

# North Vietnamese Shift to Vast Construction Drive

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The following dispatch and the one accompanying it on Page 6 are by Michael Maclear, the London correspondent of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

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THAIBINH, North Vietnam—

In what appears to be a calculated shift of emphasis, thousands of young North Vietnamese men and women of military conscription age have been assigned to development of the home front.

Their use in irrigation work here in the Red River delta and in crash economic projects is intended to release peasant labor to provide manpower for a program of rapid industrial expansion.

The peasantry, meanwhile, is assigned to additional compulsory work and those who remain on the land are being offered material incentives, including cash bonuses, and the opportunity to build new homes, in an attempt to increase rice production.

These fundamental shifts, which portend traumatic change for a people engaged previously almost exclusively in agriculture, are planned on a scale that would seem to indicate that huge resources of both men and material must be diverted from the war effort for a long time to come.



The New York Times/Michael Maclear

Peasants work to widen the Red River in Thainginh Province and create irrigation canals

To a correspondent revisiting North Vietnam, the sudden, extensive change provides a striking contrast to scenes witnessed in travel 15 months ago through the provinces south of Hanoi to the 17th Parallel near the demilitarized zone that straddles the border at North and South Vietnam. Then, the

total absence of rebuilding constituted as great a surprise as the pervasiveness of destruction that resulted from United States bombing.

Now, in repeating only a part of that journey, through the provinces of Thainginh, Namdinh and Hoabinh, one is struck by the uniformity of change.

Everywhere there is the bright red of brick and tile. New homes, schools, offices and factories stand out against the straw roof world of the co-operatives or against the urban skyline which is still largely devastated. Workers, many of

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Hanoi's main food market which was closed for five years, also reopened last month

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whom returned to flattened towns after years of evacuation, haul loads of timber, cement and paving stone.

The scale is greater than the available machinery. So, in scenes reminiscent of China, people are seen straining like bullocks yoked between the shafts of overladen carts, or with ropes biting around their waists.

#### Shades of China

In fact, the phrase "Great Leap Forward," evoking the harsh early years of China's revolution, is frequently heard. It was adopted in a directive on social and economic reorganization issued recently by Le Duan, first secretary of the party, whose leadership and policy appears undisputed.

For weeks, Mr. Duan has been stumping the provinces in support of his own decree that "leading cadres should visit every locality and every cooperative to assess the situation, recommend bold measures, build a rational economic structure and carry out a redivision of labor."

To achieve this, he has stated that "material incentives must be brought into play." As to the war, he said, "The strategic guideline is to fight a protracted war, gaining strength as one fights." And he declared that "to engage in military struggle under unfavorable circumstances is a serious mistake."

The banks of the Red River offer evidence of the enormous

service, were drafted for work around the countryside, wherever needed.

Thus, 5,000 backs bend to shift the Red River as North Vietnamese work harder and longer for the war effort, even though the fighting has slowed. As they work, a woman folksinger—resplendent in traditional ao dai—stands before a microphone placed on a stage of caked mud. Along a mile of activity, loudspeakers echo the lament of two lovers parted in the turn-of-the-century resistance to French colonial rule.

But it is not the turn of the century. Modern Soviet rifles are carried constantly, as though the Seventh Fleet might suddenly materialize on the broad river. Instead, there are only flatboats, wending along with landing parties of old women bearing steaming rice bowls to workers at siesta. Everyone takes at least a two-hour rest. The older people rest for four hours. By noon, thousands are asleep amid the churned mud.

According to Vu Tien Sung, the immediate priority in compliance with Mr. Duan's blueprint is to create surplus peasant labor for use in new local industry geared to agriculture, such as production of livestock feed, simple agricultural tools and mechanical repair facilities. He agreed that this was a complex undertaking involving sudden alteration of skills, social patterns and attitudes on a huge scale.

But this, he said, is "only a first leap toward developing heavy industry and that will be our real test, when we have to redirect large numbers of workers to other regions. We Vietnamese are very attached to our own provinces."

#### Payments for Rice

He explained that the shift of agricultural labor to integrated industry was taking place as each locality achieves the national target of five tons of rice per hectare, or two and a half acres. North Vietnam is parceled out into 5,000 agricultural collectives.

In achieving its new goals, the Government is offering the material incentives, the cash bonuses, the home purchase facilities and expanded free enterprise.

To encourage farmers to achieve the national goal in rice yield, there is now a payment in cash of half the value of any excess tonnage. Rice is valued at 90 dong a ton (\$25.20). Accordingly, each surplus ton brings a cash bonus of 45 dong.

At one small collective, called Dongphong, or East Wind, it was reported that productivity had increased 50 per cent to an average of seven tons since the bonus plan was introduced last spring.

It was said that the equivalent of \$1,800 had been distributed equally among 400 farmers. In rural wage terms of about 25 cents a day, this amounted to three weeks' extra pay.

In addition, the farmer now benefits directly from increased productivity by getting a bigger rice ration for himself and his

family, according to Dao Ngoc Che, deputy director of Thai Binh Province.

He said that every peasant laborer was guaranteed 40 pounds of rice monthly, but on the basis of productivity this could rise to a maximum of 60 pounds at a fixed price of 5 cents a pound.

The population of Thai Binh Province is 1.3 million and the able-bodied peasant labor population was put at 38 per cent of the total. Mr. Che said that most of this labor force was made up of women because "many men have gone to the military and industry." He said the new objective of one instead of two farmers to each two and one half acres meant that here alone as many as a quarter of a million workers were being redeployed.

