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# ***JPRS Report***

## **East Asia**

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***Southeast Asia***  
***Vietnam: TAP CHI CONG SAN***  
***No 10, October 1993***



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**East Asia**  
**Southeast Asia**  
**Vietnam: TAP CHI CONG SAN**  
**No 10, October 1993**

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**CONTENTS**

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[This report is a translation of the table of contents and selected articles from the monthly theoretical and political journal of the Vietnam Communist Party published in Hanoi. Notations in the table of contents indicate articles previously published or not translated.]

<b>Do a Good Job in Maintaining Social Order and Security</b>	
<i>[Bui Thien Ngo; published in FBIS-EAS-93-215, 9 Nov 93 pp 68-72]</i>	1
<b>A Number of Key Problems in the Rural Area Economic and Social Development Program</b>	
<i>[Tran Duc Luong; not translated]</i>	1
<b>Vietnamese Trade Union Activities in a Market Economy</b>	
<i>[Nguyen Van Tu]</i>	1
<b>Hold Fast to the Party's Viewpoints on Religious Activities in the Present Situation</b>	
<i>[Le Minh; published in FBIS-EAS-93-216, 10 Nov 93 pp 71-73]</i>	5
<b>Liberating Women—An Important Target and Theme of the Renovation Movement</b>	
<i>[Not translated]</i>	5

**Research-Exchange of Opinions**

<b>What Is Realistic Socialism?</b>	
<i>[Trinh Dan]</i>	5
<b>Reviewing the Party's Renovation of Theoretical Thinking on Developing a Commodity Economy</b>	
<i>[Do The Tung; not translated]</i>	8
<b>Initial Thoughts on Administrative Reform</b>	
<i>[Le Si Duoc]</i>	8
<b>The Technical Revolution—Challenges, Opportunities, and the Price</b>	
<i>[Nguyen Van Thu; not translated]</i>	10

**Realities-Experience**

<b>Agriculture and Rural Areas in Tien Giang. Development Policies and Practices</b>	
<i>[Huynh Van Niem; not translated]</i>	10
<b>Culture and Ecological Development</b>	
<i>[Hoang Dinh Phu; not translated]</i>	10
<b>The Zone 1 Nguyen Ai Quoc School Actively Contributes to Training Cadres</b>	
<i>[Le Doan Ta; not translated]</i>	10
<b>Ea Phe, a Bright Spot in the Central Highlands</b>	
<i>[Doan Hue; not translated]</i>	11

**Ideological Life**

<b>The Jealous Ways of the World (A Private Letter)</b>	
<i>[Hoai Anh; not translated]</i>	11

**Books**

<b>Comments on the Book 'A Small Tragedy' by Le Minh Khue</b>	
<i>[Duong Tung]</i>	11

**The World: Issues and Events**

<b>The World Economy—Competition and Tendencies</b>	
<i>[Tran Trong; not translated]</i>	14

**From Foreign Publications**

<b>The Prevention and Control of Corruption in a Number of Countries</b>	
<i>[Not translated]</i>	14

**Understanding Concepts**

<b>A Market Economy and Market Mechanisms</b>	
<i>[Not translated]</i>	14

### **Do a Good Job in Maintaining Social Order and Security**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 3-6

[Article by Bui Thien Ngo; published in  
FBIS-EAS-93-215, 9 Nov 93 pp 68-72]

### **A Number of Key Problems in the Rural Area Economic and Social Development Program**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 7-11

[Article by Tran Duc Luong; not translated]

### **Vietnamese Trade Union Activities in a Market Economy**

943E0003A Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN  
in Vietnamese Oct 93 pp 12-15

[Article by Nguyen Van Tu, member of the CPV Central  
Committee and President of the Vietnam Confederation  
of Trade Unions]

#### **[Text] Challenges, Confidence, and Initial Lessons**

1. Our country began shifting to a market economy just recently, but already this has had strong positive and negative effects on daily life and on the worker and trade union movements. The working class has undergone many important changes with respect to structure, thinking, psychology, and labor practices.

The reorganization of production has resulted in the layoff of more than 600,000 workers and laborers in the state enterprise sector, and a similar number lack full-time work. Because of this, their lives are very difficult. In general, labor conditions are still poor, and labor disasters and occupational diseases are increasing, particularly in the private production sector. There have been dozens of strikes in the private and joint domestic-foreign commercial sectors, with the strikers making economic demands and demands for democracy. Workers and laborers are concerned about their jobs, they are worried that their children will become degenerate, they are worried about the high cost of medical care, and they are concerned about security. They are also very unhappy about the spread of corruption.

The state economy has renovated the management mechanism, and this has resulted in Vietnamese trade unions losing millions of members (because the members have had to leave production). At the same time, only about 5 percent of the laborers in the private sector have joined a trade union. In this sector, only about 10 percent of the economic bases have trade union organizations. There is still a very large gap between the targets of jobs, living conditions, democracy, and social fairness. A trade union law has been promulgated, but it has not been actually implemented. The movement to build strong primary-level

trade unions is being carried on primarily at those state enterprises that are still in operation.

In a market mechanism, the operating conditions and environment of the trade unions certainly have to change. The trade unions are facing great challenges.

2. The Fourth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions (Sixth Term) opened a new chapter in the activities of Vietnamese trade unions and affirmed the faith and direction of the trade unions in market economy conditions. The Executive Committee is united on and more deeply aware of the functions of the trade unions and feels that the central function of the trade unions is to protect the legitimate and legal rights and interests of the workers and laborers. But at the same time, the function of participating in managing, educating, and mobilizing the workers and laborers cannot be ignored. Based on this understanding and with the party's resolutions, particularly guiding Resolution 8b of the Communist Party of Vietnam [CPV] Central Committee (Sixth Term), Vietnamese trade unions are striving to meet the challenges of the market mechanism and maintain their historical role with respect to the country and society.

Affirming their confidence in the leadership of the party and with a high degree of unanimity with respect to the party's renovation line, the various echelon trade unions have convinced and mobilized the workers and laborers to effectively implement the production reorganization policy and given attention to creating jobs. The state economic bases have held worker and civil servant conferences in order to discuss changing the direction of production, producing a greater variety of products, expanding service activities, encouraging people to contribute capital, exploiting the materials, and looking for work and markets. The creative labor movement to maintain quality and results has been maintained and expanded. During the past five years, 7,390 people have been honored as creative laborers, and hundreds of thousands of people have exhibited excellent labor standards.

Along with actively proposing ideas and participating with the state in promptly promulgating social policies regarding laborers, the Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions has launched and encouraged the bases to create many operating forms to help laborers find work and reduce difficulties. For example, a legal advisory office and a jobs promotion center have been opened, and an aid fund, a talent mutual help fund, and a job creation fund have been established. The various echelon trade unions have actively guided workers and laborers at private installations in signing collective agreements with the owners and resolved conflicts and disputes between workers and owners. The population, family planning, and social insurance activities have not only been maintained but also expanded. In order to protect the interests of the laborers, the Secretariat of the Confederation of Trade Unions has sought the opinions of



many workers and laborers to help in formulating the constitution, trade union law, and many other laws (such as the laws on investment, corporations, private enterprises, taxes, labor contracts, labor protection, health insurance, public inspections, and housing). In particular, the trade unions have proposed implementing measures to increase wages to keep pace with inflation and to provide aid in times of difficulty, and they have participated in formulating wage and social insurance reform plans.

