Bo Palace.

The situation was extremely confused as a result of the actions of our internal and external enemies.

Uncle Ho and the Party Bureau had seen the Chiang troops' inner weaknesses behind their numerical strength and apparent aggressiveness. Their greatest difficulty lay in the fact that they could not win any political support in face of our people's unity and single mindedness. They wanted to overthrow us, but knew that without help from the Viet Minh authorities,

they wouldn't be able to get the vast quantities of supplies needed by their large armies which were hated and shunned by the people. They had also to reckon with other serious dangers that might befall them.

One day, the Chiang Army Command asked Uncle Ho to see them. He came back late, silently took his place at the dining table, and put down his chopsticks and went away sooner than usual. This rarely happened with him. He said, "I was too late at dinner and had no appetite."

He told us that that morning the Chiang men had asked him to sign an agreement to supply them with a very large quantity of rice. He had refused. He was sure they would go on harassing us on that question. He said, "How can we give them so much rice? Our own people haven't enough to eat."

Noticing our indignation, he repeated his directive: to be patient with the Chiang troops so as to be able to concentrate our efforts against the main enemy.

He was very firm in principle and flexible in tactics. And once the tactics had been worked out, he was also firm in applying them.

XI

When something has happened, it seems rather easy to see what are the factors which have necessarily turned the mere possibilities into realities. We are inclined to say simply: "It was bound to happen this way, it couldn't have been otherwise."

In fact, the social field, in the struggle between conscious human beings, every chance is the result of an often very complex process of evolution. The revolutionary leader must find out the general and particular laws of events in a maze of phenomena in which the false is hardly distinguishable from the true, and where there are innumerable and entangled relations, all moving and developing unceasingly. The accurate, scientific forecast of trends, of how major situations are likely to develop in the future, is of the utmost importance in revolutionary work. Such predictions will be severely tested by realities and time and a true forecast is the work of geniuses.

Late in 1939, the Second World War started. The German fascist troops overran many European countries. They devoured France within a few weeks. England was devastated by the bombings of aircraft carrying the sign of the swastika. In Asia, the Japanese fascists had occupied a large part of the immense Chinese mainland. It was just when fascism had reached its apogee that Uncle Ho and our Party predicted its defeat and saw the opportunity for Viet Nam to win back independence. Uncle Ho decided to return home.

In the spring of 1941, in the damp cave of Pac Bo, the 8th Conference of the Party Central Committee was held under his chairmanship. The Conference noted: "If the previous imperialist war gave birth to the Soviet Union, a socialist country, then this one will give birth to many other socialist countries; now the revolution will succeed in many countries."

The Central Committee and Uncle Ho put forward national liberation as an urgent revolutionary task. The Central Committee pointed out the favourable objective conditions for a successful insurrection, among them the possible invasion of Indochina by Allied troops, and affirmed: "To prepare for an insurrection is the central task of our Party and people in the present period."

In the summer of that year, the German fascists launched a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. It was like a hurricane. Within a few weeks, they advanced hundreds of kilometres into the land of the October Revolution.

In the winter, the Japanese fascists launched massive attacks in the Pacific. In China, the Red Army had to fight on two fronts, against the Japanese as aggressors and the traitor Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang troops. The rising sun had been hoisted over French Indochina, British-owned Hongkong, Burma and Malaya, and the "US-protected" Philippines. In those cold nights when he was trying to escape from the searches by local police in the Pac Bo area, Uncle Ho predicted the victory of the revolution:

"It will be accomplished in 1945."

So said the last line of *Viet Nam's History in Verse*, written by him in those days and then lithographed. Revolutionary Museum cadres recently

discovered a copy of it hidden inside a bamboo section in a house on stilts in Pac Bo. The owner of the house had been a member of a National Salvation organization in the pre-revolutionary days.

Uncle Ho never mentioned this line. For our part we have been too busy to ask him how he was able to make such a prediction. This has become one of the things which have never been thoroughly understood about his personality and his great revolutionary life – almost sixty years of revolutionary activities.

Today, looking at through the Party's documents in this historic period, we find other prophecies.

As early as the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, many of the Party's communiques and directives had begun to point out tactics to be adopted towards the "British, Americans and Chinese" and the advantages and difficulties arising from the eventual entry of Allied troops.

In February 1943, the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee had called for an "urgent preparation for an insurrection" so that "when the opportunity arises, the masses can be mobilized for the fight."

On a spring night of 1945, the Japanese staged a coup against the French. The eighty-year hold of the French colonialists was shattered overnight. The French were caught napping by what our Party had foreseen one year before. The February 15, 1944 issue of Co Giai Phong (Liberation Flag) had carried the following statement: "The Japanese will act to topple the French", they will "stage a coup d'etat and will arrest the French and the Vietnamese traitors in their pay."

Three days after the coup, the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee in its directive entitled "The Japanese-French Clash and Our Action", had pointed out that the opportunity would arise for a general uprising when Allied troops entered Indochina and that "even before any Allied landing, a general insurrection could break out and be successful."

The resolution of the Bac Ky Revolutionary Military Conference held in mid-April had pointed out that the entry of Allied troops into Indochina was

inevitable, while stressing the utmost importance of military tasks and laying down concrete guidelines for the preparation of the general uprising.

Our Party had defined its diplomatic line as one of "turning to account the contradictions between the Chinese and the Americans and between the British and the Gaullist French." In the meantime, internally, "we should actively build up our strength, and should not rely on others."

The resolution of the National Conference of the Indochinese Communist Party held at Tan Trao on the 14th and 15th of August, 1945 had affirmed: "A very good opportunity has arisen for us to win back our independence."

On the question of "the coming entry of Allied troops in our country," the Party Central Committee decided "to oppose the French design of restoring their former position in Indochina and the Chinese militarists' design of occupying our country."

Our Party had further emphasized the necessity of making the most of the contradictions between the two Allied groups – the British-French on the one hand and the American-Chiang on the other – on the Indochinese question, but had also pointed out that "the contradiction between the British-French-American group on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other might lead the Anglo-Americans to compromise with the French and let the French come back to Indochina."

The Party's line had been to try to avoid having to cope singlehanded with several Allied forces invading Indochina at one time, and repeated that "in any case, only our own strength can settle the issue between us and the Allies."

Lenin said: "History in general and the history of revolutions in particular always take place in a richer, more varied, more diversified, more vivid and cleverer way than can be imagined by the best political parties." The revolution in our country occurred in exactly that way. Today we are proud of the fact that our Party was able to foresee the basic trend of the situation's development. The timely assessments and judicious policies of the Party took the August General Insurrection to victory, and led the newly-born Democratic Republic of Viet Nam through the great difficulties of the early

stage. In the South, the "quick fight, quick victory" plan of the French colonialists and British interventionists had failed from the very beginning. In Bac Bo and Trung Bo, the Chiang Kai-shek militarists and their handful of followers, with US-equipped forces tens of times stronger than our own, had been unable to overthrow the young revolutionary power as they had expected.

However, there were still many difficulties and dangers. Before we had seized power, the only foreign army on our soil had been the sixty thousand troops of the Japanese. No sooner had we won back independence than nearly two hundred thousand Chiang troops poured in while some five thousand Anglo-Indian troops landed in the South. They were followed by tens of thousands of French expeditionary troops while the thousands of defeated French colonial troops in Indochina were being re-equipped and those who had fled to China were also returning. The Japanese troops were still there and constituted another threat. Japan had surrendered, but the Japanese army in Indochina had not suffered heavy losses. As for the Chiang, French and British armies, in any event, they represented the victorious Allies.

Toward the end of November, the Party Central Committee made an assessment of the situation and took decisions for the coming period. It issued the directive entitled "Resistance and Reconstruction" dated November 25, 1945, in which it was stated that "...The easier it has been to seize power, the more difficult it will be to preserve it. The newly-established democratic republican Government is faced with an extremely complex situation."

The Party Central Committee pointed out that the internal tasks at the time were "to consolidate power, to oppose the French colonialists, to eliminate internal foes, to improve the people's living conditions."

In the utterly confused state of things in the country, when external and internal enemies were all around us, it was of the utmost importance to determine who the main enemy was. The Party analysed the positions of the various enemies. The Americans, in spite of statements of neutrality in the Indochinese problem, secretly helped the French by lending them troop-carriers. In their relations with the French, the Anglo-Americans were faced

with a dilemma: on the one hand, they wanted to further their own interests in Indochina and South-East Asia, while on the other hand they wanted to reach a compromise with a view to a united front against the Soviet Union. The Chiang clique sent their troops into our country with the initial intention of overthrowing the power established by our Party and replacing it by puppet government in their pay. But seeing that our entire people were united in supporting the Government, they had to enter into relations with us. They were afraid of our Communism and feared that "the alliance of Indochinese Communists and Chinese Communists would result in the communization of Southern China", therefore they planned to obtain a reorganization of the Provisional Government and introduce their own agents into it.

The Party Central Committee put forward a new judgment: "...Sooner or later, Chungking will agree to return Indochina to the French, provided that the latter concede major interests to the Chinese."

From the above analyses and judgements, the tasks of the proletariat and the nation were defined, and the main objective of the revolution was pointed out clearly:

"The slogans continue to be 'The Nation above All', 'The Fatherland above All'. Our main enemy at present is the French colonialist aggressors. The struggle should be spearheaded against them."

The tasks set by the Party were: "To mobilize the forces of the whole people to carry on the resistance perseveringly, to organize and lead protracted resistance and to combine guerilla warfare with total non-cooperation."

The situation was developing rapidly in a very complex way.

XII

I am writing these lines in May 1970.

Gone are the days when the name of Viet Nam could not be found on the maps. Our Fatherland with its four thousand years of history, together with the neighbouring lands of Cambodia and Laos, was then just a strip of land

on the Pacific coast, lying between India and China and bearing a vague name invented by the colonialists: French Indochina.

Gone are also the days when the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was just an island of freedom, amidst the rolling waves on the vast sea of capitalism in the South-East Asian region. Few were the brothers and friends to recognize us at once. And few were also those who were able to realize the full significance of that historic event.

Gone are the days when imperialism ruled the roost.

Today, every piratical act of the imperialists on this Indochinese peninsula has become a dangerous step and one liable to punishment. Every crime committed by them here will shock the conscience and feelings of hundreds of millions of people in various regions of the world. All the expensive cosmetics given by colonialism to its agents and puppets have proved of no avail. The formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam, born in the midst of the fierce struggle was at once greeted warmly by the whole of progressive mankind as a long-awaited event. The Royal Cambodian Government of National Union was recognized by tens of countries throughout the world as soon as it was set up.

Today, when the millions of Chinese Kuomintang troops have become ghosts of the past, when Chiang Kai-shek is spending his last days on the island of Taiwan, it seems difficult for us to recall the moments of danger when nearly two hundred thousand Chiang troops were pouring into North Viet Nam from several directions.

The newly-born Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, surrounded as it was by imperialist wolves, had to do its utmost, fight with courage and intelligence, try every means in order to survive. Under such difficult circumstances, "the Party had to resort even to painful ways to save the situation", as Uncle Ho put it later on. Every question, every affair of the Party, the country and the people affected him deeply.

The Party of our working class was fifteen years old when it won power. That day was the beginning of a new spring for the land bequeathed by our

forefathers. But news of that grand event did not reach all our friends abroad.

In August that year, Uncle Ho had written a letter calling for a general uprising, signed with the name of the revolutionary Nguyen Ai Quoc. Early in September, he appeared before the people under the name of Ho Chi Minh. It was a pseudonym he had used a few years before in order to conceal his real identity from the Chinese Kuomintang. The revolutionaries were coming back to the people after years of hiding from the enemy. But all Party activities were still conducted in secrecy. Party cadres made no official appearance in public. Almost all Party members carried on activities on behalf of the Viet Minh. Our Party decided to avoid doing anything that might provoke the enemies of the nation and the class. But they still recognized us.

Many days after the establishment of the revolutionary power, it had not yet been recognized by any country. Chiang's generals were obliged to enter into a relationship with us in order to get provisions and accommodation. When they met Uncle Ho, they had to refer to his official title and function and address him as President. But in all written communications to him, they only addressed him as "Mr. Ho Chi Minh." They regarded our administration as a *de facto* and not a *de jure* one.

The economic situation was extremely difficult. A large part of the cultivable lands in the North was laying fallow. The flood was followed by a protracted drought. A number of factories handed over by the Japanese could not yet be put back into operation. Foreign trade came to a standstill and goods were in very short supply.

We were not able to issue a Vietnamese currency yet. The treasury taken over from the old regime totaled less than one million piasters in tattered notes. One million in paper notes fast sinking in value to build a new power and a new life! And this while the French-held Bank of Indochina was trying its hardest to cause financial disruption. In addition to that, the market was flooded with Chinese yuans from the Chiang troops, which further aggravated our financial and commercial difficulties.

The people's standards of living were very low. The number of unemployed soared rapidly. In many places, people were living on a thin rice gruel and some were still dying of starvation. Cholera broke out along with an epidemic of typhus brought in by the Chiang troops.

The French aggression, which broke out soon in Nam Bo, made all those difficulties even more critical. Under such circumstances, what we had to do was to build a new society, a much more difficult task than that of demolishing the foundations of the old society. Moreover, this task was to be taken in hand by the working class for the first time in our history.

Anyway, the situation was no longer the same as in former times. The revolution had triumphed and the newly-won power could provide it with new means and new possibilities to defend itself. The most urgent task at the moment was to consolidate and preserve this revolutionary power.

In early September, many decrees were promulgated by the Provisional Government.

The old mandarin system was abolished. The colonial and feudal administration was utterly shattered. The Government decided to hold general elections throughout the country to elect a National Assembly. This was followed by a decree on organizing people's councils and administrative committees at various levels on the basis of universal suffrage. The people's councils were to be directly elected by the people. They were representative bodies. The administrative committees elected by the people's councils were executive bodies representing both the people and the Government. Through those elections, the people's power was firmly implanted at the grassroots level, the unity of the whole nation was broadened and the worker-peasant dictatorship was ensured.

The draft constitution was made public so that every citizen could make his contribution to drawing up the first constitution of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

The Government decided that land rents should be reduced by 25 per cent and all long-standing debts in rural areas abolished.

The eight-hour working day was enforced. Owners of factories and business firms had to give advance notice before dismissing any workers, who were entitled to dismissal allowances. The workers also had the right to undergo military training while receiving full pay during this period.

Literacy classes became compulsory and free of charge. A decree set up a Popular Education Department for the whole of Viet Nam, organized evening classes for workers and peasants, and ordered the abolition of examination and tuition fees at all levels.

As early as the beginning of September, the annual poll-tax imposed by the French on every man from the age of eighteen upward was abolished together with many other absurd taxes.

In the face of the economic and financial difficulties, how was the Government to get funds for the necessary expenditure, and especially for the large defence requirements?

For the time being the only way was to call for voluntary contributions by the people.

On the 4th of September, the Independence Fund was instituted.

A week later, Uncle Ho called on the people in the whole country to take an active part in the "Gold Week." Many eagerly offered even their dearest keepsakes: a pair of ear-rings from an old woman, carefully kept since she was a girl; two wedding-rings from a couple; a parcel brought in by an eighty-year old woman, which contained the family heirloom: a seventeen-ounce gold ingot wrapped in red silk; one family gave all the jewelry owned by its members.

Within a short time, people from all walks of life had contributed twenty million piasters and three hundred and seventy kilograms of gold to the "Independence Fund" and the "Gold Week."

President Ho paid especial attention to determining the relationship between the new government officials and the people. In October, in a letter to people's committees at provincial, district and village levels, he wrote:

"Government organs from national to village levels are all servants of the people."

In former times, Tran Hung Dao advised his king that the best policy was "to spare the people's forces in peace time so as to strike deep roots and strengthen the base." Nguyen Trai blamed Ho Quy Ly for failing to preserve national independence because he had failed to pay adequate attention to the people's forces and had concentrated his efforts solely on building defence works. Our greatest national heroes have always set great store by the people's forces in the fight against aggression.

President Ho called for "eradicating famine and illiteracy and annihilating foreign aggressors." He said: "We must rely on the people's material and moral forces." But he was unlike our forefathers in this for he pointed out that all was aimed at "ensuring the people's happiness...".

In his letter to the people's committees, he wrote: "Independence for the nation without happiness for the people is a meaningless independence."

"Happiness for the people" was what he stressed in the Declaration of Independence: "All the peoples have a right to live and to be happy and free..."

The happiness that he wanted for the people was a full happiness. The happiness did not lie only in the gain which the revolution had just brought to the whole people. It would continue to come to the working people in the struggle to eradicate the roots of all human sufferings, to build a new society in which all forms of exploitation of man by man were abolished. In this great struggle, the Party and President Ho have chosen the shortest possible way for our people.

"Happiness for the people" was the aim of the seizure, strengthening and defence of power. It was President Ho's ideal and also what his heart craved for.

In his letter to the people's committees, President Ho also pointed out some mistakes committed by Government officials arising from arbitrariness, abuse of power, favouritism and arrogance, etc. He concluded the letter in

these words: "For the sake of the nation's happiness and the interest of the country, I must stress that the words justice and integrity must be engraved in our hearts..."

In December, Uncle Ho wrote an article entitled "Self-Criticism" carried by various newspapers. He wrote:

"My fellow-countrymen have entrusted me with looking after the destiny of the nation, out of their love and confidence in me. My duty as a helmsman is to steer such a course as will lead the boat of the Fatherland safely through the storms to the shore of the people's happiness..."

"Although we have won back independence for five months, we have not yet been recognized by any countries.

"Although our soldiers have fought with great bravery, our resistance has not yet been victorious.

"Although administrative officials have done their work well and are honest, corruption has not yet been wholly eradicated.

"Although the Government has made great efforts, the administration is still not running smoothly in many places..."

"One might explain away those shortcomings saying that they are due to lack of time, lack of experience, or other reasons.

"But I must tell you the truth: such successes as we have achieved are due to the common efforts of the people while the shortcomings mentioned above are our own faults..."

The labouring people had recognized the new State as their own. It was a very new thing. In the nation's history, the feudal courts and ruling apparatuses had always been used by the few from the exploiting classes to rule over the majority of the people, the labouring people. They always furthered the interests of the few and brought sufferings to the many. Today, the State had become one of the majority, of the labouring people. It was

working every minute to defend the people's interests and bring happiness to them what it could not yet achieve, it would certainly do so in the future.

Our fellow-countrymen saw in Uncle Ho the noblest image of the people, of the nation, of the revolution, of the new power, of the new regime.

XIII

"This is the Voice of Viet Nam, broadcasting from Hanoi, capital of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam..."

Each time this sentence resounded over the radio those autumn days, it stirred deep feelings in every heart...

Viet Nam had known a rebirth. The heavy, dark cloud of the colonial regime had dissipated. The skies of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam were beautifully blue. The capital city of Hanoi, more splendid than the former Thang Long or Dong Do, was filled with revolutionary enthusiasm and ready to face the gathering storms.

The newly-promulgated democratic liberties were like rain falling on dry fields after a long drought. Our people greeted the first fruits of the revolution as "water for the thirsty and food for the starved." Not long before, one would have been imprisoned for carrying a revolutionary handbill or shouting a revolutionary slogan. At present, the mere fact that people could fly the country's flag on their roof, walk proudly in the street which was now their own, or sing a revolutionary song in a loud voice, filled their hearts with joy and sometimes their eyes with tears.

The revolutionary flame kindled by Uncle Ho and the Party some time before was blazing throughout the country. The common citizen realized his responsibility in the consolidation and defence of the new power. This was precisely to defend the fruits of the revolution, the newly won democratic freedoms, and to preserve his most beautiful hopes and dreams.

In that surging revolutionary wave of the entire people, it was necessary to continue organizing the masses, taking them to ever higher forms of struggle. Uncle Ho paid great attention to the mobilization and organization

of the workers, peasants and intellectuals. Even in his letters to the old people in Hanoi, to businessmen and to school children on the occasion of the new school year, he stressed the need for them to organize themselves and join patriotic organizations.

Within a short time, millions upon millions of people in the whole country, old and young, men and women, had organized themselves. Even in cities where the Chiang troops were stationed our patriotic organizations developed impetuously in face of their guns. Day and night in towns and in the countryside, meetings and rallies were being held. There had never been such activity and animation in the traditionally quiet rural areas of Viet Nam.

The country was encircled by the imperialists, threatened by enemies from all directions. The national conference of the Party at Tan Trao had affirmed that "Our strength alone will determine the success." In a directive written in December 1944, Uncle Ho had pointed out that the fight to defend the country was "a war of resistance by the whole people", therefore, "it was necessary to mobilize and arm the whole people." His directive set forth the basic lines for the resistance and the building of the revolutionary armed forces. The Tan Trao conference held before the general insurrection set forth the two simultaneous tasks of "arming the people" and "developing the Viet Nam Liberation Army".

Through the two long resistance wars against the French and the US imperialists, our lines regarding the resistance and the building of the armed forces – which include the relationship between the armed forces of the masses and the regular army – have contributed decisively to the victory of the nation. Today, reviewing the resolutions and directives concerning the problem, we see that the Party and President Ho had set forth correct orientations and policies right at the outset.

The militarization of the patriotic organizations, which had been put into practice only in the guerilla bases before the general insurrection, became common throughout the country. Members of those organizations, especially the younger ones were eager to undergo military training and exercise themselves in traditional boxing and fencing.

There was a great drive to procure, make and buy weapons. Village blacksmiths became producers of spears and scimitars for the militia and the self-defence units. Children helped collect scrap iron. Grown-ups contributed such household utensils as copper trays and pans, or even worship articles such as incense burners and urns, to be made into arms.

Under foreign rule, all weapons were prohibited. During repressive operations, a dagger found in a house might lead to the massacre of all its inhabitants. It is hard to describe the citizen's burning desire to have a weapon to defend the newly-won independence.

With a scimitar or a long spear in his hands, the militiaman standing at the village gate felt surging in him the nation's tradition of courage, stronger than ever before.

The self-defence and guerilla organizations existing before the August Revolution developed very quickly.

President Ho described these forces as the "iron wall of the Fatherland" which would crush any enemy, however unyielding. During the insurrection, it was the shock force supporting the people in seizing power in various places. When the resistance war broke out in the South, and later, when it expanded to the whole country, it helped to turn every street, every village into a fortress.

Towards the end of 1945, self-defence units were organized almost every hamlet, village, street and factory; one or two companies in some places, at least one platoon in others. They were put under the close direction of the Party and given assistance in military training by government authorities, but were wholly self-supporting in food and equipment.

In areas not yet at war, they proved an efficient instrument of dictatorship for the revolutionary power to ensure security of Party, State and Front offices, economic and national defence establishments, to keep peace and order, to put down the reactionaries. In most rural areas, theft and robbery were eradicated. It was a fine sight to see doors left open when people were absent or asleep.

In Hanoi, the city self-defence corps included practically all young men and numbered tens of thousands. They managed to procure for themselves various sorts of weapons, from daggers and shotguns to anti-tank mines and Japanese machine-guns.

The core of this force was made up of self-defence shock units. They were selected from the ranks of the National Salvation Youth League and included workers, poor labourers, schoolboys and students. They were armed and equipped by the Ministry of National Defence and mostly quartered in specific places, because of the existing situation. Their daily supplies came from the people. Along with the task of defending the revolutionary power against the reactionaries, they also took part in propaganda work and helped train the other self-defence units.

There was a training centre for them, called the Ho Chi Minh Self-Defence Training School. Uncle Ho visited it several times. Comrade Nhan and I often came to give lectures. Many of the trainees later became excellent cadres for the Viet Nam People's Army.

While developing the armed forces of the masses, we stepped up the building of a regular army.

The units of the Viet Nam National Salvation Army, the Armed Propaganda Brigade for the Liberation of Viet Nam, the Ba To Guerillas etc., had merged into the Viet Nam Liberation Army, undergone a swift development and been organized into battalions, companies and platoons before the general insurrection. Following Party decisions, they developed very quickly in the new situation within a month, their strength had increased tenfold as compared with the days immediately after the revolution.

All units of our army, the National Defence Guard, were put under the leadership of the Party through the agency of Party organizations within the army, in which Party members played an important role.

The cadres and members of the first armed units of the Party in earlier times became the nuclei of army units at national and regional levels.

The Anti-Japanese Political-Military School established in the guerilla base earlier was turned into the Viet Nam Political-Military School, and enlarged. Hundreds of cadres were trained at one time. Uncle Ho often came to give talks. To conceal it from the Chiang men, he renamed it "Viet Nam Cadres' School".

There was a seething nation-wide drive to enlist. Patriotic organizations sent many of their members to the armed forces. Self-defence units gave the army their best fighters and in some regions transformed themselves into army units. In Hanoi, altars to the Fatherland were set up in many quarters where volunteers were enrolled. These included middle-aged men as well as young people.

During the civil insurrection, many civil guard units had crossed over to the revolutionary side. We decided to accept former officers and soldiers who, inspired by patriotism, volunteered to join the revolutionary army. Many were later to become good soldiers and cadres of our army.

In most regions, the army had to be supported by the people. The Women's National Salvation Association played a prominent role in taking care of our fighters.

We decided to try every means to get more weapons for our army. Besides those we had seized from the civil guards or from the Japanese in battle, we used the money and gold contributed by the people to buy more armaments from the Japanese and the Chiang troops. Yet, it was hard to meet the needs of our developing army in armaments and equipment. We had to use everything we could lay hands on, so the few arms and munitions we had were of many kinds. Along with the handy lightweight submachine-guns made during World War Two and recently brought in by foreign troops, there were long rifles made in Czarist times and flintlocks turned out by local blacksmiths. While at present our infantrymen are equipped with three infantry weapons of the same calibre, at the time we had to use some forty different kinds, of varying calibres. The rifles alone belong to twenty kinds, manufactured in eight different countries:

Viet Nam:

- Phan Dinh Phung Muskets with Smooth Barrels;
- Flintlocks.

French:

- "Mousqueton" with Three-Cartridge Magazines;
- "Mousqueton" with Five-Cartridge Magazines;
- "Indochinese" Rifles;
- Muskets;
- 7.5mm "Mas"
- Semi-Automatic "Mas"
- Grenade-Throwers;
- 12-caliber Shotguns;
- 16-caliber Shotguns;
- 20-caliber Shotguns.

Japanese:

- Cavalry Carbines;
- Infantry Rifles.

British:

- 7.7mm Rifles.

U.S.:

- 1903 Remington Rifles;

- 1917 Remington Rifles.

Russian:

- 7.9mm Long Rifles (made in Czarist times).

Chinese:

- 7.9mm Rifles (made in Chiang times).

German:

- Mauser Rifles (made in Nazi times).

Armed with more sticks than rifles, the National Defence Guards trained hard day and night, rain or shine. They were offered food, drink and fruit by local women. On their way to the front, they were shown warm feelings and well looked after by the people.

A new army was appearing for the first time in national history, an army of the people, issuing from the people, fostered by the people and fighting for the people. This army was founded by the Party and President Ho Chi Minh. Therefore from its early days it bore the deep imprint of the Party and Uncle Ho. Referring to our Party Uncle Ho once quoted two lines by Lu Hsun:

Glaring contemptuously at a thousand athletes,

Bending gently to serve as a horse to the children.

And he explained that "a thousand athletes" meant powerful enemies like the French colonialists and the American interventionists, and also difficulties and hardships; while the "children" meant the large masses of common people, and also work done in the interest of the nation and the people.

These two lines also gave an image of our army. The National Defence Guards well deserved the affectionate feelings the people throughout the country showed them when they called them "Uncle Ho's soldiers".

Our army and the armed forces of the masses were born in the flames of the struggle for national salvation, building themselves up while fighting, heightening their political qualities as a result of their education at the hands of the Party and President Ho, steeling themselves in the fierce fire of the battlefields. Those armed forces have grown up day after day and met the great and urgent needs of the country.

XIV

Of his long years abroad, Uncle Ho had spent many in China. There he had been constantly watched by the dense network of Kuomintang secret agents. He was present in Canton during the tragic days when tens of thousands of Communist Party members and revolutionary workers were massacred by the Chiang Kai-shek clique. He was detained in over thirty prisons. After Japan's capitulation, the US urged the Chiang militarists to act quickly to liquidate an impending peril which was facing them – the growing Red Army led by the Chinese Communist Party. Chiang Kai-shek was preparing for a showdown, a fight to the finish to destroy the revolution.

Uncle Ho had a deep understanding of the class nature of the Chiang Kai-shek clique. He had a clear realization of the danger facing the Vietnamese revolution when the Chiang troops swarmed into North Viet Nam. They were very brutal anti-communists. While the British needed only some five thousand troops to disarm the nearly 30,000-strong Japanese army in the South, the Chiang clique introduced as many as 180,000 troops to do the same job in the North. Their designs were obvious. They wanted to destroy the revolutionary power and annex our country.

Our strategy then was to achieve a compromise with the Chiang clique and direct the spearhead of our struggle against the aggressive French colonialists. But it was not easy to achieve a détente with these men.

Uncle Ho repeatedly told our cadres: "We should try our best to avoid provocations and prevent clashes; if they should happen, the bigger ones should be minimized and the smaller ones eliminated altogether". But not everyone was able to grasp the full significance of this directive.

A number of Party cadres did not fully understand our tactics at that time either. That is why there were clashes that should not have occurred. Those incidents caused us quite a lot of difficulties. Uncle Ho was severe toward the erroneous ideas and actions of those who while implementing the Party's policy, failed to take a broader view of the situation.

On the one hand, we were trying to achieve a compromise and limit the enemy's sabotage activities. On the other hand, it was very important to discover contradictions and splits, even small ones, in the enemy's ranks so as to turn them to account.

In the Provisional Government, President Ho also took charge of foreign affairs, an extremely difficult and complex job at that time.

The Chinese Kuomintang generals who came to North Viet Nam belonged to different factions. Some were from regional cliques: Yunnan, Kwangtung and Kwangsi. Others were from the central clique at Chungking. They were all alike in their anti-Communism. But because of internal contradictions, they differed among themselves in their reactionary attitudes toward the Vietnamese revolution.

Apart from its design of intervention in Viet Nam, Chungking wanted to make the most of this opportunity to get rid of a few stubborn militarists in the southwest and the south of China. As Lu Han led his troops into our country, Uncle Ho said: "This is Chiang Kai-shek's plan of 'luring the tiger out of the mountain'. Their internal contradiction is something we can take advantage of". Chiang had long wanted to punish Long Van (Lung yun) the governor of Yunnan.

After only a few meetings with Uncle Ho, Lu Han already showed admiration for him. He was surprised at the scope and depth of the President's mind. Uncle Ho exchanged views with him on the political situation in Viet Nam, China and the world. He explained to him our struggle for independence and our policy of friendship with China. From time to time, he told him of some of the ugly activities carried out by the Viet Nam Nationalist Party and the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance.

Lu Han respectfully addressed him as President Ho. When the President visited him, he would come out to meet him at the door and would accompany him out when he left. He seemed aware of his precarious fate and looked worried.

Tieu Van was the Political Director of the Fourth War Area under the command of Truong Phat Khue. He played a key role in what was called the "Office for Directing the Vietnamese Revolution" established by Truong Phat Khue.

Chiang Kai-shek did not like Truong and his faction. But he had to employ Tieu Van, because Tieu Van had kept in touch with the Vietnamese situation for a long time and maintained control over the Vietnamese traitors of the Nguyen Hai Than group.

Tieu Van had entered Viet Nam with a division of Kwangsi troops, but this division was ordered back to China by Chungking as soon as it crossed the border. Thus Tieu Van had to accompany the central government's armies under the command of Chu Phuc Thanh. On the orders of Chungking, Tieu Van was in charge of political affairs in North Viet Nam.

On his arrival in Hanoi, Tieu Van was faced with a *fait accompli*: the revolutionary power had been established. He was very cross.

Uncle Ho had ordered a sumptuous villa to be prepared for him. However, he refused to go there and took his men to a Chinese official's house in Cua Dong Street.

When Uncle Ho said he would visit Tieu Van, many of our comrades thought the action unwise for he had only just arrived and we did not know what was in his mind. But Uncle Ho said, "Since he has just arrived and is not yet fully informed, paying him a visit might do some good." In dealing with people, Uncle Ho often took the initiative and paid attention to making an early impression.

Uncle Ho asked a few comrades to accompany him. One of them was wearing sandals; he told him to put on shoes. He said, "When seeing 'these

people', you should be properly dressed – don't take any notice of what I myself am wearing.

Then he went to Cua Dong Street. At Tieu Van's place, he told two comrades to wait outside, and walked in with the other two. We should see that, besides Chiang troops, there were also some agents of the Viet Nam Nationalist Party in the house. They were a wooden-faced lot, wearing uniform and carrying guns.

Tieu Van hurriedly came out from a book room when he was informed of President Ho's arrival. After a few words of greeting by Uncle Ho, he cheered up visibly and was as cordial as if he were meeting an old acquaintance. His respectful manners toward the President astonished the Nationalist Party agents present.

Uncle Ho recalled what had happened in Liu Chou, told Tieu Van to forget about past misunderstandings and cooperate with us in solving problems of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Tieu Van promised to establish relations with our Government. After this meeting, Tieu Van moved to the villa we had prepared for him, near Lake Bay Mau. Through him Uncle Ho managed to settle some of the incidents and clashes with the Chiang troops.

A few weeks after Lu Han arrived in Hanoi, Chiang Kai-shek attacked Yunnan and used a ruse to capture Long Van. Chungking announced that after completing his mission in Viet Nam, Lu Han was to go back to Yunnan and replace Long Van as provincial governor. However they ordered two of Lu Han's army corps back to China and sent them Northeast to fight the Red Army. These units were replaced by troops under the central government. Thus an implacable power struggle was taking place among the Chiang militarists.

The generals under the direct command of Chungking, headed by Chu Phuc Thanh (Chou Fu Cheng) were the most reactionary. They personally supervised their agents' disruptive activities. They repeatedly arrested our cadres. Yet, there were some among them who could not close their eyes to the great realities of the Vietnamese revolution. The commander of their Second Division stationed in Nam Dinh once expressed his sympathy with our people's resistance to the French. Uncle Ho called on him when he

visited Nam Dinh. Another division commander asked us to provide him with material so that he could write a book about Viet Nam's struggle for independence.

There were relatively low-ranking officers in the Chiang army who nevertheless wielded considerable power and influence. Some were friends of generals who often visited them because their wives were pretty, hospitable and very clever at filling opium pipes. So they could serve as efficient intermediaries in various affairs. We didn't know how Uncle Ho discovered the existence of such officers so soon. He directed our foreign service cadres to find appropriate treatment for each of them. It was through those officers that we managed to settle various incidents with the Chiang army.

For Uncle Ho, revolutionary truth was concrete, and what tactics were to be applied depended on the concrete circumstances. Although all the Chiang men were reactionary, we should work out a concrete treatment for each case. Naturally, the strength of the revolution was the basis for applying any tactics. Uncle often reminded our cadres of that important point.

The revolutionary movement was surging strongly all over China. The Chiang armies sent against the liberated areas to destroy the Red Army were meeting with successive failures. Chiang officers and men in Viet Nam who received orders to go back to China were all worried. Those who stayed on or had just arrived were also living in a state of anxiety.

Uncle Ho had an extraordinary flair for detecting the thoughts and feelings of the enemy. With great shrewdness, he worked out a concrete treatment for each type and each individual.

His own personality embodied the strength of our just cause. Foreign statesmen who met him then or later were unanimous in their admiration for him. Even his enemies, men who were notoriously anti-communist, showed respect for him. They seemed to lose some of their aggressiveness when they were in his presence.

Many foreigners have dwelt upon the extraordinary magnetic charm of President Ho Chi Minh. Some think that it was due to his wide mental

grasp, his keen intelligence, his exceptional will and energy. Others attribute it to his modesty and simplicity, his optimism and confidence, his forthrightness and candour, his wisdom and kindness, etc.

All that was true. But the dominating feature in President Ho's personality was his selflessness, his desire, his "only and utmost desire" – to bring about the greatest happiness for his people and his country. A life without the least concern for his private interests had created an impression of extreme purity about his personality.

Inspired by an immense love for his fellow human beings, even when applying political tactics, Uncle Ho always wanted to arouse a person's conscience, even when for some people there was hardly any of it left.

The political and moral strength of our people, together with the clever application of the Party's and President Ho's line and tactics, partly paralysed the aggressive will of the Chiang militarists who had close to two hundred thousand troops under their command.

XV

Within a week after the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, the Provisional Government issued a decree organizing general elections throughout the country to elect a National Assembly. Never before in the history of independence struggles had a decree on general elections been promulgated so soon after the seizure of power.

In the first place, this was an expression of the Party's confidence in the patriotism and political consciousness of the people. Our countrymen had been subjected to nearly a century of colonial rule by the French. The general elections would be a wide far-reaching political campaign. Through exercising their sovereign power, the citizens would heighten their sense of responsibility to the country. In conditions of utter complexity and confusion, both in the internal and external situation, a National Assembly formally elected by the people and a Government formally established along democratic principles would have the required prestige, capacity and

strength to mobilize the moral and material forces of the people in national resistance and reconstruction and in relations with foreign countries.

The September 8 decree by the Provisional Government stipulated that the general elections would be held within two months. The French came back to the South. The war was spreading day by day. The French aggression was not the only major obstacle. In the North, the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance frantically opposed the elections. They knew that elections conducted in a fair way could bring them no advantage.

The reactionary press demanded that the Provisional Government should resign at once. It claimed that the current administration was a Communist dictatorship. They tried by every means to incite a number of bourgeois elements, former mandarins, landlords and rich peasants to oppose us. They hoped that Chungking would behave more brutally towards us.

The Chiang militarists in Hanoi had realized that it would be impossible to use force to overthrow our central government. Tieu Van suggested to Uncle Ho that a government should be established with the participation of three forces: the Nationalist Party, the Revolutionary Alliance and the Viet Minh. He wanted a government in which his agents would be the majority.

We had repeatedly told the leaders of the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance that it was essential to have general elections. That could meet the aspirations and the interests of the people. Candidates from various parties would be given all facilities to expound their political lines. We also stressed our desire to achieve unity with all forces to reconstruct the country and step up the resistance that was already taking place with greater and greater intensity in the South.

Toward the end of November, a joint meeting was held between various parties. The leaders of the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance agreed to the following points: establishment of a united national government; merging of all armed forces; ending of all clashes; cessation of mutual attacks in the press.

However, only a few days later, the loudspeaker in front of the office of the "Viet Nam" newspaper in Quan Thanh Street was again clamouring day and

night for the Provisional Government's resignation. Perhaps their Chiang masters had pointed out to the reactionaries that what had been agreed on would not benefit them. Along with kidnappings, killings and extortions of money, they went on to organize demonstrations to foster disorder in the city.

The people of the Capital were very angry and requested the Government to mete out due punishment to the reactionaries. Letters were sent to the press denouncing their sabotage activities. Many self-defence units adopted resolutions in which they declared their readiness to punish the reactionaries when ordered to do so.

The bayonets of the Chiang troops and the guns of the Chiang gendarmes, who were present everywhere in the city, were the prop of the reactionaries. Because our people and armed forces tried hard to avoid all provocations, the reactionaries had so far not yet received any truly severe punishment.

In the face of this situation, the Standing Bureau's policy was as follows: we should avoid all provocations, but at the same time the masses should struggle against, expose, and isolate the reactionaries, and make the Chiang troops' leaders realize that the more their agents engaged in sabotage activities, the more vigorously the people would oppose them.

Comrade Tran Quoc Hoan and myself discussed a plan aimed at implementing that policy and stopping the wrecking activities which were creating disorder in the city.

It was necessary to act cautiously. The demonstrators were always accompanied by armed men. They could rely on the Chiang troops, who arrogated to themselves the right to keep order in the city. We had to punish the disruptive elements, but we had absolutely to avoid provocations or any big clashes.

We saw that we could mobilize the self-defence forces together with members of the patriotic organizations in this work. Self-defence fighters were to wear plain clothes and carry arms secretly when on mission. Struggles should take place away from positions of Chiang troops.

One self-defence team was charged with the first, trial skirmish.

That day, news came to the self-defence headquarters in Tran Hung Dao Street, that provocateurs had just gathered in Hang Dau Street. Three fighters were sent out, their weapons well hidden.

The provocateurs, some few dozen in number were in Hang Giay Street, holding forth through their megaphones and distributing copies of their publication in front of Dong Xuan Market. Chiang sentries had been posted at both ends of the street.

A self-defence fighter elbowed his way in and asked a provocateur, "What paper is that?"

"Viet Nam", the other answered.

"Viet Nam? Your paper should be named 'The Traitor'!" snapped the self-defence fighter, snatching the bundle of papers and throwing it to the ground.

The scuffle began. The people around immediately joined in the fight. Taken by surprise, the provocateurs fled in disorder. Some of them took refuge in private houses. One was pursued by a self-defence man who, with the help of the people in the house, found him hidden behind a door. Dragged out, he begged for mercy. The master of the house told him "Stop your disruptive activities and slanders against the Government, the people won't tolerate it."

The Chiang troops on sentry duty fired a few shots in the air when the row broke out, but none of them got out of their sand-bagged positions.

The provocateurs were routed. The self-defence fighters, after fulfilling their mission, walked in a leisurely way back past the sentry posts as if they were mere passers-by.

This incident gave a measure of the reactionaries' morale and the extent to which the Chiang troops might intervene. The latter, as a rule, reacted

weakly to what they thought were spontaneous manifestations of the common people's indignation at their agents.

A few days later, the reactionaries again held a big demonstration near Lake Hoan Kiem. This time, our force was more numerous and we had learnt of their plan sooner. But they too were prepared for clashes. They shot at one of our men. Their crime aroused great indignation: people rushed in in great numbers, using any thing which came to hand – even bicycle frames from a nearby shop – as a weapon to fight the reactionaries. The latter hid their guns, threw away their signs and megaphones and fled in disorder.

The demonstrations became rarer.

But the reactionaries intensified terrorist acts, attempting to kidnap or murder candidates to the elections, Communist party members, Viet Minh cadres, and members of their own organizations who showed sympathy with us or had broken away to join the revolutionary side.

The Chiang militarists, seeing the failure of their repeated proposals for a government reshuffle, began openly to exert greater pressure on us.

Late in November, a French national was shot dead in front of the Aviat factory. We started an investigation at once. Our Government had always advocated a humane and lenient policy toward the French nationals. In his letter to the French in Indochina in October, Uncle Ho made it clear that the French would be regarded as friends if they went about their business honestly and quietly.

The next day, the Chiang Army Command sent Uncle Ho a letter inviting him to its headquarters. Our comrades discussed whether he should go. He said, "Let me go, as they have invited me. For the time being, they won't dare do anything against us."

At nine in the morning, Uncle left in a car, accompanied by a few bodyguards. He came to Tieu Van's. Chu Phuc Thanh had sent his men there to ask him to come to his office near Don Thuy hospital. When he arrived, Chiang officers asked the guards to stay outside and requested Uncle Ho to go upstairs and see Chu.

We at home were waiting. Lunch time came but there was no news of him. Although confident in his experience in dealing with complex situations we were anxious.

Some time after midday, a guard brought us a note from him. The letter was not sealed. It contained a few words in Chinese: "Just go about your work. I've got things to do here".

It was obvious that there was trouble. Uncle Ho knew that we were worried, so he had tried to inform us briefly of the situation. The comrade who brought the note said that Uncle Ho was still upstairs with Chu.

We discussed what to do and sent some people to Chu's place to see what was happening.

A few moments later, one of the comrades with Uncle Ho was on the phone telling us to send a car for him. We were puzzled at the request and did not know what had happened to the car Uncle Ho had used.

Uncle Ho did not return till two o'clock in the afternoon. We all heaved a sigh of relief.

The incident was rather complicated. That morning, Chu Phuc Thanh slanderously accused one of our cadres of having shot the French national. The comrade in question was Son, one of our present comrades and a former member of the leadership of the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance back in Liu Choi (China). Chu's men went so far as to affirm brazenly that the car used by the "murderer" had been none other than Uncle Ho's.

Uncle Ho pointed out the absurdities contained in the accusation. The man they accused of the murder had been away on a mission to Nam Dinh for four days. Then Chu shifted to another subject: he blamed our government for "failure to ensure order and security". Afterwards he shifted to the question of food supplies, complaining that we had not supplied him with all the rice he had requested. He kept bringing up problem after problem in order to create a tense atmosphere. But finally he ran out of arguments and had to bring the talk to an end. To save face, and also to maintain a tense situation, he said that the car and its driver, Hao, should be kept in custody,

to help find the murderer. In spite of our repeated protests, the driver was released only three months later, and the car never.

XVI

Uncle Ho and the Party Bureau deemed it necessary to reach a settlement with Chiang's men. The latter had no hopes for their agents in any eventual elections. Thus, they would certainly go on opposing the general elections to the last minute. They were asking us to reshuffle the government. We could agree to form a provisional coalition government with the participation of some of them. Our conditions were: this government should organize the general elections properly, unify the armed forces and resign when the National Assembly met. And if the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance did not dare to present candidates for the elections, we would ask the National Assembly to reserve a number of seats for them.

We put forward those conditions to Tieu Van. He agreed, since he was at a loss what to do. Nguyen Hai Than also had to acquiesce. The Nationalist Party did not agree at first, but eventually had to bow to their masters' decision. The Revolutionary Alliance and the Nationalist Party promised to stop opposing the elections.

On December 19, the Provisional Government announced that the general elections were to be held on January 6, 1946.

We had overcome a great difficulty. But some cadres did not fully agree with this arrangement. Hearing that Nguyen Hai Than was to be given a high post in the Government, one comrade asked to see Uncle Ho and expressed his objections. Uncle Ho did not explain at length, but only asked: "Isn't manure dirty? But if it's good for the rice plants, will you refuse to use it?"

On January 1, 1946, the list of the Provisional Coalition Government was published in the press. Nguyen Hai Than was Vice-President. Men from the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance held two portfolios, Economy and Hygiene.

On the afternoon of the same day, the new Government was sworn in at the Municipal theatre.

Uncle Ho read the parties' declaration of unity and announced the Government's policies, which included the following points:

- Ensuring success for the nation-wide general elections;
- Unification of administrative offices along democratic principles;
- Integration of various armed forces under the command of the Government; no parties were to have their own armies.

In his opening speech, Nguyen Hai Than said, "As a national leader, I am really to blame for being so late in achieving union". He promised "to send my own troops to the South to join the people in resisting the aggressors."

Thirty thousand people in the capital city were present in the square in front of the Theatre. Uncle Ho asked the Government members to appear before the people, who began shouting "Long live President Ho" ceaselessly as he stepped out onto the balcony.

