

Marxist Regimes

Vietnam

Politics, Economics and Society

Melanie Beresford

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opullore Socialiste e Shqipërisë * República Popular de
ngola * République Populaire du Benin * Narodna Republika
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VIETNAM

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Editor's Preface

Vietnam occupies a unique position among the panoply of Marxist designs and experimentations. It is the only Marxist regime which after long and protracted war had to absorb a well-developed and ideologically hostile southern part of a previously divided country and consequently endure a complex process of reunification of social and political structures. This, the first comprehensive book on contemporary Vietnam's politics, economics and society provides the reader with an in-depth analysis of these processes as well as an evaluation of them. In addition it also gives a comprehensive background to the history of the country, the role played by Marxist groups in the development of Vietnam and Indochina, and Hanoi's relations with its neighbours as well as the wider communist movement. This work also raises a number of very important questions about the appraisal of Marxist adaptations in the developing countries.

The study of Marxist regimes has commonly been equated with the study of communist political systems. There were several historical and methodological reasons for this. For many years it was not difficult to distinguish the eight regimes in Eastern Europe and four in Asia which resoundingly claimed adherence to the tenets of Marxism and more particularly to their Soviet interpretation—Marxism–Leninism. These regimes, variously called 'People's Republic', 'People's Democratic Republic', or 'Democratic Republic', claimed to have derived their inspiration from the Soviet Union to which, indeed, in the overwhelming number of cases they owed their establishment.

To many scholars and analysts these regimes represented a multiplication of and geographical extension of the 'Soviet model' and consequently of the Soviet sphere of influence. Although there were clearly substantial similarities between the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, especially in the initial phases of their development, these were often overstressed at the expense of noticing the differences between these political systems.

It took a few years for scholars to realize that generalizing the particular, i.e., applying the Soviet experience to other states ruled by elites which claimed to be guided by 'scientific socialism', was not good enough. The relative simplicity of the assumption of a cohesive communist bloc was questioned after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau in 1948 and in particular after the workers' riots in Poznań in 1956 and the Hungarian revolution of the same year. By the mid-1960s, the

totalitarian model of communist politics, which until then had been very much in force, began to crumble. As some of these regimes articulated demands for a distinctive path of socialist development, many specialists studying these systems began to notice that the cohesiveness of the communist bloc was less apparent than had been claimed before.

Also by the mid-1960s, in the newly independent African states 'democratic' multi-party states were turning into one-party states or military dictatorships, thus questioning the inherent superiority of liberal democracy, capitalism and the values that went with it. Scholars now began to ponder on the simple contrast between multi-party democracy and a one-party totalitarian rule that had satisfied an earlier generation.

More importantly, however, by the beginning of that decade Cuba had a revolution without Soviet help, a revolution which subsequently became to many political elites in the Third World not only an inspiration but a clear military, political and ideological example to follow. Apart from its romantic appeal, to many nationalist movements the Cuban revolution also demonstrated a novel way of conducting and winning a nationalist, anti-imperialist war and accepting Marxism as the state ideology without a vanguard communist party. The Cuban precedent was subsequently followed in one respect or another by scores of Third World regimes, which used the adoption of 'scientific socialism' tied to the tradition of Marxist thought as a form of mobilization, legitimation or association with the prestigious symbols and powerful high-status regimes such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Vietnam.

Despite all these changes the study of Marxist regimes remains in its infancy and continues to be hampered by constant and not always pertinent comparison with the Soviet Union, thus somewhat blurring the important underlying common theme—the 'scientific theory' of the laws of development of human society and human history. This doctrine is claimed by the leadership of these regimes to consist of the discovery of objective causal relationships; it is used to analyse the contradictions which arise between goals and actuality in the pursuit of a common destiny. Thus the political elites of these countries have been and continue to be influenced in both their ideology and their political practice by Marxism more than any other current of social thought and political practice.

The growth in the number and global significance, as well as the ideological, political and economic impact, of Marxist regimes has presented scholars and students with an increasing challenge. In meeting this challenge, social scientists on both sides of the political divide have put forward a dazzling profusion of terms, models, programmes and varieties of inter-

pretation. It is against the background of this profusion that the present comprehensive series on Marxist regimes is offered.

This collection of monographs is envisaged as a series of multi-disciplinary textbooks on the governments, politics, economics and society of these countries. Each of the monographs was prepared by a specialist on the country concerned. Thus, over fifty scholars from all over the world have contributed monographs which were based on first-hand knowledge. The geographical diversity of the authors, combined with the fact that as a group they represent many disciplines of social science, gives their individual analyses and the series as a whole an additional dimension.

Each of the scholars who contributed to this series was asked to analyse such topics as the political culture, the governmental structure, the ruling party, other mass organizations, party-state relations, the policy process, the economy, domestic and foreign relations together with any features peculiar to the country under discussion.

This series does not aim at assigning authenticity or authority to any single one of the political systems included in it. It shows that, depending on a variety of historical, cultural, ethnic and political factors, the pursuit of goals derived from the tenets of Marxism has produced different political forms at different times and in different places. It also illustrates the rich diversity among these societies, where attempts to achieve a synthesis between goals derived from Marxism on the one hand, and national realities on the other, have often meant distinctive approaches and solutions to the problems of social, political and economic development.