The trade unions have renovated educating and mobilizing the workers based on being dynamic, creative, and self-conscious from the primary level. Clubs based on circles, interests, and special themes have been promoted. The quality of the operations of the various means of communication in the trade union system from the central echelon to the primary level (such as newspapers, journals, radio, television, and publishing houses) has been improved. Millions of trade union members have participated in ideological activities with topics such as "exploit the Vietnamese trade unions' 60-year tradition" and "follow the path chosen by President Ho" and in debates on the party's draft program, on the 1992 draft constitution, and on the draft trade union law. Joint cultural and sports activities between zone trade unions (such as the Central Highlands, Southern Trung Bo, and Western Trung Bo) have been carried on, and the activities have been effective. More attention has been given to trade union theoretical activities and to reviewing the actual experiences of trade union operations.

Positive changes have been made in trade union member and cadre work. Along with the trade union members in the state sector, to date, 180 primary-level trade unions, 42 labor unions, and more than 300 labor associations have been organized, attracting 110,000 laborers in the private sector. Based on unity of form and organization, the cooperative relationship between the sector trade unions and the local labor unions has become closer and closer and more and more effective. The ranks of cadres have been reorganized. Thirty percent of full-time cadres have specialized college standards, 20 percent have higher level standards, and 40 percent have middle-level standards regarding political theory and trade union work. There are now many part-time trade union cadres at the bases who are young and healthy people and who are enthusiastic about the work.

The changes, research, and positive and active activities of the trade union system in the past period affirm that the trade unions have matured greatly in the country's renovation movement. However, the trade unions still have many defects and weaknesses in the face of the new situation.

Used to operating in a state-subsidies system, faced with the complex changes of the market mechanism, the trade unions are confused and passive in formulating concrete operations plans to hit the target: "jobs, a good standard

of living, democracy, and social fairness." As for protecting the interests of the laborers and participating in state and economic management, the trade unions are still passive. The trade unions have been slow to participate in social activities. On the other hand, they have not done a good job in educating the laborers or mobilizing them to participate in the revolutionary action movements. Also, little has been achieved in getting laborers to join trade union organizations subordinate to the economic elements. Cadre work has not been given sufficient or all-round attention.

3. Based on the achievements and shortcomings, we can draw a number of initial conclusions:

As we move deeper and deeper into the renovation movement, the activities of the trade unions cannot be separated from the leadership of the party. Trade union activities must be aimed at supporting the political line of the party. As we switch to a market economy, the trade union organizations must hold fast to a working-class viewpoint.

The interests of the working class cannot be separated from the interests of the country and nation. The trade unions must protect the legitimate and legal rights of the workers and laborers. That is their main function. At the same time, they must also participate in managing, educating, and mobilizing the workers and laborers so that they actively contribute to developing the economy and maintaining political stability.

In order to mobilize the workers and laborers in the economic elements, the trade unions must promote spreading propaganda about and explaining the laws and trade union statutes. Social activities must be strengthened, there must be many forms of organization in accord with the special occupational characteristics, and the vital interests of the workers and laborers must be satisfied.

Attention must be given to guiding, controlling, and reviewing things and to coordinating and cooperating with and gaining the support of the state organizations and enterprise owners based on the laws. This is the only way to actually implement the resolutions and improve the operations results of the trade unions.

Cadres are the decisive factor. Only by building a rank of trade union cadres who are knowledgeable about society and the market economy, who understand the policies and laws, who will struggle resolutely, and who have the confidence of the masses will the trade unions be able to play their role and carry out their functions well.

#### Advance Steadily

1. The new operating environment of the trade unions has the following special characteristics:

Many commercial production organizations in many economic elements are operating in an interwoven manner. Laborers are both hired employees and masters

(although in some places this is still just a form). More and more laborers are moving about. They have more and more concepts about individual and personal interests. Some workers and laborers are no longer "have-nots." They are still wage earners, but they also own stock and production materials. There is competition between groups of workers. There are conflicts between managers and laborers directly involved in production and between laborers and those who use labor.

Commercial accounting does not permit meetings during production hours. The laborers have very little leisure time outside production hours. But at the same time, the need for information has increased greatly.

The need to link laborers with each other by occupation is increasing, and this has given rise to labor unions. The population centers will gradually be separated from the production zones, which means that it will be necessary to assemble laborers by population center. In the market economy, in many instances the spontaneous movements of the masses are very vigorous and fast paced. Because of this, the trade unions cannot remain indifferent or aloof.

2. Operating in this new environment, Vietnamese trade unions cannot allow their original nature and traditions to be lost. When they first came into being, the trade unions were mainly social-occupational organizations voluntarily organized by the workers and laborers in order to protect and struggle for their common interests. After expanding, the trade unions have now become political-social-occupational organizations that workers and laborers have joined in order to struggle for their legal and vital interests. The interests of the workers and laborers include both pressing daily interests and long-term basic interests. Vietnamese trade unions are led by the Communist Party of Vietnam. The trade unions are not guilds that simply struggle for local and immediate interests. The basic, long-term, and sacred target of Vietnamese trade unions is to strive to contribute to building socialism and defending our socialist Vietnamese fatherland. Thus, Vietnamese trade unions have two basic characteristics: a broad mass nature and a working class nature.

The clearest expression of their mass nature is that the trade unions are voluntary organizations of the workers and laborers in the various economic elements. Thus, the activities of the trade unions must start from the needs and interests of the workers and laborers. The operating formulas of the trade unions must attract the workers and laborers. Stated another way, the trade unions must be "of" the laborers, "for" the laborers, and "by" the laborers.

The clearest manifestation of the working class nature of the trade unions is the orientation of the activities and organization of the trade unions. No matter how broadly organized, the trade unions are still organizations of the workers. Laborers are people who use their labor strength (both intellectual and manual) to make a living.

Although they must strive to satisfy the varied needs and interests of the various strata of laborers, trade union activities must be in accord with the basic and long-term interests of the working class and nation.

The two characteristics of the trade unions have an organic relationship, with one serving as the precondition for the other. In this, the mass nature provides the basis, and the class nature sets the direction for building trade union organizations and formulating trade union activities.

In the political system, the trade unions are members and legal and equal organizations, and they occupy a worthy position in society. Legally, the rights and responsibilities of the trade unions have been set forth in the 1992 Constitution, in the 1990 Trade Union Law, and in other legal documents. As for the strength of the trade unions, this rests on the fact that they have assembled large numbers of workers and laborers, that they have the ability to engage in practical activities, that they have the confidence of and are closely tied to the workers and laborers, and that they have the confidence of the party in power, of the state, and of society.

As representative organizations that coordinate things with state organizations, the trade unions must give attention to formulating and implementing economic policies and labor procedures related to the rights and obligations of the laborers. At the same time, they must closely monitor the implementation of those policies and procedures.