Mr. Che, who spoke some English, acted as escort on a tour of the provincial capital, formerly a city of 20,000, which he said had been rendered "uninhabitable" during the bombings of 1965 through 1968.

It remains largely a bamboo metropolis, but it is taking new concrete roots. Among the projects well under way were an administrative headquarters, two new secondary schools and a 200-room workers' apartment building.

"The city will be rebuilt within three years," Mr. Che said confidently. He paused, then added, "Unless the bombers come again." He said he believed that large-scale bombing would resume if only because of all the reconstruction. But he added, "We can no longer hold back the future."

Hanoi's stated objective is to erect "some big cities and a large number of small and medium-size towns" as a base for industrialization.

In Thai Binh, the debris of the four-year air war, now referred to as the Second Resistance War, is all but gone. The rock and rubble has been fed to the furnaces of the brick factories. Virtually acres of bricks were stacked for distribution behind the largest in the locality.

The priority? "More factories," said Mr. Che. Only 20 per cent of the output was being allocated for rehousing.

But officials here talked of a new private home-purchasing



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and arduous reconstruction upon which North Vietnam has embarked in its bid to become a stronger base for "protracted" war.

From these banks, armies of workers are gouging with their bare hands a network of irrigation canals.

#### Added Work for All

According to Vu Tien Sung, who supervises Thai Binh's irrigation expansion, all males from 16 years old to 60 and women up to 50 have been ordered to contribute to reconstruction projects apart from regular duties.

He said that every peasant farmer, man or woman, must spend at least 10 days a year on such work in his or her locality. An interpreter quoted him as having said that this and other projects depended mainly on newly mobilized Ho Chi Minh brigades, which, instead of performing military

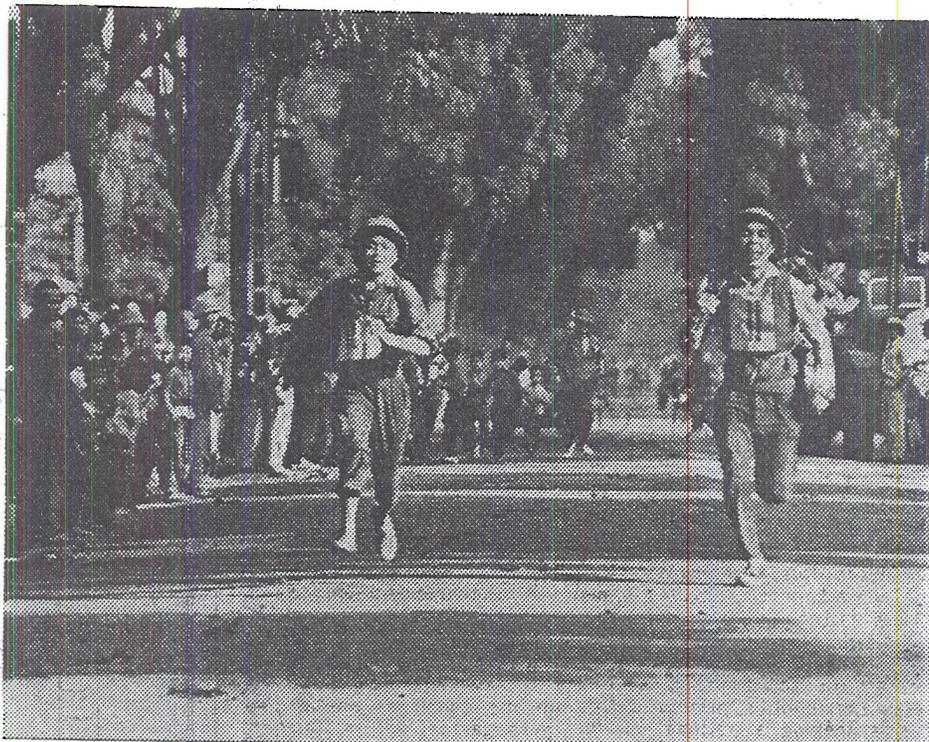
plan. It was said that any family with enough money or income could buy bricks from the state. According to Mr. Che, a two-room house would cost 1,700 dong, about \$500 at the official exchange rate, or five years' income for the average country worker. Who could afford this? A great many families saved far more during the years of evacuation, Mr. Che maintained.

The dispersal of population and factories, very much in force a year ago, is now officially stated to be ending.

Hundreds of small machine-tool and repair plants had moved from the bombed cities and from state farms to the mountainous western region, to operate from ancient caves first used as a refuge during the Mongol invasions and more recently during the 'First Resistance War,' against the French. Now the caves this correspondent revisited are empty, awaiting another troubled generation.

Some small factories had merely moved into bamboo huts in the lee of the hills. Others were being dismantled. At a truck-repair plant in the hills of Hoabinh, Pham Truong Nienh, the manager, said he "had just received orders to move to a central location to serve all six state farms in the province."

Said the interpreter: "All evacuated factories are preparing to return to original locations."



Photographs for The New York Times by MICHAEL MACLEAR

**Militiamen racing in Hanoi in physical fitness program as part of new state of alert. Regime's current slogan urges "vigilance on home front" in defense and development.**



**Students dig air-raid trenches on grounds of Polytechnic Institute in Hanoi after bombing raids in November. School, closed in 1966, reopened last month with 3,000 students.**