Uncle Ho sent his best wishes to the people on the occasion of the New Year and spoke about the formation of the Provisional Coalition Government. Then he introduced the new Vice-President.

Nguyen Hai Than stepped forth to address the people. Perhaps out of embarrassment, he stammered out a few Chinese words.

Standing close to him, I pulled at his coat and asked "What are you saying?" Comrade Tran Huy Lieu, who was also standing there, tugged my sleeve and whispered, "Leave him alone! Let him say what he likes!"

Uncle Ho had a very good house prepared for Nguyen Hai Than. He also gave him the car he had been using himself.

A few days later, the Provisional Coalition Government had a formal meeting with Government officials in Bac Bo Palace.

Nguyen Hai Than came in his car. He was escorted by a platoon of bodyguards, guns in hands, bandoleers and belts full of cartridges, and puttees wound round the legs, just like Lu Han's troops.

During the tea-party, Uncle Ho said in a friendly tone: "Today, I am glad to introduce a new member of our family: Vice-President Nguyen Hai Than..."

Nguyen Hai Than stood up, his face beaming with satisfaction.

"After decades abroad", he said, "I am now truly happy to have such a big house to live..." Then, carried away by his joy, and perhaps wanting to entertain the audience, he added, "Now, I should like to tell President Ho Chi Minh his fortune..."

But no one responded to his incongruous offer.

XVII

Hanoi was in a festive mood as preparations were being made for the first general elections in the nation's history.

Political organizations started animated campaigns for their candidates. Slogans appeared everywhere, on the walls and on banners. Decorated floats toured the city, on which boys and girls in fancy dress beat drums, played music and spoke through megaphones in support of their candidates. Newspapers issued special editions for the election campaign.

From various places, the people sent in letters asking Uncle Ho not to stand for election in any specific province, but to let the whole country elect him to the National Assembly. Everyone wanted to write Uncle Ho's name on top of his ballot-paper. Uncle wrote a short letter in reply to these proposals.

"I am a citizen of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. So I can't be exempted from the rules set for the general elections. I am a candidate for Hanoi, so I can't stand for election in any other constituency.

"I wish to thank you all for your love for me and hope that you will fulfil your duties as citizens in the coming general elections."

On the morning of January 6, 1946, flags, lanterns and flowers were seen everywhere in cities and villages.

The population, rich and poor, old and young, men and women, all cheerfully went to the polls.

Their right to vote had not been won overnight. This freedom had been won through long struggles, at the cost of so much blood and tears. Right up to election day blood was being shed for it. Forty-two of our cadres had been killed in the South while campaigning for the elections.

It was the day when the new masters of the country exercised their sovereign rights. In Phuc Yen town, an old man of nearly one hundred years of age asked his grandson to take him to the polling-booth. He asked the officials to tell him the background and achievements of each candidate. He held the ballot-paper tenderly in his hands and reflected for a long while before deciding on his choice. Young people found in those ballot-papers the expression of their hopes and dreams, of what they would bring them in the future. Older people knew the deeper meaning of those papers of freedom after the humiliations suffered during long years of slavery.

Even blind people asked to be taken to the polling stations so that they could enjoy the full happiness of personally casting their voting-papers into the ballot-box.

The general elections were a festive day for everyone. In many places, people organized processions with lanterns, torches and Uncle Ho's portraits or theatrical performances and other activities.

Yet, the self-defence forces were kept on the alert against acts of sabotage.

In Hanoi itself, in spite of previous agreements, the Nationalist Party men armed with submachine-guns prevented the setting up of a polling station in Ngu Xa. They even forbade people there to fly the national flag. The Ngu Xa people reacted by going to the polling-station in neighbouring Nguyen Thai Hoc Street.

In the southern part of our country, the elections took place in spite of the enemy's bombs, napalm and machine-guns. Even in areas under temporary enemy occupation like Sai Gon, Cho Lon, My Tho, candidates stood for election. In Tan An and Khanh Hoa, a number of people were killed or wounded when the polling stations were bombed by enemy planes. Around ninety per cent of the electorate courageously exercised their citizen's right and duty in face of the enemy's terrorism in many areas.

Uncle Ho went to the polling-booth in a house facing the Hang Voi school, Bac Ninh Street¹, in Ha Noi.

¹ Now Nguyen Huu Huan Street.

It was a cold dry morning.

He appeared in a simple khaki suit among electors clad in their warm Sunday best. He stepped into the polling-station with a radiant face. After thirty-five years of fierce struggle waged along with the whole nation against the enemy, he was now receiving, like all his people, the first ballot-paper of a free citizen in an independent country.

Hearing of President Ho's arrival, the people soon formed a large crowd in front of the polling-station. As he stepped out, thunderous applause broke out. He waved to the crowd then went visiting various polling-stations in Hang Bac, Hang Gai, Hang Trong Streets and in Ho Khau village on the outskirts. He wanted to mingle with the people on this great festive day of the nation.

Uncle Ho greatly valued this citizen's right and duty. In March last year (1969) there were elections for the Hanoi People's Council. Although he was in poor health at the time, he went to the polling-station in Ba Dinh district. People gathered round him. Before marking the name on the ballot-paper, he smilingly asked people to keep away so as to ensure the principle of the secret ballot. That was the way he cast his vote to select members of the people's council in the 79th spring of his life.

In the first general elections in the country, President Ho was a candidate for Hanoi and polled 98.4 per cent of the votes.

The people throughout the country, from North to South, elected 333 deputies to the first National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

XVIII

Toward mid-January, I was sent by the Government on a short-term mission to the South. To defend our newly-established power, the Party Central Committee deemed it necessary to step up the anti-French resistance in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo so as to win significant successes. At the same time, people in the whole country were to make very active preparations for a long war of resistance in case the enemy should extend the war. I was to impart the Party Central Committee's great determination to our people there.

The Hanoi newspapers had just issued special numbers marking the hundredth day of resistance.

Before September 2, old colonial administrators in Saigon had affirmed that once they opened fire, the "natives", whom they knew well, would disperse like a flock of sparrows. The colonial troops had the same idea and as soon as they were released from Japanese prisoners' camps they would shoot wildly at our people. Some colonial generals believed that operations in the Indochinese peninsula would be a mere military parade.

It was a testing period.

On one side was the professional army of an old imperialist power, under the command of one of France's most famous generals. They were armed with all sorts of modern weapons: aircraft, warships, armoured cars, big guns, machine guns. This "fine expeditionary force", to use d'Argenlieu's words, was assisted by the British interventionists and tens of thousands of Japanese troops.

On the other side, ordinary people armed only with rudimentary weapons were determined to fight to the bitter end to defend their country.

After one hundred days of fighting, Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo still stood firm. The pointed bamboo spears of our people under a democratic republican regime had proved to be much more effective than the cannon of the former kings and mandarins of the Nguyen dynasty.

In their past war of conquest, the French had only to lob a few shells on the walls of some citadels to conquer large areas of land. But this time, they were knocking their heads against the impregnable iron wall of a people who refused to fall back into slavery.

By using columns of armoured vehicles, they could advance into some of the provinces in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo. But the important thing was that the resistance was never stamped out. It kept on surging up vigorously everywhere, and was alive in those very cities and towns which the enemy believed they had conquered.

In those critical hours which would decide the life or death of the Fatherland, our people soon found out the way to fight. The enemy was baffled by new ways of combat. Cities and towns were destroyed by the same people who had built them. Villages were deserted wholly by their populations who refused all cooperation; everywhere the enemy went, he saw only empty houses, uncared for gardens, destroyed bridges and cut roads. "Death braving" fighters made use of every weapon at hand to defend every street corner, every trench, under shells and bombs. What troubled the enemy most was the fact that his adversaries seemed at once nowhere and everywhere and could attack him at any time.

The large rural areas in Nam Bo were still under our control. Many guerilla bases were built up. We had large base areas in the Plain of Reeds and the U Minh forests. Some bases were quite close to the cities.

The enemy landed in Nha Trang in late November, but was encircled in the city by the local troops and people assisted by a number of army detachments from the North. His scheme to attack Khanh Hoa was also frustrated.

The people from various ethnic groups fought alongside our army to dispute every village and hamlet with the enemy in the central Highlands. Our

troops recaptured Buon Me Thuot town from the French and controlled it for ten days in mid-December.

The guerilla war was everywhere, in every village, along strategic highways, even in the cities and towns under enemy occupation.

Some colonialist military men had been over-optimistic about the outcome of the war of aggression. They had believed in a simple arithmetic: "The resistance fighters have few guns. They have still less ammunition. When they have used up their ammunition – probably pretty soon – all resistance will come to an end". After three months of fighting by our people, the prospects looked gloomy to the aggressors. They began to realize the strength of a whole nation rising up in arms for the survival of the country.

The aggressors saw the danger of a protracted war. They urgently asked for reinforcement from France. From early 1946, they launched repeated violent mopping-up operations into our base areas in Nam Bo. They tried hard to occupy some more provinces in Southern Trung Bo and prepared new schemes of attack.

I left Hanoi on the 18th of January, a warm sunny afternoon. Before we started off, Uncle Ho once again asked us to convey his greetings to the people, fighters and cadres in the South and tell them that he would go and see them when the occasion arose. He told us to be vigilant and keep things secret. That was what he used to remind us of before we started on any mission.

As we drove out of Hanoi, we found a somewhat different atmosphere. In the absence of the Chiang troops' bayonets, the land appeared clear and pure, splendidly bathed in the light of independence and freedom. Everywhere there were banners and slogans urging the people to "Support the Heroic Resistance of our Southern Compatriots". Though it was not a festive day, we could see the gold-starred flags flying everywhere in the villages, the streets and even the fields. Militia posts had been set up at various crossroads and towns on our way.

It was a long time since we had been to the south of our fatherland. This trip of ours was different from those we had made when working underground.

Like the rest of the country the South had undergone many changes, and was now fighting. Our car drove fast along Highway No 1. The smell of petrol and the hooting reminded us of past travels. Our hearts palpitated as we thought of our fellow-countrymen and fighters engaged in fierce struggles with the enemy at the front.

On our way, we saw many army detachments going south. More and more sons of the North and the Centre were leaving for the front. Cadres and fighters were of different ages, but most of the soldiers were quite young. For most of them, it was the first time they had ever gone to fight in the war, and perhaps the first time they had ever gone to the far regions of the country. Those important hours would certainly leave unforgettable memories in the minds of all. On the way to railway station, the fighters were singing while marching, carrying rucksacks, guns and ammunition. Express trains full of soldiers rumbled toward the South, carrying with them songs, laughter and waving hands. The excitement of going to war was being revived in the national life. Many a time, I had the car stopped along the road so that I could have a chat with soldiers going south.

I arrived the next day in Nghe An, province of the picturesque River Lam and Hong Linh Mountains. Everywhere in the city of Vinh, we saw people undergoing military training, learning the use of scimitars, grenades and rifles. Old and young, men and women, they were learning to march in step with wooden guns on their shoulders. Some of the older ones might be former Red Guards in the Nghe Tinh Soviets of fifteen years before. They were now standing in the same ranks with their younger brothers and sons.

All the comrades I met in Nghe An asked me when Uncle Ho would come.

Uncle Ho had a very deep feeling towards his native land. He loved everything connected to it, from the leaf fans to the hibiscus hedges at his home. We could measure how deep this love was when he visited his native village Sen. After fifty-two long years of absence from home he was able to find the old path right away and the old porch in the middle of the hamlet in spite of all the changes. He remembered well where the columns had stood that had supported the hammock in which his mother used to lie and where every lemon tree and grapefruit tree had stood in the garden.

None of us thought then that it would be twelve years before another opportunity would come to him to visit his home.

The next day, we started early. After crossing the Deo Ngang pass, we again saw the familiar ricefields, narrow and long, the white sandhills of Quang Binh, that beautiful characteristic sight of the Centre.

The little, pretty town of Dong Hoi, full of remembrance, lying on the shore of the Nhat Le river, was busy receiving the southbound troops and seeing off its own sons to the front. There, I met again many friends and relatives. We chatted about country and family affairs during the whole afternoon and evening.

On the 20th we arrived in Hue.

On the outskirts were pretty houses and lush tea gardens. The car drove between two lines of regular and straight sycamores on either side of the asphalt road.

Driving past the outer wall of the West Gate, we could see the quiet Perfume River in the evening sun. The Ngu Mountain stood behind the former European residential quarters. The river and the mountain had become ours. The gold-starred flag was fluttering on top of the high flagtower in the city. Behind the Phu Van pavilion Nation Defence guards were on sentry duty at the city gate.

In the city, the palaces and residences of former mandarins of the imperial court had become Government and Front offices. I met Comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh at the office of the Viet Minh Front. I told him the decisions of Uncle Ho and the Party Bureau. We exchanged views and discussed various matters, and told each other what had happened in the country since we first met at the Tan Trao Conference.

Feudal Hue had become a thing of the past. Green moss was still visible on the walls of the ministries but the revolution had brought about so many changes. Corruption and stagnation had made room for newness and progress. Independent Hue was pretty and bright.

There, we could feel the heat of the resistance war. Hue was now the immediate rear base of various fronts. Cadres came here from battlefields in Nam Bo, South Trung Bo and Laos. Some were on missions. Others were on sick leave. Many of them, hardly recovered from their wounds, insisted on being sent back to the front. The troops were training day and night, making the most of every hour and minute before going to the front. In every office, every house, every individual, we found the same solicitude for the resistance. Here the reactionary parties had not been able to find a favourable ground for their activities. The Chiang officers and troops also appeared to be more reasonable and did not dare to commit any provocations.

We were assailed with questions about Uncle Ho's health, the situation in the North, the provocations engineered by the Chiang troops and the reactionaries in the capital. Many told us how happy the Hue people had been when they heard that Uncle Ho polled the largest number of votes in Hanoi.

Hue was the place where Uncle Ho had spent his childhood and adolescence.

Late in the last century, when he was still a young child, he came to Hue with his family. His father had been successful in a competitive examination and was called to the imperial city. Here, in 1900, in a small house facing the censor's Office, young Cung – Uncle Ho's name in his childhood – witnessed the minutes of his mother. After his mother's death, Cung returned to Nam Lien.

Five years later as a young man, he came back to Hue with the name Nguyen Tat Thanh.

There was a strong movement of struggle in Hue at that time. The French had forced Thanh Thai to abdicate in favour of his son Duy Tan, who was only eight years old. People from various regions came to Hue and for several days on end there were demonstrations for the reduction of taxes. French troops were brought in from Mang Ca fortress and opened fire on the unarmed demonstrators. Many were pushed into the river. Trang Tian Bridge was reddened with blood.

From this city, Nguyen Tat Thanh began his "ten-thousand-mile" tour of the world.

One month before I arrived in Hue, Comrade Le Van Hien had also come to Hue on his way to the South on a mission. On Uncle Ho's instruction, he had visited the wives of Thanh Thai and Duy Tan, the deposed kings.

They were surprised and moved by such solicitude on the part of President Ho. The wife of Thanh Thai said that since our Government came to power, she had been praying daily for the Government and President Ho instead of the royal family. Her daughter-in-law, the wife of King Duy Tan, said that since her husband was deported by the French, she had been completely neglected by the royal family.

I stayed for two days in Hue and discussed with the comrades there the Party Central Committee's directives – resolutely to step up the resistance in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo, make urgent preparations for a protracted war and guard against the French extending the war to the whole of Central Viet Nam.

XIX

Wherever I stopped on my way to the South, I was asked about Uncle Ho's health and activities and when he would visit those regions. Local officials were worried about the disruptive activities by the Chiang troops and their agents in Hanoi and about possible dangers for Uncle Ho and the Central Government. In mass meetings, young men asked why they had not been called up, and soldiers asked why their units had not been ordered to go south.

The seething atmosphere of the resistance made itself felt ever more strongly as we went further south.

The people's morale was very high in the two provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai. Everyone expressed his determination to fight the French and asked to be sent to the front. Girls wore their hair short. No activities by the enemy and the reactionaries could be concealed from the people's vigilant eyes.

In Quang Nam, 37 out of every hundred National Defence guardsmen had been sent to the southern front. In Quang Nam, the percentage was the highest: 85 out of every hundred fighters had been sent to various fronts.

After meeting the provincial leaders in Quang Ngai, I attended a very exciting mass rally in the stadium. That night, I wrote in my diary: "That is the immortal Vietnamese spirit of independence. With such a morale, Viet Nam will certainly be fully independent and united."

Quang Nam and Quang Ngai were greatly elated to hear the new directives by Uncle Ho and the central committee. Together with active preparations for a protracted resistance war in case the enemy came, the leaders of the two provinces proposed to send more fighters to the front.

Every small village and hamlet along the highway seemed to be on its mettle, alive with the activities of the people's militia. These could be seen everywhere: wearing brown peasant clothes, in their hands a rifle, scimitar, or a mere pointed bamboo stake, yet with extraordinarily high morale.

On the 23rd, I left Quang Ngai in company with comrade Duc. As we came near Binh Dinh, we caught sight of a militiaman with a gun by the roadside. Probably a checkpoint. The car was driving fast. As he had travelled a lot on this road, Comrade Duc told the driver to go on. Suddenly we heard a gun shot and the whizz of a bullet. We had the car stopped, realizing that we couldn't hurry on.

As we stepped out of the car, two militiamen ran up, asked why we hadn't stopped for the control and demanded to see our papers. We apologized. Duc produced a paper identifying him as Chairman of the Administrative Committee of Trung Bo (Central Viet Nam). A militiaman looked at the paper for a while, then asked, anger still in his voice, "Where is that 'Trung Bo' village?"

We had to explain. The expression on his face relaxed gradually and at last he let us go. We left with a feeling of joy and admiration. The revolution would need more time to raise the cultural level of the citizens who had just freed themselves from slavery. But it certainly had done a lot to raise the morale and mettle of those new masters of the country.

There was a strong movement to join the army in Binh Dinh. In Qui Nhon city there was even a navy unit of nearly one hundred men. Many young girls also volunteered to serve in the armed forces. There were two munitions factories in which 150 workers worked continuously making and repairing weapons.

I went to Ninh Hoa with Comrade Pham Kiet. There one already felt the atmosphere of the front. The French had just sent a 15,000-strong force, including an armoured column to attack Di Rinh and Da Lat from both Saigon and Buon Me Thuot.

I arrived at the headquarters of the 6th Zone Military Committee just as the Zone commander was ordering reinforcements to be sent to the Madorac front. The enemy had been attacking all day. Their armoured vehicles were trying to break through Madorac to Ninh Hoa. Units fighting at the front communicated with us by telephone. Comrades Nam Long and Huu Thanh were fighting at Madorac. Hearing that I had come, Nam Long phoned to me. But hardly had we begun the conversation when the line was cut.

Two days later, we arrived in Khanh Hoa in the afternoon. The French were attacking in the Nha Trang region. Their planes circled over Khanh Hoa, bombing and strafing the city. Our anti-aircraft guns hit back. Front commanders came to report on the situation, discussed operation plans then hurried back to their posts. Next door, a detachment of National Defence guards were singing. Children were playing in the yard. Only when enemy planes came roaring over their heads did they jump into shallow, newly-dug individual shelters. Camouflaged trucks were carrying troops to the front. Fighters sitting in the trucks were shouting slogans: "We're determined to fight!" From the direction of Nha Trang, enemy guns were booming, and we could hear the reports of our mortars hitting back. In Khanh Hoa, we received more information about the pressing situation at the Nam Bo front.

It was clear the enemy was trying to relieve Nha Trang, to attack and occupy a number of provinces along the coast of southern Trung Bo and cut our supply lines from the north.

Here, we could see why Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo were standing firm after four months of war. We paid with our blood for the lesson of

experience we had drawn and were still drawing on how to fight the enemy. But what was obvious was the determination of every citizen to "Die in Freedom rather than Live in Slavery". Southern Trung Bo was facing hard times. But with such a spirit, it would certainly stand firm and achieve victory together with Nam Bo.

I had only reached Khanh Hoa when I received a cable from Uncle Ho calling me back. We returned to Song Cua and Qui Nhon, then went to inspect the Tay Nguyen front.

At An Khe, a vast stretch of highlands came within sight. There in olden times Nguyen Hue had raised the banner of insurrection.

After crossing the Mang Giang pass, we came to Pleiku, where most of the population was of the Giarai ethnic group. Most of the Viet lived in the provincial capital. Our troops stationed in camps outside the town were ready to fight. We stopped in Pleiku and had a chat with the people and fighters. The soldiers were excited to hear about the feats achieved by their comrades at the front and eager to join battle.

We went to Kontum in the afternoon. One year before this remote mountainous area had been the place where the French detained captured revolutionaries. The Kontum population includes Ede, Giari, Xedang, groups... The troops were stationed partly in the town and partly outside it. People from various nationalities came to meet the Government representatives at the former French governor's residence, built near a stream. Among them was a Catholic priest. Everyone spoke about Bok (Uncle) Ho and inquired after him. Uncle Ho's image had been familiar to the simple folk of Tay Nguyen at an early date and was to become ever more deeply engraved in their hearts.

There I again met Comrade Duc Thanh, a courageous young man from the Pac Bo mountain area, who had been educated by Uncle Ho personally. He had arrived in Tay Nguyen together with the southward-going troops. We learned some time later of his death in battle to defend the mountains and jungle of Tay Nguyen side by side with the Tay Nguyen people.

We spent the night in Kontum; the next morning we returned to the coast along the An Khe highway.

On the eve of Tet, the Lunar New Year, our car arrived at the foot of the Hai Van Pass. Through the windscreen, we could see the sea lost in the mist. A glimmering light appeared in the distance, in the vastness of the sky and sea. It might come from a returning fishing boat or a thatch hut on Tien Cha Island.

As the car began to climb, it started to rain. On one side was a precipice; on the other were steep mountain cliffs. The wind was blowing hard through the thickets. The pass was well known for its impregnable position: "One man defending the pass could stop ten thousand men". In the last century, Nguyen Xuan On and Nguyen Thong, patriots who had unsuccessfully fought the French, wrote a poem when passing here.

A Chiang soldier appeared on the roadside. He stopped the car for control but let us go after checking our papers. In these Central provinces, the Chiang men and officers were reasonable in their attitude.

The mist was thick. The rain grew heavier and heavier. The car headlights could not reach further than five or six metres.

How many changes had occurred during the past few months! A foreigner who knew about our activities before the General Insurrection, said, "Your life is full of wonderful events. A week ago, you were hiding in the jungle. Now you are active in the capital itself. If I were a writer, I would write your story". The wheel of history was turning very fast. For the revolutionary, every day and every hour now seemed to be too short. Time was hurrying on. On this rainy night, spring surprised us as we were crossing the pass.

I wondered what Uncle Ho and my comrades in Hanoi were doing. The first Tet in independence in the capital must be very cheerful. Some ten days earlier, I had listened to Uncle Ho's letter calling on the people and the mass organizations to bring the joy of Tet to the soldiers at the front and their families at home. This evening, when passing Da Nang, I had been able to read his New Year's greetings. He expressed warm feelings towards the

fighters who "were setting off guns to defend the Fatherland while their countrymen were setting off fire-crackers to greet the New Year". His letter contained a few verses:

When the Resistance war is successful

We shall drink red wine together.

This Tet, we are temporarily separated

Next Tet, let's hope we shall be reunited again.

Reading this New Year letter addressed to the whole nation, each of us felt as if Uncle Ho was addressing him personally.

We arrived in Hue the next day. We attended the grand New Year rally at Thuong Bac landing-place. A vast sea of people, banners and streamers. The spring afternoon was warm and sunny. The whole city of Hue was present. The people cheered up when they heard about the situation at the front and the determination of President Ho and the Government to step up the resistance and actively prepare for a protracted war in case the enemy expanded it. Shouts of "Long live independent Viet Nam", "Long live President Ho", "Prepare for a protracted resistance war!", "Support the resistance in the South!" thundered as the rally ended. For the first time in Hue's history, our countrymen greeted the new year with shouts expressing their determination to fight.

XX

"Each year begins with Spring." Uncle Ho had written three letters – to the people, the fighters, the youth and the children – on the occasion of the spring of the year Binh Tuat. This spring, moreover, was the first of the springs of independence and freedom for the country. In Uncle Ho's views, this Tet should be one in the style of the New Life, in which joy was the lot of all, rich and poor, old and young, and the warmest thoughts were for the fighters at the front.

On the eve of Tet in Hanoi, the doors along both sides of the streets were closed, as was the rule during the last night of the year. Life was still difficult on the material side, but the atmosphere of a Tet in independence was present in each house. Rich or poor, they were decorated with an altar of the Fatherland, the national flag, President Ho's portrait, lanterns and flowers. No one had to worry about offering presents to the "mandarins" – the officials – as the city people had had to under the French. After the ritual offering to the ancestors, the conversation in each family turned to the topics of the day, politics, the grand meeting to be held next day, the fighting in the South. A few days earlier, the self-defence headquarters had sent round Tet letters reminding people to reserve their thoughts for the fighters who were laying down their lives for the country at the front and urging them to spend Tet in a merry but economical way, saving money for the Committee of Support for the Resistance in Nam Bo.

The Chairman of the City Administrative Committee had just finished dinner at home when Uncle Ho arrived unexpectedly. He wanted to visit the people of the capital on the occasion of the New Year.

There was a fine drizzle. The streets were deserted, filled with the smell of fire-cracker powder. The flags were bright red in the street lights.

Comrade Hung took Uncle to a family in Cua Nam Street. The head of the family was the commander of a self-defence company and all the members of the household were active in patriotic organizations.

Then Uncle Ho wished to visit some labouring people's quarters. He said he would like to see a very poor family. Well, there were still a lot of poor people in the city, but which family should he visit?

Uncle Ho had his car stopped in front of a narrow alley in Sinh Tu Street: Hang Dua Alley. Those small streets and alleys were the other face of the city, for which the colonialists never thought of doing anything during the past hundred years, not even thinking of installing a water tap or a street light.

The night was dark. The road was uneven and muddy because of the rain. The flags flown in front of low roofs touched the heads of passers-by. Uncle

Ho went farther into the alley. A door was left ajar, through which a kerosene lamp could be seen. He stopped, then entered.

The house was rather crowded. It was shared by several families. On the middle wall, there was the national flag, Uncle Ho's portrait and paper festoons. People were chatting. The conversation stopped when they saw an old man with a walking stick wearing a high-collared khaki jacket step in.

At first they looked at each other, thinking that he was a visitor for one of them. Uncle Ho asked them about preparation for Tet. They answered him merrily, showing the boiling pot of "banh chung" rice cakes in a corner of the yard. There was a gleam of joy in Uncle Ho's eyes. He said a few words of greeting. Then everyone present suddenly realized that the gentle old man visiting them was President Ho himself. It was like a beautiful dream: he had stepped out of the portrait hung on the wall to be among them, in their humble house. Now, unlike the moment when he first came in, no one could speak a word. All eyes looked up at him. He said "Our country has just won independence. The South is fighting the enemy. Our labouring people still experience hard times. But with independence, we'll have everything."

He went out leaving every one in the house dumb with emotion. They all went to the door and looked after him.

That night, Uncle Ho visited quite a number of places. In the first spring of independence, he wanted to bring joy to many families in the city. When he arrived at a poor government employee's in Hang Long Street, it was quite late. They were about to go to bed. Mosquito nets had been put up. The wire string across the room was full of clothes. No one in the family was expecting a visit at that hour, let alone one from the President of the Republic.

Thus Uncle Ho's round of New Year's Eve visits was completed. The next day, New Year's Day, he would be very busy. He would receive callers from the Party Central Committee, the Government and representatives of various organizations. He would attend the New Year rally of the city population at the Municipal Theatre. He would visit and talk to a unit of

National Defence guards, spend some time with the children at the Pioneers' Garden, and have dinner with his guards in Bac Bo Palace...

After seeing the President back, Comrade Hung, the Chairman of the City Committee returned home. As midnight was approaching, he went to Lake Hoan Kiem (Lake of the Restored Sword) to see the New Year in. The streets, which had been deserted at dusk, were very busy now. Everyone wanted to breathe the pure air of the first spring of independence. There had never been such an excited and merry New Year's Eve.

Fire-crackers were set off everywhere in the city to greet the coming of spring. Comrade Hung followed the stream of people to the gate of Ngoc Son Temple. As he was entering it, he caught sight of an old man in a long robe, a woolen scarf worn round his face, among the busy crowd crossing The Huc Bridge. The old man's bright eyes helped him to recognize the President at once. Uncle Ho walked slowly among those who were making their way into the shrine. The Committee Chairman also noticed another man standing nearby, who winked at him. That was the President's bodyguard. Uncle Ho did not want people to recognize him.

So, Uncle Ho had seen how spring came to a family of revolutionary activists. He also saw how it came to the house of a laboring man, and to the family of a poor Government employee. Now, he wanted to see how the spring of independence was coming to the people in the streets, in this temple so familiar to the Hanoi people, in the middle of Lake Hoan Kiem. One wonders if the people at Ngoc Son temple noticed that the young twigs they were picking that night according to the old custom were sprouting beautifully?

All this was told to me later when I was back in Hanoi by those who had accompanied Uncle Ho that New Year's Eve. Those visits became a habit with him on many subsequent New Year's Eves. Those he visited were usually people who had served the revolution well, who had children in the armed services, or laboring people in hard conditions. His visits were always unannounced. He wished to bring those families some unexpected happiness. He also wanted to see the real atmosphere in those houses on festive days. These things became habits in his simple and great life.

XXI

I arrived back in Hanoi at a moment when the people were feeling great indignation over the French invasion of Lai Chau. The invasion had been carried out by Allesandri's troops who had fled from the Japanese after the coup of March 9 the previous year. They had been kept by the Chiang Kai-shek government in an area near the Sino-Vietnamese border. In fact, they had crossed the border as early as late January. Even during the Lunar New Year, a number of National Defence units had been urgently sent to the Northwest to stop the enemy advance.

At the same time, there were persistent rumours of negotiations being conducted between the French and Chiang at Chungking on the Indochinese question. The news was spread by Western agencies; Chungking kept silent, giving neither their comments nor denials.

Hanoi pressmen interviewed Lu Han. The Chinese general stated: "The French troops have been allowed by Chungking to enter Lai Chau." He added that the French had to follow a specified route. He denied any knowledge of the Chinese-French negotiations.

About the same time, the French mission in Hanoi, through the agency of an intermediary, asked for a meeting with us.

Early in September in the previous year, a foreigner had called at the gate of Bac Bo Palace. The guards thought he was a member of the American mission. When taken to the reception desk, he introduced himself as a French officer and asked to see a representative of our Government. Comrade Hoang Minh Giam received him.

The officer conveyed Sainteny's proposal for talks with a competent representative of our Government. He complained that the French mission was held in near custody by the Japanese in the former French Governor's palace; he had had a difficult time finding some way to get here.

We too wanted to explore the French attitude. Comrade Giam came to the Japanese headquarters to see Sainteny. The latter offered to expound to our Government the French Government's stand on the Indochinese question.

Some time later, at Sainteny's request, Comrade Giam took him to Bac Bo Palace. I was appointed to receive him.

Sainteny set forth his ideas about Franco-Vietnamese relations. He tried to appear flexible and sensible. But what he said was not greatly different from what De Gaulle had announced earlier. Sainteny also complained that the sentry had made an unfriendly gesture when he passed the gate of the Palace. In fact, it was customary for our soldiers at that time to present arms with fixed bayonets.

From then on occasional exchanges of views took place between our side and the French.

Our stand was that France should recognize the independence and territorial integrity of Viet Nam prior to any discussions.

The French came back to invade Nam Bo: the war was spreading day after day. At times, the talks became tense. Uncle Ho often reminded us that we should stand by our just position and set forth our arguments clearly, but should keep an attitude of calmness and moderation. The talks did not lead to any agreement and were suspended.

Now the French mission informed us that a Sino-French agreement on the Indochinese question was to be signed soon. They said they would like to negotiate a political settlement with us: if we did not accept the offer, the consequences would be harmful to future Vietnamese-French relations.

On 20 February, in Paris, the French Minister for Overseas Affairs Marius Moutet disclosed the provisions of the Sino-French agreement. The most important one was that Chungking agreed to let the French bring troops to the North to replace the Chiang troops, who were to be withdrawn. The news was reported by Reuter with a threat: "Perhaps the French government would not hesitate to use force if Viet Nam refused to compromise."

It was obvious that the enemies had come to an accommodation with each other. The fact that Chiang had let French troops come back to Lai Chau was a concrete proof.

The French Government and the French mission in Hanoi hoped to use the Sino-French agreement – which was not yet signed by that time – to bring pressure to bear upon us in the talks.

The Viet Nam Nationalist Party suddenly intensified their disruptive activities.

They sent out men to distribute handbills in the street calling on the Hanoi people to stage a general strike and markets to close down to show opposition to the Government. They realized that in the current bargain both Chungking and the French had ignored them completely. They also sensed that the French wanted to reach an agreement with us. In the new situation, their fate as Chiang flunkies would be threatened. They carried on their struggle by spearheading their attacks against us. That was also the intention of the Chiang militarist group in direct command of those agents in Hanoi.

On the morning of February 20, hooligans gathered at some of the city gates. They prevented peasants from the outskirts from entering the city to sell their produce. Some jumped into the trams, stopped the engines and forbade the tram drivers to work. Others went to government offices, snatched the keys from the gate-keepers and prevented the employees from coming in. Still others broke into Dong Xuan market. They jumped onto the counters, calling on sellers and buyers to disperse. Women sellers of fruit and vegetables drove them away with blows from their carrying poles.

On the same morning, about a hundred other thugs gathered in Quan Thanh Road. They put up a yellow flag with the word "People" on it. Then they staged a march howling and shouting. Some of them, wearing khaki uniforms, dark glasses and high boots, forced passers-by to follow them at gun-point. They shouted, "Down with the Government", "Down with pro-French traitors", "Set up a new government under the leadership of Adviser Vinh Thuy", etc. They abused those who, standing in front of their houses were cursing them or looking at them with contempt.

The reactionaries came to the side of Lake Hoan Kiem and made for the City Hall.

The people also came in large crowds to the lakeside from various directions. A young man took the gold-starred red flag hoisted in front of the Viet Nam News Agency building. He held it high, and people lined up behind him. A demonstration took shape, with the participation of thousands of people who began marching and shouting slogans in support of the Government.

The men carrying the "people" signs had now arrived at the City Hall. Suddenly voices among them started shouting: "Support the Ho Chi Minh Government!", "Down with the saboteurs". The people standing around responded with the same slogans. A scuffle broke out among the reactionary demonstrators. Those who had been forced to join them now turned on them with the help of the people in the streets.

At the same time, the demonstration in support of the Government arrived in force. The frightened reactionaries furled their flags and banners and fled. The people's demonstration went past the City Hall, reached the corner of Duy Tan Street and then made for Bac Bo Palace. Pioneers and children from neighbouring streets had also joined in and marched in front of the victorious demonstrators, beating their drums.

The demonstrators gathered in larger and larger crowds in front of Bac Bo Palace. Uncle Ho appeared at the window. He waved to the crowd. Shouts of "Long live President Ho!" thundered continuously.

On the 21st, the Nationalist Party staged another demonstration with the participation of a few hundred people. They shouted slogans demanding power for Vinh Thuy. They came to Vinh Thuy's house in Tran Hung Dao Street. The reactionaries passed, the people expressed their disapproval by flying the national flag and slamming the doors shut. Passers-by shouted slogans against them, and children ran ahead of the demonstrators shouting "Long live President Ho." Every now and again, there were clashes between the people and the provocateurs. From small alleys and the upper storeys of houses, stones and bricks were sometimes thrown at the shouting and gesturing ringleaders in dark glasses and jack boots.

It was possible that at that time Vinh Thuy was already harbouring dark designs, but in response to the reactionaries' demand that he take power, he

told newsmen the following day: "A group of men are not the people. The election of a President for Viet Nam will be decided upon by the National Assembly, for only the National Assembly is the representative of the people in the whole country. A man cannot be made President just because of the wish of a group."

XXII

Active preparations for the resistance in various fields were now stepped up.

The most difficult thing to do then was to make the people clearly aware of the dangerous situation without allowing this to affect their morale; to mobilize them and prepare them for the resistance without giving rise to provocative actions against the Chiang troops; to keep the people undisturbed by the perfidious and very dangerous propaganda made by enemies from all directions, yet caused them to remain calm and confident in the face of any complicated, even serious situation that might arise.

On February 22, in his "Appeal to maintain and intensify the resistance in Nam Bo", Uncle Ho wrote:

"At present, besides war by military means, the French colonialists are resorting to psychological warfare; they distribute handbills, put up posters and spread false rumours hoping to make our people worried and anxious: that is the way they attack us morally

"The ancients said that 'Striking at the hearts is essential, attacking the fortresses is secondary'. So a fighting nation like ours should always be prepared, while remaining calm and firm and ready to cope with any situation...

"Wherever the enemy goes, the population should carry out a scorched-earth policy so as to deprive enemy troops of food, shelter and gradually wear them out. We will always be ready; we will never show hesitation or confusion..."

President Ho also set forth some basic ideas: the resistance should be protracted and nation-wide; we should fight the enemy in all fields: military, political, economic and diplomatic. He stressed: "First of all we must keep our morale; show no discouragement when defeated, and no conceit when winning: fight on, even if a battle is lost; work together in solidarity and unity; keep order and obey the Government..."

Thus Uncle Ho called on the people throughout the country to get ready for a long fight, a nation-wide fight in every field, against all enemies that might appear, before us, behind us and by our sides.

Hanoi pressmen came to interview President Ho on the Sino-French agreement. He answered: "First, China has not announced it. Second, this news has been reported by Reuter, so we are not in a position to comment yet..." Then he spoke about Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and the Chinese resistance to defend national independence. Though he did not refer directly to the Chiang Kai-shek government, he made our people understand clearly the treacherous and reactionary deeds of Chungking.

In those difficult times, our press did a good job in guiding public opinion. On the negotiations with the French, *Cuu Quoc* (National Salvation) the official organ of the General Committee of Viet Minh, wrote: "Whether we shall achieve complete independence or not depends on our fighting strength at the front... The time when the French want to negotiate is precisely when we must fight hard, and be fully prepared to fight for complete independence... We don't refuse to negotiate, but we certainly will not let the negotiations be used as a delaying tactic by the enemy. Neither will we allow them to lull our nation's fighting will... The nation's fate is always determined by its own fighting strength..."

In Hanoi, the militant self-defence units, propaganda teams of the Viet Minh's City Committee and Youth League members went to various quarters to give explanations to the population and make preparations for combat. The Chiang troops being present everywhere, our activities had to remain discreet. We couldn't dig trenches and build fortifications just under their noise. The self-defence fighters learnt the use of mines so as to be able to create obstacles in the city quickly in case the war broke out. National Defence Guard Units were ordered to check up all preparations for combat.

The Hanoi Administrative Committee urged old people and children to leave the city. The press and mass organizations called on the country people to receive and assist the evacuated city people warmly.

Along with preparations for the resistance, we stepped up the formation of the Coalition Government so as to develop the success of the general elections. So far consultations with the reactionary parties had led to no results. The Nationalist Party demanded that they should be given seven out of the ten ministries in the new government, together with other important offices. Even their masters found those claims unreasonable.

The National Assembly was to meet soon. Although the reactionaries were intensifying their disruptive, we remained patient and tried to keep down their provocations. The situation was very tense. A large-scale war could break out in the near future. Uncle Ho met Tieu Van and tried to persuade him. We held that it was necessary to establish at once a coalition government for the resistance, which should include people from various parties and non-party men. Finally, after careful considerations, Tieu Van saw no better arrangement, and pressed his agents to accept our solution.

It was only less than a week before the National Assembly met that the reactionaries agreed to form a coalition government for the resistance. The Government was to be composed of ten ministries. Two important ministries, the Interior and National Defence, were to be entrusted to neutral personalities. The Viet Minh front and the Democratic Party would take four ministries. The Revolutionary Alliance and the Nationalist Party would take four others. Besides, they also agreed to the setting up of the National Resistance Committee and the National Advisory Group. Mr. Huynh Thuc Khang was asked to come from Central Viet Nam and take part in the new government.

I had known Mr. Huynh when I was on the staff of the newspaper Tieng Dan (People's Voice) in Hue. He was a scholar well known for his high patriotism and integrity, but who did not have complete faith in our Party's revolutionary line. When our envoy presented him with our proposal, he showed some hesitation at first, partly because he had not understood what the new leaders from "the younger generations" were. When he learned that President Ho was none other than Comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc, he decided

to go to Hanoi. He wanted to know more about the revolutionary Nguyen Ai Quoc whom he had heard so much about.

In Hanoi, when he met us, he expressed concern about what he called the current "partisan dispute". In his opinion the Viet Minh and the Revolutionary Alliance were both fighting for the people, and their leaders were all patriots who had spent much time abroad, working for the country's interests. Now, they had to put the nation's interests above everything else, achieve unity, and should not clash over partisan questions.

The first meeting between Uncle Ho and Mr. Huynh was very moving. They both stepped forward and embraced each other, their eyes suddenly dimmed with tears. They evoked the memories of the old scholar (Uncle Ho's father – Ed) who had trudged about the country during the long dark years of colonialism. And from the very first minute, Mr. Huynh found a close friend in the famous revolutionary whom he had been longing to meet. After the meeting Mr. Huynh said to a friend of his, "It is a good fortune for our people to have Mr. Ho." He placed full confidence in him, and although he was Uncle Ho's senior by many years, he always referred to him as "the old father of the nation."

Mr. Huynh accepted the post of Minister of the Interior in the coalition government of the resistance to be formed soon.

XXIII

The deep changes in Vietnamese society, together with the heroic resistance of our peoples in Nam Bo, had gradually brought about changes in the minds of the more far-sighted officers among the French military commanders. They felt that De Gaulle's statement of March 24, 1945 lagged ten years behind the actual situation here.

According to French documents, after occupying a number of provinces in Nam Bo, the French staff in Saigon worked out a military plan for a return to North Viet Nam. In its outline, the plan provided for the use of Massu's armoured units and Valluy's light infantry for a landing on Haiphong under artillery cover; the use of paratroops for the occupation of crucial positions

in Hanoi with a view to neutralizing our central government, freeing the five thousand French troops detained in the citadel, rearming them quickly and using them to assist the paratroops in taking control of Hanoi pending the arrival of the armoured units; then, they would proceed to occupy all strategic positions...

But the French Command expressed reserve about that plan, which seemed to be highly adventurist. The strength of the French expeditionary force in Nam Bo had reached 35,000 men. Yet the realities of the war had shown that even if the French generals had an army several times as strong, they would not be able to bring the situation in Nam Bo back to the days before French overthrow.

Under such conditions, they would have to face the strength of a whole nation if they widened the war to the whole of Viet Nam. The French generals were also well aware that in the North they would be opposed by resistance forces that were many times as strong as those in the South. To restore colonial rule here, Leclerc estimated he would need an expeditionary force of 350,000 men, all white. That was what France, exhausted after the Second World War, could not afford. And even if he could have such a large army, Leclerc still realized that this "restoration" work would need much time and would meet with great difficulties and obstacles.

On the other hand, in the North, there were still 180,000 Chiang troops doing the task of disarming the Japanese. If they sent their troops to the North, the French were likely to clash with Chiang's army. It would be very dangerous.

The more clear-minded of the French generals realized that an adequate solution for the Indochinese problem should be a political one: negotiations with Chungking for a withdrawal of the Chiang army and its replacement by the French; parley with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam to avoid a long war with little chance of a way out.

The French government quickly sought negotiations with Chungking. It was a hard job, but they did not meet only with difficulties.

In the past, China had also been victim of French imperialism. At present, China had nominally become one of the five big powers in the world. But in reality the Chiang Kai-shek administration was still dependent on the United States in various respects. The French and the Americans disliked each other. But the Americans, British and French shared a common concern over the powerful development of the Soviet Union after the Second World War. This "peril" was due – many Western strategists bitterly complained – to the victory of the Allied forces over fascism in the Second World War. The Americans were trying to gather the forces of the European capitalist states to cope with the so-called "Russian peril". Thus, they could not remain indifferent to French interests.

Late in August 1945, when he visited the United States, De Gaulle had suggested to Truman that he should help the French in the Indochinese question.

On the other hand, the internal situation in China was troubling Chiang. After the Japanese capitulation and facing the surging revolutionary movement, the Kuomintang militarists were forced to sign the "October 10 Agreement" with the Chinese Communist Party. Both sides agreed to avoid a civil war, to open a political consultative conference on the basis of unity, solidarity, democracy and peace. But hardly had the ink dried when Chiang Kai-shek launched a massive attack against the revolutionary base areas, deploying as many as 1,800,000 troops. By such a treacherous action they hoped to smash the Red Army within a short time. But they were faced with fierce resistance on all fronts. The fighting spread over eleven provinces. Within one month, 110,000 Chiang troops were put out of action. The revolutionary fire was ablaze over the whole Chinese mainland. Chiang was forced to resort to delaying tactics with a view to making further preparations for war. He signed a cease-fire agreement on January 10, 1946 and started the Political Consultative Conference.

So, Chiang Kai-shek was meeting with many difficulties. Under those circumstances, he would probably have to withdraw a large part of his army in northern Indochina so as to consolidate his rear bases.

Early in January 1946, Leclerc sent a negotiator to Chungking. He was General Salan, who had been appointed Commander of the French forces in

northern Indochina in replacement of Alessandri. Salan obtained some initial results: Chungking allowed the French troops detained in China to return to Lai Chau.

Towards mid-January, at a United Nations session, the French Government's delegate Moutet met Chiang's representative and suggested concrete negotiating terms. Chiang Kai-shek expressed approval when he got the report. Paris sent at once a new ambassador, Merrier, to Chungking. Merrier was instructed by the French government to conclude an agreement within the shortest possible time. But Chungking wanted to let the negotiations drag on with a view to gaining more advantages in the final bargain.

The negotiations with Chiang were unanimously approved by all the colonialists. But many of them openly opposed any negotiations with us. De Gaulle still wanted to maintain the French empire nearly as it had been. He would not listen to the advice of the so-called "liberals". D'Argenlieu, the High Commissioner, was a very conservative colonialist naval officer, loyal to De Gaulle's ideas and policies. He wanted to preserve all the French prerogatives and privileges. The French colonialists with interests in Indochina, especially the former administrators, were angry to hear about negotiating with the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. For them, the only question was how to restore the old colonial regime as it had existed before March 9, 1945. They regarded negotiations with us as a shameful surrender.