Placed under the leadership of the Communist Party, the trade unions must faithfully reflect the desires and hopes of the laborers and make those desires and hopes known to the party so that the party can promulgate correct policies. On the other hand, the trade unions must implement the party's lines and policies in the worker-laborer movements and make them a reality. Because of this, the role of the trade unions is that of a thread connecting the workers and laborers to the party.

The trade unions will be able to play their role only if their functions are fully implemented in all economic elements. The switch to a market economy requires that the trade unions manifest their functions in a more profound and creative manner:

The trade unions must represent and protect the legal and legitimate rights and interests of the laborers.

The trade unions must represent and organize the laborers so that they participate in managing the agencies, units, and organizations, in controlling socioeconomic activities, and in managing the state.

The trade unions are responsible for organizing, educating, and mobilizing the laborers so that they play a role in controlling the country, fulfill their obligations as citizens, and help build and defend our socialist Vietnamese fatherland.



Protecting people's rights and interests is the central function of the trade unions, because laborers join a trade union mainly to ensure that attention is given to their well-being and to have their legitimate rights and interests protected. After that come the other problems.

3. Based on a profound understanding of trade unions in a market economy, the Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions has begun formulating a suitable operations strategy. The target of this strategy does not go beyond the political and economic targets of the party, but it has been concretized in accord with the special characteristics and nature of trade union activities. The target is to renovate the organization, contents, and operating formulas of the trade unions in order to contribute to building and defending the fatherland and to give attention to and protect the interests of the workers and laborers.

In order to hit this target, all of the activities of the trade union system will be renovated in accord with the following guidelines:

Members must serve as the center, there must be a very close relationship between the trade unions and members, attention must be given to the free will of the members, and protecting the legitimate interests and satisfying the needs of the members must be regarded as the motive force for binding the members to the trade unions.

The forms used to assemble the trade unions must be made more varied. Trade union organizational forms must be renovated, and it must be ensured that these are political-social-occupational organizations based on the principles of free will and democratic centralism. An effort must be made to model the tasks and functions of the trade unions. New criteria must be formulated for trade union cadres. Trade union cadres must be social activists who are knowledgeable about the problems of the sectors. They must rise up from the masses and have strong political capabilities, and they must have ties to the interests of the masses and become "leaders" of the masses.

4. In coming years, in order to continue operating effectively in market economy conditions, the various-echelon and various-sector trade unions must carry out the following tasks:

They must encourage the workers and laborers to manifest their creative potential and contribute to expanding the multifaceted commodity economy. With their functions and strengths, the trade unions must encourage the workers and laborers to manifest their creative talents and contribute to enabling the state economy to play a guiding role and serve as the macrocosmic management tool of the state. The trade unions must participate, together with the state, in creating the conditions and environment that will enable the private economic elements to grow. The workers and laborers must be motivated to play an activist role in the worker-peasant-intellectual alliance

and to actively contribute to expanding agriculture and developing the new rural areas.

They must elevate looking after and protecting the interests of the laborers through practical activities such as actively participating with the state in formulating laws and policies related to laborers. They must strengthen the control role of the workers and spread propaganda so that the workers and laborers adhere to the laws. They must actively participate, together with the state, in creating jobs for laborers. The primary-level trade unions must sign collective labor agreements with enterprise owners and monitor the implementation of those agreements. They must uncover and promptly put forth proposals to resolve the conflicts and disputes over interests between the laborers and enterprise owners. They must coordinate things with the various echelon authorities in resolutely implementing the labor protection laws and fulfill their responsibilities on the Social Insurance Fund Board of Trustees. They must strengthen the social activities of the trade unions in order to implement the population and family planning programs and establish mutual aid solidarity funds and talent aid funds in order to help each other overcome the difficulties and risks.

They must launch the workers and laborers in a struggle against corruption and smuggling. They must actively contribute to building the party and administration.

They must renovate propaganda and education, contribute to building a strong worker class, and take the lead in the renovation movement.

They must continue to renovate organization and improve the skills and political capabilities of the trade union cadres. They must adhere to the principle of democratic centralism in the trade union organization and activities. The forms used to attract workers must be made more varied. They must spread propaganda and expand membership in all kinds of economic forms. They must give attention to guiding and renovating primary-level trade union activities. A rank of trade union cadres with the ability to carry on social activities and with strong political capabilities must be democratically selected. Cadres must be actively trained in order to have a cadre system to satisfy the requirements of the movement. Attention must be given to trade union theoretical research activities, with the immediate task being to review the practices of the worker and trade union movements.

They must strengthen and expand cooperation with foreign trade unions and international organizations in order to strive for peace, national independence, democracy, and social progress and for the interests of the laborers and the strength of Vietnamese trade union organizations.

Economic activities must be promoted and additional financial sources must be created for the trade unions.

**Hold Fast to the Party's Viewpoints on Religious Activities in the Present Situation**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese No 10, Oct 93 pp 16-18

[Article by Le Minh; published in FBIS-EAS-93-216, 10 Nov 93 pp 71-73]

**Liberating Women—An Important Target and Theme of the Renovation Movement**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese No 10, Oct 93 pp 19-21

[Not translated]

**Research-Exchange of Opinions**

**What Is Realistic Socialism?**

943E0003B Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese Oct 93 pp 22-25

[Article by Trinh Dan: "What Is Realistic Socialism? (Comments on the Book *Realistic Socialism: Crisis, Renovation, and Developmental Tendencies*)"]

[Text] The book *Realistic Socialism: Crisis, Renovation, and Developmental Tendencies* by Hoang Chi Bao, which was published by the Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publishing House, has appeared at a time when everyone is very concerned about evaluating realistic socialism. This book shows the in-depth research and profound thought of the writer. In the book, the writer puts forth a number of ideas in order to defend socialist ideals and targets, and he affirms that socialist ideals are "rational, in line with progress and development, and objective." At the same time, he says that "for us, choosing a socialist development path is a unanimous choice that cannot be changed" and that "renovation based on a socialist orientation as mentioned by the party contains scientific faith" (pages 113-114). While commenting on the issues mentioned, the writer strives to analyze and evaluate realistic socialism, particularly the causes and roots of the crisis and defeat of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, in order to learn useful lessons for renovation theory and practice in our country. In the present situation, there are many complex theoretical and practical problems that must be studied and reviewed. The fact that the writer's purpose was to study and uncover new aspects of socialism is to be applauded.

However, after finishing this book, I couldn't help feeling worried and uneasy. In my view, the reason for conducting studies and making discoveries concerning the theory of scientific socialism is to protect what is correct, revise what is incorrect, create and develop things as required by new realities, and, finally, increase faith in socialist construction. But after finishing this book, I felt that I had been led to doubt and reject realistic socialism. Also, in his book, the author contradicted himself many times. For example, the author

affirmed Marxism-Leninism and the victory of socialism, but he then viewed this theory as just "ideas and scientific hypotheses" (page 20). And its success is just an "experiment" (page 8 and many other places). The author affirmed the "achievements in building socialism in the Soviet Union" but then he said that that model "does not have the capabilities to manifest the ideas and hit the real targets of socialism" (page 9). The author affirmed the renovation line of the Sixth and Seventh Communist Party of Vietnam [CPV] Congresses, but then said that we must formulate another "development strategy" (page 78) and that we must "design a new theoretical model" (page 113).

