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**Vietnam: Year of Peace and Problems**

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For the first time in 30 years, the North Vietnamese capital is seeing in a new year without anyone speaking of resistance, bombings, offensives and mobilization.

There is even a tendency to talk about demobilization because everyone here seeks to catch his breath.

On the political front, the late Ho Chi Minh's wish for a reunited Vietnam is almost a reality. Only a few formalities need to be completed, such as the election of a joint national assembly.

Otherwise, reunification of the north and south is already accomplished in fact. Vietnam again has the frontiers it had in 1860.

About 10,000 North Vietnamese, ranging from doctors to chambermaids were sent to supervise the cleaning of hotels south of the 17th Parallel, where the staffs were considered unreliable.

Political reeducation in the south is already bearing fruit. For some time, South Vietnamese pilots have been allowed to fly aircraft captured there by the victorious northerners.

North of the 17th Parallel is a Spartan, proud Vietnam, a country injured to sacrifice, intransigent and heavily politicized. But there is a visible desire for a better life. "We made the revolution to

avoid seeing once again two million dead from famine," is a common saying here. "We continued it so that everyone may obtain one day what he needs."

To the south lies a rather different Vietnam. While Northerners still pedal their rickety pushbikes, until a few months ago, even the lowliest porter in a government office in the south could boast of a Japanese-built motor bicycle.

The south was also a country where corruption and conniving reigned, but it was also a land of advanced technology, with computers and electronic equipment, a sharp contrast to the string and baling wire makeshifts of the north.

In the north, the people grumble about the Soviet-style bureaucracy and the difficulties of daily life. Even so, conditions here are certainly better than they were in 1973 and 1974.

The man in the street still asks himself a number of questions. He is bombarded today not by bombs but by statistics. Daily he is given figures showing how this or that section of the country has not only fulfilled but also surpassed its planned production.

Yet, in one of the paradoxes of North Vietnam, the press sometimes prints warnings not to believe all the figures

published by official services.

The independent peasant nature of the Vietnamese means that the average citizen here sometimes asks what such contradictions signify.

He usually has a small nestegg of savings, but the goods to spend it on are not to be found. Almost everything — a yard of cloth or a blanket — is unavailable because "everything has been reserved for export."

Not all that North Vietnam's allies supplied during the war was a gift; the country must continue to pay its war debts.

There appears to be a certain amount of open dissatisfaction in one sector of the economy. As far as can be ascertained, the coal miners of Honggai northeast of

Hai Phong have been leaning on their shovels.

Official figures announce that production levels are good. A reliable source puts output at 5 million tons for 1975. But it should have been somewhat higher. Production of anthracite has fallen notably, and anthracite is a source of hard currency from Britain and Japan.

According to rumors that are impossible to confirm, the Honggai miners have not resorted to anything like sit-down strikes but are nevertheless opposing the official plan with slowdowns. If the rumors are to be believed, the miners argue that, as earners of hard currency, they and their families are entitled to a few

privileges, such as a special food shop for them.

The rumors could be true. Recently, I saw a man who looked very much like Vice Premier and Planning Minister Le Thanh Nghi entering a hotel at Halong, not far from the mines, a traditional hotbed of agitation.

The essential question today is how to reunite the economies of North and South Vietnam. They are naturally complementary but had been managed by men with diametrically opposed concepts. If the two can be smoothly integrated, according to numerous observers, Vietnam could become an economic force in Asia, as well as a military power.