On January 20, 1946, there was a change in the political situation in France. De Gaulle resigned. Felix Gouin, a member of the Socialist Party, took office. Leclerc's plan for negotiations with the Vietnamese Government was considered appropriate by Paris. D'Argenlieu deemed it necessary to return to France to defend his position. On February 13, he left Saigon. While in temporary command in place of d'Argenlieu, Leclerc, instructed the French delegation in Chungking to try to reach an early agreement with Chiang; on the other hand, he urged Sainteny to step up the negotiations with our Government.

The negotiating position of the French Government as put forward by the French mission in Hanoi this time was somewhat different from the previous one. However, the French did not accept as yet our basic claims:

independence and territorial integrity. Uncle Ho's consistent, calm but very firm attitude made a strong impression on the French negotiators.

In Chungking, the bargain between the French and Chiang was finally struck. The French agreed to return to Chiang the concessions in Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow, Canton, the leased land of Kwanchowwan, and to sell him the Yunnan railway. In disregard of our sovereignty, they agreed with Chiang that Haiphong would become a free port, and Chinese goods could be carried in transit through northern Viet Nam duty-free. In exchange, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to let French troops replace his own in northern Indochina, and the operation was to be completed between March 1 and March 15 – by March 31, 1946 at the latest.

That was the content of the Sino-French Agreement signed on February 28, 1946. After the signing, Salan hurriedly returned to Hanoi and prepared for the comeback of the French to North Viet Nam. Crepin remained in Chungking to discuss the procedure for the troop replacement.

On March 1, Leclerc got news from Chungking that everything had been settled.

The French fleet had been waiting to sail for several days.

According to French documents available to us later, Leclerc immediately put his paratroops on the alert and ordered his fleet to weigh anchor.

XXIV

Six months before, Chungking had sent its large armies into northern Viet Nam. The political and moral strength of our people, together with the Party's and President Ho's line and tactics, had frustrated the enemy's scheme of aggression in its initial stage. They still remained a danger. But the revolutionary power had been continually strengthened. By reaching a compromise with Chiang, we had in a way, turned his armies into a temporary fence to prevent the French from returning to the North.

While preparing against a widening of the war by the French, Uncle Ho and the Party Central Committee had decided to mobilize the strength of the

whole nation to assist our southern compatriots in the first difficult moments of the resistance. Our people had strictly abided by the Party's declaration at the Tan Trao national conference: "Only our own strength can determine victory." To win important victories on the fighting front was the most active way to defend revolutionary power.

Meanwhile, the enemy was launching a series of attacks on various fronts. Militarily, he intensified "pacification" campaigns in Nam Bo, and occupied more provinces in southern Trung Bo, so as to gain some advantageous positions, while preparing for a return to the North. Diplomatically, he tried to strike a bargain with Chiang in an attempt to present our people with a *fait accompli*. While conducting talks with us, he continually spread rumours about a Sino-French treaty so as to shake our morale. The Nationalist Party reactionaries, to further their dark designs, concurred with the French in this psychological warfare.

The situation began to change.

Before, we had tried to turn to account the contradictions between the French and Chiang in order to concentrate our efforts on fighting the French. Now those two enemies had come to a temporary arrangement. They were joining hands in a new scheme against us.

The revolution was faced with a difficult and urgent situation.

Right after the Sino-French treaty was made public, the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee understood that it was not a mere bargain between Chiang and the French. It was in fact a compromise between the Americans, the British and Chiang on the one hand and the French on the other on the Indochinese question. They had temporarily set aside their contradictions with each other in order to save their common interests which were being jeopardized by the new revolutionary tides.

The Chiang clique would bring pressure to bear on our people to accept the provisions they had concluded with the French. Before withdrawing their troops, they would seek a change in the composition of our Government, trying to introduce into it the reactionaries in their pay. On the other hand,

the Chiang generals here would try to obstruct the negotiations between us and the French so that they could stay on and line their pockets.

Most dangerous at the moment were the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance groups. They pretended to be the most ardent revolutionaries. They sought to inflame the masses with such slogans as "No negotiations with anyone!", "Victory or Death," etc. They wanted to wreck the negotiations between us and the French. Their design was to force us to oppose the Sino-French treaty. That would be the pretext for a collusion between the French and Chiang to destroy the revolution. They would slander us, saying that we opposed the Allied powers and peace. While we prevented the French from coming into the North, the reactionaries would swiftly set up a puppet government against us, and would change masters according to the circumstances. The Chiang troops would avail themselves of this opportunity to stay on in Indochina.

The situation was evolving rapidly.

But our Party and President Ho had predicted such developments. As early as the end of November 1945, in its directive about *Resistance and National Reconstruction*, the Party Central Committee held that the imperialists would compromise with each other to let the French come back. In fact, this had been forecast even earlier, at the Party national conference at Tan Trao, before the August Revolution.

To Uncle Ho and the Party Central Committee the situation had developed as foreseen. During the short period that had passed, our Party had been actively preparing against such circumstances. Willy-nilly, the French imperialists were facing a new reality: the whole Vietnamese nation had risen up in unity for a life-or-death fight against the aggressors. The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam had a government strong enough to mobilize and organize the whole people for resistance and having full authority, prestige and ability to decide all questions relative to the sovereignty, future and destiny of the nation.

The French colonialists could not ignore this reality, even when their arrangement with Chiang had been achieved. An obvious sign of this was the French mission's repeated requests to see our authorities.

The question of the moment was whether to *fight* or to *make peace* with the French.

The answer was given by Uncle Ho and the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee: "We can say right away that if the French maintain their idea of an autonomous Indochina along the lines of their statement of March 24, 1945, we will fight and we will certainly be able to fight a long guerilla war; but if the French recognize a sovereign Indochina then we can make peace so as to defeat the schemes of the Chiang clique, the Vietnamese reactionaries and the French fascist diehards who intended to force us into isolation and compel us to fight against many enemies at the same time..."

Our position in the negotiations was to achieve Independence, and possibly enter into an *alliance* with the French. The French must recognize our right to self-determination and national unity. We could agree to let the French introduce a number of troops into the North to take over duties from the withdrawing Chiang army. But French troops would be allowed to remain only a definite time.

By making peace with the French, "we shall gain some respite to prepare for a new fight, in coordination with that of the French people, to advance towards complete independence."

An important point was stressed by the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee.

"The *essential thing* was that while conducting negotiations with the French, we not only *should not stop, even for a minute making preparations and standing ready to fight any time and anywhere, but should even step up our preparations*, and certainly should not let the negotiations with the French blunt our nation's will to fight".¹

¹ Party Bureau's directive on "The situation and our policies", March 3, 1946.

Acting upon those directives of the Party Central Committee, our army and people in the South unrelentingly intensified their resistance on all front

during the whole process of negotiations. Our compatriots in the whole country were actively preparing, morally and organizationally, for a long resistance war, even if the worst should happen i.e. if the French and the Chiang clique should enter into collusion and seek to destroy the revolution.

XXV

The first National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was convened for March 2. It met one day earlier than scheduled.

The situation was very urgent. The organizing committee had prepared a second meeting place in Dinh Bang village, Bac Ninh province. At the last minute, the Party Standing Bureau decided that the Assembly should meet in Hanoi. Uncle Ho had told the organizers to do everything well and briefly, so that the agenda could be finished and the session ended after one sitting.

The previous night, Uncle Ho sat up very late and smoked heavily. In the morning, he went on smoking in the car. His face was quiet and calm. But his eyes, very bright, showed that he was thinking hard. Since he had returned to Hanoi, people had often talked about his eyes, which showed like two like two bright spots in his photos. Uncle Ho had been mobilizing all his energies and genius to offer the country a decisive solution at a turning point of history. One day, when he was in jail, he had written these verses;

Look far ahead and ponder deeply

Be resolute: attack and attack incessantly

A wrong move and even your two chariots are useless

Come the right juncture, a pawn can bring you success.¹

¹ "Learning to play chess", *Prison Diary*.

The boat of the Fatherland was rushing towards the perilous rapids. The helmsman should be careful not to commit the slightest mistake.

The Municipal Theatre was splendidly decorated with national flags. The flag, which had appeared for the first time during the Nam Ky insurrection in 1940, and had been soaked with the blood of so many revolutionary fighters, had become a sacred emblem of the undaunted spirit of struggle of the whole nation. During the past few days, in consultative meetings, the reactionaries had continued to insist that the national flag and the national anthem be changed. But we had rejected their demands.

The National Assembly delegated two representatives, one being the oldest of its members, Mr. Ngo Tu Ha and the other the youngest, Comrade Nguyen Dinh Thi, to wait for Uncle Ho in front of the Theatre.

The men of the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance and the Viet Nam Nationalist Party were waiting in the anteroom. They were a crowd of well-dressed people, sitting or standing in disorder, wearing haggard looks and looking like strayed goats. They had to wait for the Assembly's consent before being allowed to enter the meeting hall. They were the people who had been fostering disorder everywhere till the day before. They had tried to scrape together enough men to fill the seventy seats we intended to ask the National Assembly to reserve for them.

Uncle Ho greeted everybody with a smile and a nod, then entered the hall, followed by members of the Provisional Coalition Government. Nguyen Hai Than was absent on the pretext of illness. Perhaps he was rather apprehensive that debates might take place in which he would have to use the mother tongue.

That historic session of the Assembly was held in the absence of deputies from Nam Bo who could not come in time because of the fighting.

Nearly three hundred deputies together with many guests and pressmen, national and foreign, greeted Uncle Ho with a long standing ovation. All eyes were turned towards the high-foreheaded old man in the khaki suit. Many had never met Uncle Ho but they recognized him at once. The applause and cheers only stopped when the National Defence Guard band in white uniforms began to play the anthem.

Uncle Ho stepped toward the microphone. He stood in silence for a while, gazing affectionately round at the deputies representing various strata of the people from the lowlands to the mountain areas. He said in a voice tinged with emotion:

"This National Assembly is the first in the history of Viet Nam. It is the result of the general elections held on January 6, 1946, which are themselves the result of the struggle and sacrifices of our forefathers. It is the result of the union of the whole people irrespective of age or sex, embracing all religions and nationalities on the territory of Viet Nam, closely united into one bloc, fearing neither sacrifices nor dangers in the struggle for national independence..."

He conveyed the Government's request to the Assembly for the addition of seventy seats reserved for members of the Viet Nam Nationalist Party and the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance. The proposal was accepted.

The Nationalist Party and Revolutionary Alliance men came in and took their seats among the vacant ones. It had been suggested in the preparatory committee that the seats should be divided into right and left, and those seventy men should be seated on the right. But Uncle Ho said that this was not necessary.

After all the newcomers were seated, Uncle Ho went on:

"First I should like, on behalf of the Provisional Government, to thank the National Assembly for having accepted the Government's request. Secondly, I wish, on behalf of the Government, to welcome the deputies from all parts of the country. In this National Assembly, all the political parties are represented; there are also many non-party deputies, women and minority peoples are represented. Therefore the deputies to this Assembly do not represent any single party but the whole Vietnamese nation."

President Ho then reported the Government's work to the Assembly. He said:

"As soon as we seized power and set up a Government, we met with many difficulties: the South was faced with aggression, the North with famine.

However, thanks to the wholehearted support of the whole people and the determination of the Government, we have done a few things:

"The first was to step up the resistance;

"The second was to reduce famine by increasing the production of food;

"The third was to hold the general elections;

"The fourth is: as the result of those elections, we have this National Assembly..."

He had summed up in a few sentences all the great achievements of the Government during the past six eventful months. He proceeded to talk about the important tasks ahead:

"The most important thing at present is the resistance. Since September last year, the South has been subjected to aggression. The Government has called on the people to be prepared for a long resistance war and has sent reinforcements to the invaded areas. From now on, the Assembly and the Government will be faced with heavy burdens and will have to overcome many difficulties but I am sure the whole nation will be of one mind that it will work together on the basis of solidarity, and that in this way, however great the difficulties may be, the resistance will be victorious and national reconstruction will be successful. Now the Provisional Government will hand over to the National Assembly the right to establish a new Government: A Government of Resistance and National Reconstruction."

The President concluded his concise and extremely simple report amidst bursts of applause.

Since Uncle Ho came to Hanoi, there had never been so large a gathering as now, with the participation of various delegates – including those from the reactionary parties – and foreign guests. Even at this meeting, he stuck to his usual manner and speech. This style, so personal to him created a special atmosphere in the Assembly, an atmosphere of solidarity and warmth, like being among the members of one family. This was very difficult to bring about among a large number of delegates coming from all

over the country and meeting for the first time, the occasion being made even more complicated by the presence of the reactionaries. This atmosphere was to prevail in all subsequent National Assembly sessions and all other meetings when Uncle Ho was present.

The Assembly accepted the resignation of the Provisional Coalition Government and unanimously elected Uncle Ho President of the Coalition Government of Resistance and Nguyen Hai Than Vice-President.

The Assembly burst into applause when the acting Chairman of the Assembly moved that President Ho be asked to form the new Government. President Ho walked across the hall amidst acclamations.

The sitting adjourned for a while, then resumed. President Ho appeared in company with members of the new Government. He briskly walked to the microphone and said:

"Now I will report on the formation of the Coalition Government of Resistance. As the Assembly knows, this Government is composed of representatives of various parties and non-party people who have discussed the matter and come to an agreement beforehand, hence its quick formation..."

He announced the list of members of the Government. The ministries of the Interior and Defence were entrusted to neutral personalities. Two ministries reserved for southerners were temporarily held by representatives of the political parties, since the former had not been able to arrive in time. The Viet Minh Front and the Democratic Party held four portfolios: Finance, Education, Justice and Communication. The Viet Nam Nationalist Party and the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance held four others: Foreign Affairs, National Economy, Social Affairs and Agriculture.

Uncle Ho went on:

"The Vice-President nominated by the Assembly is Mr. Nguyen Hai Than. And the President is myself."

The applause again burst out. The Government list was approved by the National Assembly.

Then Uncle Ho reported on the formation of the National Resistance Committee in charge of conducting the resistance war against foreign aggression, and the establishment of the National Advisory Group headed by Vinh Thuy.

One after the other, the Government, the Resistance Committee and the Advisory Group formally assumed office.

The Assembly then proceeded to discuss the powers of the National Assembly Standing Committee. A debate started between deputies holding different opinions. It was hard to settle those problems while there was no Constitution yet.

Uncle Ho listened attentively. Every now and again he would raise his hand and ask for the floor. At times, a deputy would express a different view. Uncle Ho would then listen attentively and when necessary, give further explanations in a calm voice. It was a rule that in conducting work he always created a relaxed atmosphere and encouraged others boldly to express their own views.

The French fleet was sailing on the East Sea with their guns pointed to the North.

Many deputies did not understand the value of every minute, every second in such a situation. Several times, Uncle reminded the chairman that the points debated should be concluded and put to vote as early as possible.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, the Assembly was able to conclude the sitting. Within four hours, it had approved the formation of the new Government, the establishment of the Resistance Committee and the Advisory Group, determined the powers of the National Assembly Standing Committee and set up the Committee for Drafting the Constitution.

The deputies were to return immediately to their regions to continue preparations for the resistance. It was time to part. Uncle Ho went to the

microphone, and concluded the session with a few words:

"Now the Assembly will temporarily adjourn so that all of us can return to work in our respective regions bringing along an atmosphere of solidarity, of resistance, of determination, of certain success. Before we separate, I wish to thank all the deputies, on behalf of the Government. Let us pledge that this National Assembly is an Assembly for the resistance, and the Government nominated is likewise one for the resistance. I hope the next National Assembly will be one of victory, and the next Government will likewise be one of victory."

In those difficult moments, he wanted to instil into everyone a spirit of solidarity and determination to fight. He also wanted to inspire everyone with optimism and confidence in victory and in the future.

XXVI

By early March, the negotiations between us and the French had not led to any agreement.

The French colonialists were still stubbornly turning down our fundamental demands. The colonialists still blindly believed that they had reconquered most of Nam Bo as a result of the military operations undertaken during the past few months. On the other hand, they also believed that, with the Sino-French treaty, they had acquired a legal basis and favourable conditions for a return to the North.

General Leclerc and the French negotiators in Hanoi were conscious of the real situation to some extent, and of the peril of a long war if the negotiations failed. But they were still negotiating along the line set by instructions from the French Government in Paris, where the die-hard tendencies of old-style colonialism were still prevailing.

On our side, if the nation-wide resistance should now break out, we would meet with great difficulties, having to face many enemies at one time. But we would not compromise on questions of principle. In a few days, if an agreement was not reached before the French landed at Haiphong port, even if they should do so with the permission of the Chiang authorities, our army

and people would resolutely fight them, the situation would become very complicated.

After the official announcement of the Sino-French treaty, pressmen came to interview President Ho. In reply to their questions, he said:

"This treaty can be divided into two parts. One provides for the French giving up their privileges in China. The other concerns our country. The first part not only satisfies the Chinese people but is also welcomed by the Vietnamese people. As for the latter part, it is not the moment to comment yet." Then he went on to say, "Anyway, almost all the Chinese people have at all times sympathized with our national movement."

When asked about the resistance war, President Ho said briefly, "Our greatest concern is to get ready, keep calm and maintain our morale".

A series of articles in the press openly protested against the Sino-French treaty.

The *Cuu Quoc* (National Salvation) wrote: "No one can bargain away Viet Nam's independence." On the economic advantages that the French promised to offer the Chiang clique in North Viet Nam, another article read: "Only the Vietnamese Government is entitled to decide on those interests". We openly warned the enemy that "between the signing of this treaty and its implementation stand the fighting Vietnamese people".

All the armed forces, especially in places where the Chiang troops were stationed or where a French invasion was likely, were ordered to be ready for combat and to maintain the utmost vigilance. The most important offices were all prepared for any emergency.

In Hanoi, large numbers of old people and children had been evacuated. Self-defence fighters had put explosive charges in the trees lining the streets and made preparations to fell lamp-posts and overturn tramcars when ordered. To do so they had also reconnoitered important positions of the Chiang troops in Hanoi. Self-defence units had worked out operations plans.

In the meantime, a hitch developed between the French and Chiang in Chungking.

On the evening of March 1, Colonel Crepin arrived at the Kuomintang Army General Headquarters to sign the protocol on troops replacement. But the Kuomintang commanders avoided seeing him. An aide informed the French delegation that the Chiang army could only accept the troop replacement if an order to this effect came from General MacArthur.

The French negotiators in Chungking had managed to sign the Sino-French treaty with the concurrence of Chiang Kai-shek and his Foreign Ministry. But the troop replacement was to be carried out by Chiang's General Staff. Ha Ung Kham (Ha Yin Chia) and the generals here had powers of their own. They were not foolish enough to hasten the withdrawal of their troops from Northern Indochina. Lu Han, called back for consultations, was present in Chungking. It was said that they wanted to stay on until the opium crop was brought in.

The French fleet was sailing north. On the 2nd, Crepin hurriedly dispatched a man to report the new situation to Salan, who immediately tried to reach an arrangement with the Chiang authorities in Hanoi.

Chu Phuc Thanh, Lu Han's deputy, said he had never received any order to let French come to the North for the purpose of replacement. If the French landed in Haiphong, he would order his troops to open fire. Besides, he made up another excuse: as the French had not reached an agreement with the Vietnamese Government, he could not let the French come in for such conditions, he said, Chinese nationals in the North would be subjected to reprisals(!) from the Vietnamese after the Chiang troops had withdrawn.

The discussions between the Chiang militarists and the French brasshats lasted through the night of March 4 without yielding any results.

On the 5th, the French fleet commanded by Leclerc arrived in the Bac Bo (Tonkin) Gulf.

Leclerc had Lt-Col Lecomte write to Sainteny a letter with a note of alarm:

"...Seeing that the situation is grave and the conflict that might arise may reach major proportions, I request you do everything in your power to reach an agreement within the shortest time possible..."

The French brasshats again met with Chu Phuc Thanh and the Chiang army commanders in Hanoi. Discussions and bargaining continued between the two sides. If they failed to reach an agreement, there would certainly be clashes the next day, when the French fleet arrived in Haiphong.

On the same day, March 5, the newly-established National Resistance Committee issued an appeal:

"Fellow-countrymen, rise up to fight the aggressors!

"...A grave hour has struck for the Fatherland.

"...The National Resistance Committee composed of representatives of all parties, is responsible for unifying the armed forces, and leading the army and people in the fight against the enemy for the defence of the Fatherland.

"Fellow-countrymen, let's support it wholeheartedly, be ready to obey its orders, so as to bring victory to our people and army and to win independence for our Fatherland".

XXVII

That very evening, the Chiang authorities asked to meet President Ho.

They informed us that the French fleet had come into the Tonkin Gulf. For the first time, they asked us why we and the French had not reached an agreement. They advised us not to be adamant. They said that if we signed an agreement to let the French bring in their troops to take over their duties they would support it.

As the Chiang men left, the French negotiators arrived. They asked to continue discussions of the remaining points still outstanding. The French mission expressed the desire to reach an agreement with our Government on that very evening so that a preliminary accord could be signed.

It was obvious that something new had happened between Chiang and the French.

Since the signing of the Sino-French treaty, relations between Chiang and the French in Hanoi had been tense at times. The Chiang authorities put their troops on the alert. They told us that they would not withdraw their troops. Some of their division commanders declared that they would fight if the French landed in the North. On the other hand, they ordered their agents to try and sabotage the talks between us and the French by every means. Meanwhile, the French kept close contact with the Chiang army command in Hanoi.

With his penetrating insight, President Ho realized that the tensions between them were only temporary. Their leaders had concluded their deal in Chungking. In any case, there could be no big clashes between the French and the Chiang clique. Sooner or later, they would come to an arrangement. Nevertheless, so long as there remained some contradictions, however unimportant, between them, we should try to turn them to account.

In fact, the Chiang men had altered their language. What drew the attention of Uncle Ho was that both the Chiang men and the French seemed to be in a hurry to get a settlement.

The exchange of views between us and the French that evening again evolved around two great questions: the independence and territorial integrity of Viet Nam.

The word *independence* was a frightening thing for the French authorities. The colonialists feared that it would provoke a chain reaction and give rise to movements for independence in all their colonies. The French Government only agreed to recognize us as an "autonomous" country. The French wanted to keep us within a certain framework of colonialism.

On the question of unifying the three *ky*, the French colonialists maintained a very reactionary position. De Gaulle's declaration had divided Viet Nam into three states: Bac Ky (Tonkin), Trung Ky (Annam) and Nam Ky (Cochinchina). For the time being, they were trying to restore the colonial

rule in Nam Bo and seeking to sever Nam Bo from Viet Nam by every means.

For us, *independence* and *unity* constituted the whole nation's earnest aspiration and deepest feeling. We could not agree to "autonomy", for this would mean to renounce part of the freedom we had won back at the cost of blood, to accept the return to some degree of servitude, Nam Bo, a part of Viet Nam's own flesh and blood – could not be cut from her by any enemy. Though we were in a perilous situation, we could not make concessions about those basic aims of our struggle.

Our consistent position was to reach an overall solution: the French must recognize the independence and territorial integrity of Viet Nam. This principled position was affirmed once again by Uncle Ho that night.

During the negotiations, the French had on many occasions tried to evade the issue of Nam Bo. The French government only recognized Viet Nam as a State having its own government, parliament, army and finances. In the end, concerning the question of unifying the three *ky*, the French undertook to recognize the eventual results of a referendum.

But the French still refused to recognize our independence. This again led to a deadlock that evening.

The French negotiators left at a late hour in the night. Before taking leave, they asked President Ho to give further consideration to their proposals. They seemed to be very anxious.

XXVIII

March 6, 1946

Early in the morning, the French fleet made its way from the Tonkin Gulf into Haiphong harbour. At 8.30, their first landing craft appeared on the Cua Cam river. The Chiang troops stationed along the river opened fire. Fifteen minutes later, the French fired back. The Chiang ammunition depot in the harbour blazed up. Several French ships were hit. Maybe French troops were killed or wounded. The gun battle lasted till nearly 11 a.m.

The Chiang militarists and their agents had wanted to turn to account the conflict between us and the French. But, by an irony of circumstances, they were the first to clash with the French. The Viet Nam Nationalist Party and the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance had made preparations for great disruptive activities should there be an arrangement between us and the French. But this arrangement was now needed by their own masters. On the same morning, the Chiang men again suggested that we should come to an early agreement with the French in order to avoid a possible large-scale war.

There was still a great deadlock: We resolutely rejected the "autonomy" proposed by the French; but *independence* was something the French government could not yet recognize.

President Ho found it was time to come to a decision. After consulting the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee, he put forward a solution: "France recognizes Viet Nam as a *free state*..."

The French mission agreed.

The French negotiators later recalled that those moments of waiting had been a time of extreme tension for them.

Thus, in circumstances of utmost confusion and complication, the negotiations between us and the French led to a preliminary agreement. That was the first international agreement signed by the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam with a foreign power.

The signing ceremony was held at 4 p.m. at 38, Ly Thai To Street.

The representatives of France, commanders of the Chiang Army in northern Indochina, representatives of the American mission, and the British consul arrived one after another at a villa separated from Bac Bo Palace by a park.

The room was small and simply furnished; no flags were shown.

Hosts and guests stood around a large table.

Present were men who belonged to all the "big powers" of the capitalist world after the Second World War. A slender old man with a black beard, in a faded khaki suit and indigo cloth shoes, stood in great contrast to the crowd of big, fat and well-dressed men, most of whom were military men. That was a miniature picture of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam encircled by imperialism.

Comrade Hoang Minh Giam successively read aloud the Preliminary Agreement and the annex, the contents of which could be summarized as follows:

— France recognizes the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam as a free State, having its own government, parliament, army and finances, within the Indochinese Federation and the French Union.

— The French Government undertakes to recognize the decisions of the referendum on the reunification of the three *ky*.

— Viet Nam agrees to let 15,000 French troops come into North Viet Nam to replace the Chinese troops in their duties. Those French troops must be withdrawn completely after a specified time.

— Both sides will observe a ceasefire in order to open official negotiations. While the negotiations are going on, the troops of both sides will remain in place.

When the reading was over, all eyes turned toward President Ho. He glanced over the articles of the agreement. As President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, he signed first.

Then, he handed over the agreement to Vu Hong Khanh who was standing near by. Under pressure of his Chiang masters, Vu Hong Khanh had to swallow his bitterness and sign the document, as special representative of the Council of Government.

Sainteny, who was empowered to represent the government of the French Republic, signed last.

Sixty-three years before, with some artillery pieces and a few thousand troops of aggression, a certain Harmand had handed to the Nguyen Court a 27-point draft peace treaty, telling the latter to take it or leave it but not propose any changes. The Nguyen King and mandarins had to bow their heads and accept the shameful 1883 peace treaty. One year after, the Hue Court again signed the Patenôtre peace treaty. That was the sell-out treaty which placed our country fully under the domination of French colonialism. Since then, all the national rights of independence and freedom had been lost, including that of conducting foreign affairs.

The August Revolution had brought about wonderful changes. The whole Vietnamese people had risen up from misery, slavery and suffering. The enslaved Vietnamese had become free Vietnamese. The newborn Democratic Republic of Viet Nam stood firm in the midst of raging tempests.

That day, the enemy, who had large armies supported by aircraft, warships and armoured cars, had to conduct negotiations with us on an equal footing. The French government was forced to accept a situation which they did not want in their heart of hearts.

Indeed, the first to recognize the free Viet Nam were those who had deprived her of all freedom sixty-three years before.

We agreed to let 15,000 French troops into North Viet Nam for a specified time in order to drive out of the country the 180,000 Chiang troops who would otherwise stay on indefinitely as they had declared.

President Ho had, on behalf of our people, expressed to the world's people our sincere desire for peace, a genuine peace in independence and freedom. And if peace could not yet be secured because of the greediness and blindness of imperialism, those were moments gained to prepare for a protracted resistance war which, we believed, would end in victory.

The signing ceremony was over.

The French representative raised his glass in a toast to President Ho and expressed his joy at having driven away the spectre of an armed conflict. In

a calm but firm voice, President Ho said: "We are not yet satisfied because we have not yet won complete independence, but we will achieve it". The enemy had yielded on a basic point. But for us, that was only an initial success. Complete success was still far ahead. President Ho had warned the opposite side that our fight would continue till final victory.

Part Two

"If we endure through this cold winter, we shall see spring."

From President Ho's notes of 5 November 1946: "Urgent Work at Present."

I

After the signing of the Preliminary Agreement, Uncle Ho returned to Bac Bo Palace. Quite a number of national and foreign pressmen were present as they had learnt of the news. As Uncle Ho came in, they crowded around him. President Ho informed them that we had signed a Preliminary Agreement with France. Speaking slowly, he told them briefly the main articles of the Agreement. He stressed that this was only a first arrangement: official negotiations between the Vietnamese Government and the French Government would soon be opened in Hanoi, Saigon or Paris. He told the pressmen that American, British and Chinese representatives had been present at the signing.

The Revolution had entered a new stage. The continued struggle would certainly be no less arduous and no less complex. A series of new tasks had to be tackled swiftly at the same time.

The Party Bureau had further discussions on how the Agreement should be explained to Party members and the people. It was necessary to make the whole Party and the whole nation understand our correct line, and the success we had achieved for the revolution, while realizing that the situation was still extremely complex, that we had to heighten vigilance and be ready to react if the French betrayed us. On the same afternoon, Uncle discussed the sending of men to various places to ensure the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Comrade Hoang Quoc Viet was to head a mission to the South as soon as transport facilities were available. The next morning, Comrade Hoang Minh Giam would fly to Da Nang. I was asked to go to Haiphong the same evening, as Leclerc had asked to meet a representative of our government. In Uncle Ho's opinion, I should attend the mass rally held in Haiphong to explain the Agreement, for this port city was where the French were allowed to land first in the North.

Hanoi was less busy than on other days, because there had been the evacuation order. That night, voices speaking through megaphones resounded over quiet streets. Propaganda teams were announcing to the people that important news was to be carried in the *Cuu Quoc* to appear in

the next morning. Some time after midnight, knocks on the door roused members of the *Cuu Quoc* staff: some self-defence fighters on patrol wanted to know what was the important news that was to be announced.

Our people in general had not been much aware of the negotiations between us and the French. Over the past few days, meetings had been held throughout the country, letters and telegrams had been pouring into the capital welcoming the formation of the Resistance Coalition Government headed by President Ho. All over the country the prevailing mood was a desire to fight. Everyone was expressing his determination and readiness to fight to the bitter end to defend the country.

At dawn on the 7th, many people were standing in the street corners waiting for the papers. The news about the Preliminary Agreement signed between our Government and the French Government was carried in the *Cuu Quoc* with big headlines. The French Government recognized the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam as a free state. Both sides would observe a ceasefire. A contingent of 10,000 men of the Vietnamese Army would join the 15,000 French troops coming to replace the 180,000-men Chiang army which would be withdrawn.

In the same issue of the paper, there was also an appeal of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on the occasion of the formation of the Resistance Coalition Government. The Standing Committee called on people to step up preparations, to further strengthen solidarity and to remain calm, avoiding all provocations and strictly obeying the Government's orders. In the new situation the appeal still retained its value.

The French colonialists' aggression in the South had roused the people to great indignation. Everyone was eager to fight the aggressors. The news that 15,000 French troops would come to the North came rather as a surprise to our compatriots. And in spite of the signature of Vu Hong Khanh at its foot, the Agreement was still opposed by the Nationalist Party. However, there was no sign of great disturbances among the people. Our countrymen had seen that the main representative of our people to sign the Agreement was Uncle Ho. 'Uncle Ho must have considered everything carefully,' – that was their first thought.

In the morning, Sainteny in his capacity as representative of the French government called on President Ho at Bac Bo Palace. That was the first official visit reflecting the new relationship between Viet Nam and France.

A large mass rally was convened for 4 p.m.

Back from Haiphong, I arrived at the meeting place in front of the City Theatre where I saw crowds thronging along all the approaches to the square. Policemen and self-defence fighters in charge of order had a hard time opening a way for the Government motorcade. Unlike other occasions, the people coming to the rally wore anxious looks on their faces. In fact few of them could fully realize the complex and perilous situation confronting the nation at that moment. Although they placed absolute confidence in their leader, they still worried about many things. Why did the French recognize us only as a free state? What was that Indochinese Federation? Would the Chiang army really withdraw? They had been behaving as if they were to stay on this land indefinitely. All those worries were legitimate and quite understandable.

The sea of people was quiet. News about clashes in Haiphong the previous morning had reached Hanoi. Some people knew that at that moment the French fleet had cast anchor in the Cua Cam river. It was also reported that Lu Han had left Chungking and was flying to Viet Nam. Everyone turned his eyes towards the balcony of the Theatre, waiting for the appearance of the presidium of the rally. Suddenly there was some disorder on the left side of the square. A saboteur had thrown a hand grenade. Being too nervous, he had forgotten to pull the safety pin. He was caught on the spot. He disclosed that the reactionaries had sent in four groups of saboteurs to disrupt the rally. After one of them was caught in the act, the others sneaked away hurriedly.

President Ho and the Bureau had decided to explain clearly to the people why we had signed the March 6 Preliminary Agreement. The representative of the Government explained to the people gathered there both the favourable and the difficult conditions confronting us against the very complex international background at that time. Owing to the heroic struggle of our people, the colonialists had had to give up their previous intention of regarding Viet Nam as an autonomous State only. The French

government had to recognize our country as a free State. There is much difference between a 'free' and an 'autonomous' State. The free Democratic Republic of Viet Nam had its own Government, National Assembly, finances and army. It could be said that we had won the fundamental rights in internal affairs. Once we had won freedom, we would advance towards independence, complete independence. The French wanted to seize Nam Bo and make it a *fait accompli*. Our Government had laid bare this scheme and condemned it resolutely. Finally the French had to agree to hold a referendum on the unification of the three *ky* and undertook to accept its results. We had firm confidence in our people, in those who were taking arms in the heroic fight against the aggressors. The struggle was to continue. But Nam Bo would surely come back to the motherland. The entry of French troops into the North in replacement of the Chiang army had been agreed upon by the Allied powers. We did not want to have any foreign armies on our land. But when the over ten thousand French troops came in, the nearly two hundred thousand Chiang troops would withdraw. And eventually the French themselves would have to withdraw from our country. We had negotiated with the French so as to create new, favourable conditions for our struggle which would be a long one. We would use every means to consolidate and develop our political position, our military forces and economic strength in the advance toward complete independence and unity for our country.

Long, thunderous applause broke out, expressing the people's approval of the signing of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement. Then it was Vu Hong Khanh's turn to take the floor. He slowly stepped toward the microphone. Facing the people, he was obliged to call on the population to support the Government's diplomatic activities. His voice was inarticulate and lifeless. The audience responded with a few perfunctory hand clappings.

Suddenly rousing cheers thundered across the square, President Ho, calm-faced, with his familiar high forehead and beard, had just appeared on the balcony of the Theatre. His presence had not been announced beforehand. The applause and cheers lasted a long time. He had to quieten down the crowds by waving his hands repeatedly.

Uncle Ho said only a few concise words.

"Our country had been declared independent since August 1945. But so far none of the powers had recognized our independence. The negotiations between us and France would open the way to the international recognition of our country. It would lead us to an ever firmer position in the international arena. It was a great political success. We had become a free State in the world. According to the Agreement, the French troops were to be gradually and completely withdrawn from Viet Nam. The negotiations with the French testified to our political wisdom. Our compatriots should remain calm, united and disciplined. We had always regarded the Chinese as brothers. We had many friends and first of all, we had a government supported by the whole people. However, we must be vigilant and ready..."

He stopped for a while then went on:

"I, Ho Chi Minh, have fought with my compatriots all my life for the independence of my Fatherland. I would rather die than betray my country."

The people listened absorbedly to each of his words. Many eyes were wet with tears. The President had taken an oath before the nation. The struggle, extremely complex and of great importance for the nation's destiny, was still unfolding. The leaders could not publicly reveal all the facts and policies. Under such circumstances, the main thing was to maintain firm confidence.

Our people expressed absolute confidence in President Ho. The square resounded with repeated slogans 'Let's struggle resolutely for complete independence and unity', 'Let's resolutely obey all orders of the Government and President Ho', 'Long live President Ho!'

II

I had arrived in Haiphong on the night of the 6th.

The port-city was still smelling of gun powder. From the Chiang army's ammunition depot in the harbour, explosions were still to be heard from time to time. In the morning, when the clash started, the people had set up barricades in the streets with furniture from their own houses. In the

suburbs, self-defence units had felled trees and set up barricades. Our car ran along deserted streets. Most houses were quiet behind closed doors and windows. Self-defence fighters in brown uniforms stood guard at street corners. Haiphong was ready for the fight.

We drove to the Viet Minh City Committee. Its secretary was Comrade Le Quang Dao. The comrades there told us that in the afternoon the Nationalist Party men had put out their flags at their headquarters, which was almost opposite the Haiphong Theatre, and clamoured about the 'exploits' of their Chiang masters over the loudspeakers.

In Haiphong, as in Hanoi, our National Defence Guard units had temporarily pulled out to the outskirts since last September to avoid clashes with Chiang troops. Only police and self-defence units remained in the city. The self-defence force was made up mostly of workers and poor labourers grouped in their various quarters. They numbered from a platoon to a company in each city ward. They managed to procure weapons by buying from the Japanese, from Chiang troops or by other means. Some were rather well armed, such as the self-defence unit of ward 7. The workers and youth patriotic organization, etc. had also set up armed self-defence units. There was a 200-man company of the shock self-defence force under the city headquarters. Besides, many people who were not affiliated to any self-defence organizations also procured pistols or hand grenades for themselves.

The Party Bureau's communication on the grave situation had reached Haiphong a few days before. Many old people and children had been evacuated. The City Committee was prepared to evacuate the whole population and apply scorched earth tactics if so ordered. Gun muzzles were ready everywhere, waiting for the enemy. When the clash between the Chiang troops and the French broke out, everyone was quite calm. The self-defence fighters in the harbour had managed to pick up some more weapons while the Chiang ammunition dump was burning.

On the morning of March 7, the French side was not ready for the meeting between our Government's representative and General Leclerc, so they proposed that the meeting be held in the afternoon. But as I was engaged by the mass rally with the Haiphong people and was to return to Hanoi

immediately, as Uncle Ho told me to, we arranged for it to take place the next day. Comrade Phan My stayed behind to prepare for it.

The mass meeting by the Haiphong people was held at the coach station near the Lap River. A fairly high rostrum had been set up. The city was deserted but there were very large crowds at the meeting. They were those who had been assigned the duty of defending the city. The Haiphong population was made up mostly of labouring people. The crowds attending the meeting were rather plainly dressed but they all looked resolute and high-spirited. I explained to them why Uncle Ho and the Government had agreed to start negotiations with the French. According to the Agreement we had just signed, the French troops had arrived here by order of the Allies to replace the Chiang troops who were to go home. The French were also to withdraw from our country after a definite time. We would continue in our struggle till we achieved complete independence and national unification. Our compatriots should be closely united, highly vigilant and should strictly carry out all orders and policies of the Government and President Ho.

The shouts 'Long live President Ho' resounded down to the Cua Cam River where the French warships were moored. Vu Hong Khanh, who had accompanied me on the trip to Haiphong and was present at the mass meeting, was asked to address the people but he declined, giving lack of time as an excuse.

On the same afternoon, Comrade Phan My met with Leclerc. This general haughtily said 'We have started and we have arrived, whether or not you have acquiesced.' He said that the Chiang clique here had agreed to let the French land and he asked the Vietnamese side to do the same. Phan My refused to answer any requests by Leclerc.

On the 8th, I came back to Haiphong again. Some French units had landed according to the agreement with the Chiang troops and had pitched their tents along the river. They had landed tanks and armoured vehicles. Most of their equipment was American-made armoured cars, heavy artillery, uniforms and packs. If the war were to break out, we would be fighting a French expeditionary force equipped with American armaments.

Valluy came ashore to welcome the representative of our Government. He was a middle-aged general, of high stature, with gentle and polished manners.

A small ship took me out to sea to meet Leclerc. The Commander-in-Chief of the French expeditionary force was one of the rare generals who had become famous in France during the past few years. The French press extolled his exploits in leading an armoured division in the landing on the Normandy coast and further operations in Germany. He was the man entrusted by De Gaulle with the task of recapturing former French colonies in Indochina.

Leclerc was waiting on the deck of the *Senegalais* moored in the Cua Cam River. This four-star general had the looks and manners of a professional soldier. He was tall and thin in his field uniform. On his rather bony face, there appeared keen, small eyes and a greying moustache. His smiling features seemed to be easily changed to a face of gloom.

After a handshake and a few words of formal greetings, Leclerc said, in a rather gruff voice, 'I love France, and I want France's honour to be respected everywhere.'

I felt vexed, but restrained myself and replied, 'I am a Communist fighting for the independence of our country. I think that genuine patriots always respect the patriotism of others.'

The atmosphere of the talk gradually relaxed, I spoke of the extremely heroic struggle of our people against the Japanese fascists to liberate themselves from the fetters of slavery, then went on, 'You have fought against the German fascists, so there must be room for us to understand each other.'

Leclerc led me to the reception room of the ship. He introduced me to the officers present. Then the exchange of views continued. Leclerc promised to try to maintain the friendly relations between France and Viet Nam. He frequently stressed his personal role. We discussed with him the implementation of the Preliminary Agreement in the military field. Pending a formal agreement between the two Governments it was necessary to fix

the places and the number of French troops to be stationed there when the French, together with Vietnamese troops, came to replace the Chiang army in its duties.

At this meeting, we and the French Command had agreed to hold joint meetings to reach agreements on the organization and activities of the replacement forces and the question of implementing the ceasefire.

III

'The revolutionary boat is gliding forward through the reefs.' The statement expressed in the directive on 'Situation and Policy' dated March 3 had been proved entirely accurate by what had happened. With the March 6 Agreement, the revolution again came to a turning point. Right after the signing of the Agreement, the Party Bureau met to evaluate the situation and work out new policies.

What causes had led the French to give up the declaration of March 24, 1945 by De Gaulle and sign this Agreement?

First of all it was the strength of our people's unity and struggle. This was the most decisive factor. Our fight against the Japanese in previous years, the great August general uprising and the heroic resistance in the South during the past six months had led the enemy to realize this new force. Confronted with a whole nation rising up in arms to seize power and fight resolutely for the defence of independence and freedom, even colonialist generals like Leclerc had to think twice before embarking on new military adventures. On the other hand, the difficulties facing French imperialism should be taken into account. The French bourgeoisie had been weakened during the years of the Second World War. Internally they had to deal with the mounting movement of the democratic forces. In Indochina, contradictions between the French and the Chiang clique had tended to diminish on the whole, but still caused misgivings to the French. Such a situation had forced the French to seek a new arrangement with us for the time being.

The March 6 Agreement was only an initial success for us. Negotiations were still going on between us and the French. What were the tasks of the whole Party and people at the present time?

France had not recognized the independence of the Indochinese countries. The national liberation revolution in those countries had not been completed. The goal of the Vietnamese revolution in this stage was still the complete liberation of the motherland, national reunification and consolidation of the Democratic Republic. If the country was to be completely liberated, colonialism had to be opposed. Now that the French government had signed the Preliminary agreement, the situation was somewhat different. As regards tactics, we had to determine the concrete enemy at the time so as to spearhead out attacks on him.

Three months earlier, in the directive 'Resistance and National Reconstruction' of November 25, 1945, the Party Central Committee, after giving an analysis of the situation, had pointed out that our main enemy was the French colonial aggressors. In the new situation, the Party Bureau pointed out that that our concrete and immediate enemy at that moment was the French reactionaries. These reactionaries were doing their utmost to destroy the democratic movement in France. They intended to join hands with US and British imperialism to encircle the Soviet Union. They still had plans to re-impose colonialist rule on Indochina. At that moment, they were undermining Viet Nam's unification and opposing our people's struggle for complete independence.

After the French had decided to use force to occupy Nam Bo we put forward the policy of establishing a national united front against the French colonialist aggressors. In the new situation, the Front should spearhead its struggle against the French reactionaries.

A number of new slogans were put forward: 'Association and equality with the new France', 'Let the peoples of Viet Nam and France unite to oppose the French reactionaries.'

In the military field, we had to maintain and strengthen our force to guard against every eventuality. At the same time we should intensify the struggle on other fronts: political, economic and cultural.

Proceeding from the above tactical reorientation, the Bureau forecast possible developments and set forth various tasks.

It was necessary to explain to the people, widely and deeply, that the signing of the Preliminary Agreement was a correct decision and a success for us. It was also necessary to combat both the idea that the signing was the end of all difficulties and the tendency to slow down preparations for the fight.

We had to guard ourselves against any treachery by the French colonialists. They might refuse to carry out their commitments or distort the contents of the Agreement. It might so happen that, after the landing and stationing of French troops in a number of bases, the colonialists would seek pretexts to attack us in an attempt to overthrow the people's power. To defend the fruits of the revolution was a basic question of utmost importance. The Bureau stressed that preparations for a protracted resistance war should be continued. In places where French troops were to be stationed, we should keep calm and set up liaison committees to settle problems involving both sides. We should quickly organize and educate the local people so that they would heighten their vigilance, while stepping up propaganda work among the French troops so that they would understand the just struggle of our people.

Dealing with the Chiang clique at that time also required great adroitness. The March 6 Agreement had placed them before a new conjuncture. They would realize that they could not maintain their interests in Indochina as before. We should oppose their scheme to prolong their occupation of this country and turn Indochina into a territory under international trusteeship.

Reactionaries in the country were plotting new schemes and new tricks. They were trying hard to distort the significance of the Agreement. They sought to provoke incidents to give the French colonialists a pretext to encroach on our position or denounce what they had signed. The Nationalists in the pay of Chiang wanted to stage a counter-revolutionary putsch. As they were alarmed at the prospect of being left behind by the Chiang clique, we should try to divide their ranks, winning those who had been led astray over to our side. The pro-French traitors might become active and collaborate with the French to undermine our struggle for

independence. We should find effective means to prevent them from doing harm to the common cause.

The Bureau pointed out the French colonialists' dark designs regarding the question of Nam Bo.

They would hold that the March 6 Agreement was applicable only to Bac Bo and a large part of Trung Bo. They would step up the comedy of 'demanding self-government' and try to set up a puppet government in Nam Bo with a view to continuing the division of our country and placing before us a *fait accompli*.

With regard to the referendum in Nam Bo stipulated in the Agreement, they would seek to delay it for a time so that they could suppress the resistance movement and strengthen the forces of the puppet troops and government. In a referendum conducted under the bayonets of the aggressors, our compatriots would not be free to voice their aspirations.