It must be said that the affirmations in this book seem somewhat insincere and simple. The author seems to have spent his energy looking for the "shortcomings" and "deviations" of realistic socialism instead of seeking the true lessons. Perhaps the problem is not just the methodology but also the orientation of the research.

Because of the limitations of a single article, I will give my views on just a few basic issues:

First, the author said that realistic socialism is "a test of a model in building a new society" (page 8). In many places, he reiterated that this is a "test." If you say that the 1871 Paris Commune was a test, I can agree with that. But saying that the 1917 October Revolution in Russia and realistic socialism, which has survived for more than 70 years, are "tests" is wrong in both a theoretical and practical sense. The rise of realistic socialism was a necessity of the historical process. For the first time in the history of the social sciences, Marx pointed out the basic conflicts of human society and of capitalist society. He pointed out the main class relationships of capitalism and exposed the secret of the exploitation of surplus value by the capitalists. Based on that, he proved the necessary laws concerning the self-negation of capitalism and the objective nature of the process of replacing capitalism with socialism. That process manifests the advance of history, of society, and of man. Thus, this is a necessary tendency and an objective law. The rise of realistic socialism is a manifestation of that law.

The author said that scientific socialism is just a "scientific hypothesis" (page 20). That is totally wrong. Even though "scientific hypotheses" contain rational elements, Marxism-Leninism, or scientific socialism, is not simply a "scientific hypothesis" but the greatest theory, conceptual system, and truth of the age. The great discoveries by Marx about the laws of social development and the replacement of capitalism by socialism form a scientific theory. This was formed based on analyzing the nature of capitalist society and reviewing the realities of the worker movement at that time. This stemmed from reviewing and inheriting the valuable achievements of human civilization, particularly the



newest conclusions reached by the social and natural sciences in the 18th and 19th centuries. Marx and Engels did extensive research and distilled the essence of the theories of Hegel (B.W.F. Hegel, 1770-1837) and Feuerbach (L.A. Feuerbach, 1804-1872), of French idealistic socialism, of classical English economic and political theory, of the hypotheses of Kant (E. Kant, 1724-1804) and Laplace (P.S. Laplace, 1749-1827) about the universe, of the theory of evolution of Darwin (C.R. Darwin, 1809-1882), of the theory of conservation and transformation of energy, and of the law of circulation of Mendeleev (D.G. Mendeleev, 1834-1907). While arguing the necessity of the death of capitalism, Marx and Engels were not afraid to "fully recognize the revolutionary role played by capitalism in the past."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, scientific socialism has inherited things and is a high point of development of human civilization. Not only has it distilled the intellectual essence of history, but it has also elevated human science to new heights and become a scientific and revolutionary theory that people can use to promote historical development. Lenin continued [to make] creative discoveries in order to supplement, develop, and apply the scientific socialism created by Marx and Engels.

Historical realities show that wherever the theory of scientific socialism has been adhered to, the movement by the working class has expanded greatly and history has advanced. At the end of the 19th century, England, the United States, and France were progressive industrial countries, and the working class forces were very strong. But the worker movement in those countries was greatly inferior to that in Germany, a country that was far less developed than those other three countries in terms of its economy and working class. The reason for this is that in Germany, scientific socialism took root earlier and more deeply and manifested a great effect. Because of this, at that time, Germany became a vanguard country in the world revolutionary process. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russia played a vanguard role even though Russia was then far behind West European countries socioeconomically. Another reason for that was that Russia had Lenin, Lenin's party, and the direct light of scientific socialism. The October Revolution transformed that theory into reality. Thus, I cannot agree with the author's argument that, because of the collapse of realistic socialism, the matter of the October Revolution must be "reformulated" (page 21) or with his vague statement that "between Marx-Engels and Lenin, it is impossible to say who was right and who was wrong" (page 22).

Second, when talking about a model of realistic socialism, the author "sought the truth... in the reality of the process of socialist construction in the Soviet Union" (page 9). But what he actually did was reveal the weaknesses and errors without paying sufficient attention to the achievements of socialism and its great contribution to mankind. We are using the dialectical method when we say that both before and after the October Revolution, in the Soviet Union, socialism used the working

class as a material weapon, and the working class and Soviet laborers used socialist theory as a spiritual weapon, transforming it into a very powerful material strength. The powerful growth of Soviet society over many decades has provided clear proof of this.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party, relying on a progressive socialist system, the Soviet economy made giant strides. In 1917, the value of Russia's industrial output accounted for only 1 percent of the world's industrial output. It was only one-seventh that of the United States and was far below that of England, France, and Germany. But in the 10 years starting from 1928, when the first five-year plan was implemented, the Soviet manufacturing industry increased seven times, leading Europe and standing second in the world behind the United States. By 1940, the Soviet Union had 15 million tons of iron, more than 18 million tons of steel, and 31 million tons of petroleum, more than the combined output of England and France for the same types of items. That guaranteed the glorious victory of the Soviet people in World War II. But in the war, more than 20 million Soviet citizens were killed, and the losses suffered by the Soviet Union were much greater than those suffered by the United States, England, or France. Along with the allied forces, the achievements scored by the Soviet people in saving mankind from the scourge of fascism will live forever in the history of mankind.

After the war, from the piles of rubble everywhere in the country, with the courage of victors, the Soviet people quickly restored the economy. In 1950, as compared with 1940, the national income had risen 64 percent and industry had increased 73 percent. During the 1980's, Soviet industrial output was 70-80 percent of that of the United States as compared with only 6.9 percent prior to the war. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite, opening up a new era in space travel. The world saw that the Soviet Union had a large rank of scientists and the best system of scientific research organizations in the world.

After World War II, an international socialist system was formed. With not quite one-third of the world's population, this system accounted for two-fifths of the world's industry. In 1989, the per capita gross national product of the Soviet Union reached \$1,780, and in Eastern Europe it was \$2,465. The changes and adjustments that benefited the working class and laboring people in the capitalist countries were due in part to the tireless struggle of the Soviet people based on an international spirit and the powerful existence of realistic socialism.

Throughout the 70 years of its existence, even though enemies of realistic socialism have labeled it in various inappropriate ways, mankind will never forget that realistic socialism was the pillar in defending peace and social progress and the trusted and loyal friend of all oppressed peoples, including the Vietnamese people. During the 50 years since the war, the world has been free of a great war, peace and development have been maintained and protected, the face of the world has

constantly been renovated, and many countries have prospered. Those wonderful things are surely related to the great work of the Soviet people and realistic socialism. Surely the achievements and victory of the Vietnamese revolution are tied to the great help of Soviet realistic socialism. It can be affirmed that realistic socialism has made invaluable contributions to man's economic, political, cultural, and social progress and development in the 20th century. But the author of this book thinks that "all the wonderful things of socialism are still in the future and that they are the targets of history. Socialism is the direction in which history is moving. It is a developmental trend and has not yet been fully manifested" (page 10).

Third, the author exhibits a one-sided and incomplete understanding in his views on realistic socialism and in his analysis of the factors that led to the crisis and defeat of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Starting from the argument that "in testing a theory in actual practice, if results aren't achieved, the natural thing is to reexamine the theory" (page 10) and "reformulate" the question (page 21), the author says that scientific socialism has never existed. There has never been "a humanitarian and cultured scientific socialism in accord with the laws and aspirations of the people." He says that socialism is just an "idea" and a "cherished hope" of people in every age (page 9).

Actually, there were many reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union. Of these, the direct and decisive factor was the mistakes made by the party leaders at that time. It should always be remembered that initially it was said that reorganization was aimed at fostering a correct understanding of scientific socialism. But during the reorganization, people moved farther and farther away from the principles of scientific socialism and abandoned everything that that great theory had achieved for the Soviet people. In this, the most important principle was to maintain the people's regime led by the working class through its party, to maintain democratic centralism, and to constantly increase production and improve the lives of the people. Here, history has repeated itself: Madame Roland (1754-1793), a fighter in the French bourgeois revolution, said: "Freedom! Countless crimes have been committed in the name of freedom!" Similarly, during the period of "reorganization," countless mistakes were made in the name of socialism. Ignoring the basic principles of scientific socialism led to the collapse of the Communist Party and allowed the regime to fall into the hands of the opposition. This explains the fact that during the 70 years of its existence, realistic socialism experienced many crises, and many mistakes were made. But socialism did not collapse. It collapsed only when errors of a traitorous nature were made. But this defeat of communists certainly doesn't mean that scientific socialism has collapsed or disappeared.

Analyzing the reasons for the crisis and collapse of realistic socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern

Europe, the author is not really objective. He does not have an all-round, concrete, and historical viewpoint, and he fails to adequately analyze the objective and subjective aspects and the internal and external conditions. The author repeats many of the same arguments of political pluralism prevalent in the Soviet Union during the period of reorganization and concludes that there were "five defects in the socialist construction model" and "five mutations concerning socialism." Based on that, he sharply criticizes the leadership of the Communist Party and the managerial responsibility of the Soviet state. In the end, as the author said over and over, a "more modern theoretical" model of socialism must be found.

Following the events of August 1991, an article in the LOS ANGELES TIMES stated that "communism has collapsed, but it has not disappeared." The article also affirmed that the socialist ideas of Marx cannot be eliminated from the theoretical sphere. Many of the world's political, social, and economic problems are now being analyzed through the prism of Marxism, and some are even being analyzed using Marxist concepts. "If you don't read the works of Marx, you won't become an economist and thinker with the power of clear observation. All historians have read the works of Marx. All social scientists have read his works."

Fourth, this book appeared more than 18 months after the seventh congress. That congress reviewed four major lessons, mentioned six basic characteristics of socialism, and gave seven basic guidelines to build socialism and defend the fatherland, along with the targets and solutions found in the program and strategy. I think that this book could have clarified and creatively expanded the basic viewpoints of the seventh congress. But instead it concentrates on making general comments about the concepts of "renovation," "development," "creativity," and "liberation." At the same time, the author makes seven points about renovation (pages 97-98) and four points about the direction of socialism (from page 114) and seems to think that this is a "new theory of socialism."

One of the author's arguments that needs to be given attention is that "socialism is the target or means of development" (page 95). Concerning this, the author concludes that socialism and development are one and the same (page 101). I think that between socialism and capitalism, even though each has inherited things from the other, there is a fundamental difference between them with respect to their nature and targets of development. Socialism and development in general cannot be thought of as being identical.

Many times, the author emphasizes that "our country still doesn't have socialism" and "socialism in Vietnam is basically an issue of the future" (page 11). "What is socialism? It will be a long time before that question can be answered" (page 95). The question then is, when will there be socialism? Will socialism suddenly appear sometime in the future, and are there



now no socialist factors in our country? Are we carrying on renovation and advancing to socialism from scratch? Clearly, the author is not engaged in dialectical thinking. Concerning the economic growth targets mentioned at the seventh congress, the author says that the "question of socioeconomic growth in Vietnam will not be easy to answer" (page 77) and that "no country in the world can double the national income in such a short period of time" (page 76). According to the author, it will take Vietnam "another 92 years" just to "get on the runway in preparation for takeoff." I don't know what the author bases this on.

I have presented a number of ideas that I wanted to share with the author. I think that exchanging ideas and discussing the book by Hoang Chi Bao is a wholesome manifestation of our maturity in the theoretical sphere. As one scientist said, many times the lessons learned from failures are just as valuable as those learned from successes. This is true with respect to what has happened in Soviet society and the circumstances surrounding this book.

#### Footnote

1. Marx-Engels: *Selected Works*, Su That Publishing House, Hanoi, 1980, Volume 1, page 535.

#### Reviewing the Party's Renovation of Theoretical Thinking on Developing a Commodity Economy

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese No 10, Oct 93 pp 26-30

[Article by Do The Tung; not translated]

#### Initial Thoughts on Administrative Reform

943E0003C Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese Oct 93 pp 30-33

[Article by Le Si Duoc, MA in economics, department head, Government Office]

[Text] To satisfy the large and complex requirements of the renovation movement in our country, in recent years we have gained a new awareness and improved the activities of the state in general and national administration in particular. The 1992 Constitution and the Government Organization Law (passed in September 1992) affirm an important principle: Our state is a state of the people, by the people, and for the people. All power belongs to the people under the leadership of the party. The powers of the state are unified and indivisible, but there is a clear division of functions. The government is the highest executive organ of state power.

It is still too early to evaluate the rationality and effects of the government's new organizational methods. But in reality, improving the executive organs in general and administration in particular is not something that can be done all at once.

I would like to discuss the following problems:

1. In principle, the organization of our state apparatus does not distinguish between legislative and executive powers. These two powers are not separated, and there is no tendency for executive power to prevail over or rise above legislative power and conversely. But today, because of the economic and social conditions existing in the country and the complex changes that have taken place in the world, the government must be strengthened in all respects so that it can truly become the highest state executive and administrative organ, an active and dynamic organization that can satisfy the requirements of changing the mechanism. This includes promoting and ably supporting legislative work.

Because of this, in my view, the functions of the government must be made more concrete, and government regulations should be reexamined. In principle, our state powers are unified and indivisible, but there is a clear division of functions in accord with the need to elevate the National Assembly (the unified and highest state power organ), to elevate the government (the state power organ with the highest executive function), and to preserve the unity of power in the National Assembly. Thus, it should be clearly stated that the government is the highest executive and administrative organ of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The government is responsible to the president and the National Assembly for all the executive and administrative tasks assigned it. The government must be active, creative, and very effective in controlling and managing things. This will enable the government to respond flexibly and quickly to complex changes in the situation.

With the above position, a very important aspect of the government is its ability to actively make regulations (documents under the law) in order to implement the laws passed and promulgated by the National Assembly. This is in accord with the functions of the highest executive and administrative organ.