The French would take advantage of the confusion before the ceasefire agreement was fully put into effect in Nam Bo to encroach upon our military positions and attack our political stand. They would try to dishearten our compatriots and create favourable conditions for the reactionaries' activities.

Our policy was to resolutely demand that the French carry out the ceasefire agreement strictly and recognize the legal status of the Viet Minh in the areas under temporary French occupation pending a formal treaty between us and France. In occupied cities, there would be a strong movement of political struggle for national unification.

The signing of the Preliminary Agreement had brought about a period of détente. We should take the greatest advantage of this valuable time to consolidate and develop our forces in every field as a basis for the long struggle to come.

The above points were set forth in the directive 'Make peace in order to advance' by the Standing Bureau of the Central Committee, dated March 9, 1946. The directive concluded:

'Dear comrades,

'The Fatherland is facing a difficult time. But the revolutionary boat is gliding forward through the reefs. We have made peace with France to gain time, to preserve our force, to maintain our position so as to advance quickly towards complete independence.'

IV

D'Argenlieu returned to France in mid-February. Among the French ruling circles, there had been changes that ran counter to his wishes. General De Gaulle, his master who had appointed him High Commissioner in Indochina, had resigned. Felix Gouin, a Socialist Party member, was nominated Prime Minister of the provisional government. The Ministry of the Colonies, formerly held by one of De Gaulle's close associates had become the 'Ministry of Overseas France' and was held by Marius Moutet, also a Socialist. The Gouin government, with a majority of members belonging to the Socialist Party, had agreed to the plan of negotiation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, proposed by Leclerc, D'Argenlieu was most active in seeking support from rightwing elements in the new administration in France. He clamoured everywhere that the Viet Minh was an 'anti-French party', which could not be trusted, that 'Ho Chi Minh and the other Viet Minh leaders' were all 'Communist rebels'. Early in April, he came back to Saigon.

After the Preliminary Agreement of March 6 became public, D'Argenlieu made a speech over Saigon radio. The High Commissioner praised the morale of the French troops during the days after the Japanese coup. He blamed the Japanese for having aroused 'evil desires among the natives', meaning the Indochinese people's aspirations for independence. He expressed thanks for the British army who had helped France to return to Nam Bo. D'Argenlieu referred to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam as 'the Hanoi authorities' or 'the Hanoi government'. He was compelled to mention what had been stipulated in the Agreement: 'The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam has its own government, its own parliament, its own finances and its own army'. But he added: 'I should like to tell you that Cambodia also has its own government, its own army, its

own finances and its own parliament'. He praised what the French had done in Nam Bo, i.e. the establishment of a consultative council. Finally, he expressed the hope that 'Indochinese in all walks of life' would 'proliferate and prosper'.

That colonialist-minded speech was immediately attacked by our press in vigorous fashion.

On March 9, 1946, the Minister of Overseas France, Moutet, submitted the Vietnam – French Preliminary Agreement to the Council of Ministers in Paris. The Agreement was approved by the French Government. But only a few days later, on March 14, Moutet himself stated that Cochinchina would have a free constitution and would 'enjoy a separate regime like the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam'. This showed that we should not expect much from the so-called Socialists in power in the French government.

With regard to the Agreement that the French government had just approved, the French in Indochina were most inconsistent in their words and deeds.

On March 13, Leclerc issued an appeal to French troops and citizens urging them to have a friendly attitude towards Vietnamese. Sainteny wrote in the newspaper *L'Entente* published in Hanoi: 'It is not with vain regret for an out-dated past that one can build up a fine and full future'. But at the same time, in Nam Bo, the French scattered leaflets from the air calling on the Vietnamese army to surrender their arms. On March 9, French troops were mustered in Ca Mau, Rach Gia... They launched surprise attacks against many positions held by our troops. Our armed forces resolutely fought back in self-defence. The guns were still booming in Nam Bo. In the North, the newly-landed French troops made movement without asking for our leave.

By mid-March, leaders of the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance and the Nationalist Party agreed to issue a Joint order on the integration of administrations and armies. The parties were to cooperate in a friendly way, refrain from attacking or arresting each other's members, refrain from intimidating the population, carry out propaganda freely in a lawful manner, and strictly abide by the Government's order.

Just one day after the order was published in the press, on March 16, the Nationalists had a group of their henchmen march in the streets shouting slogans against the signing of the Preliminary Agreement. When they arrived at Hang Dau square, our police forced them to disperse. Three of our policemen were injured when doing their duty. The Nationalists continued to stage kidnappings in the cities.

The situation developed according to the forecast of the Party Bureau in its directive 'Make peace in order to advance.' A new stage in the struggle, most complex and no less fierce, had started.

Two days after the signing of the Preliminary Agreement President Ho met with district chiefs and company commanders of the Hanoi self-defence corps at the city hall. He said, 'The signing of this ceasefire agreement does not mean an end to the war, nor is our moderate and mild attitude towards the French troops one of limpness or passivity. On the contrary, more than ever, we should strengthen our forces and heighten the morale of the whole people so as to cope with all eventualities. The spirit of resistance should be maintained and careful preparations be permanently in force without a second or a minute's relaxation'. He talked to the comrades there for one and a half hours.

In a letter to the Nam Bo people and fighters dated March 11, Uncle Ho wrote:

'During this ceasefire period, especially when troops from both sides have to remain at their present positions, it is more than ever necessary to make preparations, strengthen your forces and observe discipline. And later, when peace is achieved your mettle will be a valuable force to guarantee the complete independence of our country for the future.'

On March 13, President Ho sent a letter to our compatriots and to the government and peoples in the world denouncing the French for their acts contrary to the spirit of the Agreement. He called on our people to keep calm and be ready to act on order. He called on the peoples and governments in the world, especially the French people, to support our just cause and to demand that the French government carry out the Agreement. On the same day, President Ho sent a message reminding the French side of

the need to open formal negotiations, as it had been agreed that such negotiations were to start at once.

Meetings and demonstrations surged up everywhere. In Hanoi, a hundred thousand people gathered on the grounds of the University students' hostels demanding that the French stop all acts contrary to the Agreement and open formal negotiations in Paris at once. The masses shouted the slogans: 'Support President Ho', 'We're ready to obey the Government's orders' and 'Nam Bo is part of Viet Nam'.

In spite of the reactionaries' acts of sabotage, we persisted in carrying out the policy of uniting various parties. A large gathering was held jointly by the Viet Minh, the Revolutionary Alliance and the National Party at the Municipal Theatre on March 17. Comrade Dong, on behalf of the Viet Minh, explained the necessity of rallying round the Coalition Government for the Resistance and expressed the Viet Minh's desire to achieve unity. Uncle Ho arrived in the middle of the meeting. A thunder of applause burst out in the auditorium and all the people present stood up. The military band played the tune 'Long live Ho Chi Minh.'

The reactionary elements of the Nationalist Part in the Coalition Government advocated seeking support from Chiang and the Americans. On March 12, Nguyen Tuong Tam, arriving at the Foreign Ministry in assume office, declared: 'China and the United States have the duty to maintain peace in the Far East.' He constantly spoke of the necessity to keep in touch with the Americans, to win the aid of the Americans and Chiang in every field. Nguyen Tuong Tam proposed that a goodwill mission be sent immediately to Chungking to strengthen Sino-Vietnamese friendship. It was certainly an idea of his masters. Vinh Thuy, who was then at the head of the Foreign Affairs Commission, the task of which was to advise the Government on diplomatic affairs, approved Tam's proposal. He expressed his wish to go to Chungking. The Chiang leaders in Hanoi also suggested that we should let Vinh Thuy go. We learned later that Marshall was present at Chungking at that time. It was possible that the US imperialists had seen in Vinh Thuy a card they might use later on. The sending of a mission to Chungking would also help lessen the contradictions between us and Chiang. Our Government agreed. It was a severe test for Vinh Thuy. He had

said some fine words in August of the previous year: 'I'd rather be a citizen of a free nation than king of an enslaved country.' Some time later, he was again to be confronted with a choice: whether to march on with the people or relapse into a traitor's life. Before French troops arrived in Hanoi, Vinh Thuy had left the capital for China on board an American aeroplane. The short journey made by the last king of the Nguyen dynasty on the side of the people had ended. Not long after the outbreak of the national resistance war, Uncle Ho sent an emissary to Hong Kong to see Vinh Thuy and ask him to return home and join the resistance but he refused. In early December 1948, Vinh Thuy chartered a Catalina sea plane and flew to Ha Long Bay to meet Bolaert who had replaced D'Argenlieu as the French High Commissioner in Indochina. Thus Vinh Thuy's bargaining with his old master to resume the life of an enslaved puppet started.

V

Not until one week after the Preliminary Agreement was signed in Hanoi did the Chiang Kai-shek Army General Staff consent to let French troops take over northern Indochina in place of Chinese troops. The Sino-French accord under which the Chiang troops withdrawal would start on March 15 and end on March 31, 1946 was made public in Chungking on March 13. So the 200,000 Chiang troops had no legal right to remain there after that date.

Hanoi's armed self-defence units made their presence felt again, for the first time since the Chiang troops had entered the city. Before, only units of Chiang's 53rd Army Corps had stood guard behind earthworks at street corners, their helmets decorated with the white notched Kuomintang sun. Now, there were also our own self-defence fighters in their forage caps with the golden star on a red background. They looked quite impressive as they stood guard on the pavements, rifles in hand and hand grenades at the belt. This signalled a change. The city put on a new look, assumed a new spirit.

On March 18, 1,200 French troops were allowed to come to Hanoi, as replacements for the Chiang troops. Both the Vietnamese and the French issued separate communiques calling on the Vietnamese and French populations to remain calm in order to avoid any regrettable actions.

Along the roads the French troops were to go through, our compatriots and armed forces were on the look-out in case any incident should happen.

According to our regulations, every French convoy should fly a Vietnamese flag and be accompanied by Vietnamese liaison officers. The gun barrels in the vehicles should be completely covered. When they reached Hanoi the vehicles must enter it in groups.

Two hundred French military vehicles left Haiphong early in the morning. But it was not until noon that the first ones reached the Long Bien Bridge. The convoy, accompanied by armoured cars and Vietnamese liaison officers, had had to stop at every one of our militia men's check-points.

As the French troops went past, all the doors and windows of the houses along the route were closed. Nobody was in the streets except a few traffic policemen and self-defence fighters on duty. What met the eyes of the French Expeditionary Corps were banners hung across the streets bearing such slogans as: 'Viet Nam for the Vietnamese', 'Nam Bo is part of Viet Nam', in the Vietnamese and French languages. The presence of some French nationals who gathered at Trang Thi Street could not change the cold atmosphere of the whole city: a host turning his back on an unwanted guest.

At 5 p.m. on that day, Leclerc led a delegation including Sainteny, Pignon, Salan, Valluy to the Bac Bo Palace. Leclerc quickened his pace as he came to greet President Ho Chi Minh and smilingly remarked, 'Mr. President, we Vietnamese and French have now become friends.'

Uncle Ho invited Leclerc to sit beside him on the sofa. The Commander-in-Chief of the French Expeditionary Corps raised his glass to toast the health of President Ho Chi Minh. He expressed his hope that the official talks between the Government of Viet Nam and the French government would be held as soon as possible so as to provide an opportunity for the Vietnamese and the French people to cooperate in the pursuit of peace and happiness.

Some days later, as an expression of this spirit of cooperation and friendship, Leclerc proposed the organization of a military parade in which the Vietnamese Army and the French Army would take part.

A fully-equipped battalion of Vietnamese troops was sent to Hanoi from the suburbs. Although they lacked training in parade exercises our troops marched in good order and looked valiant. The troops, dressed in green uniform, had leather shoes and carried rifles with fixed bayonets. Commanders with long sabres led their units who advanced singing. The heroic words of their songs springing from hearts burning with revolutionary fire caused great excitement. For the first time the French saw a Vietnamese regular unit. They showed respect and admiration.

After the parade, before returning to the barracks, our troops marched through the main streets of the city. Once more, our compatriots in Hanoi were able to see an armed detachment of the Vietnamese army make its appearance in the capital. Passers-by stopped and people poured out of their houses onto the pavements to watch the scene. Along the streets through which the troops were passing, gay shouts rang out.

VI

During the month of March, Chiang troops refused to withdraw. A great number of Japanese troops had not yet been repatriated and several thousand more French troops arrived, consisting both of new soldiers, recruited in France, Germany and North Africa, and of those who had been arrested by the Japanese on March 9, 1945, and had just been released from custody. The number of foreign troops in the streets of Hanoi was greater than it had been during the first days of the revolution.

But the situation was now different from the time when Chiang troops had entered the capital.

Before, our troops had been forced to move to the outskirts. If we ever wanted to carry a large number of rifles through the city, we had to put them in a cart and cover them with rush mats. Now units of our armed forces were able to march freely through the streets of Hanoi. Formerly the Vietnamese sentries guarding the government offices had been ordered to withdraw temporarily behind the fences; now they were able to stand on duty in front of the offices, rifles in hand, without being troubled by the Chiang troops. Apart from the Chiang troops' check points, there were also

those of our own troops and joint Vietnamese-French ones. The city's armed self-defence fighters were present everywhere, ready to defend their homes and fatherland and protect the people. By the Preliminary Agreement signed by our government and the French government, the Chiang army had to give our country *de facto* recognition as a sovereign state. They could no longer interfere in our security as in the past. They knew that they were about to pull out. As for the French, they were fully aware that Viet Nam was no longer their colony and they could no longer act as they had done before.

Although the situation was growing tense due to the presence of the French, the atmosphere had become more relaxed. It was true that the numbers of the enemy armies had increased, but nobody dared deny our sovereignty.

Through the emissaries sent by him to discuss with us the question of taking over from the Chiang troops, Leclerc affirmed that he would honour his commitments and expressed his wish that the Vietnamese government would do the same. Once, during a meeting with me, he wanted to know the Vietnamese people's attitude towards the French. I said to him:

'You and I are military men. Do you want me to speak frankly?'

'Of course,' he replied.

'The French are just paying lip service to peace, while their actions are those of aggressors. That's what the Vietnamese public think of them.' On March 23, Leclerc left Hanoi.

The command of the French forces in northern Indochina was transferred to Valluy.

No major clashes had yet occurred between us and the French since they arrived in Hanoi. The Chiang troops were still there and their presence forced the French to act cautiously. We deemed it necessary to exploit the contradictions between Chiang Kai-shek and the French at that time in order to drive away the Chiang troops as soon as possible, and force the French to do what they had pledged.

All of a sudden, on March 27, some days after Leclerc's departure from Hanoi, the French ordered a small detachment to break into the premises of our Finance Department. The French soldiers removed the Vietnamese flag and prevented the Vietnamese staff from entering. This office stood at a key crossroads on the road from the citadel to the old Governor General's palace. We found out later that Saigon had instructed Valluy to occupy that building so that it could be used as the headquarters of the French High Commissioner when the latter arrived in Hanoi.

That was the first act of provocation.

Our offices in the Liaison Commission strongly protested against this action by the French and demanded an immediate investigation. I also met Valluy to lodge a protest against this violation of our sovereignty and demanded that the French should leave the place at once and return authority to guard it to the Vietnamese troops.

Throughout North Viet Nam a wave of indignation was mounting, and on March 29 a general strike was called. People closed shops and markets and refused to cooperate with the French. There was a prompt response from the Chinese nationals too. Shops, restaurants and tea-rooms closed except a few French owned ones in Trang Tien Street and Trieu Quang Phuc Street... But even there, the Vietnamese employees refused to work and gathered in the streets to talk. Posters calling for non-cooperation with the French were stuck up on doors. The vans of the French commissariat, sent to purchase food, returned empty. Those French soldiers who had been given town leave, stood about on the pavements at a loss what to do. They realized that the Vietnamese people, who had been cold to them, were now showing outright hostility.

Our firm reaction caused the French to reconsider their policy and finally compelled them to return the Finance Office to us. The Vietnamese flag was hoisted again. The office personnel returned to work as usual. But the French still insisted on sharing guard duty and creating a joint body composed of twelve people from each side.

Our compatriots in the capital as well as the Chinese nationals refused to cooperate with French until a communique was issued by the Hanoi

Administrative Committee calling on everyone to return to work and to reopen their shops.

The delegates of our Armed Forces and of the French Army met to discuss the implementation of the military clauses of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement. General Salan and General Valluy represented the French side and Vu Hong Khanh and myself the Vietnamese, in our capacity as Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Military Commission. After many prolonged meetings the two sides reached a temporary agreement on April 3.

Under this agreement, the French troops who assumed the task of taking over should be of French nationality; non-French nationals should only be used as guards in the Japanese P.O.W. camps. This condition was aimed at excluding members of the Foreign Legion from the take-over troops. The Vietnamese troops in the take-over force were part of the Vietnamese armed forces. They had their own command, and were placed under the control of the General Staff of the Vietnamese Armed Forces receiving direct orders from the General Staff.

The French and Vietnamese troops should form a joint take-over force in Hanoi, Nam Dinh, Hue, Da Nang and some frontier towns. In other places such as Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Thanh Hoa, Dong Hoi, Quang Tri, the French should nominally take over from the Chiang troops and then hand over to the Vietnamese Armed Forces. Plans for future movements of Vietnamese and French take-over troops should be discussed and agreed upon by the Commands of both sides and be submitted to the Vietnamese Government at least 48 hours before execution. Military vehicles used to carry supplies for such troops were allowed to carry at most four armed men each, with the total number of armed men in any convoy not exceeding sixty.

A Vietnamese-French Central Liaison and Control Commission was set up in Hanoi to supervise the implementation of the Agreement. If necessary similar regional commissions should be set up.

The two sides agreed to send a ceasefire Commission to southern Trung Bo.

The discussions on the procedures for realizing a ceasefire in Nam Bo were very heated and lasted several sessions. Our delegates strongly protested against the illegal attacks launched by the French troops in Nam Bo. We insisted that a ceasefire commission should be sent to Nam Bo to implement Article Three of the Preliminary Agreement. Salan eluded our legitimate request, arguing that the ceasefire question was to be settled by the two governments. This argument was refuted by our delegates. Due to the negative attitude of the French side, the discussions did not achieve any results.

Clashes took place in many places where French troops were stationed. In Haiphong, on April 11, French troops blatantly occupied the premises of many offices. Our compatriots there immediately closed shops and markets, went on strike in protest against the French action and our delegates in the Vietnamese French Liaison and Control Commission made a strong representation. The French had to withdraw from the places they had illegally occupied. Some days later, while the people of Haiphong were gathering for a mass rally, the news came that the French had sent 500 troops to Hanoi without notifying us. Meanwhile a number of French troops had started to attack the Haiphong headquarters of the Democratic Party near Ha Ly bridge. The rally at once turned into a demonstration. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in the rain, shouting angry slogans. The next day a general strike took place. The city was deserted. Shops closed. Long lines of empty buses and taxis were standing at the stations. There were no ferry boats to cross the river. Filled with apprehension the French sent armoured cars which took up position at the ends of the streets. Finally they had to apologize. At the end of April another clash took place between the French troops and our self-defence units. The French made attacks with tanks and armoured cars against us in Tran Hung Dao Street, Station Road and Ho Chi Minh Boulevard. Our self-defence units fought back fiercely. It was a long time before the Haiphong Vietnamese-French Liaison and Control Commission could restore order.

In the middle of April, a Vietnamese delegation headed by Comrade Hoang Quoc Viet, together with a number of French officers, flew to Nha Trang to enforce the ceasefire. Here the French had summoned former mandarins and village notables to work for them. Those who refused to cooperate with

them were terrorised. Their scheme was to restore their protectorate over the areas they occupied in southern Trung Bo. Our delegation made repeated representations to the French authorities there. After seven days, as the discussions had failed to yield any results due to the obstinate attitude of the French side, our delegation left Nha Trang.

VII

Towards the end of March, d'Argenlieu suggested that a meeting should be held between him and President Ho Chi Minh to discuss the relations between the two countries. He proposed that the meeting be held aboard a French cruiser, in Halong Bay.

Some weeks earlier, the newspaper *Cuu Quoc* (National Salvation) had carried a commentary strongly criticizing d'Argenlieu's colonialist attitude. The French High Commissioner's position had been very clearly revealed. So what question did he really want to solve? Why did he choose to hold his meeting on board a cruiser anchored offshore, and not Hanoi or Saigon? Given d'Argenlieu's record since his arrival in Indochina, especially since March 6, Uncle Ho and his comrades-in-arms had to study the offer very seriously. Anyhow the Preliminary Agreement had just been ratified by the French Government. The news of the signing of the Agreement had had echoes throughout the world. Many foreign newspapers considered it as a good way of solving the hostilities then existing between colonies and colonial powers. What was most important was that in such a meeting the tens of millions of our people in both North and South Viet Nam would certainly back our government's position. Uncle Ho also desired to meet with the French High Commissioner in order to press for the immediate holding of official negotiations in Paris, where the French reactionary elements in Indochina would find it difficult to conceal the truth about the talks from the public. So Uncle Ho decided to accept the Admiral's invitation.

On the morning of March 24, Uncle Ho, wearing his broad-brimmed hat and carrying his stick, got into his car. He was accompanied by Hoang Minh Giam and Nguyen Tuong Tam. At Gia Lam airport they were met by Sainteny and boarded a French sea-plane.

About 10 a.m. the okay reached Ha Long Bay. The Catalina alighted on the sea. The High Commissioner and Leclerc had been waiting aboard the cruiser Emile Bertin.

The welcoming ceremony took place in a solemn atmosphere.

A salute was fired from the guns. Host and guest shook hands. Introductions were made in turn by d'Argenlieu and Uncle Ho. The cruiser set sail towards the open sea. A cocktail party was held aboard the cruiser. Raising his glass, the Admiral said:

'This is the first meeting held to strengthen the friendly relations between France and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. May I propose a toast to the health of the President and to the prosperity of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam'.

D'Argenlieu stressed the fact that this was the first meeting. He wanted to imply that it was he who represented France in Indochina, and not Leclerc, who had met President Ho in Hanoi.

Uncle Ho was straightforward in his reply to the Admiral. He said:

'The present meeting is the result of the March 6, 1946 Agreement. So far as the Vietnamese government is concerned, it has strictly implemented the Preliminary Agreement. And we also request a sincere from the French side, so as to help bring about friendship between Viet Nam and France.'

President Ho was invited by d'Argenlieu to review the fleet. The warship steamed past a line of ships carrying big guns, their barrels pointing to the sky. Then she cast anchor. The strap of his hat pulled down, leaning on his bamboo stick, President Ho, with d'Argenlieu by his side, reviewed the French fleet. As the ships went past the French Navy seamen shouted hurrahs to welcome the President of the Democratic republic of Viet Nam.

As regards this meeting, some people say that d'Argenlieu was forced to meet President Ho under pressure from Leclerc, who had been instructed by the French government to open preparatory talks in Viet Nam before conducting official negotiations. Others consider it as part of the High

Commissioner's delaying tactics. It was d'Argenlieu himself who suggested that a preparatory conference be held in Dalat. D'Argenlieu feared that the unstable political situation existing at that time in France would lead to too many concessions to the Viet Minh. He still entertained the hope that de Gaulle would soon return to power. And for the moment he had not yet succeeded in building up his puppets for the autonomous State of Cochinchina. Moreover he was taking advantage of the welcome ceremony to President Ho to bring up his fleet as a show of force.

After the review, President Ho and the French High Commissioner settled down immediately to an exchange of views.

Uncle Ho wanted the negotiations to open immediately in Paris, d'Argenlieu on the other hand did not want an early conference, nor did he want it to be held in Paris. He said that as the French government had not been fully informed of the situation, a preparatory conference would be necessary. He suggested Dalat as the venue of these preparatory talks, for, in his opinion, Dalat would become the capital of the federation of Indochina. Uncle Ho saw the Commissioner's scheme of deferring the official negotiations clearly. He said he did not see the need for holding preparatory talks. D'Argenlieu stuck to his guns: as long as the French government was not fully aware of all the problems in Indochina there could not be any official negotiations.

There was also a long debate on the seat and date of the official talks. Uncle Ho insisted on Paris. His suggestion was supported by Leclerc and Sainteny on the grounds that to hold it in Paris, the capital of France, would prevent the conference from being troubled by extremist elements (i.e. the Viet Nam Nationalist Party). Finally d'Argenlieu had to accept the proposal. The date of the departure of the Vietnamese delegation for France to hold official negotiations was fixed for the last quarter of May. Uncle Ho also agreed to the holding of preparatory talks in Dalat. But he made it a condition that the French delegates attending the preparatory talks should be sent by the French government from France. It was also agreed that, by the middle of April, at the same time as the French delegation left the country for Viet Nam to attend the preparatory talks, a Vietnamese parliamentary delegation

would pay a good will visit to the French National Assembly and the French people.

Salan later related that the meeting at Ha Long Bay led to an irreconcilable rupture between the Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Corps and the French High Commissioner.

That afternoon as he was watching the sky and sea of the aft deck Salan was summoned by the admiral. D'Argenlieu, pale-faced and trembling with anger, was in his cabin. He told Salan: 'General Leclerc has acted impolitely towards me. I would like to request you to bring him to reason. During these few weeks he has been talking to Mr. Ho Chi Minh to his heart's content. It is my turn now, that's obvious. I don't want to chase after a Munich conference in Indochina, going from one concession to another. If I accept Paris, Mr. Ho will start making new demands'.

Salan looked for Leclerc and told him what had happened. That very afternoon Leclerc left for Saigon.

On the plane back to Hanoi, President Ho told Salan: 'If the Admiral was intending to use his ships to intimidate me, he made a big mistake. Those ships cannot go upstream on our rivers'.

VIII

On March 11, in a letter sent to our fellow country-men in Nam Bo, Uncle Ho told them about the recognition by the French government of our country as a free and sovereign State. He wrote: 'This is thanks to the heroic struggle of the people all over the country, especially our compatriots in Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo and of all our fighters during the last six months.' He pointed out that the negotiations 'will create political conditions which we should know how to exploit in order to achieve our goal – a completely independent Viet Nam.'

Later, at the Second Congress of the Party in 1951, in his political report, he referred to the March 6 Agreement and remarked that our compatriots and Party members in Nam Bo had considered that that policy had been correct.

Indeed, for our compatriots in Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo the Agreement brought them new faith. Those who were fighting against the aggressors saw clearly that they had won a great victory when the French government was forced to recognize Viet Nam as a free State. Our compatriots were still more delighted at the fact that the Chiang Kai-shek troops would have to pull out. Some people said: 'By a mere signature Uncle Ho has managed to drive nearly 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek troops out of our country.' The Agreement created a new opportunity for our compatriots in their long struggle.

It was the enemy who was puzzled, bewildered, in face of the newly-signed Agreement. The former administrators and their puppets were at a loss. They were angry at every word, every sentence in the Agreement. They put many questions: Why do they call the Hanoi authorities the 'Vietnamese government'? Why does the French government officially recognize the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam as a free State? Why is the French government pledging to accept the result of a referendum about the unification of the three *Ky*? – For them Nam Bo was simply a French colony.

In a session of the Consultative Council on March 12, Cédile, the French Commissioner in Cochinchina explained: 'The March 6 Agreement is only a local agreement between the Hanoi authorities and the French Commissioner in Bac Bo. If a Vietnamese government is referred to, it is by mere courtesy, and does not imply recognition of a single government for the three Annamese countries. Before long Cochinchina will have its separate government, parliament, army and finances... all the rights enjoyed by the other countries in the Federation.'

Those words of Cédile reflected d'Argenlieu's attitude and scheme. On March 8, when Valluy came, in the name of General Leclerc, to inform him of the newly signed March 6 Agreement, d'Argenlieu said at once: 'I am amazed, really amazed, General. France has such a fine expeditionary corps yet its commanders would rather negotiate than fight.'

Thus the opposition of the reactionary elements in Saigon to the spirit and letter of the Agreement was advocated and encouraged by the highest representative of France in Indochina.

Instead of implementing the Agreement by ceasing all hostilities and holding a referendum as was laid down in the clauses which had been signed, d'Argenlieu speeded up the formation of an 'autonomous government' of Cochinchina, in order to carry out his policy of splitting Nam Bo from Viet Nam.

After the signing of the Agreement in some places such as Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan the French feigned a desire to establish contact with our military units with the view of arranging a ceasefire. In reality, these were only ambushes. Through lack of vigilance, one of our units was caught and suffered some losses.

The High Command of the French Expeditionary Corps imposed many arrogant conditions on our armed forces. They demanded that our 'March South' units should withdraw to the North, and our troops in Nam Bo should come together and hand over their weapons to the French before returning to their native localities.

The enemy in South Viet Nam had laid bare his true colours: he had betrayed the Agreement. Our compatriots and fighters remembered clearly President Ho's words: 'Hold firm to your fighting positions.' And so all the enemy's treacherous acts were immediately beaten off.

With the Ninth Colonial Infantry Division and the Armed Division moving to the north, the French had only one division left in the south, the third Colonial Infantry. The French forces were not only smaller in numbers they were also more scattered. The recently set up puppet machinery was still very weak.

Like a river bursting its banks, our people from the plains to the mountain regions rose up as one man, swept away the local puppet machinery plank by plank and restored the revolutionary power. With any weapon they could lay hands on, the people arose and fought side by side with the army. A series of enemy posts were wiped out, encircled or abandoned by their defenders. Many important roads and water communication lines were cut. Together with the local cadres our troops had organized many armed propaganda units. Fast-moving units of our armed forces penetrated into temporarily occupied areas. Each time our troops attacked a village, the

people at once sounded the gongs, beat and drums and, making their way to the puppets' offices, forced them to admit their crimes and return all they had plundered. Within a short period of time, vast areas in Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo were freed from enemy control. There was a new fighting spirit all over South Viet Nam.

Guerrilla warfare was widespread. Everywhere there were rallies and demonstrations. As they were equipped only with rudimentary weapons, our army and people in Nam Bo had to depend mainly on stratagems to defeat the enemy. The Kinh Sang post in Cai Be district was on the bank of a canal... The enemy soldiers stationed there exerted a strict control over the passing boats. One day, in broad daylight, one small unit of ours went past the post by boat, disguised as traders. The soldiers ordered the boat to come near the bank so that they could check it. Our men invited them to board the boat and then killed them with scimitars and daggers. After that they landed and wiped out the other soldiers in the post.

In Cao Lanh district, Sa Dec province, a platoon of puppet troops was stationed near a market-place. On market days, the soldiers would come looting in the market-place. One morning, no sooner had they left the post than our troops assaulted it. Those who had stayed behind surrendered. Hearing the shots, all the people in the market-place fled, leaving their belongings behind. When the shooting ended they returned to find that everything they had left remained untouched. As our troops went past, parading their prisoners and carrying trophies, they were acclaimed by the people who stood along the road.

Women in many places took part in the fighting to wipe out the enemy and capture weapons. Some used bamboo flails to kill the enemy right in the market-places. Others would use a wicker fish trap to catch an enemy soldier by his head and capture his rifle.

The puppet troops and administration were facing a new situation: the revolutionary force was continuously growing. The March 6 Agreement bound the French to accept the abolition of the colonial regime. What would become of the puppets, after the referendum? Their immediate cause for fear was that the French troops' bayonets had become powerless and could no longer be used to shield them. The best way for them was to rally

to the people. Many puppet agents and officials came to our cadres to hand over their seals and files, ready to accept any punishment meted out to them. Groups of puppet soldiers surrendered with their weapons. Some offered to help wipe out enemy posts from within.

In Saigon and other cities a movement of political struggle surged up. Rallies, demonstrations, and strikes were held in protest against the French violations. The press denounced the farce of French stage-managed 'autonomy' and condemned the collusion between the traitors and the aggressors in their scheme of dividing the country.

Armed activities were even conducted inside Saigon city. On April 8, one task force crossed the Saigon river and blew up a big ammunition depot. A platoon of French troops guarding the depot was wiped out and four thousand tons of ammunition destroyed. The explosions shook the whole city, heavily damaging the premises of the head-quarters of the French Expeditionary Corps General Staff including Leclerc's own office.

On the same day the French delegation to the Dalat preparatory conference arrived in Saigon. In the evening Leclerc gave a dinner in honour of the delegation. Max André, the head of the delegation was displeased with the explosion at the depot. He said to Leclerc: 'I suppose that those responsible will be punished for their negligence.' Leclerc angrily replied: 'I am the only one responsible here.'

Was it because the four-star general realized that his statement a month before – 'Cochinchina has been pacified' – was erroneous? For him everything would have to begin again from the beginning.

IX

The Sino-French agreement signed in Chungking on March 13 stipulated that the replacement of Chinese troops by French troops should begin as from March 15 and end of March 31, 1946.

On the afternoon of March 18, upon his arrival in Hanoi, Leclerc went to the former Governor General's palace to meet Lu Han. Those who accompanied him related how, when the General Commander-in-Chief of

the French Expeditionary Corps praised Sino-French friendship, Lu Han replied coldly: 'We are executing the order of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.'

The blue-uniformed soldiers of the 53rd Army Corps continued to add more sandbags to their fortifications at the crossroads. At the same time as the French white-helmeted military policemen were riding their motor-bikes along Trang Thi Street to make their presence felt, Lu Han would also send his yellow-uniformed guards with their wooden stocked Mauser pistols to stroll along the pavements. Chiang troops looked at French troops with the indignant eyes of those whose food had been carried off by others.

March 31, the deadline for the Chiang Kai-shek troops' withdrawal arrived. The first clash between Chiang troops and French troops flared up. It occurred over a very trivial thing. Some French soldiers refused to pay a pedicab driver after a ride. The driver tugged at the sleeve of a French soldier to insist on payment. Some Chiang soldiers on guard nearby opened fire at the French soldiers. The French soldiers returned fire which grew intense.

The incident was still unsettled when, the following day, April 1, two cars, one belonging to the Chiang troops and the other to the French army, accidentally collided. The Chiang troops opened fire. The French generals in Hanoi resignedly tried to find some way to settle the matter.

During these clashes our people and armed forces remained calm and maintained strict discipline. We just stood by, not interfering in their clashes nor their attempts at settlement.

The relations between the Chiang troops and the French were becoming tense. With the Chiang soldiers waiting for a chance to open fire fighting could break out any moment.

Apart from carrying out propaganda activities against the Preliminary Agreement, Chiang's henchmen kidnapped and assassinated isolated French soldiers to get their rifles and money. But their main aim was to cause confusion and bring about a direct confrontation between our side and the French troops. However, thanks to the efforts made by the Vietnamese-

French Liaison and Control Commission, most of the incidents provoked by them to undermine relations between us and the French were settled.

The biggest clash between Chiang's troops and the French occurred on April 21. As in the previous cases, it started with a minor incident: two cars, one belonging to the Chiang troops and the other to the French, collided in front of a flower shop at the Trang Tien crossroads. The bonnet of the Chiang troops' car was smashed and a number of the soldiers were injured. This led to an exchange of fire between the Chiang troops and the French. Shots were also fired in Bo Ho restaurant by the Sword Lake, Hang Da Street, Cot Co Avenue and Mai Ha De Street. This incident lasted more than one hour and involved machine-guns as well as ordinary guns. Not until after 5 p.m. could the two sides come to a settlement. This engagement had caused scores of casualties.

The Chiang troops were seeking a pretext to stay on. As they had been unsuccessful in provoking clashes between our side and the French, they were trying to create minor confrontations between themselves and the French.

But in China events were happening to harm the position of Chiang Kai-shek. Towards the end of March 1946, the Red Army launched a great offensive in the Northeast and advanced into the capital of Heilungkiang. The General Staff of the Chiang armed forces could no longer retain their 200,000 troops in Viet Nam.

In mid-April General Juin, Chief of Staff of the French Army arrived in Chungking. He had been instructed by the French government to persuade Chiang to implement the March 13 Agreement. Juin came just at the moment when the Chiang administration's capital was being transferred to Nanking. So he had to catch up with them and wait several days. He eventually met Pai Shung-hi and Wang She-chie, who agreed to withdraw their troops from northern Indochina in the shortest possible time. In late April Lu Han was summoned to Nanking where he was ordered to withdraw his troops from Indochina and move them to Northeast China.

But it was not until the middle of May, however, that Lu Han finally ordered his troops to withdraw from Thanh Hoa, and only one month later

did Chiang troops start to pull out from Hanoi.

It was obvious that they were deeply attached to this strip of land to the south of their country where they could lead a quiet, affluent life, away from the inevitable punishment meted out to them for their way against the Chinese people. Before leaving this country they plundered everything within reach. In one instance, Chiang soldiers even demolished the staircase of a house where they were quartered and sold the wood in the market.

Their troops withdrawal dragged on and was not completed till September 18, 1946, that is six months after the deadline set by the Sino-French agreement. That was the very same day as the date on which in the previous year, they had made their massive advance into our country. As they advanced they had ordered their henchmen to seize power in the towns their troops were marching through. They had believed that their time had come. The Chungking government had always borne in mind the promise of the late US President Roosevelt to give them this fertile peninsula when the Second World War ended. Now all their mirages of a new paradise had turned to nought. The autumnal wind of that year blew them out of our country, like fallen leaves.

With the 180,000 notoriously barbarous and anti-communist troops driven out of the country, together with all their dark and vicious schemes, our revolution had got rid of an extremely dangerous enemy, and a heavy load – both material and spiritual – had been lifted from its shoulders.

X

'According to the government's plan, we will ensure that everyone in the country has sufficient food, clothing and schooling.' In his letter to anti-illiteracy teachers at the beginning of the year, President Ho again stated that the lofty goal of the revolution was finally to liberate the nation, liberate the exploited classes and to bring about a free and happy life – material as well as spiritual. The people should enjoy not only independence and freedom, but also wealth and happiness. For him, the ideal of the revolution was not something remote or abstract, it was very nearby, concrete, and closely connected with the people's everyday life.

With the signing of the March 6 Agreement, a period of compromise lay ahead of us. While continuing to force the French side to implement the clauses of the Agreement we went on vigorously building our country in every field.

'Increase production' and 'Fight illiteracy' were the two major slogans set forth by Uncle Ho. By the end of 1945 President Ho's appeal to the people to increase production in order to combat famine had had a great effect. In order to push up production and create better working conditions for the poor peasants, a decree was issued on the reduction of farm rents by 25 per cent.

Uncle Ho attached great importance to the fight against illiteracy, a heavy heritage left behind by the colonial regime.

In response to his appeal some 10,000 anti-illiteracy teachers and millions of our people took part in the fight to roll back this enemy.

Uncle Ho felt greatly the importance of increasing the knowledge of all the citizens of the independent country, and wholeheartedly dedicated himself to the cause. The anti-illiteracy department sent him a book entitled 'Methods of teaching Vietnamese to beginners'. He read the book carefully and wrote down a note on the fly leaf: 'Anti-illiteracy teachers must study this book carefully. Then they must set to work to teach our illiterate compatriots in order to wipe out illiteracy quickly. By so doing they will fulfil the sacred task assigned them by our fatherland.'

On April 13, Uncle Ho visited an evening class in Hang Trong Street. The learners' makeshift desks consisted of door panels. The teacher, a bespectacled young man, was writing model letters on the blackboard. His students belonged to different generations and were dressed in every kind of style. They bent over their boards studiously working. The white-haired head of a long-robed old man was seen near the black mop of a little boy in shorts. Leaning on his bamboo stick, Uncle Ho watched the scene and was deeply moved. He said encouragingly: 'Both teacher and learners are fighters on the anti-illiteracy front'. In a letter sent to anti-illiteracy teachers he wrote: 'I hope that within a very short time your ardour and effort will bring about glorious results and all our fellow-countrymen will learn to read

and write. Nothing, even bronze statues and stone stelae can compare with such an honour.'

In face of a tense situation, in order to defend the achievements of the revolution against the enemy from within and without, our Party advocated building up the people's armed forces, consolidating our national defence, continuing to arm the revolutionary masses and stepping up the building of the people's army. The self-defence forces, which had increased in numbers, constituted a network spreading to all corners of the country, especially in the cities and towns where French troops were stationed. Self-defence units formed the backbone of the people's struggle against provocations and violations of the Agreement by the French army. French troops started to have apprehensions about the 'Viet Minh in square badges' meaning the members of self-defence units. In Hanoi the self-defence cadres training school opened its second class in April.

With the founding of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam favourable conditions were created for the rapid growth of our armed forces. The March 9 instructions of the Party Standing Committee pointed out that 'especial attention should be paid to the training of political and military cadres to guide the new movement.'

In March 1946 the Bac Son Military and Political School was opened by the Party; in May the Tran Quoc Tuan Military School was opened by the Ministry of National Defence; in June, the Quang Ngia Secondary Infantry School was set up by the Southern Viet Nam Resistance Committee – In every regiment there were also military and political school to train squad and platoon commanders.

The curriculum for political education consisted of the present situation and tasks, Viet Minh policies, introduction to Communism, summary of dialectical and historical materialism, and political work in the revolutionary army. The most important lectures in the Bac Son military and political school were given by members of the Central Committee of the Party.

The curriculum for military education consisted of guerilla tactics, individual basic training, and combat actions. The syllabus for guerilla

tactics was based on the book 'Methods of Guerrilla Warfare' written in the base area during the anti-Japanese resistance. So far as regular warfare was concerned, lacking experience we had to make a selection from the tactics of various countries.

On May 22, 1946, Uncle Ho went to Son Tay to inaugurate the Tran Quoc Tuan Military School. Self-defence units and youth from the province lined up along the road to welcome him.

In the wide school-yard cadets in khaki uniforms had gathered to listen to his instructions.

Having exhorted the cadres to stand united, work hard and observe strict discipline, Uncle Ho said: 'To be loyal to the fatherland and faithful to the people is the sacred duty, heavy responsibility and also the honour of all the combatants of our country's first national army.'

'Be loyal to the Fatherland and faithful to the people,' that behest of Uncle Ho's has become historic. Right from its earliest days he showed our army how to make a clear distinction between the old armies of the past and the new army of the revolution. That historic behest has been embroidered in golden letters on the army banner and will guide our combatants in the fulfilment of their glorious tasks and the building of our army into an invincible force.

Since the last days of November 1945 the situation had become very tense. Our Party had to go underground. Uncle Ho pointed out to the Party Standing Committee that, together with consolidating and broadening the Viet Minh Front, we should form a very broadly-based national united front to include all strata of the population including those who were still outside the Viet Minh Front. The idea of uniting all forces which could rally to our side to fight the enemy was one of the great ideas which permeated all his revolutionary activities.

He suggested that this new front should be given the name of Hoi Lien Hiep Quoc Dan Viet Nam (Viet Nam National Alliance). The goals of the front were: independence, unity, democracy, and prosperity. All Vietnamese, irrespective of nationality, religion or social origin, could become members

of the Alliance. Uncle Ho suggested shortening the name to Lien Viet just as he had shortened Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Alliance for the Independence of Viet Nam) to Viet Minh.

On May 27, the Lien Viet was officially founded. President Ho was elected Honorary Chairman of the Alliance. Huynh Thuc Khang was elected President of its Executive Committee. Ton Duc Thang was elected Vice-President. The political organizations which joined the Lien Viet were: the Viet Minh, the Democratic Party, the Viet Nam Revolutionary Alliance and the Viet Nam Nationalist Party.

Besides there were also various religious committees and trade-union organizations. Patriots who had not yet joined an organization now joined the Lien Viet. This was the beginning of the great influence of the broader-based national united front, founded on the initiative of President Ho, on our people's struggle for independence and democracy.

XI

Some days after the meeting between President Ho and d'Argenlieu at Ha Long Bay, early in April, Reuter reported, 'D'Argenlieu has been named head of the delegation to enter into negotiations with the Government of the DRVN... The delegation will consist of representatives of the Ministries of Economics, Finance, Defence and Overseas France.'

If the report was correct this could only be a scheme of the French reactionaries. D'Argenlieu was a faithful follower of the most wicked type of old style colonialism. Talks between us and him could not produce any good results. The fact that a representative of the Ministry of Overseas France was to be a member of the delegation implied that Viet Nam was still considered as a French colony.

Our press immediately denounced this reactionary manoeuvre to sabotage the agreement. We demanded that the official negotiations be held in Paris on the principle of equality. The French should renounce their intention of including a representative of the Ministry of Overseas France in the delegation. The right people to represent the French government in the talks

with liberated Viet Nam would be officials of the French Foreign Ministry. The Reuter report was not confirmed, nor was it denied.

Uncle Ho and his comrades were discussing sending delegations to France and Dalat. The Parliamentary delegation who would pay a friendship visit to the French National Assembly and people would be headed by Comrade Pham Van Dong, who would later also lead the Vietnamese delegation to the official negotiations in Paris. I was designated deputy-head of the government delegation to the Dalat preparatory talks. This delegation would be headed by Nguyen Tuong Tam, then the Foreign Minister of the coalition government of the DRVN.

On April 16, the two delegations set out for the talks. The delegation to Dalat left the Bac Bo Palace at 6 a.m. Uncle Ho had come there earlier to see the delegation off. Once again he told us: 'The Nam Bo question and the cease-fire question should be on top of the agenda.' He shook hands with each member of the delegation.

It was drizzling. The city was quiet. As the news of the departure of the two delegations had come too late, the people did not turn out to see them off. But some days before, rallies had been held to support the two delegations.

A number of journalists put questions about the prospects of the negotiations. It was difficult to answer them. The answers were still ahead of us. We would reach a political settlement with the French if the French sincerely honoured their commitments and respected the fundamental rights of a free Viet Nam. The success of the negotiations depended not only on us but also the opposite side. The struggle between the progressive forces and the reactionary forces in Indochina and in France was still raging. The first indications were not very promising. It had been reported that Max André would lead the French delegation. The French government had complied with our request and sent their representatives directly from France. But Max André was a man from the banking world, a member of the Catholic MRP. The leaders of this movement were representatives of the French monopoly capitalists closely connected with the US and the Vatican. With such an interlocutor the conference could not be expected to proceed smoothly. So far as our side was concerned the composition of our delegation was not homogenous. Nguyen Tuong Tam had refused to sign

the agreement the previous month and at the last minute Vu Hong Khanh had to sign on his behalf. Besides, some delegates from Nam Bo whose names were on the list failed to arrive at the time of departure.

At 7 a.m. the plane took off. From above we could see, beneath the clouds, now the jade blue of the sea with its white waves, now the green foliage of the Truong Son Range. Then there would be a river shining with sunlight, winding like a snake. Our ancestors had said that 'the mountains and rivers are like a piece of beautiful embroidery.' That was just the image of our fatherland as it was viewed behind the aeroplane's wing.