2. As for the tasks and powers of the government, the key thing is to clearly mark the boundary between the National Assembly's power to make laws and the government's power to make regulations. The relationship between the National Assembly and the government and between the government and Supreme Court and Supreme People's Organ of Control must be handled well. The government has two important responsibilities: to participate in legislative power with the credentials of an organ that initiates laws and to formulate regulations with the credentials of the organ that enforces the laws. Confusing these two responsibilities will lead to distorting the functions.

The highest executive organ must manifest its responsibilities by uniformly managing the political, economic, cultural, social, and security tasks of the country. Concerning this task, the government must determine its position in the process of handling disputes in the administrative and economic spheres.



3. With the government's present structure, there are two concepts that must be understood clearly. Those are "sector" and "ministry." "Sector" refers to an objective socioeconomic sphere. It is formed and it survives and develops based on an ever broader and deeper division of social labor. "Ministry" refers to a state administrative organization (and has a subjective character). It can manage one or a number of sectors. Depending on the growth of the sector, the size of the ministry can be expanded or reduced as long as this is in accord with the general operating laws and things do not become distorted or oppressive.

4. As for work procedures, attention should be given to the relationship between the individual and the collective in the government. The premier is responsible to the national Assembly and the president for managing the administration of the entire country. The job of the vice premiers is to help the premier. They have the full power of the premier when he is not present. The position of vice premier is not a management echelon in the government. Thus, the vice premiers have the authority to make decisions only when the premier has given them the authority to do so in certain circumstances. The collective discussion sessions in the government should be regarded only as a means to achieve unity of thought. After meeting with members of the government, it is the premier who must make the final decision and take responsibility for that decision. Actually, the government is an executive organization, not a discussion organ. Thus, decisions of the premier must be implemented based on a system of heads. The fact is, in many cases, something is discussed but no decision is reached. Conversely, there are very important issues that should be discussed, but they are not discussed in depth or are not discussed at all before a decision is made.

The old organizational regulations and formulas must be examined and eliminated, and it must be ensured that the government becomes deeply involved in macrocosmic management, that it manages things using the laws and documents under the law, that it does not interfere directly in the activities of the economic organizations or production commercial units, and that it does not interfere with the independence of the cultural and social bases.

To have a centralized, unified, and highly effective administration, over the long term, procedures for appointing, removing, and transferring those who head administrative organizations must be established. The first thing is to gradually implement procedures to have the premier appoint the chairman and vice chairmen of the provincial and municipal people's committees directly subordinate to the central echelon.

5. To ensure that the ministries concentrate on state management functions at the macrocosmic level and do not engage in production or commercial functions as stipulated by the law, the current guideline is merge those ministries having the same or similar functions,

strengthen the functional ministries, cut back the ministries that manage sectors (replacing them with national general corporations), and reorganize the organizations directly subordinate to the government. This is in accord with the need to streamline organization and have few centers and middlemen. This will also separate production and commercial activities from the functions of the ministries.

In place of the administrative management forms and instead of deep interference in the production and commercial management activities of the enterprises, the management activities of the ministries must be raised to the level of formulating regulations and managing the entire sector and the entire sphere (both at the central echelon and in the localities and in all economic elements). The ministries must be capable of formulating strategic plans and long-term and intermediate plans based on market forecasts. They must set guidelines and have a scientific and technical development policy to help the sectors. Along with the financial, banking, and price tools, the ministries must give attention to planning with completely new contents and formulas suited to switching to a market mechanism under the control of the state.

Decree 15/CP of 23 March 1993 stipulates that the ministries have the right to establish and disband state enterprises subordinate to the ministries, stipulate production and business guidelines, control the preservation of capital and the use of property, appoint cadres to lead the enterprises, and so on. These stipulations must be studied and handled in accord with the development requirements of a multifaceted economy. And they must be studied in order to answer the question: Are the ministries still the higher echelon management organizations of the enterprises?

It is the ministers who implement state executive power on a nationwide scale in the sectors and spheres for which they are responsible. The ministers are under the centralized and unified leadership of the premier and are responsible to the premier and National Assembly.

Today, the fundamental reason for the poor management at various echelons in the executive apparatus is that the individual rights and responsibilities of the management cadres are inadequate and unclear. The premier and vice premiers cannot do the work of the ministers. As for employing only a few vice ministers, besides the goal of reducing the management centers, another goal is to prevent higher echelons from encroaching on the powers of the ministers. Similarly, the reason for appointing only a few heads is to prevent lower echelons from encroaching on the powers of the ministers.

Based on the spirit of the 1992 Constitution on appointing people to more than one position, besides the premier, steps must be taken to keep to a minimum the number of members of the government participating as delegates to the National Assembly and holding other

positions. Implementing this gradually will reduce the confusion between legislative and executive powers and enable the ministers to concentrate on carrying out their primary tasks.

6. A current problem is that there must be a rational distribution of power between the central echelon and the localities. This is a basic theme that is very important with respect to the effectiveness of state management. In order to solve this problem, the relationship between centralization and democracy in national administration (specifically, between the central echelon and the localities) must be clearly determined. The role and powers of the state, government, and ministers with respect to the localities must be clarified, and the unity and centralization of powers of the state must be maintained.

Decentralization to the localities refers to decentralization of jurisdiction and tasks to the administrative echelons (provinces, municipalities, wards, and villages). Today, many elements of decentralization are irrational, primarily the issue of budget decentralization. This has a bureaucratic centralism character and does not entrust the local authorities with sufficient powers and responsibilities. This makes the localities passive and can lead to the localities relying on the central echelon. This is also a dispersal of power, which can lead to anarchy.

7. In order to maintain the unity of the law, there must be a system of laws that fully manifests the nature and requirements of the political system and state administrative apparatus, an administration that is organized and that operates based on the system of laws, most directly the administrative laws, and that strengthens the laws. The administrative laws regulate all activities of the state agencies and organizations and administrative officials.

The state administrative apparatus must have operating formulas that will enable the democratic rights, initiative, and creativity of citizens to be fully manifested in participating in managing the state. Service formulas must be improved, the daily needs of citizens must be satisfied, a service must be provided quickly, conveniently, and efficiently without authoritarianism, bribery, or corruption. One of the most important tasks in perfecting the management formulas is to formulate laws on powers and procedures for promulgating state legal documents and establishing administrative courts. These laws will contribute to concretizing the policies on controlling and managing the state through laws. The administrative laws or civil servants are responsible for administrative disciplinary violations that occur in the course of operations. The administrative apparatus is used to deal with criminal violations and administrative violations when citizens or administrative officials file a complaint against a public servant.

8. A dynamic rank of state civil servants must be built. A regular state that operates effectively must have a system of scientific tools and a clear civil service

system in accord with the existing socioeconomic situation. The civil service concepts of other countries with a specialized administration orientation cannot be imposed on the civil service concepts of our state. The state civil service system must be stipulated using legal documents and under the laws promulgated by the organizations with jurisdiction (not by administrative agreements). This system must contain clear stipulations on the selection, appointment, promotion, removal, dismissal, and retirement of civil servants. The training given to state cadres must be reorganized based on standardizing things. Programs must be formulated, and a system of obligatory state management training must be implemented for cadres who hold positions at various echelons.

Renovating the state administrative apparatus is really aimed at improving the effectiveness and results of state management, building socialist democracy, and strengthening the socialist legal system. This is in accord with the need to build a law-governed state that is truly of the people, by the people, and for the people in our country. This is a broad and complex issue. Many theoretical and practical studies, particularly all-round studies, must be done in order to clarify all aspects in the movement to reform our present national administration.

### **The Technical Revolution—Challenges, Opportunities, and the Price**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 34-36

[Article by Nguyen Van Thu; not translated]

### **Realities-Experience**

#### **Agriculture and Rural Areas in Tien Giang, Development Policies and Practices**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 37-40

[Article by Huynh Van Niem; not translated]

#### **Culture and Ecological Development**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 41-43

[Article by Hoang Dinh Phu; not translated]

#### **The Zone 1 Nguyen Ai Quoc School Actively Contributes to Training Cadres**

00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 44-46

[Article by Le Doan Ta; not translated]

**Ea Phe, a Bright Spot in the Central Highlands**  
00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 93 pp 47-49

[Article by Doan Hue; not translated]

### Ideological Life

**The Jealous Ways of the World (A Private Letter)**  
00000000 Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese  
No 10, Oct 92 pp 50-51

Article by Hoai Anh; not translated]

### Books

**Comments on the Book 'A Small Tragedy' by Le Minh Khue**  
943E0003D Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN  
'n Vietnamese Oct 93 pp 52-54

[Article by Duong Tung: "Comments on *A Small Tragedy* by Le Minh Khue" (published in 1993 by the Writers' Association Press)]

[Text] In the article "Writing About Evil Is a Way of Arousing People," which appeared recently in TAC PHAM MOI, Le Minh Khue, a female writer, said: "Evil, like a poisonous mushroom or dangerous weed, is destroying the collective and signals a terrible cultural decline and the loss of the traditional morals of the nation. Perhaps no where else on this planet is money worshiped so blindly as it is in our country." She said that "writers, with their civic responsibilities, cannot close their eyes to this social situation."

First of all, I fully understand the great concern of the writer in the face of the decline of social morals and rise of "evil." And I sympathize with her spirit of struggle against evil and her mournful appeal. However, I am surprised by and concerned about her explanation: "Writing about evil does not mean approving or disapproving of something. And this is not an explanation or a matter of self-defense. This is not a matter of entering into an argument or making innuendoes. This is simply a topic that must be discussed through the eyes of a writer looking at life."

In my view, some of her arguments are contradictory. If you say "discussed through the eyes of a writer looking at life," how can you avoid looking at the key questions of a literary work: Who are the targets of description? How are the personalities and fates of the characters in the work manifested? What are the ideological themes of the work?

Literature is not simply an impassive, aimless, and cold view of things or an awkward and rough copy of life. Literature is always a reflection of reality through a lens

(thought, analysis, reflection, and an expression of an attitude) and through the sensitivity, warmth, and kindness of the writer.

The viewpoints expressed in *A Small Tragedy*, an experiment by Le Minh Khue in writing about evil, have the nature of a "declaration." Perhaps this is why this work has had just the opposite effect of what she wanted, which was "to arouse people."

How do we usually view the realities portrayed by Le Minh Khue in *A Small Tragedy* (a book composed of nine short stories)? Here I would like to divide things into two parts. One part talks about love and happiness. What do readers see there? They see grief, sadness, and great anger with the past. They see exhaustion and weariness with the present. What about the future? According to the author, "the future is dim as if shrouded in fog."

The characters in a number of the stories want to rise up and find love and happiness even though that happiness is fleeting and something that no one can achieve. Le Minh Khue has sketched a life with countless obstacles and rapids. People are compelled by a concept of "having stolen the thread binding two people together" (In "Fragile as a Sunbeam"). People are pulled this way and that and worn down by life and all the difficulties they must face (In "The Storm at the End of the Season"). Because people become absorbed in things that are "dark, senseless, and unreal," individual happiness is interrupted and isolated (In "A Late Afternoon"). And because they have been tricked and fooled by an older generation, younger generations must suffer the consequences, like a predestined condition stemming from the consequences of previous actions (In "A Small Tragedy").

In this realistic part, the attitude of the writer is one of sympathy [for people] and trying to protect them from the deceptions of life. But that protection seems to be subjective and extreme. For example, the author describes a citizen after going to a public security station in our society several decades ago: "She left the public security station, and from that moment on, she was no longer young. She had lost her sense of faith and light-heartedness." And she says that during the war, the stipulations on associating with foreigners were very severe and complicated. She says that public security officials blundered and dealt with people very harshly, which left this young girl with a frightening impression. In life, if people "cry out in pain even if they have not been hit," what will the relationship between people be like? And to how many more "tragedies of life" will writers give "premature" birth? Such seriousness and complexity to the point where the character does not marry and remains in that state to old age is illogical and difficult to believe.

Let's listen to what Mi (one of the characters in "The Storm at the End of the Season") has to say about her collective zone: "A real rat's nest. There, people are as



afraid of the rats as they are of tigers, because there are many large rats that are old and fierce. And people are like rats, because they slip into every inch of space to make their nests. The market stalls are always in an uproar. And in such housing zones, it seems as if all the 'essences' of mankind have been concentrated there." She then tells about an elderly person who climbs into a cesspool and who worries about coming down with a fever. A "great duke" does magic in an area of 8 square meters. A philosophy instructor who has three college degrees commits evil acts because he is jealous of his neighbors, and so on. She says: "How can we avoid the flies in this area? We, too, are flies who pester others." Her tone is so bitter. In reality, those people are just outsiders who do not want to become involved, along with others, in the struggle to improve things, and many times that leaves them gasping for air. In life, there are many tight spaces, and there is much confusion and complexity. There are many unfortunate people all around us. But like Mi, if she can just escape from her four small walls, in this country, a much wider space, she will discover many new things and many people worthy of her admiration and affection. Thus, concerning the characters in these stories, if the author just lets them look at reality from their own very narrow perspective and based on their individual discontents, how can they avoid having superficial views, which can lead to their duping and scaring other people, particularly gullible people?

I like Le Minh Khue's idea that "people should not take an ordinary view of ordinary people." And I believe that she, like her characters, will "never be able to sleep." But the issue here is having a dispassionate, objective, and thoughtful attitude and weighing things properly when observing and depicting reality. Does it serve any useful purpose for a writer to coldly relate all the trivial details of ordinary life in a work? If such things are then exaggerated or even fabricated and if things are presented in a general and distorted manner, readers cannot accept this. This will just add to the bitterness of life and create doubt and despair in the minds of readers. And in this situation, readers will never "wake up" and will easily become used to doing things in an unconscious manner.

The second part of reality depicted in the book by Le Minh Khue was even darker and more violent. Throughout the book there is a suffocating, heavy, and melancholy atmosphere, a dirty and bloody past, and a stifling present. Hating and killing others is as easy as ABC. People have lost their faith and live without restriction. They are driven by money and power. They become stupid and foolish and fly into rages. Naturally, the result is a series of evil actions: knives, blood, deception, punishments. Things become so terrible that a child cuts open his father's stomach and pulls out his liver, a child carrying a sword plunges it into the stomach of a pregnant woman, a father and his children must make a blood oath.