That day we only reached Pakse where the French Dakota stopped for refuelling. Just before take-off there was a mechanical failure and the delegation had to stay there to wait for another plane from Saigon. We strolled about the streets, visited an ancient pagoda, then went to the bank of the Mekong. This broad river, red with alluvium, separated Thailand from Laos. On either bank of the river the terrain was flat. The news of the arrival of the government delegation brought along a great number of Vietnamese nationals; such unexpected meetings were very moving.

The following day the plane flew on to Dalat. As soon as we descended from the plane, we were struck by a complete change in the weather. In Pakse it had been very hot but here it was cool like a late autumn day. Dalat was a health resort, a tourist city reserved for the French and Vietnamese belonging to the so-called 'upper-classes'. There were villas, big and small, everywhere. There were hotels and avenues where one might stroll about and look at the landscape, the endless hills of pines around the city. A really beautiful city.

Our delegation was put up at the Lang Biang Hotel. The hotel looked out onto a quiet lake surrounded by lines of trees. It was beautiful but was called by the French the 'Lake of Signs'. Beyond the lake there were mountains.

On April 18, at 9 a.m., it was announced that at 10.15 a.m. d'Argenlieu would receive the heads of the two delegations at his residence. Then the High Commissioner would meet all the members of the two delegations in order to introduce the French delegation, with Max André as the newly

appointed chief delegate. There had been no discussion between us and the French side about this. The Admiral was acting in a patronizing fashion hoping to receive the two delegations at a federal palace in his capacity as High Commissioner. It was known that after meeting the two delegations, the High Commissioner would open the first plenary session. This was also unilaterally decided by the French. Of course, we could not agree.

We sent the secretary of the delegation to inform the French side that the head of the Vietnamese delegation wished to meet d'Argenlieu to discuss the points recently put forward by the French.

At 10 a.m., all the members of the French delegation were present at d'Argenlieu's palace. Correspondents and journalists were there too. They all waited for us until 11 a.m. As we firmly refused to come to the meeting arrogantly called by d'Argenlieu, the situation was very tense.

The French side thought out a face-saving solution: they invited us to a dinner party. So the first meeting between the High Commissioner and the two delegations took place round a dining table. D'Argenlieu missed the opportunity to open the conference in his capacity as High Commissioner of the Federation.

This was my first meeting with d'Argenlieu. This defrocked priest had small, wily eyes under a wrinkled forehead and thin lips. After spending a moment with him, my impression was that he was an experienced, cunning, arrogant and mean man. Such a one could belong only to the past, to the colonial system.

D'Argenlieu boasted that he knew a lot about us. He inquired after my family, asked about the years in which I conducted underground activities, and about the period of terror under the Japanese. Then he expressed his wish to meet me again for further talks. He also invited me to a mountain-climbing party the following Sunday. Both sides touched upon the prospects of the Vietnamese-French relationship. I said: 'There will certainly be many difficulties ahead, but these difficulties are to be overcome. Given a common effort from both sides we Vietnamese can surmount them.'

During the talks, d'Argenlieu said that he was called by some people a 'man of silence and asceticism'. Certainly, what the High Commissioner was trying to imply was that he was still a priest at heart. But in reality, he was not so much a priest as a perfidious politician.

The two sides agreed to meet again in a plenary session the following day. The opening session would be presided over by a member of the Vietnamese delegation. This was the first concession made by the French side. It did not mean, however, that the obstacles had been reduced at all, nor that there had been a rapprochement in the positions of the two sides.

The preparatory Conference held its first plenary session on the morning of April 4, at the Yersin Secondary School. The French delegation contained many former administrators such as Messmer, Bousquet, Pignon, etc, and economic, financial and military experts. Some of them had been present in Indochina since the early days of the 1945 August Revolution. Messmer, in particular, had been parachuted into the North in September, 1945. He had been captured by our militiamen but later on had managed to escape.

The political sub-committee met on April 20. We moved that the creation of a favourable political atmosphere for the negotiations and the ceasefire in Nam Bo should be put on the agenda. The French side began to put forward many devious arguments. They tried to avoid discussion of our proposal, by saying that those questions went beyond the competence of the two delegations. We referred to the legal foundations of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement and to common sense in order to force the French side to meet our request. After a long argument, the French made a partial concession. They agreed to include on the agenda the question of 'Creating a favourable political atmosphere for the negotiations'. We insisted on putting the question of 'a ceasefire in Nam Bo' on the agenda as well.

During the break, the French delegates had a consultation. When the session was resumed, Pignon, political adviser of the French delegation, stated that they were not empowered to consider the question of a ceasefire in Cochinchina. We retorted:

'We wish to know if the French delegation is empowered to discuss the issues raised in the March 6 Agreement.'

Pignon, with much reluctance, replied:

'Yes, we are.'

'Is it not, then, written in this Agreement that 'the two Governments shall, at once, take decisions on all necessary measures to put an end to the hostilities?'

The French were thus driven into a corner. By the end of the morning session, they had not yet found a reply. So, the question had to be set aside.

In the afternoon, I went for a walk along Cam Ly spring. The reactionary attitude of the French was all too clear. The negotiations could hardly end well. Anyway, the talks between us and the French would continue... The path was carpeted with pine needles. Wild flowers grew on the banks of the spring. The town was quiet, the air cool and the scenery beautiful. Dalat was, indeed, a magnificent place. The cool breeze and the murmuring pines urged me on until I realized that it was getting dark. I returned to the hotel.

In the evening, I hadn't been working long at my desk when there was a knock on the door and it was immediately opened. One of the comrades rushed in and said excitedly:

— 'Please come upstairs. Comrade Thach has arrived!'

Pham Ngo Thach was then fighting in Nam Bo. His name had been announced in the list of our delegation but we had always thought he would never be able to make it. We wondered how he had managed to arrive here at the beginning of the conference. The French still did not know of his arrival.

In a moment, all the delegates, except Nguyen Tuong Tam, turned up. Comrade Thach looked thin, swarthy but vigorous. Happy and deeply moved, we all gave him a tight hug. His voice still bore the militant sentiment of fighting Nam Bo. He told us about his trip from Saigon. It was really a risky adventure. He spoke of the situation in Nam Bo, the sacrifices and heroic deeds of the combatants and the people. We chatted far into the night.

The following day, Comrade Thach was arrested by the French in front of the Parc Hotel. Though our delegation made an energetic remonstrance, our Government protested against the illegal French action, and our people held meetings in many places to demand his release, he was only set free after the negotiations ended.

XII

The Conference continued in earnest. Apart from the plenary sessions and the sub-committees' sessions, there were several exchanges in the lobbies — Max André, Messmer, Bousquet and, sometimes, even d'Argenlieu joined in these informal talks. However, no progress was made in the negotiations as regards the questions at issue.

Our delegation's single-mindedness was apparent in all the discussions. Nguyen Tuong Tam alone stayed away from most of the sessions and seldom took part in the consultations among our delegates.

The question of the ceasefire dragged out over several sessions. The conference's atmosphere became stifling. The French side knew for sure that we would not give up. Our firm and well-reasoned dealing with the question of the Nam Bo ceasefire drove the French into a difficult situation. Bousquet, an economic specialist on Indochina, had to admit: "This question caused us no end of trouble. The (i.e. the Vietnamese side) were in the right." A few other French shared Bousquet's opinion.

After the first sessions, the Dalat people began to grumble about the French side's absurd arguments. A French delegate even said: "You have redoubtable dialecticians in your delegation".

The French could not find any excuse for rejecting our request but they were still unwilling to put the issue on the agenda. Clearly, the French were not anxious for a ceasefire in Nam Bo.

Now a question arose within our delegation: Was it worthwhile to continue the negotiations?

On April 23, the two delegations held a plenary session. Again, we raised the question of a ceasefire in Nam Bo. The French made a concession... They proposed to set up a limited mixed Commission, comprising persons who were not members of either delegation here, to bring about a ceasefire in Cochinchina and, at the same time, to solve other urgent problems. This Commission would convene first in Dalat, and later in Hanoi.

We knew this was simply an attempt at procrastination. But it was thanks to this concession by the French that the negotiations could continue.

Late in April, General Juin, the French army Chief of Staff dropped in on the Dalat conference on his way back to Paris from Nanking. I met him for about twenty minutes and made my position clearly to him:

"The French must put into effect a ceasefire in Nam Bo in accordance with the spirit of the Agreement. Otherwise, the Vietnamese people will continue to fight to the end. I want to tell you that, in the name of the resistance."

Heated debate occurred not only in the political sub-committee, but also in all other sub-committees, military, economic and cultural.

On economic matters, we stood firmly for the preservation of our fundamental economic interests to ensure a favourable development of the national economy. At the same time we made certain concessions to French economic interests in Indochina.

The problems to be handled by this sub-committee were:

- Customs
- Currency
- The existing French business enterprises in our country.

Big difference of opinion centered around the currency problem and the problem of French business undertakings in Viet Nam.

On culture, the two sides reached some agreement. But we disapproved of the French request to set up in Indochina a number of cultural centers under

the Federation's direct control and the French proposal to use French as the second official language after Vietnamese.

On the military issue, several exchanges of opinions failed to bring about any result. For this was dependent on the political issue and no military agreement was possible as long as the political problem remained unsettled.

The political issue was the fundamental and the most arduous and time-consuming problems throughout the negotiations.

Our principled position was: Viet Nam must be a free country. The Indochinese Federation would be of an economic character and should not be allowed to be detrimental to the fundamental rights of Viet Nam.

On the relationship between the countries of the Indochinese Federation and France, our delegation declared the ending of the governor generalship. We advocated organizing a federation which would be, in fact, solely economic. The French representative in the Federation would work as a diplomatic officer. The Indochinese Federation would ordinate the customs and currency policies, and the planning of construction works among the Federation countries on the principle of respect for their sovereignty.

The French side wanted the French High Commissioner to be representative of the French Union and, at the same time, President of the Indochinese Federation. They demanded that legislation, foreign trade, finance, foreign exchange, transport, health, research and invention, culture, science, economics, the statistics service, post, telecommunications and radio, and immigration be all under Federal control... The French thus revealed beyond any doubt their design to revive the former Governor General's rule.

The French requested that we recognize the manifesto concerning the rights of citizens within the French Union. We favoured the democratic principles in the manifesto but refused to recognize it as yet. Even the French people had not yet recognized this manifesto. And in fact the French side had no definite idea as to what the French Union they proposed would be like.

On foreign affairs, our position was that Viet Nam would have its own Ambassador to France and the French High Commissioner here would be

the diplomatic representative of France in Viet Nam. A free Viet Nam would have the right to appoint its ambassadors to the countries within the French Union and to other countries. The French wanted the representative of France in Viet Nam to be a French official appointed by the French High Commissioner, and Viet Nam to have diplomatic representation in other countries only through the French Union.

As regards Nam Bo the March 6 Preliminary Agreement had provided for the holding of a referendum to settle the question. Our stand was that the objective of a ballot was not to ascertain who should have sovereignty over Nam Bo, because the Vietnamese territory was made up of all the three *ky*, North, Centre and South. The referendum was in order to ask the Southern people whether they wanted to remain a *ky* in the framework of a unified Viet Nam. But the French wished the referendum to deal with the question of Vietnamese sovereignty over the southern part of Viet Nam, Nam Bo, formerly Cochinchina.

In our opinion, and as a matter of course, a referendum needed to be held in Nam Bo only. But the French demanded also a referendum in Trung Bo, formerly Annam, and Bac Bo, formerly Tonkin, about sovereignty over these two *ky*.

We held that, to ensure the legality and equity of the referendum, genuine freedom for the voters was indispensable. Therefore, we proposed that a temporary administration represented by a thirty-member council be set up in Nam Bo. This council would elect an executive committee whose task would be to bring into effect within a short time a ceasefire, to release all political prisoners, to put an end to all terrorization and to ensure freedom of action for the people's political organizations. The French side replied in ambiguous terms that they would ensure freedom for the referendum in Cochinchina, and that they did not approve of Vietnamese participation in the present administration in Cochinchina.

A big gap remained between our position and that of the French. To all appearances, the representatives of the new France who took part in the negotiations lagged far behind the actual situation brought on by the fundamental changes that had taken place on this peninsula. Their mentality remained, to a large extent, that of the old-fashioned colonialists of the

French Empire. Max André, head of the French delegation, increasingly revealed himself as a diehard reactionary. Once, in a reception, he said "France has been very generous to Viet Nam. She has made too many concessions already. We can't have another Munich here."

Meanwhile, in France, on these first days of May, the new draft constitution was rejected in a referendum. This was another setback for the movement of struggle for democratic liberties in France. The rightists had scored a success. The French reactionaries in the colonies would become even more aggressive. Our struggle would be even more arduous.

On May 10, another plenary session was held. We stuck to our position on the holding of a referendum in Nam Bo. The French delegates remained obdurate. We told them outright that some Frenchmen nurtured a design to sever Cochinchina from Viet Nam; this design could not be tolerated and would certainly fail. After a heated debate, our delegation got up and left the conference room.

That night, after a consultation within the delegation, I sat up late. It was murky outside the window. The lake and the mountains could no longer be discerned. The lovely pine hills and the wild woods of Lang Biang plateau were blurred in the darkness. The resistance waged by our people and our guerilla fighters from those distant mountain peaks and dense jungles was going on and could not yet come to an end. Since the beginning, we had made regular reports to Uncle Ho and other comrades on developments at the conference. Our press and radio had kept the public informed of our delegation's struggle at the conference. Uncle Ho and the comrades at home were closely watching the progress of the negotiations. In the session this morning, I had said to the French delegation "The Vietnamese combatants, who have gone through untold hardships in the struggle for the freedom of the nation, can only accept peace in justice and honour... In the name of a nation which has been tempered in labour and struggle for thousands of years I can assure you that, so long as Nam Bo is separated from Viet Nam, every Vietnamese will struggle his utmost to bring it back to the bosom of the Fatherland. If our voice finds no response and the Agreement is not respected, we shall not be responsible for anything that may happen later on... History will testify to the truth of our words..." We had told the French

all that was necessary to tell. But the French still clung to their colonialist stand. We were now able to make a better assessment of the frenzied opposition by the reactionaries. The negotiations brought home to us a truth in a just struggle for independence and freedom for one's country, diplomatic activities invariably depended on the people's might. It was indispensable for every Vietnamese to have sufficient energy and determination to raise his own might. Our people had to be strong. Our country had to be strong. Diplomatic activities must stem from that basis. Once, I recalled, Uncle Ho had said "Strength is like a gong and diplomatic activities may be likened to its sound; a loud sound can only come from a big gong."

The session this morning became the last one of the Dalat conference. However, this was but a preparatory negotiation held on the spot. The link between us and the French had not been completely cut off.

XIII

We came back to Hanoi from Dalat on May 13. Our National Assembly delegation which was on a visit to the French National Assembly and the French people had not yet returned. One week after the delegation's departure from Hanoi, Saigon news agencies reported that a "Cochinchinese mission" had left for France to inform the French Government of the present situation and request autonomy for Cochinchina. The mission was headed by Nguyen Van Xuan. This was just another trick by the High Commissioner.

On May 18, under the headline "Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Nation", the *Cuu Quoc* published in the capital city wrote "On this day of May 19, fifty-six years ago (1890) Ho Chi Minh was born.

"It is he who, with his skill and determination, has founded and fostered several Vietnamese revolutionary organisations. The dynamism of almost all Vietnamese combatants is the result of his talented training..."

The article spoke of President Ho's contribution to the revolution, exalting him as the soul, the personification of the Vietnamese revolution and

highlighted the great significance of May 19.

For the first time, the entire Vietnamese nation learned of the date of President Ho's birthday. To him, our people owed the change in their life for the better. We prepared to celebrate his birthday. As we were well aware of his modesty, we kept the anniversary as simple as possible.

On the same day, d'Argenlieu arrived in Hanoi. This was the first time the French High Commissioner had come to the capital of our country. The objective of this visit was as invidious as all his other schemes. At the meeting in Ha Long Bay, the High Commissioner had agreed with President Ho that our Government's negotiating delegation would leave for France on May 31 at the latest. The day was drawing near and the political situation in France was still in a muddle. Political parties were fully engaged in the election campaign. It was not clear who would gain power in the French government. D'Argenlieu did not want the Vietnamese government delegation to come to France for negotiations in such a situation. Besides, Cédile's actors were not yet ready to stage their play of an "autonomous Cochinchina" and the French Government had not yet formally adopted the political solution of the High Commissioner. Therefore, d'Argenlieu wanted to request President Ho to postpone the departure of our Government's delegation for France. He also intended to take this opportunity to give us forewarning of the imminent founding of the "autonomous state of Cochinchina."

At 6 p.m, d'Argenlieu, accompanied by General Valluy and Crepin, went to pay their respects to President Ho at the Bac Bo Palace.

With Uncle Ho to receive them were Messrs Huynh, To and a few of us. Proposing a toast in honour of the High Commissioner, Uncle Ho said

"The capital city of the new Democratic Republic of Viet Nam is glad to receive the representative of France. Following our consultations in Ha Long Bay, the Dalat preparatory conference and the friendship visit of the Vietnamese National Assembly delegation to the French National Assembly, your visit, today, will surely mark a new development in Vietnamese-French relations."

With great civility, d'Argenlieu replied

"Mr President, tomorrow is your birthday anniversary. May I wish you, Mr President, a long life. I am confident that, from now on, the friendship between France and Viet Nam will grow closer and more intimate day by day."

Early on May 19, the comrades in the Standing Bureau and the Government came to present their birthday greetings to Uncle Ho. This was a rare occasion for us to be all with him on his birthday. In a poem dedicated to his memory and composed in early Spring 1970, To Huu wrote

As usual he was, perhaps, away

Leaving all the greetings to the nation...

Uncle Ho was often away on the occasion of his birthday anniversaries.

He tried to refuse, to put away the glories which were reserved for him. He did not like to speak of his achievements and to listen to eulogies in his honour.

Stirring drumbeats resounded before: the Bac Bo Palace. The children were coming. Uncle Ho went out to bring them in. A dozen boys and girls came on behalf of all the young pioneers in the city and its outskirts to present to Uncle Ho their birthday greetings. Among them was one who had to make his own living as a newsboy and another who came from the Hang Bot orphanage. They vied with each other in their rush to pin "Young Pioneer" badges onto his coat and to make him gifts of the letters "i" and "t" which were symbols of the popular literacy movement and pamphlets of statutes and songs of the Young Pioneers' Association for National Salvation.

Uncle Ho's present to the children that year was a *bach tan* ("hundred domes") ornamental plant grown in a pot. He pointed to the lush plant and said

"This is my present to you, children. Later, its branches will develop into a hundred domes. Take good care of it so that it may grow strongly! That's

the way to show affection for me."

The children sang a gay song to thank him. As they left carrying the plant with them, a group of more than fifty men and women entered. The men wore khaki and the women black peasant pyjamas. There were representatives of fighting South Viet Nam who came to present their greetings.

Having received their greetings, he said

"Thank you very much for having come to wish me a long life. As a matter of fact, the press here had made too much of my birthday. I think that at the age of fifty-six I do not yet deserve to receive your wishes for longevity. It is still a young age. And I must confess that I am ashamed seeing you here, in comfortable and joyous North Viet Nam, while Nam Bo is still deprived of peace.

Tears trickled down his cheeks. Theirs also welled up in the eyes of the Nam Bo representatives.

A few moments later, the Central Board for the New Life Style, set up the previous month by Government decree, came to greet him. Its members seized the opportunity to ask him to give the movement a motto. He said

"You want a motto? Here it is:

"Diligence, thrift, integrity, uprightness, total devotion to the public service and complete selflessness."

One of them suggested that it was already a familiar motto now they should like to ask him for a new motto which would encourage the New Life Style.

Uncle Ho smiled

"Everyday we eat, drink and breathe to live. These are the things our forefathers had to do. We have to do them now and future generations will have to do the same. Thus, to eat, drink and breathe can never be considered

outmoded. It is the same with diligence, thrift, integrity, uprightness, total devotion to the public service and complete selflessness."

The same day, an AFP correspondent asked him, in an interview, about the disruption of the Dalat conference. He answered

"In a sincere frank and sometimes even brutal manner, representatives of the two countries have made their positions clear. But this is a good thing. For we now understand each other better than before. Mutual agreement has been reached on some questions and differences remain on others. Anyway, this was only a preparatory conference. It is the task of the Paris Conference to adopt the provisions agreed upon in Dalat and to iron out the conflicting viewpoints: which, in my opinion, are not irreconcilable. The two nations should agree with each other to bring about friendly cooperation. We shall lay a solid foundation for the future negotiations."

In face of the French reactionaries' acts of sabotage, he still did his best to obstruct them so that in case a war could not be avoided, the period of accommodation would at least be stretched.

During his few days in Hanoi d'Argenlieu made every effort to persuade President Ho to postpone the Vietnamese delegation's departure for France for formal negotiations. He tried to present this as a necessity that would serve the interests of the negotiations and of Viet Nam. In the talks, he artfully touched upon an existing "difficulty" i.e., he "could no longer continue to block the Cochinchinese people's aspirations for autonomy." He sought to justify beforehand his treacherous act — to be effected later — against the March 6 Agreement.

However, all his crafty words could not in any way cover up his brazen and odious schemes and action. We knew very well that any delay in the formal negotiations would further facilitate the realization of the *fait accompli* policy pursued by d'Argenlieu and the reactionaries in Indochina. Uncle Ho firmly demanded that the High Commissioner keep the Vietnamese delegation's date of departure to that already agreed upon at Ha Long Bay, i.e. by the end of May 1946 at the latest. Having failed in his mission of persuasion, d'Argenlieu, disappointed, returned to Saigon on May 22.

The press in Hanoi reported that, on May 31, the Vietnamese delegation would leave for France for formal negotiations.

There was not much time left for the High Commissioner. Now, all the efforts of the reactionaries in Saigon were focused on the farce of "autonomous Cochinchina" which should be staged before the negotiating delegation of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam set foot on French soil.

XIV

The imperialists tried to cover up their ugly features by a screen of lies. Though the French colonies were nearly twenty times as large as France in area, the famous statesman Clemenceau, then Minister of War, had still done his best to prove to the world that France was not an imperialist country. President Poincare himself had declared that France was the first colonialist power to know how to colonize. When the colonialists spoke of their humane mission to bring civilization to the backward nations, this meant draining them dry, poisoning them by means of alcohol and opium and keeping them in ignorance.

The colonialists and administrators in the colonies were like ostriches¹ greedily swallowing all the resources of the colonized peoples and directly committing numerous crimes. They would even cheat their own compatriots and the metropolitan government. Uncle Ho had become well aware of this during his stay abroad. It was understandable that the French people in France were quite ignorant of what their representatives were doing in remote countries, but even those who were in the government often had only a vague idea about what was happening. Uncle Ho noticed that "the proletariats of the two countries do not know each other and that is why they are prejudiced against each other, and "imperialism and colonialism have always used this mutual suspicion to hinder their propaganda work and sow division among these forces which should be united." For him imperialism was a "leech with two suckers" of which one sucked the blood of the colonies and the other that of the metropolitan country. Both of them must be cut off before imperialism could be exterminated.

¹ President Ho used this simile to castigate the boundless greed of the colonialists. The French expression *estomac d'autruche* designates a stomach that will digest anything.

It was because he was resolved to tear to pieces this veil of imperialist deception that the revolutionary Nguyen Ai Quoc had first taken up his pen as a journalist, lecturer and even a writer of satirical plays. His journalistic career, in particular, was prolific and original. His biting articles, written in French, formed a pitiless exposure of colonialism. But the small clique who controlled the government possessed many modern means of propaganda and would resort to any underhand trick to spread lies and deception.

After the Second World War, the French imperialists alleged that the French had returned to Indochina to liberate the people there from the yoke of Japanese fascism. Moreover the colonialists claimed that the Viet Minh was an organization of rebels in the pay of the Japanese fascists. Our National Assembly delegation which had just re-turned from France informed us that not only did many Frenchmen not know who we were but even our own compatriots in France had only a vague idea of the situation in our country.

Uncle Ho continuously reminded us that in revolutionary activities it was necessary to rely on our own forces but at the same time he also attached importance to winning the sympathy and support of our friends. His boundless confidence in our people was matched by a strong belief in the working people of other countries. From the moment of the victory of the August Revolution, he often reminded us of the need to make other peoples know the Vietnamese revolution and support our just struggle. He himself received almost all the foreign journalists who came to Hanoi. All those who had met him felt great admiration for him and through him they got to know our country better.

Uncle Ho saw the signing of the Preliminary Agreement as a good opportunity to intensify our propaganda abroad. The March 9 directive of the Standing Bureau of the Party Central Committee declared that "Contact with the French Communist Party should be established without delay with a view to common action between us and the French comrades." During the German occupation the French communists had acted as the vanguard of

the people's national liberation, movement against the German fascists. The French Communist party enjoyed high prestige among the masses. In spite of the strong counter attacks of the reactionary forces, the struggle for democracy and progress in France had recorded many successes. Uncle Ho was well aware of the close ties between the French people's struggle and our own national liberation struggle.

For all these reasons, the Standing Bureau demanded that France should open the official negotiations in Paris. These would certainly benefit by the sympathy and support of progressive French opinion and would avoid being harassed by the colonialists and administrators, whose interests were inseparable from those of the colonial regime. Even if the negotiations did not lead to any favourable result, this would also be an opportunity for many French people to gain an understanding of the Vietnamese revolution which would prove advantageous for our long-term struggle in the future. However, the choice of Paris as the seat of the negotiations would also involve us in a number of difficulties. Many of our leaders would be engaged at the same time in negotiations which might be prolonged, far from the country meanwhile the situation at home might undergo sudden changes. Uncle Ho held discussions with leading comrades on the judiciousness of his own journey to France on the occasion of these negotiations. It should be remembered that the French reactionaries had once condemned him to death. Therefore if the negotiations met with difficulties and the French made a volte-face the worst might happen. After weighing the pros and cons he and the comrades nevertheless decided that he should go with the delegation.

Comrade Pham Van Dong led the delegation which was composed of Hoang Minh Giam, Phan Anh, Ta Quang Buu, Nguyen Van Huyen, Trinh Van Binh and others. Nguyen Tuong Tam's name figured on the list but at the last minute claiming to have fallen sick, he refused to leave. Some days later the Nationalist Party explained that by his refusal to participate in the delegation Tam wanted to express his disapproval of the negotiations between us and the French.

Uncle Ho accompanied the delegation but did not take part in it. He went to France as an honoured guest of the French government.

The date of departure came.

May 30. Under torrential rain fifty thousand Hanoi inhabitants went to the grounds of the University students' hostels in perfect order for a farewell meeting. They brandished posters which read *"Fully Sovereign Viet Nam"*, *"Nam Bo is Vietnamese land"*. *"Territorial integrity for Viet Nam"*, *"Support President Ho Chi Minh"*, *"Support our delegation"*, *"Greetings to the French people"*.

This was the first time our compatriots had come to pay respect to Uncle Ho before a great journey.

At 7.30 a.m. President Ho and the delegation arrived at the meeting place. Also present at the meeting was Salan, appointed by the French High Commissioner to accompany the President during his tour. Uncle Ho said

"As instructed by the Government and in conformity with the people's will, we, the delegation and I, are going to Paris to enter into official negotiations... In all my life I have been pursuing only one aim — to serve the interests of my fatherland and the happiness of my people. If I have had to take refuge in the mountains, suffer prison terms, or brave danger, it is because of this aim. And, since power was won by the force of our national union and the people entrusted the care of public affairs to me, I have worked day and night to achieve this aim. At all times and in all places I have pursued only one aim — to work for the benefit of the country and people. This time I promise you, dear compatriots, that the delegates and I will do our utmost to be worthy of the confidence that the nation has put in us...

To help win victory for the struggle in the diplomatic front, he gave four recommendations

— To unite closely, avoid all division.

— To practise thrift as much as possible in order to escape shortage and famine.

— To strive to keep order, and strictly obey Government orders.

— As regards foreign residents, it is necessary to treat them well and with moderation.

During the afternoon and late into the night, from all directions cars followed one another to enter the capital. These brought delegates from the provinces who came to see the President and the governmental delegation off. The cars carried portraits of Uncle Ho and were covered with slogans.

Early on the morning of the 31st, Uncle Ho wrote a message to the people of Nam Bo

"...You in Nam Bo are citizens of Viet Nam. Rivers may dry up, mountain may erode; but this truth can never change.

"I advise you to unite closely and broadly. The five fingers are of unequal length but they are united in the hand.

"The millions of our fellow-countrymen are not all alike; but they are descended from the same ancestors. We must therefore be generous and broad-minded and admit the fact that the descendants of the Lac and the Hong are all more or less patriotic. With regard to those who have gone astray, we must use friendly persuasion. Only in this way can we achieve unity, and broad unity will bring us a bright future."

The members of the delegation, all dressed in formal suits, arrived at the Bac Bo Palace. Uncle Ho came out from his room, still in his everyday khaki suit — the only change being that on that day he had put on a pair of black leather shoes.

From daybreak the people were heading for Gia Lam, waving his portraits and flags. The Long Bien bridge was reddened under the fluttering flags. The weather was bad and the sky was covered by cloud as if it were sharing the general grief of the people who had come to say good-bye to Uncle Ho before his long journey.

The airport was thronged with people. The President made a tour to greet all the delegates and compatriots who waved their flags, clapped their hands and burst into cheering, pushing forward so as to see his face more clearly.

Before climbing the steps into the aeroplane, he squeezed old Huynh Thuc Khang's hand, saying "To fulfil the mission assigned me by the people I must be absent for some time. I expect you and the comrades to solve the difficulties that will crop up in the country. I hope that you will 'remain unchanging in face of many thousand changes'."

Greatly moved, Old Huynh grasped Uncle Ho's hands for a long time. Uncle had entrusted him with the post of acting president during his absence.

Unexpectedly he called the members of the delegation. They gathered around him. After a minute's solemn silence Uncle said

"We who have been assigned an important mission are going to leave. Before the people present here, let us pledge to remain united and be of one mind whatever the circumstances so as to fulfil our task toward the motherland."

All raised their hands shouting "We swear." As for our people, in seeing him off, they showed him that they had full confidence in him.

Two military aircraft with the delegation on board took off one after the other and disappeared in the cloudy sky.

On that day we were haunted by an anxiety that none of us dared mention. At that time plane crashes often occurred. The ex-king, Duy Tan, whom the French were bringing home by air, had been killed in an accident on the way back.

As though he had foreseen the worry felt by us and our fellow countrymen, at each stop he sent us a new telegram. In the first telegram, dated June 2, 1946 on his arrival in India, he wrote "We have arrived safely in Calcutta after spending one night in Rangoon. We shall resume our journey tomorrow. We ask the government to convey our thanks to our fellow-countrymen and the French friends who came to see us off in Gia Lam. Many kisses to the little children..."

In April when General Juin, Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, called at Calcutta on his way to Chungking, d'Argenlieu had sent him a letter through a messenger demanding the recall of Leclerc on the grounds that the latter had refused to execute orders from his superiors. As a result of this, Juin decided to appoint Leclerc Inspector General of the French troops in North Africa. Thus the Admiral had his hands free, having succeeded in getting rid of his main adversary in Indochina.

Though the French reactionaries in Saigon had done all they could to delay the journey of the delegation, the two aircraft with Uncle Ho and the delegates aboard were heading for the French capital. The French High Commissioner had to act quickly by the only policy left to him — that of the *fait accompli*. Without waiting for any answer from the French Government, he rushed ahead with his comedy of "Autonomous Cochinchina", hastily scenarioed by Cédile.

On June 1, just a day after Uncle Ho's departure, the formation of the so-called "provisional government of the Republic of Cochinchina", headed by Doctor Thing, was announced in Saigon. As an aid to confusion, an agreement was signed between the representatives of France and the Republic of Cochinchina which repeated almost word for word, Article I of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement. "The French government recognizes the Republic of Cochinchina as a free State having its own government, parliament, army and finances and forming part of the Indochinese Federation and French Union." There was an annex to the agreement. What clearly revealed the puppet character of the "provisional government of the Republic of Cochinchina" was the fact that it was to have a French adviser, in the person of Cédile, who was publicly declared to be responsible for the internal and external security of the "Republic".

The Standing Bureau was well aware that the French reactionaries in Indochina were cynically intensifying their sabotage hoping to create difficulties to these negotiations held at a time when the political situation in France was far from stable. The struggle in the time ahead would certainly be very complicated. We had to remain highly vigilant.

We knew that D'Argenlieu would not stop there.

On the morning of June 26, while working in the Bac Bo Palace, I was informed that General Valluy had come and asked to see me.

On entering Valluy gave a salute, then said at once "I come as a soldier executing an order from my superiors. I have a note to transmit to the Vietnamese government."

I had more than once discussed military questions with Valluy. Though outwardly pleasant; open-hearted and courteous he was a cunning and perfidious man. At the banquet given on the occasion of Uncle Ho's departure, he had brought his daughter who had just come from France. Presenting her to us and joking about his age, he said, "Let the young people sit together."

This time his manner was different from usual. I had the impression that this was a new provocation. "Give me the note, please," I said.

He handed me the note and stood waiting. It was a brief communication, addressed to the acting President of the government of the DRVN "As he has already informed President Ho Chi Minh when he was in Hanoi, the French High Commissioner in Indochina, Admiral D'Argenlieu, has given orders to the French army to occupy the *Moi* highlands (Tay Nguyen, *Ed*)."

It seemed to me that Valluy observed me attentively while I was reading the note. This was a new move from the crafty unfrocked priest. I said to Valluy, "If you have come here only to discharge the mission given you by your superiors, your task is fulfilled."

He left.

On the evening of the same day we learned that at 4 a. m. the French had launched a surprise attack on Tu Bong near Deo Ca. Their aircraft flew very low to strafe our positions. At 10 a. m. they landed in Dai Lanh but, meeting strong opposition on our part, they had to withdraw.

On June 22, they attacked our positions at Cung Son. Repulsed by our forces, they once more pulled out.

On June 23, the French launched a sudden attack at Pleimедден on the road between Pleiku and the Cambodian border.

Hostilities became widespread throughout the Tay Nguyen Highlands.

D'Argenlieu's scheme was obvious — his seizure of the Tay Nguyen Highlands would be the preliminary to the formation of a "Republic of Tay Ky". Our armed forces there received the order to hit back resolutely at any aggressive French action. The acting President sent a note to the French, refuting their allegations and strongly protesting against their illegal action. It read "President Ho Chi Minh was never informed by the French that they would occupy the Tay Nguyen region and he never in any way agreed on such an occupation."

Meanwhile, on June 25, an incident took place in Hanoi. The French occupied the former Governor General's palace. Even before the withdrawal of the Chiang Kai-shek troops we had more than once held discussions with the French on taking over this sector. Valluy had agreed to wait for the decision of the official negotiations in Paris. Now no sooner had Lu Han left the place than the French troops had occupied it. We protested against this. Valluy tried to deny responsibility by claiming that this was a detachment entrusted with keeping watch over the building.

The French encroachment on the former palace of the Governor General aroused strong indignation among the people.

"We cannot let the French reactionaries and colonialists go on doing as they please. We must prevent them. On June 27 various parties and political organizations called on the people to hold a general strike in Hanoi, Haiphong and every town with French presence. The government let the people show their condemnation of the illegal actions of French troops but orders were given to public services, water stations and electric plants to continue working.

Protest demonstrations took place at the same time wherever there were French troops. The resolute attitude of our government and people caused anxiety to the French forces. Valluy had to declare that his troops had only entered the former Governor General's palace to take it over on the

withdrawal of the Chiang troops — the palace, he agreed, would be guarded jointly by the Vietnamese and French troops pending the decision of the Paris negotiators.

XVI

In July the French command demanded that we allow them to organize a march through the main streets of Hanoi to celebrate July 14.

We had not yet made any answer when, on July 11, the Standing Bureau received a report from the Security Service that the reactionaries of the Nationalist Party were preparing a very serious provocation. According to their scheme their men would lie in ambush along the route of the French troops and open fire on them, throwing grenades. They hoped to cause the French to open hostilities with us thereupon they would distribute leaflets calling on the people to overthrow the government and next offer their own hands to the French. For the moment they were making feverish preparations, printing leaflets and collecting weapons.

We knew that though the men of the Nationalist Party publicly made frenzied criticisms of our talks with the French, they were secretly trying to join hands with them. They had been in contact with them for a long time. As for the French, while they carried out negotiations with us, they were indulging in some murky scheming. Some of the French reactionaries planned to use Vietnamese traitors to draw them into this adventure.

The security comrades were instructed to follow every activity of the counter-revolutionaries closely.

At that time the Nationalist Party was made up of two reactionary groups. One, with Vu Hong Khanh at its head, had been living abroad for a long time, supported by Chiang Kai-shek; it had lost contact with the country. The other, including Nguyen Tuong Tam, Chu Ba Phuong and others, belonged to the pro-Japanese Dai Viet party set up in 1939. About the beginning of 1945, the Dai Viet group, foreseeing the defeat of the Japanese, had gone to Yunnan to seek Vu Hong Khanh. The two groups merged together under the name of *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang* (Viet Nam

Nationalist Party) in order to win the favour of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (*Quoc Dan Dang* in Vietnamese). Though the Dai Viet leaders had joined forces with Vu Hong Khanh's group, they looked down on it. What they wanted was a refuge to avoid being charged with collaborating with the Japanese fascists. Apart from this they still nurtured their own designs. When Lu Han withdrew, the pro-Chiang elements trod on his heels in their hurry to go abroad. Most of the Dai Viet group remained in the country, waiting for an opportune moment to serve the new masters, and the scheme of provocation was theirs.

Well aware of their reactionary designs the Standing Bureau decided to refuse the French permission to hold their march for security reasons and instructed the Police to act promptly so as to nip the counter-revolutionaries' designs in the bud.

On July 12, at daybreak, a police commando unit rushed into the headquarters; of the Nationalist Party at 132 Minh Khai Street and searched the house. The reactionaries were caught red-handed with pieces of material evidence — a printing machine and heaps of leaflets still wet with ink.

At 7 a.m., the Bac Bo Police launched simultaneous raids on many offices of the Nationalist Party in Hanoi. In three houses by lake Thuyen Quang the reactionaries resisted with machineguns but the police, acting in coordination with the self-defence, succeeded in forcing them to surrender.

At 7 On Nhu Hau Street¹, the police discovered a press for making false banknotes and a room littered with instruments of torture — electric charge devices, pincers, hammers and so on. The walls were stained with blood. In the garden at the back of the house, we unearthed seven bodies some of which had been dismembered. Two persons kidnapped for ransom were saved just at the moment when the assassins were about to execute them.

¹ Today Nguyen Dia Thieu street.

While the police were carrying on their search, a man in shorts entered carrying a Japanese sword. Striking an attitude he proclaimed himself in a loud voice as a leader of the Nationalist Party and a member of the National Assembly and declared that no one had the right to interfere with him. One

of the kidnapped persons pointed his finger at him affirming that he was the man who, the day before, had threatened him with his sword and forced him to write a ransom note.

The people came in great numbers to see the bodies we had unearthed. Some identified members of their families. It is not easy to imagine the motives that urged the reactionaries to commit such crimes. Among the victims, some were our cadres who had been kidnapped and then liquidated; some were women who had been seized while passing by their offices, raped, robbed and finally murdered, while others were pedicab-drivers whom those brutes had killed so as not to have to pay them.

At 6 a. m. the following day, the police continued their search of the Nationalist Party centre in Quan Thanh Street. This was close to where the French had troops stationed and the reactionaries thought that they would protect them. When our police came they took up position behind a thick wall and fired at us with machineguns. There was a prolonged exchange of fire. Two hours later, the French came in their armoured cars hoping to intimidate our police force. But, our representative in the Liaison and Control Commission intervened at once and the armoured cars had to beat a retreat. In the end our men gained entry into the house, and seized many documents that they had not had time to destroy.

At the H. Q. of the Nationalist Party in Do Huu Vi (present-day Cua Bae) Street, we found still more bodies of men, women and even French soldiers whom the reactionaries had killed to provoke incidents between the French and our administration. Among the documents captured, we found a plan for a campaign of assassination and kidnapping. The Nationalist Party had been conspiring to murder French officers and men and kidnap French women and children. This was to have been carried out in Hanoi itself between July 10 to 17 by a group of special agents.

Mr. Huynh Thuc Khang came with us to look at the Nationalist Party centre in On Nh.u Hau Street.

A few days later, some Nationalist Party men came to Bac Bo Palace and requested an interview with the acting President to justify the revolutionary

line of their party. When he heard this Mr. Huynh asked at once, "Where are they?"

Rising up he went out leaning on his stick. Seeing them at the foot of the stairs, he pointed his staff at their faces and shouted

"Rascals! Robbers! And you have the face to give yourselves out to be nationalists and patriots!"

He turned his back on them and came back to his office.

After the On Nhu Hau street affair, even the most politically naive people who so far had more or less believed in the propagandist stunts of the Nationalist Party saw what they were up to.

On July 16, at a press conference acting President Huynh Thuc Khang declared "Unity is indispensable if we want to build our democratic republic, but no one should use 'unity' as a pretext for taking illegal actions. I advise all political groups and parties and all citizens to stand united. But, in the interests of the State, those who have taken illegal actions must be brought before the law. Genuine members of the Nationalist Party are ensured the right to act freely within the framework of law. The law is applied to everybody. Those who kidnap, hold to ransom or assassinate people must be severely punished by the law. The 10 articles of the National Edict signed by President Ho Chi Minh and Vice-President Nguyen Hai Than have laid down regulations regarding such cases. I only apply them. This is not an affair between political parties. The searches which have just been carried out are dictated by public security."

XVII

Since the departure of Uncle Ho, in the meetings of the Standing Committee, Comrade Nhan¹ and the other members regularly exchanged their views on the unfolding of the negotiations in Paris and on the increasingly tense home situation. Our messages to Uncle Ho and the delegation had to pass through the hands of the French. Most of the telegrams sent with reports on the implementation of the Preliminary

Agreement were blocked up in Saigon by the French while those of Uncle Ho reached us very late, sometimes after ten days. For us, these were moments of anxious expectation. We had more than once protested to the French against this. Our only means of following the situation was by listening to the radio and reading French and Western newspapers which would give no more than a brief communique on the sessions of the talks. However, through the documents left by Uncle Ho and the stories of some comrades who had the good luck to accompany him, we can give an account of his multiple activities during this period and the main lines along which the negotiations developed.

¹ Pseudonym of Comrade Truong Chinh, then Secretary General of the Indochinese Communist Party.

Uncle Ho again took the road he had first taken 35 years ago. Since then the revolutionary current had never ceased to flow. The young Vietnamese who had "lost his fatherland" and had gone to work on board the Latouche-Tréville had become the first President of the free Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

On May 31, owing to bad weather, the plane carrying President Ho and our delegation had to stop over at Pegu, an airfield near Rangoon.

On June 1, they arrived in Calcutta. The representative of the British Governor-General and the French Consul went to the airport to greet the President and accompany him to the Great Eastern Hotel, the largest hotel in the city. Uncle Ho stayed in this city for two days. Overseas Vietnamese came from every corner of India to meet him, some having covered hundreds of kilometres. Many women cried when leaving him.

On June 4, the delegation arrived in Agra. Uncle Ho and the delegation visited famous monuments and beauty spots.

On June 5, the delegation arrived in Karachi. The Governor told the delegation that the Government in London had informed him of President Ho Chi Minh's passage and instructed him to greet the President.

On June 6, Uncle Ho arrived in Habbaniya, Irak. The weather in this country was so hot that trees could not grow. To soften the view iron trees painted in green had been erected.

On June 7, the plane was heading for Cairo. It circled over Jerusalem for the President to have a clearer view of the ancient capital of Palestine. The delegation spent three days in Cairo. The Egyptians were then struggling hard to demand the withdrawal of British troops. The city was beautiful, airy, and animated with boats lying at jetties by the river, but the atmosphere was tense. Here Uncle Ho received a telegram from Paris — "President Ho Chi Minh is requested to rest a while in Biarritz until the new French government which will receive him in Paris is formed."

On June 11, the plane left Cairo for Biskra in Algeria.

On June 12, the plane landed in Biarritz, a very beautiful seaside resort on the west coast of France, not far from Spain. At the airport only representatives of the local authorities were on hand to greet them, for the French government had resigned, and was only taking charge of the day to day business of the State. Uncle Ho stayed in the Carlton Hotel in Biarritz while our negotiating delegation went on to Paris.

On the following day, overseas Vietnamese from every corner of France, some with their families, came to Biarritz to greet our President. They made collections for the delegation to bring home for the public funds. Greeting telegrams were sent to the President from our compatriots who had emigrated to England, the United States, New Caledonia and other countries.

French political organizations such as the French Communist Party, the CGT and the France-Viet Nam Association which had been founded a few days before sent their representatives to Biarritz to meet our President. Uncle Ho met some of his old comrades among the delegates of the PCF. He explained to them the policy applied by our Party in the complicated situation of the past few years and its directives at present.

The French press began to publish news about Viet Nam and discuss the Franco-Vietnamese negotiations.

During his stay in Biarritz, our President made a careful study of the existing situation in France.

Living conditions were still very difficult for the French people after the war. The bread ration was 300 grams a day, the meat ration 100 grams a week and the butter ration 500 grams a month. The hotel staff confided to him that since the first days of war each of them had only been able to buy one suit and one pair of shoes. The French workers were carrying out a fierce struggle for a 25% wage increase.

The new French government was formed ten days after the arrival of Uncle Ho in Biarritz, with Bidault, a leader of the MRP as Prime Minister. Moutet still headed the Department of Overseas France and was responsible for affairs concerning the French Union.

On June 22, the French government invited Uncle Ho to come to Paris.

The President's plane carried the flags of both Viet Nam and France. The yellow-starred red flag was flying for the first time in French skies.

Before landing, the plane circled over the city of Paris. Uncle Ho could recognize the Eiffel Tower, the grey and white dome of Les Invalides, the Sacré Coeur basilica on Montmartre hillock and the Arc de Triomphe with so many avenues fanning out from it. It was twenty-three years ago, on a summer day, that he had calmly left this city which was so familiar to him. Paris was still as it had been during World War Two. France had declared it to be an open city. People thronged Le Bourget airport to greet the President. A large Vietnamese flag was fluttering from the summit of a great mast and others were to be seen among the Tricolours.

When the plane had taxied to a halt, the Minister of Overseas France and the Head of Protocol representing the French government and accompanied by generals of the French land, naval and air forces, went out to meet President Ho Chi Minh and accompanied him into the air terminal. The fact that the Minister of Overseas France had been appointed to receive the President helped us to sense the attitude of the new government to the Viet Nam problem. However, all the diplomatic formalities were solemnly observed. A red carpet stretched from the air terminal to the car.