We understand the author's motive. She wants to sound the alarm about the decline in social morals and the degeneration of people because of power, money, and the complexity of the process of switching to a market economy. We also admire the literary talents of Le Minh Khue, who has exploited new themes using bold language to create destinies and multifaceted personalities of psychological depth. In several of the stories, people can relate this to her graceful, intense, and fast-paced style of writing in previous works such as "The High Point of the Summer" and "Far From the City." But we do not approve of her realistic style of narration in many places and in many stories, a style that exaggerates things, that is superficial and derisive, and that is even cruel and spiteful.

In actual life, there are father-son relationships such as that of Quang and Tuyen and such as Thien and Than. In some families, there is deception and lack of conscience as in the families of Truong and Cu Ngheo. In a society that has only recently implemented a market mechanism, there may be people who used to have difficulties but who have now become prosperous and vice versa. Good and bad fortune cannot be avoided in a country that is undergoing powerful changes. The renovation movement is shaking everyone to the core of their being, opening up opportunities, and giving countless people greater vitality. But for various reasons, some people have not kept pace. They are stupefied or overwhelmed by the present situation. But the face of our society is gradually changing. The atmosphere is much more democratic and open.

With the lofty responsibilities of writers, authors must contribute to changing direction and providing an orientation for life and for people. They must avoid the "fog" and not block or confuse others. In the writings of Le Minh Khue, there are many "foggy" passages. She wrote: "There was a somber-looking man, of whom there are many in metropolitan areas." "There are too many sad stories in the land." "Vietnamese people look very feeble." "Intellectuals waste their time and are resigned to a life of bubbles in a beer and the blackness of a cup of coffee." More than once, she portrays the collective zones as cages imprisoning people and animals, even depicting all as animals. "At night, they sleep like wretched, vile people. During the day, they are evil ghosts, a herd of animals living together, with the strong getting the most." Even worse, she concludes that "that is the face of hundreds of thousands of collective buildings after it was determined to imprison the souls and bodies of people in the same cage." She portrays the quarters of several college instructors as "burial grounds." She bitterly jokes that "baskets used to be full, unlike today. The schools are very lofty places remote from the masses. Those allowed to enter a school must meet the standards put forth for people at that moment. This means that people must constantly hunt for crabs and snails, but they never enough to eat." Suddenly, she observes that "throughout their lives, people are like coolies." Her observations and generalizations are arbitrary, arrogant, and cruel, and they have hurt the author

herself. Tens of thousands of intellectuals have been trained under our socialist system. What will they think about these observations?

In the story "Toni D," a father and son are "bandits" (prior to that, the father had been a civil servant and the son had been a soldier, but now they are very cruel). They grumble, advance and retreat, dance around their prey, struggle to stay alive, kill, are wounded, and so on. What a disgusting and foul life. Reading this story gives people goose pimples and makes their hair stand on end. In the story "Winter Train Trip," a group of poor artists are set on and killed by a group of poor people.

A pressing question is, is it true that life is so desolate and sad as that portrayed in "Winter Train Trip"? On this train, did honest people such as Luoc and Tu Heo have to flee and hide without any possibility of being protected by the law? Is our society today filled with evil events such as those portrayed by the author?

How can stories that push people to the brink and who have no way to escape or who intentionally live by the philosophy that "it's all right to kill for profit" and "in this age, some will win and some will lose" awaken people's human feelings, give them greater confidence, or give them the strength to oppose evil?

Now, I would like to discuss "A Small Tragedy," the short story used as the title of the book, the cover of which is illustrated with "drops of blood." Reading "A Small Tragedy," it can be seen that the writer laboriously constructs her story to cover a broad sphere and long period of time, that is, the complex changes in our society from the resistance against the French, land reform, and the resistance against America to today. The cast of characters includes Tays, Vietnamese, patriotic overseas Vietnamese and so on. The mood is moving and sad. There is separation, incest, death, and so on and so on. The writer skillfully uses all the tricks of her trade (a love story and an old criminal story) in writing this story. But going into this work more deeply, we can clearly see the intention of the writer. Starting from a certain premise, she builds her characters around the tragedy of the Tuyen family, varies the pace of the plot, and finally reaches the climax of the story: the tragic death of an innocent boy.

The author repeats her theme over and over and finally hits the targets, which are:

To smear the Vietnamese people, the Vietnamese nation, and certain revolutionary cadres (at high and very high levels) by portraying things in a very detailed and cynical manner.

To paint a black picture of our society in the development of the revolution.

To portray life as involving the pursuit of money (particularly dollars) and power.

Pictures of "a father killing his son and a son killing his father" are drawn in different colors, but they all show

the tragedy of modern life. The fates and futures of all generations (particularly youths) are like "fog."

The greatest weakness of the work is that the author is too engrossed in her original theme and viewpoint and as a consequence has to arrange and compress countless details, events, and characters. Many times, things become very illogical and contrary to the feelings of the community and nation. Let's analyze the subject raised by the author. The story has a deterministic-fatalistic nature that people refer to as a "waiting for the return of the husband" motif (father's generation has food, children's generation is starving). The price that must be paid is very high, but this really stems from the social changes (land reform and our nation's resistances against France and the United States) and the pursuit of and intoxication with fame and fortune by the father (Tuyen). He represents a group of cadres who participated in the revolution, and he has become a high-ranking cadre in a province. But he is filled with evil. The author portrays all the evil characteristics of Tuyen in painstaking detail and compares him with Quang, the son whom Tuyen abandoned and who is now a returned overseas Vietnamese. Quang is a very generous, noble, lovable, and attractive person. Tuyen comes across as an opportunistic fellow and as a tyrant who has the power of life and death over people. The masses are like "a herd of animals with nothing to protect them," and they stupidly and blindly rush to their death. The "other person" is still imposing based on his achievements and reputation. His son has a happy life like a prince. When he leaves his position, the "other person" is "unsullied and has a good conscience." In the story, the author has one of the characters say: "My country is truly joyful. Everything is secret. To maintain your prestige, everything should be vague so that people don't really know what is happening." The author then discusses the present situation and present age: "The same is true of the world. It is in the hands of just a few people or even one person."

Everyone has the right to observe and evaluate the present situation and present age. There is nothing strange about that. As for writers, that is a matter of freedom of thought and sensitivity in political and artistic thought. This also has to do with being awake and making necessary predictions regarding society and people. But the evaluations and judgments must be honest. People must not distort reality or history, particularly when reality and history are tied to the self-respect of a people or generation of people. For writers, that is presented in a work that anyone can read. Thus, if the judgments and criticisms of a writer are subjective and biased and tied to a pre-existing assumption and the writer intentionally creates stories in which the characters are manipulated to illustrate the author's own distorted views, that is abnormal and dangerous.

Many people still have a wonderful impression of Le Minh Khue and her works. Perhaps because of a previous shock in dealing with the realities of life, she has "given birth" to a child with a puny spirit. That is very unfortunate.

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No 10, Oct 93 pp 55-58

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