Representatives of French political parties and mass organizations as well as large numbers of Vietnamese residents crowded round to greet the President. In the name of the French women, a delegate offered him a bouquet and embraced him.

The brass band played the national anthems of Viet Nam and France. Tears welled in the eyes of many Vietnamese nationals on hearing the Vietnamese anthem resound for the first time in France. Ho Chi Minh and the representatives of the French government saluted the flags then reviewed the guard of honour. Thousands of Parisians including children cheered him and tossed flowers into the air. The President stopped a long time to talk to representatives of Vietnamese residents — workers, students, intellectuals — forgetful of the French officials accompanying him. Hundreds of cameras and movie cameras were directed at this Head of State who had come to the French capital in his modest khaki suit.

An agency reporter gave his microphone to the President asking him to say some words to the French people. "I thank the French government and people," Uncle Ho said, "for offering me this solemn welcome. I hope that in future the Vietnamese and French people may cooperate with each other in an equal, sincere and cordial way."

A procession of cars and outriders accompanied the President to the Hotel Royal Monceau, a large hotel situated near the Elysee palace. Along the road French people greeted him by waving streamers and shouting words of welcome.

XVIII

President Ho Chi Minh was not officially received by the French government until eleven days after his arrival in Paris. This delay was an unfavourable sign for the negotiations.

Let us take a look at the general situation in France at that time.

For many years political power in France had been in the hands of a group of capitalists and especially financiers who controlled banking, industry and commerce.

Lenin had already noted that "Unlike British colonialist imperialism, French imperialism might be termed usury imperialism."

The classical French policy was to invest ever more capital abroad for profitable purposes while protecting French and the colonial markets by setting up a strict customs barrier so as to hamper the inflow and competition of goods from other capitalist countries. The French method of colonial exploitation consisted in draining their natural resources by exporting them to the metropolitan country while exploiting the natives by paying them the lowest possible wage and imposing high taxes. The French colonialists maintained the economy of colonial countries in a perpetual state of backwardness.

The French grand bourgeoisie was notoriously cunning. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the men in power in France had supported the German and Italian fascists, finding in fascism a means to oppress the French workers, animated by a long tradition of revolutionary struggle. They supported Hitler's and Mussolini's intervention in Spain, and helped Franco suppress the Spanish Republicans. Together with the British bourgeoisie they hoped to use the Nazis to annihilate the Soviet Union. The French authorities had allowed the Germans to invade Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, aiming to direct the fascist attacks toward the East. But before advancing further in this direction, the fascists had turned round and within a few weeks, had seized France.

During the German occupation the French grand bourgeoisie had played a two-faced role. On the one hand they had collaborated closely with the German fascists, helping Hitler continue his aggression against Europe — on the other, they joined hands with the English and Americans, waiting for an opportune moment to act in case the Allies triumphed. The French Communist Party had taken the lead in organizing the People's resistance to German aggression. It was not only the Vichy administration that had given a helping hand to the fascists in repressing the patriots, de Gaulle himself had also tried to restrict the resistance movement inside France.

After the war, France, though standing on the side of the victorious allies, was in fact a defeated country exhausted by occupation. The French bourgeoisie had been weakened and its political influence was declining.

Industrial production had fallen far below its pre-war level and industrial equipment, not having been renewed for a long time, had become out-of-date. The French army was, in the words of a French political commentator, a "foetus in the womb of the US army." The outlet for French products in Europe had shrunk as some countries there had left the capitalist orbit. The French grand bourgeoisie had lost many plants, mines and banks in Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc. Meanwhile the Communist Party, which had been tempered during its long years of struggle against German fascism, had gained a high prestige among the people. The democratic forces were causing great anxiety to the French grand bourgeoisie as well as to the British and American imperialists faced with the new situation which had just been created in Europe. De Gaulle, who had always claimed to stand above the parties — a claim also made by many bourgeois papers — was in fact representative of the interests of the finance capitalists. Relying on the hundreds of thousands of American and British troops stationed in France, De Gaulle disarmed the revolutionary armed forces which had been fighting against the Nazi army of occupation. All his efforts were aimed towards liquidating the democratic institutions and founding a dictatorial regime. The Communist Party tried hard to lead the workers' struggle for the defence of their economic interests and for freedom and democracy. The workers' struggle against the monopoly capitalists who were trying to free themselves from their bad position was very fierce.

In October 1945, De Gaulle was forced to organize general elections to elect a constituent assembly which was to draft the constitution of the 4th Republic. A provisional government was set up with De Gaulle as President. This government was formed of members from the three main political organizations, the MRP, the Communist Party and the Socialists.

In early 1946 De Gaulle suddenly offered his resignation. His intention was to ferment political disturbance in France which would create favourable conditions for him to come back to power with a dictatorial regime. A provisional government was founded with Felix Gouin, a Socialist as President. This government approved the Preliminary Agreement signed between France and Viet Nam. The French Communist Party advocated seizing this opportunity to enter into alliance with the Socialist Party, form a government composed of communists and socialists and evict the pro-

Gaullist rightists. This was a real possibility because the two parties held the majority of seats in the government. But the leaders of the Socialist Party turned down this proposal.

In March 1946, the Gouin government sent Leon Blum, a leader of the Socialist Party, to Washington to ask for loans. After eleven weeks of bargaining, the US agreed to lend 650 million dollars to France on condition that the latter gave preferential customs treatment to US goods. It was widely believed that the Americans had urged the French to purge the communists rapidly from the government. To oppose the French people and prop up their weakening rule the finance capitalists chose to rely on the USA which had been enriched by the war and was now the ringleader of the imperialist camp.

In May 1946, the first draft constitution was put to referendum. It was democratic and progressive in many points. De Gaulle, although he had declared his withdrawal from the political arena, started to attack it. As a result of the frenzied campaigning of the reactionary forces helped by pressure from De Gaulle, the constitution was rejected. The Gouin government fell. The French people had to go once again to the polls to elect another constituent assembly.

At the June elections, the French Communist Party's position remained stable but the Socialist Party lost many votes on account of its indecisive attitude. The MRP greatly benefited from De Gaulle's influence and also gained some more seats. Thus the post of president of the provisional government went to Bidault, a leader of the MRP who had for long collaborated with De Gaulle as Foreign Minister. This government, in spite of the participation of a number of communists, was leading to the right and showed a tendency to depend ever more on the Americans. The new administration in France tried to sabotage the March 6 Preliminary Agreement and did not respect the agreements reached between France and the DRVN regarded by the finance capitalists as very dangerous and capable of leading to downfall of the French empire.

However the programme of President Ho Chi Minh's reception was carried out in all its solemn protocol.

On July 2, at 11 a.m., the chief of Protocol followed by high-ranking French officials went to the Hotel Royal Monceau to seek the President and accompany him to the reception party offered by the French government.

The car procession passed through streets which had been forbidden to traffic.

The Hôtel Matignon was hung with Vietnamese and French flags. After the military band had played the national anthems of both countries, President Ho reviewed the guard of honour. President Bidault went out to meet him and led him into the reception hall to present him to the members of his government.

Before the party began Bidault read his welcoming speech

"Mr. President,

"On behalf of the French people, I am very glad to receive the President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. I regret that events over which we had no control have delayed the reception which we have been wishing to offer you ever since your arrival in France. Your presence here is a great delight to the French people. It testifies to the traditional friendship between the two peoples. This friendship, which has been obscured for some time, must again become stronger and more sincere."

Bidault praised President Ho Chi Minh for his "courteous and heartfelt words appropriate for the reception which Paris and France wish to reserve for friendly countries" He extolled the French Union as an "original creation animated by a great humane spirit." He spoke of the "poetical and glorious scenery" of the castle of Fontainebleau where the Vietnamese and French delegations were to meet. He said that the "two parties were going to work together with sincerity and mutual understanding." He spoke about the meeting of Confucianism and Western philosophy, the new concept in relations among free men, the evolution and ideals of mankind, etc.

There was nothing precise in this speech from the French President so full of brilliant abstract words. President Ho Chi Minh replied "I am greatly moved by the warm welcome offered me by the French people and

government. Paris, this immortal city, is the cradle of the noble ideals of the 1789 revolution, it has remained faithful to its ideals in the bloody confrontation between the democratic and fascist blocks. It is probable that many difficulties are lying ahead in the Fontainebleau Conference the duty of which is to establish the foundation for relations between France and the new Viet Nam. But sincerity and mutual confidence will clear away all obstacles. Both eastern philosophy and western philosophy extol this principle of conduct: 'Don't do to others what you don't want others do to you.' I am convinced that in such conditions the future conference will lead to a good result."

On July 3, President Ho laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe. He also visited Versailles. In the summer of 1919, he had gone to Versailles where the Allies were meeting to work out a peace treaty terminating World War One. He had then handed them a petition, asking that independence be granted to Viet Nam.

On July 4, he visited the war memorial on Mount Valerien. It was on this hill that many French partisans had been executed by the German fascists in the Second World War. We can understand the emotion felt by Uncle Ho as we read the following lines in his notes "Seeing the monument to the French combatants massacred by the Germans while fighting for independence and freedom we felt sorrowful and greatly moved. Independence and freedom in any country are won at the cost of the blood of its combatants and as a result of national union. Therefore, those who truly esteem the independence and freedom of their country should respect those of other nations."

XIX

Formal negotiations between the Vietnamese and the French delegations did not start till July 6, in the palace of Fontainebleau, 60 km from Paris.

D'Argenlieu hastened to return to France coming one week before President Ho Chi Minh's arrival in the French capital.

D'Argenlieu felt that, with the Gouin Government's downfall and Bidault's recent coming to power, he now had a good chance to realize De Gaulle's policy towards the colonies. He made every effort to meet the leaders of the new Government in order to win their approval for his course of action in Indochina. He was said to have requested the French authorities to let him lead the French delegation to the negotiation. The High Commissioner wanted to show that his power extended beyond Indochina, as far as this conference. The new French authorities while not in fact opposing D'Argenlieu's line on Indochina, refused his request to lead the delegation. They did not want to incense public opinion during President Ho Chi Minh's stay in Paris. Moreover, they were afraid our delegation might refuse to deal with him; they were aware of our dislike of the man after our experience in Dalat. They advised the High Commissioner to keep out of the way. D'Argenlieu went back to Saigon disappointed.

The nomination of the French delegates to the negotiations was not approved by the French Government until July 5, one day before the beginning of the conference. Leading the French delegation was the same Max André, head of the French team to the Dalat preparatory meeting. The French delegation was largely composed of the same people who had been in Dalat Messmer, Pignon, Torel, Gonon... A new military personality, Admiral Barjot was appointed to the delegation in addition to General Salan. The Admiral was one of De Gaulle's close associates. In an attempt to defuse possible criticisms, the French Government included in the delegation three deputies from the three principal Parties in the Government: the Communists, the Socialists and the MRP. Professor Paul Rivet, a progressive personality who represented the Socialist Party, withdrew after the delegation's caucus meeting to prepare for the first session, saying that he did not want to become an accomplice in the scheme to betray the provisions signed on March 6, 1946 by the representatives of France. Max André later admitted that before going to Fontainebleau he had been instructed by French Premier Bidault to make sure by every means possible that Viet Nam "would not become a new pawn in the Soviet world chess game."

At 10 a.m., our delegation and the French delegation entered the court of honour of the palace of Fontainebleau.

Vietnamese and French flags were hoisted over the palace, Max André delivered an opening speech, congratulating the representatives of Viet Nam and wishing the conference good success. The French delegation was resorting to the tactic of talking generalities, avoiding discussion of any concrete questions.

In his reply, Comrade Pham Van Dong said

(...) While the Vietnamese people were striving to resist the Japanese invaders, the Vichy government sold out Indochina to the enemy. In August 1945, the Vietnamese people rose up to seize power and founded the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. Since that day, Viet Nam has been an independent country. Under the leadership of President Ho the Vietnamese people have set about their national construction in peace."

Our delegation pointed out that it was the dispatch of the French expeditionary army to Viet Nam which had rekindled the war. Later, France signed the March 6 Agreement with the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam...

"However, has France respected this Agreement? It is with deep concern that we have to tell you that a number of provisions related to the cessation of hostilities have not been implemented by the French authorities in Viet Nam..."

Our delegation denounced France for continuing the war in Viet Nam, sending troops to encroach upon the Tay Nguyen Highlands and perpetrating acts of violence in North Viet Nam, of which the most glaring was the recent seizure of the former governor-general's residence in Hanoi. Our delegation emphatically protested against the design to divide Viet Nam, the appearance of an "autonomous Cochinchina" rigged up by the French authorities in Saigon and their recognition of its self-styled "provisional government."

At the end, our delegation stated, with complete frankness

"The March 6 Agreement was not designed to provide for the French troops safe entry into North Viet Nam, and the policy of *fait accompli* adopted by the French in Indochina can in no way facilitate the negotiations..."

Our delegation's firm statement showed clearly what was the actual situation in Viet Nam and had a resounding echo in France. The reactionaries branded this statement undiplomatic and unfriendly. The progressive people saw in our delegation's attitude a determination to defend our national independence and national unity and, at the same time, a desire to find a satisfactory solution to the relationship between Viet Nam and France.

It took the two sides quite a few days to reach mutual agreement on the agenda which included the following main points

- The status of Viet Nam in the French Union and its relations with other countries;
- The reunification of the three parts of Viet Nam by negotiations and a referendum;
- The drafting of an Agreement between France and Viet Nam.

Besides a sub-committee to work out an agenda the conference set up committees to hold specific discussions on political, military, economic, financial and cultural affairs.

In these discussions, the French delegation revealed the policy adopted by France as regards her overseas territories. Despite some modifications in name and organization, this policy remained, in essence, one of maintaining the former colonial system. In Indochina, it would mean putting the peoples of the three countries of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia under the control of a federal government headed by a governor-general.

As to the urgent problems raised by our delegation such as a cease-fire in Nam Bo, the timing and modalities for the holding of a referendum there, the French delegation adopted an evasive attitude. The conference was in an impasse for several days. For some sessions, half of the French delegates failed to turn up.

President Ho did not attend the Fontainebleau negotiations. In his capacity as a distinguished guest of the French Government, he stayed in Paris.

He worked without respite, sometimes as much as 14 hours a day, as the comrades in our delegation later told us.

President Ho met and talked with almost all major political organizations in France. All the three leading Parties in power sent their representatives to see him. The delegation of the French Communist Party, which then had a membership of half a million, consisted of such important leaders as Thorez (then Vice President of the French Government), Duclos, Cachin, Billoux, etc. Some of these had known him back in the twenties and thirties at the Tours Congress, in Moscow and at the Conferences of the Communist International. He met with representatives of several international mass organizations such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the Women's International Democratic Federation. These organizations were given information on the activities of the Vietnamese workers, youth and women, and admitted the Vietnamese labour, youth and women's organizations as affiliated members. Some young people from other countries who had a chance to meet President Ho at that time were already calling him by this name full of love and respect "Uncle Ho."

He met many influential personalities in Paris, politicians, economists, financiers, military men and intellectuals including journalists and writers such as Louis Aragon, Ilya Ehrenburg, Anna Seghers, Elsa Triolet, Richard Bloch, Pierre Emmanuel...

He was fully aware of the importance of enlightening all the people on what was happening in Viet Nam, its revolutionary movement and the Vietnamese people's legitimate aspirations for independence and reunification. This work couldn't be done in one day or even one month. Representatives of the new Viet Nam were now present in Paris. But it was not easy to give people a correct understanding of our people's urgent problems and legitimate aspirations when the reactionaries were doing everything in their power to distort the facts.

President Ho exerted a great influence on the Paris press circle. The correspondent of the daily *Combat* reported on his meeting with President Ho

"Mr Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, received me without ceremony, his manners being always simple. He is an elderly man with shrewd and kind eyes and a face radiating benevolence and determination. A black beard accentuates its Asian character. He wore a military jacket without decorations, in a manner reminiscent of the men of the October Revolution. He spoke slowly with a thorough knowledge of the French language and all its subtleties — his voice was clear and distinct, his style plain and unaffected. With him were some intelligent and patriotic young people. On his shoulder, he carried firmly the destiny of a nation of whose characteristics he was the representative..."

Some of the journalists who had formerly distorted our people's struggle began to write more truthful articles following their first contacts with President Ho.

Later, a French journalist wrote "with his brilliance, his eloquence and his prestige, his words had a deep effect. Some journalists approved of him, others criticized him but the whole world spoke of him."

President Ho's image, described in identical terms by the press — bright eyes, broad forehead, scanty beard, a plain suit and simple gestures — won the French people's love and left a deep impression in their hearts. A Vietnamese resident in France, noticing that the President had been wearing the same suit of plain cloth since his arrival in France, hastened to get his measurements with the intention of making him a new suit, presumably more in keeping with fashion and his status. But President Ho found out about it in time and stopped him.

The French authorities were unable to find any excuse which they could use to obstruct the contact between their distinguished guest and various political organizations, influential personalities and the press.

One week after the opening of the Fontainebleau Conference, President Ho gave a press conference in Paris. In an attempt to keep the Viet Nam

question out of the limelight, Bidault then President of the French government had had the Conference held 60 km. away from the French capital, pleading the need for a quiet place for the sake of the talks. The journalists, cameramen and photographers could not spot anything behind the high walls of Fontainebleau palace. They thus rushed to the press conference in large numbers.

President Ho pointed out the 6 points of the Vietnamese side's negotiating positions

1. Viet Nam demands independence. Its independence does not mean a complete severing of relations with France, but would be an independence within the French Union, thus both countries may profit from it. In the economic and cultural fields, Viet Nam is willing to cooperate with France.
2. Viet Nam firmly rejects a federal government.
3. Southern Viet Nam is part and parcel of Viet Nam, no one has the right to separate it, no force can separate it.
4. Viet Nam will protect French properties. But the French must abide by the labour regulations of Viet Nam and Viet Nam reserves the right to purchase those properties which are important for its national defence.
5. If Viet Nam needs advisers, French people will be given preference.
6. Viet Nam has the right to send its ambassadors and consuls to other countries.

President Ho said

"For our part, we are very sincere. We hope that other people will also treat us with sincerity. We are resolved not to lower ourselves. But neither do we wish to degrade France. We have no desire to push the French out of Viet Nam; but we want to say let them send to Viet Nam those who respect us. Only mutual trust and cooperation in all sincerity and equality can bring about a friendly relationship between the two countries."

While the Fontainebleau negotiations were being kept in the dark, President Ho's statements brought the problem to light and were followed by a heated debate in the press. The majority of the press regarded his statements as reasonable and sincere. One paper wrote "Those statements show that President Ho and the Vietnamese Government are resolved to settle Franco-Vietnamese relations through a mutual and amicable understanding between the two nations." French progressive opinion was on our side, and criticized the provocative comments of a few reactionary papers.

Over half a month had passed and no progress had been made at the Fontainebleau conference. Unexpectedly, on July 23, the Paris press reported that D'Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner in Indochina, was convening a federal conference in Dalat on August 1. The composition of this conference would include representatives of Laos, Cambodia, Cochinchina, Southern Annam and the Central Highlands... This suggested that D'Argenlieu wanted not only to cut off the South from Viet Nam but also to split Viet Nam into several "countries" and regions. On the same morning, our delegation lodged an energetic protest at the Fontainebleau Conference. The French again tried to evade the problem by promising to submit the protest to their government.

Because of the High Commissioner's action and the French Government's calculated indifference, the conference, already in a state of tension, became further stalemated.

On July 26, at noon, President Ho paid a visit to Fontainebleau. The Vietnamese delegation, the French delegation and representatives of the local administration and people welcomed him with bouquets of flowers. After the welcoming banquet given by the head of the local administration, the director of Fontainebleau palace showed him round the palace with all its ancient luxury and the splendour of its architecture. After that, President Ho suggested a walk in the woods. The director again accompanied him.

On his return, the President inquired into the situation of the conference and talked to the members of our delegation.

The conference was now in a hopeless impasse. The representatives of the French Government in the negotiations, acting on their leaders' instructions,

openly evaded the implementation of the Agreement, contending that they should not create a precedent for other French colonies to oppose the mother country. They still clung to obsolete reactionary ideas on the colonial question. The system they wanted to set up in Indochina was hardly different from what the French had established here before World War II.

President Ho went back to Paris in the evening.

The French Government maintained silence in the face of our delegation's protest against D'Argenlieu's convening of a so-called "federal conference" in Dalat on August 1. On that day, our delegation declared that it would postpone the session until it received a proper answer to its protest. Our delegation left Fontainebleau never to return.

The period of florid greetings and promises was over.

The French inter-ministerial council on the Indochina question met under the chairmanship of Bidault from August 10 to 12 to discuss the breakdown of the negotiations. Earlier, Varenne, a former governor-general in Indochina and now Minister of State in Bidault's Government, who had just been appointed chairman of the inter-ministerial council on Indochina, declared to the Press "The third republic has created across the ocean a splendid work which brings glory to the genius of France! Are we going to abandon and destroy this work ? For the French such an action would be an irremediable disaster. We are a people who fully understand what we are saying and we will do everything in our power to ward off this disaster."

A few days later, even De Gaulle made his voice heard. While censuring the draft constitution which was about to be put to a referendum, he severely criticized the statute of the French Union as laid down in the draft. He considered that the principle of "free self-determination" could only lead to anarchy, division and finally foreign domination.

All the meetings, discussions and exchanges of views held throughout the month of August could not help to get the Fontainebleau Conference under way again.

XXI

Early in August, French news agencies unofficially reported President Ho's imminent return to Viet Nam. This news coincided with our delegation's declaration that they were suspending the Fontainebleau conference. Evidently, the negotiations held no prospects of success.

During these days, the French troops had repeatedly carried out provocative acts along the Hanoi-Lang Son route. As had been agreed upon by both sides, the French army was permitted to go to Lang Son to replace the withdrawing Chiang Kai-shek troops. The modalities for the logistical supplies for French troops stationed far from Hanoi had been clearly laid down. But, the French army units assigned to this task were constantly violating these provisions. They often went without an authorized pass, including even armoured vehicles in the supply convoys and seldom failing to provoke our soldiers at the sentry posts along the road.

On August 1, a French military lorry drove from Lang Son to Hanoi. Our sentry post at Duong bridge asked to see their pass. When the French replied that they had left it behind, our men requested them to stay where they were while they telephoned a report to the Central Liaison and Control Commission. However, the French drove on across the bridge. Our men blew their whistles to stop them, but in reply the French opened fire hitting five of our national defence guards and two civilians. Our soldiers returned the fire. The lorry rushed over the bridge and headed for Gia Lam.

We knew that the French reactionaries in Indochina were deliberately making trouble so as to wreck the already precarious negotiations at Fontainebleau. The delicate problem now was that president Ho and our delegation were still on French soil. Faced with the French troops' provocative acts, we tried to find a peaceful settlement while remaining firm in our dealings with them. However, our people, burning with pent-up anger against the French invaders, were liable to fight back at once, particularly when the enemy caused losses to life and property.

Two days after the incident on Duong bridge, on August 3, a French convoy of twenty lorries drove from Hanoi to Lang Son. When crossing Duong

bridge, the French soldiers wantonly opened fire shooting at the sides of the road. They fired into a sentry post two kilometres from Bac Ninh, killing one national defence guard. The convoy raced on into Bac Ninh town, firing away all the time. Our soldiers and self-defence force fired back. The clash went on from 7.30 a. m. until noon.

Instead of joining us in an effort to find a settlement, the French command in Hanoi sent up a *detachment* of reinforcements accompanied by armoured cars. On their way, the French troops opened fire and set on fire several houses in the Duong bridge area and Yen Vien and Tu Son districts. They arrived in Bac Ninh at 10 a. m. Thus, the dash worsened. The Vietnamese-French Joint Commission came in the afternoon but its intervention was to no avail.

On August 4, the French major commanding the operation requested our authorities in Bac Ninh to let him station his troops in the barracks of the former "Indochinese Guard." We rejected this absurd request. A few hours later, four French aircraft came to attack the town, hitting civilian houses. The French troops refused to withdraw from the town.

On August 6, Crepin, Commissioner of the French Republic in the North, acting in place of Sainteny who had returned to France, came to see us at the Bac Bo palace. He protested against the French casualties caused by our side in Bac Ninh. We replied that the clash had been brought on by the French troops' provocation. The Vietnamese side had agreed to send a joint commission to investigate with a view to a settlement but the trouble continued because the French troops refused to pull out of Bac Ninh, thus seriously violating the provisions of the Agreement signed by the two sides.

Crepin said "If you allow such action to go on, clashes will surely break out." This was a veiled threat. I replied "You know very well the cause of clashes of this type. French troops have been mainly responsible for them. We have expressed our good will on several occasions. There will be peace if you want peace, war if you want war."

Faced with our firm stand, Crepin lowered his tone and changed the subject. He offered to ship to the North a quantity of rice from the South.

D'Argenlieu lost no time in distorting and exaggerating the clash in Bac Ninh and reported it to Paris as an incident which had caused heavy losses to the French army and which "involved the responsibility of the Vietnamese government."

A few days later, new provocative acts took place along the Vietnam-China border. On August 10, French troops made unprovoked attacks on our army in Tien Yen and Dam Ha. On August 13, they stationed local bandits in Lang Son. They harassed our compatriots in Ha Long Bay and on the Hong Cai seaboard. Meanwhile, it was reported that French troops were moving south from Son La. Earlier, D'Argenlieu had revealed his desire to set up in the North a "Nung — That republic" on the pattern of his "western republic" in the Central Highlands. The enemy's activities, which were noted around the same time along the whole border from the coast to the mountains and from the east to the west, signalled the beginning of this scheme.

On July 18, Leclerc, the French general who had had a more or less correct understanding of the Viet Nam problem, had returned to France and the French government had appointed Valluy to replace him. In mid-August, Valluy left Hanoi. Until then, despite the French continuous provocations, Valluy had maintained a flexible attitude. On his arrival in Saigon, he even sent a cable expressing his thanks for our send-off and his desire for friendly relations between Viet Nam and France.

On August 17, Morlière who replaced Valluy, flew to Hanoi. This major-general had spent several years in North Viet Nam during the French domination. Later, he had gone back to France and had taken part in the resistance against the German fascists.

He had been credited with some achievements during the fight for the liberation of France.

I met Morlière at the airport. He seemed grateful for the presence of a Vietnamese government representative. He told me that before leaving France he had had the honour to meet President Ho and he was bringing a letter of introduction from President Ho addressed to us. He added that he had come to Viet Nam with the spirit of a new France and he strongly

approved of the liberation of Viet Nam under the leadership of President Ho. He expressed his confidence that the Fontainebleau negotiations would end in great success.

In his contacts with us, this old general reiterated his desire to see a great improvement in the relations between France and Viet Nam. He often presented himself as having a great sympathy with the Vietnamese people and a high appreciation of their good qualities. To illustrate this, once in a talk with me, he extolled the "native soldiers" in the former colonial army and heaped praise on one of his servants who was a very skilful and honest cook! A few months later, Morlière was to send us one ultimatum after another — for a time, he was nicknamed "the general of ultimatums" — It was during his tenure of office as Commissioner of the French Republic and commander of the French Army in northern Indochina that the clash in Hai Phong broke out which led to war spreading all over our country.

Today we have sufficient documentation to form a clearer picture of this general. A report written by Morlière in January 1947 on the clashes in Hai Phong and Hanoi was made public recently in France. From this report, we can see that, although Morlière's outlook and mentality remained very much those of a "colonial", nevertheless he was someone who meant well and desired peace. In his capacity, he had tried to prevent the war-eager colonialists in Indochina from kindling a large-scale war. It was because of this attitude that he was recalled to France and "shelved" for a time. He was to be promoted and given an appropriate appointment only much later, when the French government realized its mistake in pursuing the war in Indochina.

Later, in August, the first trouble over the customs took place in Hai Phong. As was said above, the French were very concerned about this question, which was raised by the French delegation at the Dalat and Fontainebleau conferences. No settlement had yet been found to the contradictory viewpoints of the two sides. The presence of French troops at a northern seaport made it possible for them to attempt to encroach upon our rights in the field of customs.

As a rule, foreign merchants who imported goods at Hai Phong port paid their duties to our Customs. Instigated by the French, some of them now

tried to evade them claiming that the Sino-French Treaty had provided that Hai Phong was a free port. In August, we detained a foreigner who had brought with him an amount of new French currency which we had not yet allowed to be put in circulation, and confiscated from him 100 cases of cigarettes for tax evasion. On August 15, the French interfered in the matter, demanding the release of the detainee and the return of the confiscated money and cigarettes. The French military command in Hai Phong told the local authorities "Hai Phong is a federal port and only the French are entitled to carry out a customs control. The French army will not tolerate foreigners being searched and their goods confiscated. If such incidents are to happen again, the French army will resort to military action. Of course we could not accept this absurd demand for there had been no agreement on federal customs reached between the Vietnamese and the French governments.

A few days later, while carrying out its duties in the port, the boat "Seagull" of the Hai Phong Customs was accosted by a French gunboat. French soldiers jumped onto our boat and attacked our customs officers, finally seizing our boat together with its men.

On the afternoon of August 29, Colonel Debès in Haiphong sent tanks, armoured cars and troops to besiege our custom-house and police station in the port. They arrested a number of our policemen, pillaged the goods in the custom-house and occupied the two buildings. We sent along our troops and a fight took place. The Vietnamese-French Liaison and Control Commission in Haiphong came to settle the conflict. We resolutely demanded the release of the detainees and the withdrawal of the French troops from the places they had illegally occupied.

Several anti-French demonstrations broke out in Haiphong. In the areas where they were stationing their troops the French had been terrorizing the population and old people and children began to evacuate the city. Our struggle went on. Not until two weeks later did Debès release our men and withdraw his troops from the custom-house and the police station in the port.

However, this was but the first, minor conflict in the customs problem.

XXII

September 2, 1946.

The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was one year old.

The streets were submerged under a sea of flags and flowers. Everywhere, there were flags, portraits of Uncle Ho, lanterns, festoons, and triumphal arches.

By this day last Autumn, the revolution had just succeeded. The century-long night of slavery had ended. Uncle Ho had come back at the country's dazzling daybreak, the beginning of a new era of independence and freedom. The year which had passed had contained so many historic events. It was a year which had testified to the vitality of the democratic republic and to the skill of the helmsman who had successfully steered the nation's boat over untold perilous swirls and surges. Today, the new masters of the country had asserted their identity, realized their responsibility and were fully aware of their abilities. Though the revolutionary road ahead was still very long and arduous the flame of hope and confidence was burning ever brighter day by day.

The celebration of the first anniversary of Independence took place in the absence of Uncle Ho. But our people had striven to live up to his advice given at his departure. The negotiations between us and the French were passing through moments of extreme difficulty. On the eve of the anniversary, Uncle Ho sent a cable recommending our compatriots to do everything possible to avoid clashes with the French in order to create favourable conditions for the continuing negotiations.

7 a. m. A long blow of the siren sounded. The whole capital city turned south where part of the country was fighting. A minute's silence was observed to pay tribute to the martyrs who had laid down their lives for national independence and reunification. As the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was one year old, its southern part had now been fighting for nearly one year. The first difficult days had gone by. The temporary retreat in face of the enemy's violent onslaught had ended. The whole of southern Viet Nam, which had matured after one year of combat, was rising up to

return the enemy's blows. As he expanded the occupied area and sent part of his force to the North, the enemy was revealing more and more weaknesses. His expeditionary corps had first moved from Saigon to various towns and then spread out to the rural areas. Now, they were being driven out of the large rural areas back to the towns and even to Saigon. The enemy admitted that beyond the range of his sentries' guns he had no control, The illusions of some of their Excellencies the French commanders on a quick war and quick victory had been shattered. Southern Viet Nam had learned how to fight the enemy who now found themselves bogged down in a long war.

At the beginning of this jubilant day, the entire country turned to southern Viet Nam, grateful to it for having, during the past year, given evidence of the vigour of the new regime, the indomitable strength of a whole nation which had awakened to stand up in arms as one man to fight for independence and freedom. Starting this happy day, the whole country pledged to live up to their sacred oath to fight to the end for the defence of their national independence and unification.

The minute's silence ended. Large numbers of people streamed to the Lake of the Sword area where a military parade was to take place on the occasion, of the National Day. A grand stand had been built in Chi Linh Park. The previous year, on September 2, on the stand in Ba Dinh square, President Ho and the Government had come before the people for the first time. Then the Government was a Provisional Government and no foreign guests were present. This year, on the stand were seen Acting President Huynh Thuc Khang and the ministers, elected by the people themselves and now familiar to them. Besides, there were British, American, Chinese, French... representatives. Morlière and some other French military officers were also present. The organizing committee showed them to their designated places like other foreign guests. The Commissioner of the French Republic in North Indochina, who had spent several years here in the golden days of colonialist rule, didn't show any displeasure.

After the Order of the Day addressed to the army, people's militia and self-defence forces by the Military Commission, a parade of the armed forces began.¹

¹ General Vo Nguyen Giap delivered the Order of the Day (Publisher's note).

Since the founding of the Republic, this was the second big military review. On September 2 the previous year, a detachment of the liberation army, just arrived from the revolutionary base and carrying assorted captured weapons, had been lined up in front of the stand. It had been impossible to hold a military parade then. Our fighters had gone through many battles but they were unused to the rules of parading in formation. Now, a regiment of the national army of Viet Nam, properly equipped, clad in green uniforms, golden-starred caps and leather boots and carrying rifles, were proudly parading before the stand to the stirring music of the military band. Preceding each unit was the commanding officer armed with a long sword with the political commissar marching beside him.

After only a year of training while fighting, our army was reporting to their new government and compatriots their monumental growth and their readiness to enter a protracted fight should the enemy spread the war. In fact, our army was carrying only light arms that day. Besides rifles, each company had one or two medium sized machineguns and a few submachine-guns. This, however, was the result of enormous efforts made by the parade's organizing committee. The presentation of a regiment of the regular army today was just like the well-timed appearance of a liberation army detachment in Hanoi just following the success of the revolution. At a time when red-bereted French paratroops were tramping the pavements and vehicles of the Second Armoured Division were roaring up and down the streets of Hanoi, this event was highly significant.

This was also our Army's report on its progress before engaging in its long nation-wide war of resistance. The second military parade was not to be held in the capital city until nine years later when the last battle fought against the French expeditionary army had ended in victory in Dien Bien Phu.

In the afternoon, a great gathering was organized. Large numbers of people amid a sea of flags and posters streamed down to the square in front of the Municipal Theatre. Flower-bedecked floats of multiple forms and colours

appeared, turning the square into a blossoming park. Half a million people from the plain to the mountain regions came here today to hear the new administration's report on what had been done during this year of liberation from the old regime and of building a new life.

The Government's report was also a review of the people's achievements for this year in the realization of the three big tasks laid down by President Ho — *to fight hunger; ignorance and foreign aggression* in order to build and consolidate the revolutionary power.

Today, the new administration was in a position to put before the people many concrete questions.

The Franco-Japanese policy of forced delivery of foodstuffs had deprived our people of hundreds of thousands of tons of rice, thus causing a horrible famine. At the time when the revolution succeeded, the Red River had risen to an unprecedented level of 12.6 metres and the August floods swept away another 400,000 tons of rice from our people in the North. Moreover the rice growing acreage had been considerably diminished as a result of the Japanese policy of forced cultivation of jute and castor.

Industry and commerce were completely paralysed. Handicrafts were ruined.

The new administration had been set up when, in the coffers of the Treasury, there remained only 1,230,000 piastres half of which were worn out small-change banknotes. The time for the collection of direct taxes had passed. Customs which formerly had made up the greater part of the budgetary revenues of the whole of Indochina now brought in almost nothing because of the recession of commerce. Meanwhile, the value of the piastre had gone down from 500 to 10 Thanh Hoa coins. In November, the French-owned Bank of Indochina refused to advance money to our Government and illegally annulled the validity of the 500 piastre banknote. To make matters worse, the circulation of Chinese currency by Chiang Kai-shek's army was going on uncontrolled.

Our people were faced with a grave famine. Moreover they had to feed 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek soldiers and 60,000 Japanese soldiers.

Such was the economic and financial situation in our country during the first days. In the meantime, in the North, the internal traitors and reactionaries, relying on the Chiang soldiers' bayonets, sought every means to overthrow the revolutionary power in the South, the French imperialists started their invasion.

Responding to the call of the government, our people built and consolidated hundreds of kilometres of dykes to prevent flood.

President Ho's call for the increase of production to ward off famine brought about marvellous successes. The rice-growing acreage increased by 50%. The sweet potato acreage quadrupled while total yields increased five times. The maize acreage increased by five times — total yields four times. In July that year, the price of rice in the North went down from 700 to 200 piastres per hundred kilos. The revolution had thus defeated the famine. This was a stupendous achievement for the democratic republic right in the first period of reconstruction.

Thanks to an amendment of taxation regulations to lighten and equalize the people's burden, to the call for sacrifices on the part of civil servants and army-men, to the people's voluntary contributions and to the issue of Vietnamese banknotes, our administration was able to pay for its expenses, particularly its big expenses in national defence.

In the field of education, the struggle against ignorance achieved unprecedented success. Eighty thousand men and women teachers; working voluntarily without pay in sixty thousand classes, helped to eradicate illiteracy for one and a half million persons.

The struggle against foreign invaders and internal enemies was waged resolutely and won great successes. The two hundred thousand Chiang Kai-shek soldiers were driven back to their country. The dark designs of their henchmen, the reactionaries, were utterly smashed. In the South, our army and people, getting stronger and stronger as they fought, foiled the enemy's scheme of a quick war and quick victory. The revolution was still standing fast in twenty out of the twenty-one provinces of South Viet Nam.

The democratic republic had been consolidated the new administration, after a year of hardships and troubles had successfully held the first general election in the history of the country, convened the National Assembly and formed the official Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. The first democratic constitution in the history of the country had been drafted and was to be discussed and adopted by the National Assembly. Almost all the Administrative Committees and People's Councils from village to provincial level in Central and North Viet Nam had by now been officially elected. The people were in a position to exercise their right to democratic liberties. Before the revolution, there had been twenty newspapers and reviews. Now, there were as many as one hundred and twenty. Over ten million people had been admitted to various associations and organizations for national salvation.

It was with no ordinary elation that today the people, dressed in their best clothes, came to take part in the great festival commemorating the first anniversary of the foundation of the democratic republic.

The meeting was followed by a parade of half a million persons extending over five kilometres. The decorated float of the Viet Minh National Committee bearing the national golden-starred red flag headed the parade. Another float carried a model of the rostrum (in Ba Dinh square) from which President Ho, in his first appearance before the people the previous year, had read the historic proclamation of independence. On the Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour's decorated vehicle was a globe which symbolized the world wide movement of the working class and the labouring people. On another decorated platform was a golden bird with widespread wings symbolizing the new regime in its vigorous growth. Several other vehicles carried posters reading "*Hail to Viet Minh. Gratitude to the Front which has liberated the nation and won back national independence.*" There was a sudden downpour. But the sea of people carrying flags, posters, portraits of President Ho and flowers carried on imperturbably, rain or shine, bringing their endless joy to the streets of the city also submerged in flags, flowers and portraits of Uncle Ho.

In the evening, the whole city glowed in the pink light of tens of thousands of paper lanterns hung under the front porches of houses. A group of young

people of the capital city held high a torch, symbol of the revolutionary flame, and ran round the Sword, Lake to thundering cheers. People were holding parties right on the street pavements and inviting passersby from distant provinces to join in. The whole capital city became a single giant party which could hardly contain the immense joy of the nation on the first anniversary of Independence Day. Artistic performances such as concerts, song and dance shows, plays, traditional dramas, and operas went on in various city quarters till very late at night.

Just as, when enjoying a ripe fruit, we are grateful to the grower of the tree and when drinking sweet cool water, we are grateful to the digger of the well, so in that day's jubilation, everyone could not but think of the source of his happiness. This was the moment when President Ho's image came to one's mind, an image bathed in all the national hues, simple yet warm, unaffected and bright. On this great day of jubilation, he was far away, facing all sorts of cares and worries for the sake of the people, and the country.

XXIII

Late in August, the Western press reported that President Ho had sent a note to the French Government. Then Moutet and Varenne were said to have stated "The Fontainebleau Conference may be resumed."

But even the beginning of September saw no resumption of the conference because a great disparity remained between the viewpoints of the two sides. This fact was confirmed by the French Government's note sent a few days later in reply to that of President Ho "The difference between the viewpoints of the two sides on fundamental problems is too great to make a resumption of the conference practicable, for such a resumption would not have any success."

Now came a point about which we had been very anxious if no agreement could be reached by the two sides, the French reactionaries, undoubtedly aware of the trend of developments in Indochina, might try to obstruct the return of Uncle Ho and our delegation to Viet Nam. However we believed that Uncle Ho would be able to find a solution.

The following days saw a swift succession of news. The French press reported on September 10 that President Ho and our delegation were preparing to leave for home on September 14. On September 12 and 13, it was reported that the Vietnamese and French delegations were working out a summary agreement. But the following day, on September 14, all the French news agencies carried the information that our 15-man delegation had left for Toulon port on September 13 in order to take the ship back to Viet Nam. At the same time, there was a report that President Ho was to leave Paris on September 14 and was to return to Viet Nam aboard a French warship. Thus the reported summary agreement that we had supposed to be a conciliatory action by our delegation before leaving, would not be concluded.

On September 15, according to the latest news given by the French agencies, an Agreement between Viet Nam and France had been signed on Saturday night, September 14, and on Monday morning, September 16, President Ho would leave Paris. Though the content of the Agreement hadn't been made public, we felt somewhat relieved.

A few days later, Franc-Tireur published an account of the signing of the September 14 Modus Vivendi. It said roughly

The meeting between President Ho and Mr. Moutet on the night of September 14 took place in a tense atmosphere. The main difficulties were all derived from the problem of Southern Viet Nam. Every time, President Ho Chi Minh suggested the participation of both sides, Viet Nam and France, in the settlement of the southern Viet Nam problem, the French government's representative replied "This would be a violation of French sovereignty. It is unacceptable. Moutet showed himself inflexible. He said "Will your Excellency, please, sign the Agreement, to avoid a breakdown ?" In reply to Mr. Moutet, President Ho Chi Minh reiterated his determination to set out for Viet Nam at 8 a. m. on Monday, then rose to leave. President Ho and the Minister parted coldly at 11 p. m.

The situation became very strained. Those who accompanied President Ho were of the opinion that the Agreement would not be signed.

On his return from Mr. Moutet's, President Ho went into his room and pondered over the matter. At half past midnight, when all his assistants had gone to bed, he met again with Mr Moutet. He once more raised the problem of southern Viet Nam. In his persuasive voice, he discussed things with Mr. Moutet and put several questions to him.

"Why does the French government refuse the cooperation of Vietnamese government representatives in bringing about an armistice in southern Viet Nam?"

As a result, the presence of a Vietnamese representative by the side of d'Argenlieu was agreed upon in principle. Then President Ho asked:

"If so, why can't we agree with each other that such a representative would have the duty to participate in the implementation of the Modus Vivendi?"

This point, too, was approved.

"But will this representative have the right to go to southern Viet Nam?"

Mr. Moutet kept silent. However, Moutet had agreed that Vietnamese would have the right to freedom of movement in southern Viet Nam and that the Vietnamese army could stay on there.

Yet, the question of the movement of the Vietnamese representative by the side of Admiral d'Argenlieu was left pending. However, at long last, the two sides agreed to sign the Modus Vivendi.

We read this article on the news bulletin of a French agency and we were not sure of its authenticity. Two days later, the Modus vivendi was made public. What Franc-Tireur had published was not inconsistent with its content. But the developments which had lead to the conclusion of the Agreement were not clearly known until the return of Uncle Ho and the delegation. The negotiations between our side and France had gone through excruciating movement. And, like the conclusion of the Preliminary

Agreement half a year earlier, it was Uncle Ho who made the decision at the eleventh hour.

The struggle for freedom and democracy in France was encountering untold difficulties. The reactionaries' counter-attacks became more frantic at every success of the democratic forces. The monopolies had never eased their grip on the State apparatus. Even after De Gaulle's resignation, they maintained their firm control over the key posts of the French government. With Bidault's coming into power, they were able to further consolidate their rule. As regards the problem of French overseas territories, none of the successive governments had ever suggested any amendment in the French policy going beyond De Gaulle's statement in Brazzaville on March 24. It was noteworthy that the Inter-Ministerial Council on Indochina had always been in the hands of those who backed De Gaulle's policy towards colonies, with men such as Bidault, Michelet and then Varenne. This was the mainstay of d'Argenlieu after de Gaulle's withdrawal from the government.

This fact had been the stumbling block in the earlier negotiations between our side and France at Dalat and the cause leading to the impasse of the Fontainebleau conference. It was under such circumstances that Uncle Ho signed the September 14 Modus Vivendi. The document as its name indicated, had only a provisional character and did not contain decisions on questions of principle. These, by mutual agreement, were to be further discussed in early 1947 between the two Governments. It was noteworthy that President Ho had succeeded in his demand for a provision to be inserted in the document that "France undertakes to put into effect democratic freedoms in southern Viet Nam and to cease all acts of force."

XXIV

On September 16, 1946, the dispatch ship Dumont Durville was preparing to leave Toulon for Indochina. The captain received an unexpected order to remove all passengers and cargos for another mission.

The French Government had decided to use this ship to take President Ho home. Accompanying him, besides his assistants, were some overseas Vietnamese.

On the morning of September 18, the warship weighed anchor and sailed out into the Mediterranean.

A French warship flying a red flag with a golden star was indeed an unusual sight for the people of Africa. She passed through the Suez canal and entered the Red Sea. On the way, several ports fired salutes in honour of the first Head of State of a free Viet Nam. Uncle Ho visited Djibuti at the invitation of the French Governor General who had been informed by the French Government and had made preparations for his reception. The ship called at Colombo on its way through the Indian Ocean. Uncle Ho came ashore to visit Ceylon for a day. Gandhi and Nehru sent envoys to the Ceylonese capital to meet Uncle Ho and present him with a banner of the Indian parliament. The previous month, the Indian people had celebrated Gandhi's 77th birthday. On that occasion, Uncle Ho had sent a cable wishing him a happy life, twice as long as his present age.

The warship sailed at a rather low speed. The French seemed to be deliberately prolonging President Ho's return trip. She once stayed in a port for several days for "maintenance." She even conducted shelling exercises on the sea, supposedly part of her "routine drill." In face of this procrastination, Uncle Ho maintained his calmness and composure.

As his companions recounted, the crew on the ship were amazed at the utmost simplicity of the President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. He travelled to France without any luggage. He took with him just one change of clothes and said he would do the washing himself. The French sailors assigned to serve him found themselves seldom called on. President Ho spent much time in conversation with the officers and men, inquiring after their families. Through his talks, they got a better understanding of the Vietnamese people's struggle for independence.

Throughout the voyage, he chatted with the overseas Vietnamese almost every day, in the morning, afternoon and evening. Later, they realized in retrospect that they had attended a special study course tutored by President Ho himself.

There were four "students." They were intellectuals who had been living away from the country for a long time. They were the luckiest among the

many Vietnamese residents in France who had wished to go back to Viet Nam with Uncle Ho and our delegation to serve their country. Each country that the ship passed by became a subject for a talk. In Djibuti, Uncle Ho spoke of the French colonialists' exploitation in Africa, the life of the black people and their struggle. In Colombo, he spoke of the difference in the policies applied by the French and the British in their colonies, and the Ceylonese people's struggle for liberation. When the ship was sailing on the Indian Ocean, he talked of the collusion between the British imperialists and the French colonialists in the repression of the Indian people's struggle for independence. In some places, he predicted the revolutionary movement's eventual strong growth despite its present immaturity. Every day, he talked of the struggle for independence at home. He told many stories about the August Revolution. He cited the examples of poor labouring people who had joined the revolution, been tempered and grown up in the struggle and who had now become outstanding cadres having achieved glorious successes.

He paid attention not only to their knowledge but also to their life style and habits. Having nothing to do on the ship, they often got up very late. Once he came in the early morning when all of them were still in bed. He asked if they had slept well. From then on, they rose with the sun. He always urged them to mix with the masses. This was a new sort of work which they found very difficult. He took them to see the sailors and talked with them so that they could learn from it.

Once he asked comrade Pham Quang Le

"Back at home, you'll have the opportunity to do good work, but there'll be many difficulties and hardships. Can you bear them?"

"I can, Uncle."

"A resistance war may break out. Our material basis is still beset with difficulties. Do you have the determination to overcome them?"

"I do."

A few months later, Comrade Le became director of the Armaments Department of our Army.

Before the ship arrived in Hai Phong, the study course had been completed. As a result, though they had been living far from the country and from the revolutionary movement at home, the intellectuals felt much better informed and were all eager to begin their work.

One month after her departure from Toulon, the dispatch ship entered the sea off central Viet Nam. Admiral d'Argenlieu, for the second time, gave a welcoming ceremony for President Ho on the sea.

The Dumont Durville entered Cam Ranh bay with D'Argenlieu and Morlière, the latter having just arrived from Hanoi, were present on the Cruiser Suffren to welcome President Ho. Several journalists were also invited on board.

French sailors, lined up on the ship's deck, cheered repeatedly as President Ho came aboard. The Admiral walked up to greet him. President Ho inspected the guard of honour and went into the banqueting room.

D'Argenlieu toasted President Ho's health and asked about his trip. President Ho said

"Excuse me, Admiral, for my poor French, but I assure you that I'm speaking in all sincerity. I put much hope in the negotiations that will soon take place. The French people, including the press circles, have come to understand us better. There were a few papers which attacked me but that didn't do me much harm... "

President Ho talked with the High Commissioner for two hours on the implementation of the September 14 Modus Vivendi. He requested d'Argenlieu to organize immediately the joint commissions to settle the conflict in southern Viet Nam, as provided for by the Modus Vivendi. D'Argenlieu agreed with him on the appointment of a Vietnamese government representative to work by the side of the High Commissioner.

After the talk, President Ho and the High Commissioner met the press. President Ho urged the journalists to work for the cessation of the current clashes and for the implementation of the provisions of the Modus Vivendi with a view to making a good preparation for the negotiations which would be continued the following January. Following President Ho's address to the journalists, the High Commissioner added with a persuasive smile "I believe that a real step forward has been made on the road to cooperation."

XXV

Our delegation, having left Toulon port two days before Uncle Ho, arrived in Hai Phong on October 5. We were thus better informed about the negotiations in France. Everyone felt unceasingly anxious while the warship Dumont Durville continued to linger on the Indian Ocean. The news that the ship had entered Vietnamese waters and would soon arrive at Hai Phong port was a great relief to us. The entire nation exalted in expectancy.

Delegations of the Government and mass organization went to Haiphong to wait for Uncle Ho on the evening of October 19. A representative of General Morlière, Commissioner of the French Republic in North Indochina, accompanied them. Along Highways, the towns and villages were covered in red flags.

Our comrades in Haiphong had made very good preparations for Uncle Ho's welcome. The army was to play a part in the welcoming ceremony, in which a French army unit was also to participate, under our command. The entire armed forces in Haiphong were mobilized to maintain order and cope with any possible emergencies.

On the afternoon of October 20, when we went to the port, people from Hai Phong, Klen An and the adjacent rural areas were standing along the two sides of Pham Hong Thal, Ho Chi Minh and Tran Phu Streets. Self-defence units and security forces had formed cordons all along the road.

At 4 p.m., the Dumont Durville sailed into Ngu landing place. The golden-starred red flag fluttered by the side of the Tricolour on top of the tall ship's

mast. The ship emitted a long siren blast. Never in this port had a ship's siren so stirred the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people as on this afternoon!

The Vice-Minister for the Interior, the Mayor of Haiphong and Colonel Debès, commander of the French forces in Haiphong, went on board to pay their respects and to report the programme of the welcoming ceremony. A familiar figure in a faded khaki suit appeared on the ship's deck, There he was. Immediately thunders of applause and shouts of "Long live President Ho!" drowned everything out.

And the moment when Uncle Ho left the ship and stepped on the soil of the home port a siren blast sounded from the Haiphong Municipai Theatre to spread the happy news throughout the city. After his long sea voyage, he looked healthy with a sun-tanned complexion. He smilingly nodded his greetings to the representatives of the government and the provinces who had gathered here to welcome him. The Vietnamese and French national anthems were played. He attended the ceremony of saluting the flag and inspected the guard of honour. Our soldiers, simply dressed in green uniforms, soft caps, carrying rifles With fixed bayonets, and their officers, whose caps bore a golden star, holding drawn swords, had the honour of presenting to him the greetings of the entire nation on his long-awaited return. Then he moved on to the French unit. At the Vietnamese officer's order, the Tricolour was lowered to salute him by the French guard of honour, dressed in their white ceremonial uniforms.

The ceremony having ended, he came back to Ngu landing place to express his thanks to the various delegations, accepted a bouquet from the Haiphong population and embraced two children who came running to him.

Thunders of applause resounded all along the route. Many people couldn't hold back their tears when they saw him.

He went to stay at the City Administrative Committee premises. After dinner, he briefed us on his return voyage. His attitude was as simple and composed as it had been formerly when he used to chat with us after dinner before the trip. He inquired about our health and the situation at home. As he had just arrived back after a long journey, it was not planned for him to

receive any visitors that evening. But while he was sitting with us, a comrade from the City Committee reported that there was an old man with damaged eye sight who was insistently asking for an audience. He told him to show the man in. It was not cold but the old man was wearing a peculiar woollen blue suit which looked like a military uniform. As soon as he saw him, Uncle Ho rose, came up to him and took him to a seat. Thirty-five years previously, the old man had worked on a ship with Uncle Ho. Having learned that Uncle Ho had returned and was staying in Haiphong, he had put on the suit in which he had worked on the ship and asked one of his grandchildren to take him here. No sooner had the old man said "Respected President Ho..." than our Uncle interrupted him, saying "Just call me Ba as before." Uncle Ho spent a long while with him. The old man was too moved to speak much.

At 5 a. m. on the following day, Uncle Ho went for a walk in the city, then returned to receive his visitors who were many. There were representatives of mass organizations and political parties from Hanoi, representatives of various offices and organizations from Haiphong and representatives from the provinces Kien An, Hon Gai, Quang Yen, Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Bac Ninh... An aged man presented him with an embroidered scroll bearing this inscription in classical Chinese "Only one word and the nation is uplifted", another with a walking-stick made from one hundred vertebrae of a boa constrictor.

At 10 a.m., the special train taking him to Hanoi left Haiphong.

The rows of people coming to welcome him back extended all along the railway line. At every station, there was a big mass gathering amid a sea of flags and posters reading "Long live President Ho" "Long live the victorious revolution" "North and South are one country" Everywhere, triumphal arches had been put up. The train made a short stop in Hai Duong town where the local people held a grand meeting at the station to welcome him. It took the special train no less than five hours to cover the 100-kilometre journey from Haiphong to Hanoi. During the whole time, Uncle Ho stood by an open window waving to the welcomers.

In Hanoi it was a beautiful autumn day with splendid golden sunshine. Red flags fluttered over the moss-covered roofs and green tree tops. It was past

3 p.m. As it began crossing Long Bien bridge the train gave a long whistle.

At 3.30 p.m., it pulled into Hang Co station. On that day, all the Hanoi population had taken a day off to welcome him back. Acting President Huynh headed a delegation of the government, National Assembly and various mass organizations which was waiting for him on the station platform. People crowded in front of the station and along the road leading to the Bac Bo palace. Standing out in the sea of people were the soldiers in their green uniforms, the military band with its brass instruments and young girls dressed in white shirts and blue skirts in the "New Life" style.

Morlière who had just returned from Cam Ranh was present at the station. The French Command also sent a guard of honour and a military band.

Uncle Ho attended the welcoming ceremony at the station, then drove to Bac Bo palace. The motorcade went through countless triumphal arches. On behalf of the whole country, Hanoi applauded, waved flags and scattered flowers to welcome him.

The whole country was overwhelmed with elation. Uncle Ho shared the same joy, which showed on his radiant face. He came back safe and sound. With his hands at the helm, the Fatherland's boat would move forward, overcoming all stress and storm. The sun shone more brightly! The colour of the flags became brighter! The trees were greener and the sky grew more lofty!

Uncle Ho met Comrade Nhan and all the other members of the Party Standing Bureau in the Bac Bo palace. At this time, as the struggle was becoming more complicated, some of our leaders were not working in the open. After nearly four months, we again had the opportunity to gather round him. As he talked with each one, he showed his solicitude for every one of us.

Before long, there was a throng of people in front of the palace. He went to the window to wave to them. More and more people kept coming. Young pioneers paraded by, beating drums and shouting: "Uncle Ho has returned! Uncle Ho has returned!" This was also the cry of the entire nation, resounding everywhere on this jubilant day of his return.

On October 23, President Ho issued a statement to the people

"(...) I went to France in response to the French Government's kind invitation with the aim of settling the question of Vietnamese independence and the reunification of North, Central and South Viet Nam. Because of the present circumstances in France, these two questions have not yet been settled. More time is needed. However, I can assure you that sooner or later, Viet Nam will be independent and North, Central and South Viet Nam will be reunified..."

To the people in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Ba he stressed:

"North, Central and South Viet Nam are the same country. We have the same ancestors and forbears; we are kith and kin. North, Central and South Viet Nam are like three brothers of one family.

"Since no one can divide the members of one family no one can divide our Viet Nam."

"So long as the country is not yet reunified and my compatriots are still suffering, I am unable to eat well and sleep peacefully. I solemnly declare to you, compatriots, that with your determination, with the determination of all people in the country, our beloved south will certainly return to the bosom of the Fatherland."

XXVI

Since the signing of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement more than seven months had passed. Yet over our territory the aggressor's guns had never ceased to sound. Availing themselves of the political confusion in metropolitan France and supported by financial circles with vested interests in the colonies, the Gaullists in Indochina headed by d'Argenlieu adopted a policy of *faits accomplis* to further their aggressive designs. D'Argenlieu had grossly violated the clauses of the Agreement. However he had never suffered any reprimands for this from the French Government even after de Gaulle had left the political arena. It was not difficult for the wily defrocked priest to realize that his entire activity in Indochina had never run counter to the political line followed by the new French government. He had received

firm support from the inter-ministerial council on Indochina presided over by Bidault.

In North Viet Nam, after the withdrawal of the Chiang Kai-shek troops, d'Argenlieu began to carry out a "nibbling" policy — the piecemeal invasion of our territory. He had been devoting his efforts to consolidating and expanding the French footholds and at the same time vigorously recruiting reactionary elements and former lackeys who had been lying low, in preparation for the establishment of "autonomous zones" to encircle the revolutionary forces and create the conditions for overthrowing the revolutionary power. In South Viet Nam, d'Argenlieu continued to extend the war of aggression. He had openly repudiated the articles of the Agreement on South Viet Nam, even going to the length of declaring that South Viet Nam remained legally a French colony. He had given orders to Nyo, commander of the French Expeditionary forces in south Indochina, to use every possible means to undermine the revolutionary power, suppress the people's resistance and rapidly reestablish the colonial administration as it had been before 1939.

For our part, over the past period we had been conducting a struggle to make our adversary observe the Agreement and check his nibbling tactics while at the same time carrying out resolute retaliatory strikes against his acts of aggression. By combining our efforts to maintain detente with strong military counter-blows, we were able to consolidate and develop our forces in every field and improve our ability to deal with any eventuality.

Our Southern compatriots' continued and widespread uprisings over the past months had changed the political and military situation in Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo.

Our resistance in the South had continued.

In Nam Bo our armed forces had been developing rapidly. In the months of May, June and July we had formed new regiments. Like their brothers and sisters in the North, our troops in the South were mostly of peasant origin. But, particularly in the eastern zone of Nam Bo where there were many factories and rubber plantations, workers joined our army in large numbers. Officers and men of the 13th Regiment were all workers. Most of the

officers were political cadres put in charge of the armed forces by Party committees. A number of them had been politically active since the 1940 Nam Bo uprising.

Nam Bo is a land with few forests and mountains. But our Party had pointed out that, though favourable terrain plays an important role, the essential factor is the support of the people. By firmly relying on the people's support, our armed forces had been able to hold their ground, build up their organization and obtain more equipment.

Our motto was "Capture the enemy's guns and use them against him." In this way many units had managed to replace almost all the weapons they were originally supplied with.

The Resistance forces had succeeded in establishing large bases embracing several provinces such as War Zone D, the Plain of Reeds and the U Minh Forests. Every province had medium and small-sized bases covering two or three districts or five or six villages. In many regions, these bases were linked up with each other. As for Saigon city it had become a source of supplies providing the resistance bases with weapons, explosives, machines, medicines, medical apparatus and also with technicians, medical workers and doctors. Our armed forces had frequently made their presence felt there. The mass organizations in urban centres had "adopted" various army units each military zone each regiment had set up a factory to manufacture military equipment.

In southern Trung Bo we had been able to form some regiments using the reinforcements dispatched down from the Fifth and Sixth Zones in July.

In the Tay Nguyen Highlands our first regular regiment had been formed incorporating one battalion composed wholly of young men of various ethnic minority groups — the M'To-rang-lon Battalion.

Many small guerilla bases had sprung up in the delta and mountain areas of southern Trung Bo.

Our armed forces had everywhere stepped up guerilla activities. The army in coordination with the guerillas and self-defence units attacked and

ambushed the enemy, thwarted his mopping-up raids, launched successive campaigns of attrition' and annihilation and did their utmost to protect the people and their property and to expand the liberated areas. They controlled many strategic communication links and thrust deep into urban areas and the enemy's military, political and economic centres.

The development of guerilla warfare compelled the enemy to take urgent counter-measures. The enemy forces had to maintain 24-hour patrols around their scattered bases. Their mobile forces, limited in numbers, were thrown into unending and fruitless "pacification" raids.

Our armed forces in the meantime had learned various methods of fighting. Many units had gained experience in surprise assaults on small posts, in ambushes along roads and rivers. Gradually we became able to defeat the enemy's large-scale raids and check his thrusts into the free zones.

In Nam Bo, on September 22, the enemy committed 2,000 troops covered by aeroplanes, tanks and armoured cars in a big raid on Due Hoa. Our army and guerilla forces intercepted them there. In the battle, which raged for the whole of that day, we destroyed tens of tanks and other vehicles, killed a large number of troops, captured many weapons and shot down one French plane. (Was this the first enemy plane to be shot down by infantry fire in Viet Nam?) In Vinh Loc the enemy troops were apparently encircling a section of the 12th Regiment when they found themselves being surrounded and shot at. It turned out that our troops, having received in advance information of the enemy plan, had secretly moved out and laid an ambush. The battle ended in heavy losses for the marauders. In southern Trung Bo, our army and people beat back enemy attacks on Deo Ca, An Khe and Kontum. We also launched many attacks on the enemy's newly-established network of posts, especially against those in the Kimbrai area, the battle of Van Gia. In the Central Highlands, guerilla warfare was beginning to develop.

The resistance in the South could be said to have entered a new stage.

On September 13, our government, by Decree 182, decided to reorganize the Resistance Committee of Nam Bo so that this committee would assume leadership of the resistance movement in Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo.

A week later, on September 22, the Provisional Resistance Committee of South Viet Nam was inaugurated, becoming the only legal administration in the South. The Committee declared its readiness to implement the provisions of the Modus Vivendi signed on September 14 between the Governments of the DRVN and France.

Under the Modus Vivendi, the government of France had undertaken to observe the ceasefire, put into effect democratic freedoms in Nam Bo and hold a referendum as soon as favourable conditions had been created. Like the March 6 Preliminary Agreement, the Modus Vivendi in its turn threw the traitors into confusion. The political struggle, which had been strong after March 6, now had new conditions in which to develop. The press launched seething attacks on the puppet ruling clique. Hundreds of intellectuals, many of them well known figures, called for the overthrow of Nguyen Van Thinh. After barely two months the struggle had reached such a pitch that Thinh committed suicide by hanging. The French and their agents, frightened by the upsurge of the political struggle in urban centres hurriedly banned all marches, meetings and demonstrations.

The political struggle was accompanied by extensive attacks launched by our armed forces. As a result, large sectors of the puppet administration were smashed while more and more of its civilian agents and soldiers surrendered to the Revolution. Our propaganda work among the enemy ranks achieved good results. We were able to organize a full company of European and African deserters in the Thu Duc-Gia Dinh area and once a full squad of European soldiers surrendered in Hoc Mon.

At his meeting with President Ho Chi Minh in Cam Ranh Bay, d'Argenlieu did not touch on the frenzied acts of sabotage committed against the March 6 Preliminary Agreement and the the September 14 Modus Vivendi by the French troops. Instead he complained that "Terror has assumed formidable proportions in Cochinchina since the conclusion of the Modus Vivendi" (by terror, he meant our activities against the traitors). In so doing the French High Commissioner was, in effect, simply admitting his anxiety over the new attacks of our Southern compatriots.

In spite of the French acts of sabotage, our Ministry of National Defence, on October 30, acting on the agreement reached between the two sides on a

ceasefire, gave orders to our army and people in the South to stop fighting. The order was strictly carried out throughout Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo. Once again the enemy was surprised and embarrassed to find that we were in full control of South Viet Nam. His claim that "Hanoi controlled no one and nothing in Cochinchina" had turned out to be either a blindfold on his own eyes or a bluff.

XXVII

On his return from abroad, Uncle Ho and the Standing Committee of the Party's Central Committee began a review of our people's struggle on the military, political and diplomatic fronts over the last months.

The systematic undermining of the Agreement, the continuation of the aggressive war in the South and the intensification in occupation attempts in the North advocated by the chieftains of the French Expeditionary corps in Indochina obviously had the support and encouragement of the French authorities. Because French big business had not given up its ambition to maintain its domination over former colonies and dependencies, our negotiations with the French had ended in an impasse. The prevailing political trend in France offered even more favourable conditions for the French reactionary colonialists in Indochina to extend the war. We, however, found it advisable to exploit every chance to maintain the detente. As a matter of fact, the French financial magnates were facing many difficulties. The struggle of the democratic forces in France was continuing. The French political situation was still fluid. The French government remained a provisional one. The Modus Vivendi we had concluded with the French, though not containing decisions on principles had compelled them to reaffirm their commitment to the spirit of "reconciliation and cooperation" of the March 6 Agreement, undertake to put into effect democratic liberties in Nam Bo and pledge to join us in fixing the time and procedure of the referendum in Nam Bo.

One policy was to wage a relentless struggle to force the enemy to honour and carry out his commitments and at the same time, to strike back resolutely against his invasion and other acts of sabotage. We drove home to the masses the necessity of building up and developing our political,

military and economic potential, keeping watch over the enemy's manœuvres and getting ready to cope with any eventuality, including the extension of the war by the enemy to the whole country.

The convening of the National Assembly became an urgent problem.

Since its last session in March, many important events had taken place. The government's activities ought to be reported to it. The first democratic constitution of the DRVN had been drafted and was awaiting approval. As for the Resistance Coalition Government itself, it had been, we may recall, formed in an unusual situation at the beginning of March. Though its general composition had met the requirements of the time, some of its members had never been elected by the people. Now that both in the Government and the National Assembly there were vacant seats because some of their members belonging to the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance had fled along with the Chiang Kai shek troops, Uncle Ho and the Standing Bureau of the Party felt it necessary to have a new strong, popular and efficient government which could fulfil its tasks in leading the people in the changed situation.

The National Assembly met on October 28 at the City Theatre.

The seating at this session was somewhat different from that at the previous ones. The assembly hall was divided into three sections left, right and centre. Sitting on the far left were the Marxists, including those members of the Indochinese Communist Party who were working in the open. Coming next were deputies from the Socialist Party wearing red neckties and those from the Democratic Party. The centre found the deputies without party affiliation but who had participated in the Viet Minh Front. Deputies from the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance were on the right, the former sitting at the far end. Nearly half of the 70 seats reserved for these two organizations at the first session were unoccupied this time.

Foreign guests included the British, American and Chinese consuls and General Morlière's representative. They were seated among journalists in the private boxes in the circle.

The agenda consisted of the following items

1. Reports of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly and of the Government.
2. Discussion and approval of the draft constitution.
3. Formation of a new government.

Uncle Ton, a deputy from South Viet Nam, was elected leader of the Assembly's Presidium.

A deputy from Rach Gia province, Comrade Nguyen Van Tao, read a message of greetings to the Assembly on behalf of all South Vietnamese deputies. He spoke of the deputies of South Viet Nam absent from the present session — Lawyer Thai Van Lung had been tortured to death in Saigon jail, Architect Huynh Tan Phat and other patriots were being detained by the enemy on Poulo Condor prison island. As he stepped down from the rostrum, President Ho Chi Minh came across to embrace him. Tears trickled down the President's cheeks.

The South Viet Nam representative proposed that the National Assembly express confidence in and support for President Ho Chi Minh, our 'First Citizen', who had led our nation out of slavery. In response, all the deputies gave him prolonged applause. In its report to the National Assembly the Government recounted its activities since its formation including the negotiations with the French Government in Fontainebleau and the conclusion of the September 14 Modus Vivendi.

On October 31, the Government was questioned by deputies. Altogether there were eighty-eight questions concerning national defence, foreign relations, the economy, finance, justice and home affairs, which were forwarded to the Ministries concerned. President Ho Chi Minh, on behalf of the Government, gave replies on foreign policy, the conclusion of the Modus Vivendi and the desertion of Nguyen Hai Than, Nguyen Tuong Tam, Vu Hong Khanh...

He said

"The Government's foreign policy and the September 14 Modus Vivendi... have been dealt with at length in previous reports... In short, as regards the democratic countries, we stand on very good terms with them; though they have not officially recognised us they have great sympathy for us. As far as our diplomatic efforts with France are concerned, the Government, in the process of its negotiations for the March 6 Preliminary Agreement, at the Dalat and Fontainebleau Conferences and for the September 14 Modus Vivendi, has shown a great resolve to safeguard Viet Nam's independence and territorial integrity and at the same time a readiness to cooperate with France on sincere and friendly terms. Naturally, on the principle of equality, they must cooperate with us.

He continued

"Will the Modus Vivendi affect future agreements? In human society what does not have an effect on something else? However, the Modus Vivendi can in no way have a binding effect on future negotiations. Whether future negotiations will lead to a fruitful result depends on the implementation of the Modus Vivendi..."

He added

"About the Vice-President, Mr. Nguyen Hai Than, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Nguyen Tuong Tam, and the Vice-Chairman of the Military Commission, Mr. Vu Hong Khanh... They are not here... Our country has been in difficulties. Our people have entrusted important tasks to those in whom they had confidence yet these gentlemen have abandoned their posts. They ought to consult their consciences. Those who have quitted work either do not care to share in the burden of State affairs or are incapable of shouldering it! Now that they have left, we who remain are ready to shoulder it ourselves."

There was prolonged applause. Uncle Ho continued

"But should they find they cannot betray their consciences, should they change their minds and return to the people and the motherland, we should gladly welcome them back."

Before sitting down, he ended up by saying to the Assembly

"If any other member of the Government has made mistakes, I will accept the responsibility and offer my apology to our compatriots."

The afternoon and evening sessions were reserved for replies by the Ministries. When the Ministries concerned had answered the last question, many deputies raised further questions. After the final question had been put, President Ho, on behalf of the Government, again took the floor to answer them. With familiar, simple words, he said

"Concerning the national flag, the Government has never intended to demand that it be changed. As a few members of the Government had made a proposal to that effect, the Government had considered it its duty to submit their proposal to the Standing Committee of the National Assembly. Since then, the situation has greatly changed. Our red flag with its golden star has been soaked in the blood of innumerable Vietnamese fighters in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo.

Everywhere it has been carried, from Asia to Europe and from Europe back to Asia, it has been respectfully saluted."

His eyes brightening up, the President emphasized

"Now, no one except our twenty-five million people can invoke any right to demand a change in the national flag."

The meeting hall burst into resounding applause. Uncle Ho continued

"As for the question of integrity, the present Government has made great efforts toward this end. However, from Ho Chi Minh to those who work in village committees the Government is very numerous. Nevertheless, it' has been doing its best to set a good example. Wherever this effort is not successful, legal measures will be taken against those who take bribes. We have punished, are punishing and will punish them until corruption is eradicated.

Again, there was resounding applause.

"Certain deputies maintain that the Modus Vivendi has been signed on unequal terms. The Government begs to differ. Under its terms, each side makes certain concessions. If we ensure the French some economic and cultural interests here, they have to ensure the putting into effect of democratic freedoms in the South and the release of detained patriots. As to whether the French will sincerely implement the Modus Vivendi or not, we ought to keep in mind that in France there are good as well as bad people. I can affirm that now the majority of the French people approve of our independence and territorial unity."

In the same way — simple, informative, articulate and concise — he answered the other questions raised. No more questions were asked after his replies. It was just midnight.

On behalf of the Government, President Ho submitted its resignation which the National Assembly accepted. Then the National Assembly unanimously requested him to form a new government.

On the rostrum once again, having expressed thanks to the National Assembly for its confidence, Uncle Ho said

"This is the second time the National Assembly has entrusted me with forming a government. As long as Viet Nam is not independent and reunified, anyone, whether myself or any other person, entrusted by the National Assembly with this task, must strive to fulfil it. I now accept the task and would like to declare before the National Assembly, our people and the world that Ho Chi Minh is not the kind of man who hankers after power and tries to cling to his position seeking the "spoils of mandarinship." The government to be formed must be one of national unity, grouping able men irrespective of political affiliation... Though the decision of the National Assembly did not contain the term 'integrity', I would like to declare before the National Assembly, our" people and the world that the Government to be formed must have integrity. In accordance with the Assembly's decision it must be efficient, courageous, and determined to pursue the cause of national construction and struggle for the achievement of national independence and unity. Despite all dangers, the members of the Government will rely on the strength of the National Assembly and the

people and resolutely pursue the aims defined for them by the National Assembly and the people."

That session ended at one o'clock in the morning. Starting on November 1, the National Assembly began its discussions of the first draft constitution of the DRVN.

On the afternoon of November 2, President Ho announced that he had completed the formation of the government. At 5 p.m., he arrived at the Assembly and was warmly acclaimed. He said

"This Government may not fully meet your aspirations but has been formed in conformity with the guide-lines you have set. It has the participation of eminent personalities from the North, South and Centre. The honourable Huynh Thuc Khang wanted at first to retire due to advanced age but, at my request, has decided to stay on for another term."

The National Assembly greeted the list of ministers submitted by President Ho with prolonged applause.

The National Assembly, by vote, unanimously approved the new government. Nearly seven weeks later, due to the enemy's policy of aggression, war spread all over our country. The Government formed in November by President Ho was to lead our people in a nation-wide resistance that would last 8 years.

The National Assembly continued its debates on the draft constitution. On November 8, 1946, with 240 votes against 2, it passed the constitution of the DRVN.

At the final session, on the new constitution, President Ho said

"Our country has enjoyed freedom for only 14 months. Yet, the first democratic constitution in our history has been adopted by the National Assembly. This constitution proclaims to the world that Viet Nam is an independent country that its people already enjoy all the democratic freedoms; that in the enjoyment of citizen rights the Vietnamese woman is

equal to the man. This constitution upholds the solid unity of the various nationalities in Viet Nam.

XXVIII

According to the stipulations of the Modus Vivendi, the French Government was to carry out the following main provisions in Nam Bo

1. Release of Vietnamese citizens detained for political reasons and participation in any activities related to the resistance.
2. Guarantee for Vietnamese citizens in Nam Bo of democratic freedoms such as the rights to free association, free speech and free movement.
3. Ceasefire.

On October 26, our military command in a message to the Supreme Commander of the French Expeditionary Corps proposed that the two sides put into effect a ceasefire from zero hour on October 30. A few days later, Valluy in his reply said he had ordered his troops in South Viet Nam to stop firing on that date.

At the beginning of November, d'Argenlieu in a statement to the press said hostilities had ceased at zero hour on October 30. He also said that more than two hundred "political prisoners" had been freed, that other cases were being considered and that General Nyo had been dispatched to Hanoi to discuss the establishment of a Franco-Vietnamese military commission with the Vietnamese Government. In a letter to President Ho Chi Minh, d'Argenlieu confirmed all this.

On November 4, Morlière took Nyo to call in President Ho at the Bac Bo Palace. With the President were myself and the Vice-Minister for the Interior. Nyo was introduced as Head of the French military delegation appointed by the High Commissioner. Previously, President Ho and his assistants, myself included, had agreed with Morlière to set up, at the earliest possible date, a joint military commission and to hold urgent talks on the implementation and control of the ceasefire in Nam Bo.

However, while Nyo was in the North, it was reported that the French had opened fire in many places in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo. Under the circumstances our armed forces had been compelled to take defensive measures.

On November 7, the Franco-Vietnamese joint Military Commission held its first session at the premises of the former Chamber of Commerce. The French delegation was headed by Nyo. At the session our delegation condemned the French for their ceasefire violations, pointing out that these violations had not been brought to an end on the contrary, they were continuing on an ever larger scale. We stated that we wished to get the situation stabilized by introducing into Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo a joint ceasefire Commission. This was turned down by Nyo. We also raised the question of the accreditation of our representative to the French High Commissioner as stipulated by the Modus Vivendi — a point which had been agreed upon by President Ho and the French High Commissioner at their talks in Cam Ranh Bay as well. To this Nyo replied that that question was beyond his authority. The meeting ended with no questions solved. The two sides agreed to continue that discussions later.

The same day, our Government received from d'Argenlieu a message of protest against our establishment of a Provisional Administrative Committee in South Viet Nam saying that this was not in keeping with the spirit of the Modus Vivendi and that the activities of the said Committee could be detrimental to the implementation of the Modus Vivendi.

In his reply, President Ho said

"The Nam Bo Provisional Administrative Committee was set up in August 1945 and has been functioning under the central Government ever since. Moreover it had official relations with the Allied military authorities and with the French authorities in October last year.

"The fact that Nam Bo is under both the occupation forces and the Vietnamese administrative and military authorities was recognised by the March 6 Preliminary Agreement and the September 14 Modus Vivendi. Under these agreements the status quo is to be maintained in South Viet Nam until a referendum is held. The activities of the Provisional

Administrative Committee and the Vietnamese military authorities are simply directed towards the strict implementation of the political and military provisions of Article 9 in the Modus Vivendi concerning Nam Bo. They can only be of help in the policy of goodwill and cooperation which our two governments wish could be carried out unobstructedly."

On November 12, another message from d'Argenlieu was transmitted to us by Morlière. In this message the French High Commissioner said that, as Nam Bo was a French colony, a change in its political status could only be decided on by the French National Assembly on the results of a referendum. The Nam Bo Provisional Administrative Committee remained "illegal"; although Cédile had entered into relations with it in October 1945 this had been done out of a desire to avoid bloodshed. Now; if the Vietnamese Government meant to implement the agreement it had signed, it should stop forthwith or else disavow such actions.

To d'Argenlieu's cynical allegations, President Ho sent a laconic reply

"The government of Viet Nam wishes to remind the French High Commissioner that that Administrative Committee in no way goes beyond Article 9 of the Modus Vivendi whose aim consists in restoring for Nam Bo a just and lasting peace despite any obstacles and difficulties however great they may be and wherever they may come from.

"The President of the DRVN believes that, in order to attain a peace so cherished by the two nations, forceful methods are not only useless but might even block the implementation of the Modus Vivendi. If this happens the Vietnamese Government does not accept responsibility."

The position of the French colonialists in Indochina with regard to the implementation of the Modus Vivendi had thus been made clear.

According to French historians, d'Argenlieu during the first days of November was busying himself in preparations to meet the adverse situation should the French progressive and democratic forces win the coming elections. In that case, de Gaulle's policies could only be continued through a large-scale war in Indochina. He was meeting with all the administrative and military officers in Saigon in turn in order to reassert that

"only a new military stand could prevent the situation from deteriorating in Hanoi's favour."

The man who fully understood the High Commissioner's intentions was Valluy. In a secret directive to his subordinates, he wrote "Decent attempts at a compromise are no longer appropriate and a severe lesson is now needed." On November 21, at the same time as Valluy informed us that he had given orders to French troops in Nam Bo to stop firing he also instructed Debès in Haiphong to seize control of this town and neutralize our resistance there.

XXIX

On November 11, President Ho had lodged a strong protest with the Bidault Government over France's unilateral control of customs and foreign trade in Hai Phong.

Before the conclusion of the Mollus Vivendi, on September 10, in Saigon, d'Argenlieu had instructed Morlière to try to establish French control of customs in the Hai Phong area as from October 15.

At the Fontainebleau negotiations, France had raised the customs issue several times. This issue had also been taken up by Moutet in his talks with President Ho in Paris. Customs revenue, as was known, used to make up a large percentage of the total revenue of Indochina. President Ho told Moutet that customs was not an issue that could not be solved by negotiations. The talks between the President and the representative of the French Government, Moutet, resulted in Article 6 of the Modus Vivendi.

"Viet Nam forms a customs union with the other nations in the Indochinese Federation. A coordinating committee on customs and foreign trade shall study necessary measures for putting this into effect and make preparations for the organization of customs in Indochina..."

This Article was completely distorted by the French authorities in Saigon. As Viet Nam had recognized that customs was a federal issue, they said, the coordination committee would simply define control procedures over the exchange and analysis of the customs already collected. On October 14, just

one month after the signing of the Modus Vivendi the French in Saigon declared in a circular that the High Commissioner's September 10 decision on customs would take effect on October 10. In defiance of the stipulations of the Modus Vivendi, the French unilaterally decided that we would need a permit from them for the export of coal, ores, cement, metals, wood, cereals, salt, paper, etc... This was an extremely insolent action. As President Ho had not returned, Huynh Thuc Khang, as Acting President, lodged a strong protest with the French. President Ho, at his meeting with d'Argenlieu in Cam Ranh Bay, said that the customs issue could be solved through the Coordination Committee set up under the terms of the Modus Vivendi. According to him, this committee should meet at once in Hanoi. D'Argenlieu wanted the committee to meet in Dalat so as to link this issue with the other Federal issues. In the end, however, he was obliged to accept Hanoi as the venue. But no meeting of that Committee was ever held.

Aware of the plan of the French reactionaries in Saigon to stage a *fait accompli*, President Ho Chi Minh sent the Bidault Government a message of protest on November 11. Morlière sent the message to Saigon where it was withheld and it was not until November 26 that it was finally transmitted to France. The delay was not unintentional — the Hai Phong incident had been provoked six days earlier.

The incident began with a minor clash.

On the morning of November 20, a Chinese barge carrying petrol with a permit from the Vietnamese Customs Office sailed into the mouth of the Cam River -in Hai Phong. On arrival, it was searched and seized by the French under the pretext that the petrol was contraband. Their act was thus a violation of our sovereignty. Our police intervened. As if they had been waiting for just such an opportunity, the French opened fire. One of our policemen was killed and our men in a self defence unit nearby retaliated. The clash had begun.

At 11 o'clock, a French armoured detachment attacked the railway station area, which was a long way from the site of the morning's incident. It met with strong resistance from our self-defence forces. Gunfire began to be heard all over the city. This was not the first time that the French troops and our civil defence forces had clashed in Haiphong. Previously, the Franco-

Vietnamese Joint Control Liaison and Control commission had been able to bring the clashes to a stop. But this time, when the Commission members tried to intervene, the Commander of the French forces in Haiphong, Colonel Debès put on a most arrogant attitude. He demanded that we release all the detained French soldiers, dismantle the police posts and the barricades erected in the streets and, even more insolently, he demanded the withdrawal of our armed forces from their positions in the Chinese residents' quarters.

At noon, Debès sent an ultimatum under which we had to meet the above demands before 2 p.m. We agreed to release five French soldiers captured in the morning clashes and demanded the release by the French of ten persons from our side kidnapped some days earlier. Debès's other absurd demands were rejected.

At 2 p.m. the French launched new attacks. This time the forces deployed were quite big. Covered by tanks, French troops made their way to the Municipal Theatre. Those defending the Theatre fought very valiantly, driving back wave upon wave of the attackers.

To exclude any negotiations, the French slanderously alleged that we had killed Camoin, a major and chief of the French team to the Liaison and Control Commission, who was known to be a man of sense and judgment. In Hanoi, we learned of the clashes immediately after they had taken place. Our representative in the Central Liaison and Control Commission requested that the French High Command intervene to prevent the hostilities from spreading. The French pretended surprise — we should not dramatize the incidents, they said, and hostilities could in no way be spreading. Hostilities in Haiphong, however, did spread that afternoon.

To create conditions for a settlement our Ministry of National Defence, at 3 p.m., moved reinforcements into Haiphong and gave orders that our troops should act only in self defence.

In the evening, on Morlière's orders, Colonel Lami, who was in charge of political affairs, had a meeting with the head of our military delegation. The two sides discussed the cessation of hostilities in Haiphong and reached an agreement which consisted of the following points immediate ceasefire,

withdrawal of Vietnamese and French troops to their former positions; formation of a mixed commission headed by Comrade Hoang Huu Nam and Lami to arrive in Haiphong the next morning.

Morlière approved of the agreement and kept Debès informed of it.

At 8 p.m. our comrades in Haiphong reported that our troops had ceased firing. But the French troops refused to follow suit and even used artillery, placed in Cat Bi. Gunfire was heard all through the night.

On November 21, in the morning, a mixed Franco-Vietnamese delegation travelled to Haiphong by rail. At kilometre zero outside the town, it got a signal from French soldiers to stop for the line was broken. The delegation then had to go into Haiphong by car from Thuorig Ly. Haiphong was smelling of gunpowder and gunfire was still continuing in many places. Indeed, after arriving at Debès's headquarters, the delegation was able to note that the ceasefire order was not being observed. It was found imperative that the ceasefire should be at once put into effect and the troops on either side withdrawn to their previous positions.

Our representative saw the Haiphong Party Committee and learned from it that our troops and civil defence units had strictly observed the cease-fire order since the previous evening and captured French soldiers had been returned. He rang up Lami and brought this to his notice.

Gunfire in the city did not cease until 2 p.m. However, Debès still refused to pull his troops back to their old positions claiming he could not carry out the orders of his Hanoi-based superiors because they did not understand the situation. French troops were unable to leave the positions for which they had shed blood. Morlière's representative thus failed in his efforts to persuade Debès who showed an obstinacy with regard to his superiors that is rather difficult to understand.

Pending further instructions from our government, our representative and Lami discussed the matter and agreed on the following points

1. A strict ban on either side opening fire for any reason whatsoever.

2. Withdrawal of all French armoured vehicles to their camps.
3. Limitation of night-time movement.
4. Formation of a mixed contingent to be posted at the railway station as a guard force to ensure normal communications.

Debès not only refused to put into effect the fourth point but even demanded that the Municipal Theatre be put under French occupation and that our troops be withdrawn from the former European residential quarter. Our representative rejected this demand.

Finally, the two sides could only reach an agreement on troops remaining where they were and the banning of provocative acts by either side.

At last, on the afternoon of November 21, gunfire stopped in Haiphong.

On November 22, in the afternoon the mixed delegation journeyed back to Hanoi to report on the situation. On the way, Lami told us the French wanted to have some sort of settlement.

While hostilities in Haiphong were still going on, President Ho, on November 20, received Lacharrière who had been delegated by Saigon to discuss customs issues, and suggested to him that the mixed commission on customs and foreign trade should meet immediately in Hanoi. Lacharrière relayed the President's suggestion to Saigon.

XXX

The situation in Haiphong looked as if it were heading for a settlement.

All of a sudden, on November 23, at 7 a.m. Debès sent an ultimatum to the Haiphong Administrative Committee demanding that our troops be withdrawn from the Chinese and the former European residential quarters and that our self defence units in the Lac Vien Sector (the 7th Sector), where the French had been badly cut up, be disarmed. He insisted that his demands should be met not later than 9 a.m. otherwise the French would

strike. We rejected all these demands. The French extended the deadline for 45 minutes.

At exactly 9.45 a.m., the French artillery began firing. Covered by tanks and armoured vehicles, French troops attacked the Chinese residents' quarters. Even their planes bombed Haiphong and the adjacent town of Kien An. Our troops and self defence units, behind barricades and entanglements made of bedsteads, wardrobes and other wooden furniture, returned the enemy's fire. Molotov cocktails and grenades were thrown down from upper floors and verandas onto French armoured vehicles. Resistance was mounted at every street corner and from every block of houses.

In Hanoi, the same day at 9 a.m. the head of our military delegation arrived at the French headquarters and requested an urgent meeting with Morlière. The latter kept away but delegated the colonel commanding the Hanoi garrison to meet him. Our side demanded an explanation of Debès's ultimatum. The colonel said it had been approved by his superiors in Saigon. He added that the French troops in Haiphong would be allowed to use fire if we did not accept it. The French command in Hanoi had made a sudden volte face.

According to documents later made public, things had passed off in this way as early as November 21, in the afternoon. Valluy, then in Saigon, had instructed Debès to avail himself of the existing situation to expand the French-occupied area in Haiphong. Carrying out Valluy's instructions, Debès then repudiated, all agreements reached between Morlière and our representative in Hanoi. On November 22, Valluy instructed Morlière to demand the total withdrawal of our armed forces from Haiphong. Feeling that this demand constituted an "ultimatum" which could bring about a large-scale conflict, Morlière refrained from conveying it to our government and instead asked Valluy to take into consideration the consequences which might arise from such a demand. Morlière was completely unaware of the fact that, along with his instructions to him, the new French Commander-in-Chief had also personally directed Debès to use all the means at his disposal to make himself master of Haiphong. Valluy was only carrying out instructions issued to him by d'Argenlieu who had left Indochina a week before.

On November 23, at noon, President Ho made a direct appeal on the Voice of Viet Nam radio

"I call on General Valluy Commander-in-Chief of the French Forces and the Acting High Commissioner and the other French generals in Viet Nam to stop forthwith the bloodshed between the French and the Vietnamese.

"I call on our entire people to remain calm and on our army and self-defence forces to be prepared to safeguard the sovereignty of our Fatherland while protecting the lives and property of foreigners.

"The government will always stand with the entire people to defend our country.

"Long live the independence and unity of Viet Nam."

The French attacks in Haiphong were of a very brutal character. Their troops were ordered to burn down every house which stood in their way once they met with resistance. But on the very first day they were forced to a halt and Debès had to appeal to the Navy for artillery support.

At 3 p.m. our troops launched a counter-attack. They stormed and recaptured the Municipal Theatre which had been held by the French for the last two days. Fighting was fierce whether it was for the control of a street, a lane or a house. The self-defence units, especially those of the 7th Sector were very brave.

On November 25, we made a strong attack on Cat Bi airfield, destroying the ammunition depot and petrol store there and succeeded in putting it under our full control.

Our valiant fight in Haiphong was, in a sense, a rehearsal for the battle lasting many days which took place in Hanoi one month later.

On November 25, our troops and self-defence forces moved out and took up new combat positions outside the city.

Even so, French patrol teams were afraid to enter many of the places we had evacuated.

On November 27, Morlière saw us. He conveyed a message from the French High Command demanding that we dismantle the entanglements and barricades put up on the roads linking French posts and ensure French troops free movement between Haiphong and Do Son. He explained that everything that French troops had done in North Indochina had been in accordance with orders from above. That reminded me of Valluy, when he came to give an explanation of the French occupation of the Tay Nguyen Highlands, it was, he said "orders from above." Morlière and Valluy had such a similar vocabulary. Then d'Argenlieu had been Valluy's superior, now it was Valluy who was Morlière's superior.

On the morning of November 28, our Ministry of National Defence received a message from Morlière to confirm what he had said the day before — "Today I confirm to you the military conditions set forth by the French High Command."

In this message, Morlière also defined the boundaries of the French-occupied zone which was to include the city of Haiphong and the adjacent areas. He reiterated the demand for free movement of French troops on the roads linking their posts and between Haiphong and Do Son.

The situation had become very serious. In order to gain more time for our army and people in Haiphong to make preparations, we briefly replied to the French that as their proposals were of extremely great importance, the two sides should set up a mixed commission to discuss them.

In the afternoon, Morlière sent us another message, the second in one day. "...I would like to bring to your notice that the conditions set forth in my letter of November 28 originate from very clear instructions received by me. As a result, there is no question of setting up a mixed commission to consider this as you have proposed. In my opinion it is pointless to form such a commission otherwise than for defining the measures needed to fulfil the conditions already put forth."

As a reply to the French messages with their demands for the expansion of their occupation over a larger area we ordered our troops and self-defence forces to tighten their encirclement of the enemy forces in Haiphong and thoroughly undermine the roads linking French posts especially the Haiphong — Do Son Highway.

The battle in Haiphong marked a new level of the French aggressive war. The enemy had now extended his aggression from the southern half of our country to the whole of Viet Nam and to the whole of the Indochinese peninsula.

XXXI

In France, a bitter struggle between the democratic and progressive forces and the reactionary capitalists was going on throughout the month of October over the constitution of the Fourth Republic.

In comparison with the draft rejected by the May referendum, the present draft was a backward step. However, it still contained progressive ideas. Under this Constitution, legislative power was voted in the National Assembly elected through universal suffrage; Republican Councils elected by representatives of communes and prefectures were simply consultative bodies. It ensured the newly-gained social and economic rights of the citizen, and equality between men and women in all fields. It was opposed to wars of plunder and colonial repression and undertook to respect the right of dependent nations to self determination. If this draft were adopted it could well be the most progressive constitution of bourgeois democracy since the founding of the French Republic.

For this reason the French bourgeoisie resorted to every possible device to prevent its adoption. This class wanted to maintain the existing instability in France in order to cause anxiety among the masses and, by proving the helplessness of democracy, to open up prospects for the setting up of a dictatorial regime. De Gaulle renewed his strong attacks on the draft Constitution. He maintained that the National Assembly had been given too many rights, while the executive had been left with almost no powers and the principles of freedom governing the French Union would only lead to

the disintegration of the Empire. He even asserted "If the constitution is approved, there will be a rebellion." Such a threat had its effect on the French middle classes.

In the meantime, the French Communist Party made every effort to promote the people's struggle and to maintain and defend democratic institutions.

On October 23, the Constitution was put to a referendum. Nearly one third of the electorate abstained. However the constitution was adopted with 9.5 million against 8.1 million votes. The democratic forces had won an arduous battle.

The majority of the French electorate in the colonies voted against the draft constitution. In Indochina in particular, the Gaullists opposed to the draft constitution made up a very large majority. 8,313 votes were cast against and only 1,701 for. This shows the reactionary political tendencies of the French living in the colonies as a whole and in Indochina in particular.

On November 10, France held general elections to the National Assembly whose term of office would be 5 years. In the results, the French Communist Party headed the list gaining 24 more seats. The Socialist Party lost 20 seats. The victory of the Communist Party was remarkable. But the reactionary forces also gained strength. The MRP, the *Cartel des gauches* (a rightist group) for instance won more votes than before. Thus the French political forces had lined themselves up in two opposing blocs.

In those circumstances, the Indochina issue, far from being obscured, emerged as a question of prime importance in French politics, the progressive forces believed that, in her relations with the countries associated with her, France should respect the principles of democracy and self-determination and replace the policy of force and repression by one of "reconciliation and cooperation" while the reactionary forces held that, if France was ever to restore her strength and prestige on the international arena, she must pursue a tough policy to maintain her domination over her overseas territories.

It is noteworthy that the French ruling groups — big business men and the politicians in their pay — seemed to have learned nothing of the great and

profound changes that had taken place in Indochina over the past years. They were still cherishing the "golden dream" of Empire as regards Indochina which although it made up only one-sixteenth of the area of all French colonies, accounted for two-fifths of the population and brought France annually over a billion francs. Between 1900 and 1945 the profits of the Bank of Indochina increased 33 times. Before World War II, the greatest investment of the French monopoly capitalists had been in Indochina — more than fifty-two billion francs.

The financial magnates believed that, with money and weapons supplied by their imperialist allies, they would not have any difficulty in restoring "order" in Indochina. The then U. S. and British positions on the Indochina question were very favourable to France. Having ousted France from Syria and the Lebanon, Britain had made a volte-face and set out to make peace with her. In the United States, Roosevelt had died and Truman who was now in power, began cajoling France De Gaulle was invited to Washington; a French representative was asked to attend the Japanese capitulation ceremonies and, later, France was offered a loan. As a matter of fact, what the U. S. was up to was to dominate France through the Marshall Plan and turn her into an anti-communist stronghold in Europe. As regards Indochina, the United States had long been keeping an eye on this Southeast Asian peninsula. It had attacked French Indochina policy demanding that France give the Indochinese countries more rights or that Indochina be internationalized for fifty years. These proposals had been strongly opposed by France and cold-shouldered by Britain. The United States had also considered using Chiang Kai-shek to drive the French out of Indochina but Chiang proved too weak. Now the United States wanted to help France put down the revolutionary movements in Indochina to give it time to work out a long-term scheme. Thus the French monopolists became dependent on the United States.

The general elections over, Bidault was now to hand over executive power to the National Assembly. As the new constitution would not take effect until mid-January 1947, the National Assembly nominated a provisional government. The political parties were again busy girding themselves for the battle for the presidency of this provisional government to be contended for at the beginning of December.

In mid-November, d'Argenlieu got back to France. The September 14 Modus Vivendi endorsed by the French Government had, in a sense, dealt a heavy blow to the policy pursued by the reactionary colonialists in Indochina. The French government's reaffirmation of its respect for the spirit and some clauses of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement had demoralized the Vietnamese traitors in Saigon. The new developments in France such as the adoption of the new constitution and the emergence of the Communist Party as the front-runner in the general elections... had made d'Argenlieu and the French reactionaries in Indochina worried. He had thoroughly discussed his future policy with Valluy before he left Saigon.

In the outgoing Bidault cabinet which had stayed on as a caretaker government, the High Commissioner found reliable supporters. D'Argenlieu soon became aware of the anxiety felt by French ruling circles about the weakening of France and her obscure role in the international arena. Playing on these feelings, he tried to drive home that Viet Minh was seeking ways to drive the French out of Indochina, that only a tough policy could uphold the Empire and that concessions to the Indochinese Communists and to President Ho Chi Minh would endanger the whole French Union.

The Haiphong clashes gave d'Argenlieu a chance. Our resistance to Valluy's acts of aggression was presented by the High Commissioner as evidence of the use of force by the Vietnamese to drive the French out. The French rightist press immediately made a hullabaloo the French Expeditionary Corps had once again fallen victim to a Viet Minh plot! There must be a tough policy to replace that of compromise and retreat!

On November 23, a meeting of the Interministerial Council on Indochina, which was still presided over by Varenne, was convened. After hearing a report by the High Commissioner, the Council decided that force could be used against violations of the agreements when necessary. D'Argenlieu at once cabled Valluy that a hard political line had been adopted by the government and all the parties.

During the clashes in Haiphong, we captured from the enemy an important circular dated April 10, 1946. The French military commanders were instructed as soon as they were posted to a locality to draw up a security plan for its protection and, above all, a plan for moving forces about the town. These initial plans were to be completed, at the earliest possible opportunity, by a study of various measures aimed at gradually transforming the purely military operational plan into a "scenario for a coup d'Etat." They should also gather information about the organizations in the town and about our local leaders, their backgrounds, habits, lodgings... and keep them under close and constant watch.

At the same time, disguised special force detachments were to be formed, which would, on order, kidnap or liquidate our men... This secret document revealed the insidious schemes of the French reactionaries and laid their foul behaviour up to now bare.

The attack on Haiphong port, the second largest city in North Viet Nam, by Valluy's army marked a new stage in the French invasion. Dark clouds were looming up portending a widespread war. On the following days, one incident was quickly succeeded by another, like a chain reaction.

Future historians will dig into those events, make a thorough analysis of the enemy's objectives and actions and prove beyond doubt our Party's clear-sighted line as well as its practical and well-timed directives and highlight the ardent patriotism of our people and army and their preparations for a great resistance war. I have no intention of assuming the historian's role. I will just make a review of the main developments, which are commonly known, and from this background, bring out Uncle Ho's activities in December 1946, the last month of this greatly significant period.

Morlière's note, delivered to us on November 28, which evidently bore the character of an ultimatum put forward by the High Command of the French Expeditionary Corps, was unacceptable. And Morlière rejected all negotiations.

Early in December, Sainteny arrived in Hanoi. He went to the Bac Bo palace to pay his respects to President Ho. For the whole of Sainteny's stay in France, the post of High Commissioner had been in the hands of the

military for d'Argenlieu was unwilling to work with those who had been directly involved in the signing of the March 6 Agreement. It was Moutet's decision in November to send Sainteny back to Indochina. He had been kept in Saigon for a time before being allowed to go on to Hanoi.

President Ho stated that we would stand strictly by the stipulations agreed upon in the September 14 Modus Vivendi. He demanded the return of the French forces to the position they had held before the hostilities. Sainteny promised to send an urgent report home and to inform us of the French government's latest decisions as soon as he received them.

The French army began to intensify its provocative actions in Hanoi. Bands of red capped Foreign Legionaries roamed Trang Tien Street, looting shops, tearing up the press publications and photos displayed in the Information Centre and even on one occasion snatching off the Vietnamese flag on the wall. French motorcycle patrols rode recklessly through crowded streets. They deliberately brought on road accidents and needled our traffic police. A running jeep suddenly halted. Black-bereted soldiers jumped down, grabbed a passer-by and hauled him up on the car which then rushed into their barracks... the kidnappings which had ended with the repatriation of the Chiang troops were now resumed by the French forces. French soldiers even fired from the upper storeys of their houses on passing trams. French armoured cars rumbled in the streets night and day. Fierce clashes could break out any time.

On December 7, the French army in Haiphong launched a new offensive to force their way to Do Son. They met with a stiff counter attack from us and had to pull back.

On December 8, the French illegally increased their strength in Hai Duong on the Hanoi-Haiphong road.

On December 9, the French illegally landed 800 Foreign Legionaries in Da Nang. President Ho sent a note of protest to d'Argenlieu and the French government.

On December 12, French soldiers attacked our army in Tien Yen and Dinh Lap. In the Northeast the fighting spread.

On December 13, a big French cruiser called at Da Nang.

On December 14, 400 more Foreign Legionaries were sent as reinforcements to Haiphong.

On December 15, AFP reported that a large contingent of French soldiers in Algeria was being rushed to Marseilles to board ships for Indochina.

In view of the way the situation was developing, our Party had foreseen the inevitability of a widespread war. While doing our best to promote the possibility of reconciliation, we stepped up the preparations which had already been started for a protracted national war which would be waged on every front.

On December 7, a correspondent of the newspaper *Paris-Saigon* had an interview with President Ho. In this, President Ho said "My compatriots and I sincerely desire peace. We don't want war and I know that the French people don't want war either. But if a war is forced on us, we shall fight. The fight will be atrocious, but the Vietnamese people would rather endure all than lose their freedom."

The French reactionaries' belligerence in Son La, Lang Son, Haiphong, Kien An had given rise to a movement of protest throughout the country, from North to South. On behalf of its 9 million members, the Viet Minh National Committee sent an open letter to President Ho and the government, urging them to defend national sovereignty resolutely and expressing their readiness to sacrifice their lives to safeguard every inch of the fatherland. Mass organizations of youth, women, teachers... issued appeals calling for their members active contribution to the efforts of the entire people to smash the French army's scheme of aggression.

Such slogans as "The entire people participate in the resistance", "Ready to wage a long war of resistance", "Active preparations for the resistance war", "Resistance means life non—resistance death" appeared daily in the newspaper *Cuu Quoc* (National Salvation). Defence committees composed of representatives of the army, civilians and administration were set up in various zones, provinces and towns (later, these became Resistance Committees). Masses of cables from the people in all corners of the country

flooded into the capital city, expressing absolute confidence in President Ho and the government and a determination to fight to the end for the defence of the independence and freedom of the fatherland.

Old persons and children began to evacuate Hanoi and other towns garrisoned by French soldiers, in case the enemy suddenly attacked.

By this time, our army had considerably expanded. The National Defence Guard had been strengthened and reorganized into the National Army of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. The first artillery unit had been founded.

In mid-October, our Party had convened a National Military Conference. It had made a thorough analysis of the military situation in the whole country and taken several important decisions in order to heighten the quality and combativeness of the armed forces.

The Party network within the army had been completed before that, the Party Central Committee had set up the Central Military Committee to give leadership to the various armed forces. Now, alongside the establishment of the base areas, Party Committees of the various military zones were formed. More members and cadres from the Party were assigned to work in the army. The system of commander and political officer, both of them sharing the leadership of the unit, was applied throughout the army. There was a political commissar for every military zone, a political officer for every unit from regiment down to platoon level. Organs for political work were also established from the highest to the lowest levels. After some time, Comrade Van Tien Dung was put in charge of political work in the army.

Our Party assumed exclusive leadership of the armed forces and directly led the army. The local Party organizations were leaders of their regional armed forces.

Militia and guerilla forces were consolidated. These had grown considerably and now numbered nearly one million members. The building of fortified villages was pushed forward.

The army and militia forces would be drilling day and night, striving to improve their combat skills and preparing themselves to face any

eventuality in the event of an early war.

We had at once drawn experience from the battles fought in Nam Bo, and above all, from the recent engagements in Haiphong and Lang Son, with a view to mapping out a general plan of resistance and directing the war preparations in various regions. We had also planned the destruction of roads and bridges, and the implementation of a "scorched earth" policy. If the enemy widened the war we were determined to leave them nothing.

Many former French factories and workshops were transformed into arms manufacturing plants. Conscious of being new masters of the country, the workers, together with technicians, mostly from the French schools of practical technology, set out energetically to repair damaged rifles and artillery pieces. We also began to manufacture a quantity of the weapons needed for the infantry, ammunition, grenades, mines, anti-tank bombs...

On President Ho's instructions, the Viet Bac base area had continued to be consolidated. Now, many of our factories and stores were being gradually moved there. He sent Comrade Sao Do (Red Star)¹ back to Viet Bac to prepare for the evacuation of the Party and government leading organs whenever necessary.

¹ Nguyen Luong Bang.

One day, after a meeting of the government council, when everybody had left, Uncle Ho asked me

"How long can Hanoi be held, if the enemy widens the war in the North?"

I replied

"Possibly for a month."

He again asked

"What about the other towns?"

"We can hold them more easily."

"And the countryside?"

"We can surely hold the countryside..."

He pondered for a while and said

"We shall return to Tan Trao."

XXXIII

The preparations for the defence of the capital city were made with urgency from November, when the situation in Haiphong became explosive. The Party decided to set up the Hanoi Front Party Committee, with Nguyen Van Tran as its secretary, and Dao, Tien... as members. Tran Quoc Hoan was appointed especial envoy with a leading capacity and also sat on the Committee. Zone XI, covering the Hanoi area, was established. Vuong Thua Vu was appointed Commander in Chief, with Tran Do as Political Commissar.

The French forces here consisted of the Foreign Legion units which had arrived in Hanoi from France after the signing of the March 6 Agreement and Legionaries who had been imprisoned by the Japanese and then free by the Allied Forces. They were equipped with new American automatic weapons, besides heavy artillery, tanks, armoured vehicles and aircraft.

The greater part of the French forces was stationed in the citadel area. The rest was in Don Thuy hospital, the former Governor General's palace, Bui school (now Chu Van An School) and Gia Lam airport. According to our investigations, there was also a detachment in the Metropole Hotel (now the Reunification Hotel). This building was almost in front of the Bac Bo Palace and the French soldiers here were disguised as civilians. By mutual arrangement there were, besides, small French units, sharing sentry duty as a take-over force with our army on such important spots as Long Bien bridge, the railway station, power plant, water works, Bank of Indochina. The families of French residents totalling about 8,000 and a few other places of the city had all been armed by the French forces.

The French troop disposition was not as densely concentrated as the Chiang forces formerly. But if we didn't keep a close watch, they would be able to deal a surprise attack on our leading organs, which would cause us heavy losses. With the mobility of tanks and armoured vehicles, they could swiftly block every access to the capital and divide up the city in order to annihilate the resistance forces piecemeal.

Our strength in Hanoi, then, was made up of the army units, the detachments of the combat self-defence force, the city self-defence force and the guard squads which had been freshly formed in various city quarters.

Our army was stationed partly within and partly outside the city. Within the city, their number was not very large, but these were all crack units. As their core there were the units which had fought the Japanese in the base area. The battalion commanders were all battle tested. However, most of the rank and file were young new recruits.

Our army was concentrated in Bac Bo Palace, the National Defence Guard camp and some other key places. Besides, smaller units protected the State organs, the factories and shared sentry duty with the French forces.

We had, till then, worked hard to equip our army better. But due to numerous difficulties, we were still very short of weapons and ammunition. We formed our first artillery companies with a number of heavy guns captured from the French and the Japanese, some 75-mm A.A. guns converted into field guns. Before the war started, the munitions service had supplied the army with 80 anti-tank bombs.

Our self-defence forces in Hanoi were quite strong. They were the combat self-defence force and the city self defence force and numbered about 8,500. They were present everywhere in the city and knew thomughly every by-road and back alley. Prompted by their ardent patriotism, these young people, who came from all strata of the urban population, earnestly trained day and night. Their discipline and morale were superb. They were eager to learn how best to fight the enemy. They were mostly armed with weapons acquired or made by themselves. For a long time, these fighters wearing

square badges with a gold star in the middle were the enemy soldiers' most redoubtable adversaries.

The building of fortifications in Hanoi was chiefly done by the self-defence forces and the city population.

The armed forces and people of Hanoi were given the duty, in the event of a war started by the enemy, of decimating an important part of the enemy forces, besieging them and seeking every way to detain them as long as possible, to pave the way for the rear to complete the preparation and organization of forces for the state of war. To attain this objective, it was necessary to wipe out the enemy forces piecemeal and take full advantage of the city-terrain to check their advance, so inflicting losses on them while at the same time saving and enhancing our own strength and safeguarding the key areas and positions. It was also an indispensable necessity to have a successful combination between the forces inside the city and those striking from outside so as to drive the enemy into a state of confusion as a result of having to face attacks from both sides, thus keeping the enemy pinned down for a long time.

A detailed combat plan for the defence of Hanoi was made.

The City Hoang Dieu organization of the Viet Minh called on its members and the entire people to further strengthen their unity and step up their preparation so as to be ready to fight when the order was given. The people in various city quarters and in the suburbs held meetings and passed resolutions demanding the French troops' withdrawal to the positions they held prior to November 20, urging the government to deal firmly with the invasion by the French reactionaries and reporting to the government and President Ho their readiness to defend every street corner and every house of the capital city.

The Viet Minh National Committee's appeals and calls to prepare for resistance, published daily in *Cuu Quoc*, met with a warm response from the entire population of Hanoi. Slogans appeared on the walls and doors of every house "Better death than slavery!" "Better to die gloriously than live in humiliation!" Those who had firearms tried to get more ammunition. Those who had nothing, tried to acquire grenades, swords, spears,

machetes... Every day, crowds of people thronged the city district committees, asking to be enlisted into guard squads, first-aid teams and logistic services. Women put away their graceful long robes, cut their hair short, wore military uniforms, carried firearms, swords and shared in patrol and sentry duty. The Evacuation Committee had ordered old people and children to leave the city. But many old men insisted on staying and formed groups to go and encourage the young to prepare for the resistance war. Old and young women collected voluntary contributions of cotton, cloth, wool, yarn,... to make blankets and knit warm jerseys for the fighters who were getting ready to destroy the enemy. People vied with each other to contribute rice and medicines to the resistance stores.

The war preparations in sector I, lying adjacent to the French garrison, were particularly feverish. Day and night, the sounds of hammers and crowbars resounded everywhere. The houses now communicated with each other through openings made in the partition walls. Roof terraces, balconies and windows became firing vantage points. Apertures were broached in the walls for loopholes. House floors were dug up for combat trenches and shelters. People got the furniture in their houses ready to be thrown out on the streets as barricades to check the enemy's advance. Dwellers in Sector I laid in a stock of foodstuffs to last them for three months. Sector I was given half of all the weapons in the Hanoi arsenal.

Early in December, the suicide squads held their oath-taking ceremony and received arms to be ready for their assignments. These fighters, carrying anti-tank bombs, would throw themselves at the enemy's tanks and armoured cars.

Government offices, store houses and public works such as the post-office, the banknotes printing press, the central pharmaceutical enterprise, the army engineering works... were, one by one, moved out of the city. Hospitals and army clinics were also moved further away.

In the meantime, we decided to refrain from such actions as might be used by the enemy as pretexts to challenge us. The erection of barricades was done only when the situation became critical. And even then, we blocked only the street quarters the French forces didn't have to go through. However, the French army command reacted strongly when they saw earth

works, strengthened with wooden pillars and iron bars, growing up in many places of the city. They dispatched several protest notes. Once, Morlière met the chairman of the Hanoi Administrative Committee. He asked, with tongue in cheek

"Mayor, are you stepping up the repair of the city streets?"

The mayor replied

"That's right. It's because your tanks and armoured cars are driving around so wildly.

The big trees lining the streets had holes drilled in them for dynamite.

The workers got the railway carriages and tramcars ready to be overturned when necessary to complete the blocking of the streets still left open for French force movements.

XXXIV

In face of the dangerous situation induced by the French reactionaries in Indochina, Uncle Ho sought, by all means, to check their criminal hands.

On December 6, the Voice of Viet Nam broadcast President Ho's appeal to the French National Assembly. He reiterated the Vietnamese people's sincere desire to cooperate with the French people. He denounced certain Frenchmen in Indochina who were betraying the spirit of the September 14 Modus Vivendi and pursuing a policy of strength. He called on the French National Assembly and Government to order the French authorities in Viet Nam to withdraw their troops to the positions they had held before November 20 with a view to facilitating the implementation of the provisions laid down in the Modus Vivendi, thus averting useless bloodshed.

A week had gone by but President Ho's urgent appeal remained unanswered.

France at that time was witnessing acute inter-party conflict for the post of president of the provisional government.

In the first ballot on December 4, Maurice Thorez, the Communist Party candidate, led the poll, but he did not gain the absolute majority needed to win the election. In the second ballot, no candidate got the necessary proportion of votes. The French Communist Party did not enter its candidate this time and declared that it would not join any government headed by the MRP.

The Socialist Party put forward Leon Blum. Before the voting, Leon Blum expressed his opinion on the Indochina problem — "The one and only way to preserve French civilization in Indochina is to make a just settlement with the Indochinese people, on the basis of independence. The right to decide the Viet Nam problem should not belong to the French military and residents in Viet Nam. It should be in the hands of the Paris Government." He urged that the French Government be formed immediately in order to solve the Viet Nam problem. The French Communist Party declared "We shall vote for Mr. Blum, but this does not mean that we shall, later on, invariably support him."

On December 13, the French National Assembly voted for the third time. Blum won the election but he had only a lead of seven votes over Schumann, the MRP candidate backed by the great monopolies.

On December 15, President Ho sent a telegram to the new French President. Again, he referred to our basic position and set out certain concrete conditions for the settlement of the present deadlock

— On the Vietnamese side: to bring those who had been evacuated back to the towns, to cease the protective measures taken in self-defence, to restore normal communication between Hanoi and Haiphong and Hanoi and Lang Son.

— On the French side: to bring the French troops back to the positions they held prior to November 20 in Haiphong and Lang Son, to withdraw the reinforcements landed illegally in Da Nang, to end the raids and terror in Cochinchina and southern Trung Bo.

— By both sides: to set up without delay, the projected commissions for the implementation of the Modus Vivendi, to stop hostile propaganda by radio and in the press.

But, like all of his other messages addressed to the French government, this one was delayed in Saigon by the High Command of the French Expeditionary Corps. When it eventually arrived in Paris, eleven days had gone by and the war had expanded.

What would Leon Blum do to fulfil his statements on the Indochina problem?

As soon as Blum won the election, a right-wing paper in France wrote "Realities will prove stronger than theories. And even though it will be contrary to his stated ideas Leon Blum, after taking office, will not dare to abandon Indochina any more than than Clemenceau, when coming into power, dared to abandon Morocco." We certainly did not lay our hopes on Leon Blum whose Socialist Party was acting counter to the French labouring people's interests... Despite his occasional progressive pronouncements regarding colonial policy, he was openly opposed to the Communist Party. Half a year before, it was Blum who had been delegated by the big monopolies to go to the United States for negotiations on U.S. loans.

Blum met with opposition from several sides in the formation of the new government. The Communist Party demanded some amendments in his programme. The right-wing parties insisted on a tough political line as regards the question of the French Union. His first cabinet list was rejected by the MRP.

On December 17, Blum submitted for the National Assembly's approval a Government list exclusively composed of the Socialists. Moutet remained Minister of Overseas France. This was the first time, since De Gaulle had held elections that the Communist Party was not given a share in the Government despite the fact that in the recent general elections it was the Party with the largest number of seats in the National Assembly. One wondered if the rumours about a Blum-US bargain in March were completely without foundation.

Then it was reported that d'Argenlieu had left Paris for Saigon. His appointment as High Commissioner in Indochina had been confirmed. Moutet declared "I have the impression that Admiral d'Argenlieu has never shown any signs of disagreement with me on the policy we have applied with a view to settling this problem."

The policy that Moutet referred to was reaffirmed by d'Argenlieu before a large number of journalists — "The Indochinese people must be made to believe that France cares for her presence in Indochina. If France shows indecision or reluctance, they will lose this belief. We should indicate this desire by maintaining our forces there." The High Commissioner recalled the method of "display of strength" by Lyautey, a French colonialist general notorious for his brutality in the war of aggression in Morocco.

So, we met again the same old hands and the same old policies.

XXXV

From mid-December, the French forces increased their provocative actions in Hanoi.

On December 15, French soldiers opened fire in several parts of the city. They shot at our policemen of Precinct VIII in Hang Dau park. They threw grenades wounding two National Defence guards in Ham Long Street. They challenged members of the self-defence corps in Tran Quoc Toan Street, seized a rickshaw and brought it into Don Thuy hospital.

All day December 17, French aircraft flew reconnaissance flights over Hanoi.

Then at 10 a.m. for the first time, the French Army sent armoured cars to demolish our fieldworks in Lo Duc Street and carried away the wooden pillars. When the joint Liaison and Control Commission came to intervene, French soldiers said they were obeying their superiors' orders.

At the same moment, a military troop car came to one end of Hang Bun Street and dropped down a band of Foreign Legionaries. These climbed onto an earth rampart and fired on the people in the street. Our self-defence

force fired back. More French soldiers were sent in and broke into the people's houses, massacring women and children. One man had his throat cut and was left dying in a pool of blood. They carried off a number of women. Not long after, bands of Foreign Legionaries again swept into Yen Ninh Street nearby, ransacking the houses, killing and wounding more people.

At noon, the French lined up their troops from the citadel gate to Long Bien bridge. They besieged the police station of Precinct II.

At the Yen Phu power plant, where a mixed guard team had been set up just a few days previously, a French soldier suddenly turned his gun on a Vietnamese soldier sharing sentry duty with him and shot him dead. Immediately all the workers in the plant staged a vigorous demonstration to condemn the French troops' action.

In the afternoon, the French pounded Hang Bun Street with mortar shells. Bands of Foreign Legionaries swarmed into the streets, breaking the glass windows of many houses.

Strictly observing the orders of their leaders our army and self-defence forces refrained from opening fire. They continued to consolidate their positions and calmly followed the enemy's movements.

Later on, we learned that, on December 17, Valluy had unexpectedly left Saigon for Haiphong to meet Debès. Morlière and Sainteny were also summoned there.

On the morning of December 18, the city seemed quiet. Our men working at the Hanoi Joint Liaison and Control Commission were not so busy with urgent phone calls from various places as they had been the previous day. But, towards the end of the morning's work captain De Chatillon, head of the French Joint Liaison and Control team, handed us a letter which read as follows

"The French army command here is obliged to take measures to ensure the safety of its forces, and of the French civilians and foreign nationals. Therefore troops will be sent to be stationed in the Department of Finance

and at the house of the chief of the Communications Service on Pasquier Boulevard¹. Anything which may obstruct the French troops' movement must be removed, otherwise the French troops will destroy it themselves."

¹ Now, Dien Bien Phu Boulevard.

This was the first ultimatum from the French in Hanoi.

Two hours later, at midday, fully loaded French troop carriers, escorted by tanks and armoured cars, charged into the streets around the citadel area. They besieged the Hong Ha, East Gate and Hang Chieu areas. They sent armoured cars to destroy our ramparts and trenches on Hang But street.

In the afternoon, towards the end of working hours, the French team on the Joint Control Commission handed us a second ultimatum from the French command

"On December 18, 1946, the Hanoi city police failed to perform its task properly. If that state of affairs continues the French army will take charge of security within Hanoi by the morning of December 20, 1946, at the latest."

Our team of the Joint Liaison and Control Commission made a prompt reply

"The allegation that the Vietnamese police failed to perform its task properly is a complete lie. The French army should not take this as a pretext to violate our rights in the maintenance of security, the supreme right of the free State of Viet Nam."

That same day, while enemy reconnaissance aircraft were flying over Hanoi, in a village by the side of a small river in Ha Dong, the Party Central Committee met to assess the situation and work out an appropriate policy. Uncle Ho asked us

"How are the crops this year? Have the people enough to eat?"

Some comrades replied

"The weather this year has been favourable. A bumper harvest was reaped in many places. The people are better off than last year."

Looking pleased, he asked again

"If the war breaks out, have we got enough rice to feed our soldiers?"

"The districts in the outskirts of Hanoi and the provinces have built food stores to supply the army. Every village has a supply committee."

"How is the destruction of communication lines getting on?"

"All the highways around Hanoi have been cut. Enemy mechanized forces can no longer use them. But as for the roads on top the dykes, we are not destroying them, only building earthworks to block them. That's why it is taking a longer time."

After analysing the situation in all respects, he said

"The French scheme of extending the war has moved to a new phase. The period of conciliatory efforts is over. We have made concessions. But the more we concede, the more the enemy presses forward. Our people will not go back to another life of slavery. Our people's resistance war will be long and hard but it is bound to be victorious."

Early on December 19, we received yet another ultimatum from the French army command, the third within two days. The demands they made on us were to disarm the self-defence forces in Hanoi; to cease all preparations for a resistance war to hand over to the French army the maintenance of security in the city.

Compared with their demands of the previous day, the French had gone one step further the disarmament of our self-defence forces.

What had happened in Haiphong in late November was happening here now. In Haiphong, Debès had also made a number of conditions which he could be sure would be unacceptable to us before opening his offensive to take the city.

President Ho wrote a short letter to the Commissioner of the French Republic in North Indochina

"The situation has become more tense these last few days. This is very regrettable. Pending the decision from Paris, I hope that you, together with Mr. Giam, will find a solution in order to improve the present atmosphere."

Uncle Ho gave the letter to Hoang Minh Giam. Our Liaison and Control team informed their French counterpart of Comrade Giam's request to see the Commissioner of the French Republic that very afternoon. Sainteny refused to receive him, saying that Mr. Giam should wait till the following day.

The following day, December 20, was the day on which, according to Morlière's declaration, the French army would "take action" if we didn't hand over to them the right to handle security affairs. Did the French mean to refuse all settlements? Replying to the 'Paris-Saigon' paper in an interview a few days back, the Commissioner of the French republic had said that France was standing in a position of strength and would calmly wait. For half a month, now all French soldiers, excepting those sent out in the streets for ravaging and provocation, had been forbidden to leave camp. Time was flying swiftly by. When would they start? Tomorrow or even earlier?

On the afternoon of December 19, together with Tran Quoc Hoan and Vuong Thua Vu, I visited the army and the people who were preparing for combat.

At O Cho Dua in the suburbs, many houses were securely closed but trams were still running. Those coming from Ha Dong were almost empty. Some old persons and children continued to leave Hanoi on rickshaws hemmed in amid bundles of clothes and bedding. Little did these evacuees suspect that it would be many years before they could return to their beloved streets. A few self-defence members., one carrying a shotgun, another with a grenade tucked under his belt, were checking the mine holes drilled into the tree trunks.

We climbed over a rampart to enter Kham Thien street. While O Cho Dua looked deserted, Kham Thien street was all noise and animation. Groups of self-defence forces, accompanied by a few National Defence guards wearing caps with golden-starred badges, were walking up and down exchanging opinions. Carts full of earth were rolling out of the alleys, pushed by enthusiastic men and women and accompanied by cheerful shouts to the people to keep clear. Some restaurants and cafes were still open.

The rampart at the other end of Kham Thien street, near the railway station, was full of action. Earth, walls were being heightened. Some railway sections had been inserted, their heads pointing outwards. Two self-defence corps members, rifles in hands, were standing sentry in their fieldworks. Just a few score metres away in front of them, was the Shell Oil depot where there was a garrison of French soldiers. And not much further on was the railway station where there were also French soldiers. Meanwhile the self-defence members were driving wooden pillars into the ground and strengthening the rampart with earth. Women were bringing up more earth and steel sleepers. A service team was singing to cheer them on. From time to time, the roar of an armoured car could be heard from the direction of the railway station.

We inspected the firing positions and talked with the combatants. They cheerfully told us that a French armoured car had come at noon, but when the driver saw the upturned earthen pots on the ground in front of our rampart, he thought they were land mines and pulled back.

These young people were making energetic preparations for a fierce battle against the enemy. They knew but little about war. Nevertheless, talking with them, I could see that they were awaiting it with optimism and confidence. They had no idea what would befall them on the morrow. But their appearance told us that they would surely overcome all trials.

Dusk fell. The whole city was unusually quiet. It was cold and dry. The houses seemed to shrink back and to be standing warming themselves in the yellowish electric light. Outwardly, the city seemed to grow lazy in the cold and go to bed early. But beneath this calm surface, line upon line of surging wave was ready to rise. All the combatants were present at their posts. It

was reported that not a single French soldier was to be seen in the restaurants, bars or streets. And enemy armoured cars began to push out and stood blocking some crossroads...

XXXVI

It was on a winter evening that President Ho's call for the national resistance war — dated December 20, 1946 — was broadcast by the Voice of Viet Nam radio from a place not far from Hanoi as the station was being moved to a base area.

Since the previous night, the historic December 19, the war had spread all over the country. Just over a year after Nam Bo had risen up in arms, and after the battles already fought by our army and people in Son La, Lang Son and the port city of Haiphong, the army and people of Hanoi now began to strike back against the invaders. Nam Dinh, Hai Duong, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hue, Da Nang — also rose up to destroy the enemy for national salvation.

The national resistance war had thus broken out.

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Today, at the Hanoi Museum of the Revolution, we can see on display a manuscript in President Ho's handwriting with the headline "*Urgent work at present*" dated November 5, 1946. By this rare document, we learnt that as soon as he returned from France, President Ho had foreseen the inevitability of a widespread war started by the French imperialists. He had himself mapped out the fundamental lines in dealing with a possible emergency situation and outlined a plan for staging a resistance war and, at the same time, for building the country.

On the long resistance war, he wrote

"We must understand and make the people understand that the resistance war will be very hard and arduous.

"Even if the enemy is driven to almost complete failure, he will, all the same, strive to hit back. For a defeat in Viet Nam would lead to a disintegration of all his empire.

"Starting from scratch and with only a few revolutionary activists hiding in the jungle we were able to build up an anti-Japanese, anti-French base. Now that we have an army and the people what can we not do? Though Nam Bo has unfavourable terrain and was not well prepared, it has been able to fight for over a year. Over the whole country, we have good terrain, stronger forces. We can surely fight for several years, till victory..."

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As we desire peace, we have made concessions. But the more concessions we make, the more the French colonialists press on. All the efforts he made till the last moment could not stay the criminal hands of the enemy. The flame of the war of aggression spread to the entire country.

"No! We would rather sacrifice all than lose our country. Never shall we be enslaved! Compatriots, rise up!"

That winter, fifty-six years old, with a bamboo walking-stick and a pair of rubber sandals, he set out for the resistance war, the first sacred resistance war.

If we endure through this cold winter, we shall see spring.¹

Responding to his call, the entire nation rose up with great determination, a high fighting spirit, superb heroism and noble sacrifices and achieved resounding military exploits from the very first winter days of the national resistance war.

Since then, under the banner of President Ho and the Party, our people have overcome untold hardships during the three thousand days and nights of combat, continuously increasing in strength, winning ever bigger victories and ceaselessly advancing on the road to the spring of the nation, the historic victory of Dien Bien Phu.

These notes were begun in the spring of 1970, some time after Uncle Ho's death. I was unable to complete them at an earlier date.

With the documentation that could be gathered and the active contribution of many comrades, you, readers, and I have recalled the activities of President Ho during a short but very important period of the history of our revolution.

Early in the twentieth century this eminent son of the Vietnamese nation, who had set out, with an ardent heart, in the thick night of colonialism to find a way to save his country, his people, saw a radiant light on the horizon. A new era had started for mankind with the great Russian October Revolution. Nguyen Ai Quoc was the citizen of a colonized country who had quickly found the road to national salvation in the new era, that is the road of proletarian revolution, the road of Leninism.

More than forty years of revolutionary struggle by our Party have proved that the "revolutionary road" he chose for our nation was the only correct road to genuine independence, freedom and happiness. It is also the road to liberation for numerous other countries which are writhing under colonialist and imperialist rule.

Uncle Ho was a great patriot. His immense love for his country and his profound solicitude for his people knew no bounds. He devoted his whole

life to the cause of national salvation and of liberating his people.

Uncle Ho was the first Vietnamese Communist. His love for his compatriots was linked with his love for the toiling and poor people. For him, the cause of national liberation was inseparable from that of class emancipation, the emancipation of that part of mankind who were suffering from the injustices of a society in which exploitation and oppression existed.

Uncle Ho was the Leader of our Party, of our people. His revolutionary activities during the past sixty years show beyond doubt that he was an exceptionally brilliant strategist, the man of the great turning points. The decisions taken by him and the Party mere of historical, political and military significance, bringing the Vietnamese Revolution to ever bigger and more glorious victories.

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The tempestuous onslaughts of the soviet Army pursuing the German fascists to their last lair had enabled the working class and the labouring people in several East European countries to rise up and seize power. The imperialists were infuriated at the appearance of a great socialist revolution. They even thought of rearming the beaten fascist armies in preparation for a new world war to stamp out communism. The cold war between the West and the East started.

At that time, our Party, fifteen years old and with a membership of five thousand, led the entire people to stage the victorious August Revolution. We seized power from the Japanese fascists and their henchmen and founded the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, the first people's democratic state in Southeast Asia.

The red flag of the national liberation thus fluttered over a free Viet Nam, making its proud appearance in imperialism's immense forbidden realm hitherto inviolate. The Vietnamese revolution signalled to the five continents the collapse of the colonial system, the new growth of the revolutionary torrent of national liberation. This was not only a challenge but also a menace to imperialism.

Armies of all skin-colour, enemies of national independence and freedom, simultaneously swarmed into every corner of our country. One hundred and eighty thousand Chiang soldiers, the basest anti-communist soldiers, thronged our capital city and every other town of the North. They had gathered a dangerous gang of lackeys in an attempt to topple the young revolutionary power. The French Expeditionary Corps, equipped by the US imperialists and given the green light by the British imperialists, started the invasion in the hope of reoccupying South Viet Nam by a lightning offensive. Sixty thousand brutal Japanese fascist soldiers who had smashed the French colonialists' power over this peninsula within one night, could still be seen all over the country from the North to the South.

Never had Lenin's words been so significant as at this moment — "It is difficult to seize power but it is even more difficult to hold it."

The fate of the Fatherland was in constant danger and, at times, seemed to hang on a hair — A bit of confusion, a little moment of indecision would impair the revolution beyond remedy. This was the time when an exceptionally clear-sighted and keen leadership was badly needed.

Move with lightning speed either to attack defend.

Talent and nimble feet will give you the upper hand.¹

¹ Ho Chi Minh — Learning to Play Chess *Prison Diary*.

That we had the Party and Uncle Ho was a great blessing for our people and revolution.

Historical realities have given full evidence of the correctness of the Party's and Uncle Ho's political line which was firm in principle and flexible in

tactics. just as Comrade Le Duan remarked

*"We would at one time reach a temporary compromise with Chiang Kai-shek in order to get our hands free to cope with the French colonialists, only to do the same later with the French in order to drive out the Chiang Kai-shek troops and wipe out the reactionaries, their agents. We thus gained time to consolidate our forces and prepare for a nation-wide resistance to French colonialist aggression, which the Party knew was inevitable. Those extremely perspicacious moves will go down in the history of the revolution in our country as magnificent examples of the Leninist tactics of exploiting contradictions within the enemy's ranks and granting concessions while holding firm to principles."*¹

¹ Le Duan — *The Vietnamese Revolution — Fundamental Problems, Essential Tasks.*

If the capitalists' system of ownership has at times "turned them from mutual allies into fighting wild beasts"², here Ho Chi Minli, the Communist, armed with the wisdom of Marxism-Leninism and high morals and behavior was able to tame these ferocious wild beasts and sometimes use them in the interests of the revolution. Thus, he was able to protect the newly-born Democratic Republic of Viet Nam against a pack of wolves and take it safely through the vulnerable stage of its infancy.

² Lenin, *Complete Works*, Vol. 30, p. 570. *Su That Pub.*, Hanoi, 1971. (in Vietnamese).

Thanks to the leadership of the Party and Uncle Ho, the Vietnamese revolution was able to stand firm in face of the rigorous trials of the early period and to set out bravely to fulfil the great tasks that history had entrusted to our people.

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The imperialists and the representatives of their interests in their own countries as well as in the colonies were both unwilling to recognize and unable to realize the fundamental changes that had taken place on this peninsula during the years of World War II.

De Gaulle fancied that he had "bestowed generous favours" on the Indochinese people by his March 24, 1945 Manifesto. Most of the French bourgeois statesmen and army officers believed they could reestablish their rule in Indochina by military strength. They advocated restoring the weakened French position on the international arena by holding on to the colonies. While the majority of the French people condemned colonialism and supported our people's just struggle for independence and unification, those in colonialist circles who were more or less enlightened, like Leclerc, and chose to protect their interests in a different way were very scarce. Only when the French Expeditionary Corps had been completely routed did De Gaulle acknowledge his mistake on the Indochina problem.

Imperialism, avaricious, brutal and muddle-headed, had become a stain for the whole of mankind to clean up. Our entire Vietnamese people, millions rising as one, were determined not to let the enemy annex our country for a second time. And that winter, Uncle Ho voiced the profound aspiration and determination of the whole nation.

"We would rather sacrifice all than lose our country. Never shall we be enslaved! Compatriots, rise up!"

It was his own grave that the enemy was digging, he forced the war upon us. This well-deserved lesson was taught to the French imperialists eight years later in Dien Bien Phu. We have proved a new truth of our era — A nation, even a small one, which has a correct political line and resolutely rises up in arms against the aggressors, is fully capable of defeating even mighty imperialists.

The man who negotiated with the French authorities in Paris in Autumn 1946, became "the wrecker of French colonialism."

By the historic victory of Dien Bien Pliu, our people won back half of the country. The liberated North has been advancing steadily on the road to socialism and has become the impregnable bulwark for the revolutionary cause in the whole country.

The senile and decrepit French imperialists have been put out of action. For colonialism the bell has tolled. However, the long hard fight between our people and imperialism has not ended. The US imperialists, the imperialist ringleader, are still bent on clinging to South Viet Nam. With their tremendous economic and military potential, US neo-colonialism, more perfidious and much more brutal, has not yet drawn the necessary lesson. The war which was started on this peninsula by French soldiers released by British forces from Japanese prisons in Saigon has not ended with the French Expeditionary army's ignominious defeat. It is still continuing over half of our country and has nowadays become the biggest, fiercest and longest war since World War II.

In realization of their global strategy, the US imperialists have mobilized over one million and a half US, satellite and puppet troops for their war of aggression in South Viet Nam. They wanted to stamp out the revolutionary national liberation movement which, blazing here, was vigorously fanning up the anti-colonialist flame already kindled everywhere, threatening to destroy the whole lifework of the imperialists. They have employed here the most modern means of destruction of the western world. They have unleashed on this peninsula a quantity of bombs and shells greater than what they had used in all battlefronts during World War II. The "Huns" of this century have unleashed on our country the most atrocious war of aggression in the history of mankind.

Again President Ho's anti-US appeal resounded all over the country

"They may send here five hundred thousand, a million or even more troops to step up the war of aggression against South Viet Nam. They may employ thousands of aircraft to intensify their attack against the North... The war may drag on for five, ten, twenty years or even longer, Hanoi, Haiphong and some other towns and enterprises may be devastated. But the Vietnamese people will never be intimidated. Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.

In response to the call of Uncle Ho and the Party, our entire army and people, braving all hardships and sacrifices and heightening their fighting spirit and superb heroism are determined to live up to his teaching: "So long as there remains a single aggressor on our soil, we must fight on to drive him out.

South Viet Nam, tenacious and staunch, which started fighting the first and will put aside its arms the last and which deserves the title "the Brass Wall of the Fatherland" has grown stronger and stronger as it fights and driven the aggressors, armed to the teeth, deeper and deeper into the quagmire of their criminal war. From the flames of a long and fierce fight, the revolutionary power has emerged. The Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam is carrying out its historic mission of leading the army and people to drive out the US imperialists, liberate South Viet Nam and advance towards the peaceful reunification of the country.

The North has stood firm in face of the enemy's barbarous and wanton bombing. It has beaten off the air pirates who came to perpetrate crimes and poured its efforts into aiding South Viet Nam while continuing to advance steadily on the road of building socialism.

We have frustrated one strategy after another of the enemy's war of aggression. The aggressor army of the US imperialists, over-supplied with arms and ammunition, cannot, certainly, avoid the doom that has befallen the other invaders on this soil.

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Over forty years of our people's revolutionary struggle since the founding of the Party are for ever engraved in radiant relief on our nation's history of undaunted struggle to build up and preserve the country. The significance

of our Party's and people's struggle for national liberation has gone beyond that of a country's resistance against aggression, for it stands as witness of the new truths of the present era.

Against this magnificent background appears President Ho's image, majestic yet simple, noble yet familiar, dazzling yet pure and fresh like the sunlight at dawn.

The short period from the successful August 1945 Revolution to the beginning of the National Resistance War on December 19, 1946 was of great importance in the history of our Party's and people's revolutionary struggle. By these unforgettable days alone, we can form a picture of Uncle Ho.

President Ho was the most eminent son of our Fatherland.

President Ho was an outstanding combatant of the world communist movement.

President Ho was a great strategist who guided the Vietnamese revolution through untold stress and storm to victory.

President Ho was the new Vietnamese man. He was the leader, the teacher and comrade. He was the quintessence of the qualities and the moral values of a new society which was taking shape.

President Ho was the new man of the new epoch.

Thanks to the Party and President Ho, a new generation, the Ho Chi Minh generation, was born.

This generation has undertaken the mission of a shock team fighting for a new era of their country and of mankind: the era of Independence, Freedom and Socialism.

This generation, trained after the example set by our great Uncle Ho, is unceasingly going forward to realize his and the Party's ideal: "To build a

peaceful, reunified, independent, democratic and prosperous Viet Nam, thus making a worthy contribution to the world revolutionary cause."

*This generation is advancing steadily in response to his call: "Forward!
Complete victory will surely be ours!"*

Spring 1972