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Basic Data

Official name	Socialist Republic of Vietnam (July 1976)
Population	60.1 million (1984)
Population density	181 persons per sq. km. (over 1,100 in parts of Red River delta)
Population growth (% p.a.)	2.6 (1979-84)
Urban population (%)	19.1 (1984)
Total labour force	23.1 million (1984)
Life expectancy	63 years (1986)
Infant death rate	49 per thousand under age of 1 year (1985)
Child death rate	4 per thousand under age of 4 (1985)
Ethnic groups	Viet (also known as Kinh) (88%); 60 minority nationalities (incl. Tay, Thai, Chinese, Khmer, Muong, Nung, Hmong)
Capital	Hanoi (population 2.9 million in 1984)
Land area	331,688 sq. km. of which 6 million ha. cultivated
Main language	Vietnamese
Administrative divisions	36 provinces, 3 municipalities (Hanoi, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh City), 1 special zone (Vung Tau-Con Dao) 443 districts and town wards 9,504 communes and street blocks
Membership of international organizations	UN, IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Non-Aligned Movement
Political structure	
Constitution	December 1980
Highest legislative body	National Assembly (496 seats)
Highest executive body	Council of Ministers
President	Vo Chi Cong
Prime Minister	Pham Hung
Ruling party	Vietnamese Communist Party
Secretary-general	Nguyen Van Linh
Party membership	1.8 million (1986)

National income (UN method)	
Per capita	US\$189 (1982)
Growth rate	2.5% p.a. (1975-82)
Staple food production	c. 300 kg. paddy equivalent per capita (1984)
Energy consumption	76 kg. oil equivalent per capita (1985)
Structure of production	32.8% industry, 42.5% agriculture (1984)
Structure of workforce	11% industry, 71.3% agriculture (1984)
Trade and balance of payments	
Exports coverage of imports	45% (1985)
Imports as % of GNP	13% (1984)
Main exports	Handicraft and light industrial products, fresh fruit and vegetables, coal, rubber, marine products, tea, wood, coffee
Main imports	Fertilizer, fuel, rice, cloth, machinery
Direction of exports	32% convertible area, 68% non-convertible area (1981)
External debt	US\$5,339 million (1982)
debt service ratio	72% (1982)
Foreign aid	US\$1.1 billion est. (1978), 70% CMEA
Foreign investment	n.a.
Armed forces	Approx. 1 million (Western estimates)
State budget (1983)	
Wages, salaries and consumption	
subsidies	19%
Health, education, welfare	16%
Economic construction	31%
Other (incl. defence, admin., debt service)	34%
Education (1980)	
Pre-school enrolments	2.8 million
Primary school enrolments	7.89 million (in 1983 113% of age group)
Secondary school enrolments	3.16 million (in 1983 48% of age group)
Higher education enrolments	0.84 million
Adult literacy	95% (1978)
Religions	Buddhism, ancestor cult, Catholicism, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao

Women (1979)

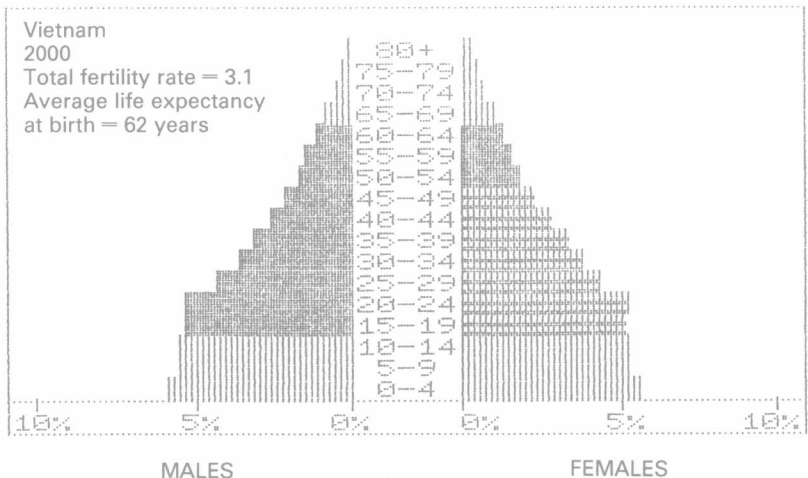
Labour force	53%
University students	38%
Technicians	42%
Graduate cadres	26%
National Assembly deputies	22%

Health (1984)

Population per physician	4,310
Population per trained nurse	1,040

Population Forecasting

The following data are projections produced by Poptran, University College Cardiff Population Centre, from United Nations Assessment Data published in 1980, and are reproduced here to provide some basis of comparison with other countries covered by the Marxist Regimes Series.



Projected Data for Vietnam 2000

Total population ('000)	78,894
Males ('000)	38,874
Females ('000)	40,020
Total fertility rate	3.08
Life expectancy (male)	60.0 years
Life expectancy (female)	63.6 years
Crude birth rate	25.9
Crude death rate	8.9
Annual growth rate	1.70%
Under 15s	33.30%
Over 65s	4.42%
Women aged 15-49	27.11%
Doubling time	41 years
Population density	237 per sq. km.
Urban population	36.4%

Vietnamese Terms

Names of Vietnamese Regions

The French divided Vietnam into three administrative divisions which they called Cochinchina (in the south), Annam (central region) and Tonkin (in the north), also known by their Vietnamese names of Nam Ky, Trung Ky and Bac Ky respectively. These are no longer administrative divisions, but under the names of Nam Bo, Trung Bo and Bac Bo, they are still widely used to identify three distinct geographical regions. For the sake of simplicity I have adopted the modern nomenclature throughout the book.

Between 1954 and 1976 the country was divided at the 17th parallel of latitude. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam occupied the territory to the north and the Republic of Vietnam (and, at the end of the period, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam) held the southern half. In this book capitalized 'North' and 'South' refer to the former territory of these two regimes. Non-capitalized 'north', 'south' and 'centre' refer to the three regions designated above.

Written Vietnamese

Written Vietnamese contains a number of diacritical marks indicating differences in the tone of pronunciation and changing the meaning of words which are otherwise spelled the same way. For reasons of printing convenience these marks have been omitted in this book.

Abbreviations and Glossary

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIP	Commercial Import Program (US aid program to South Vietnam)
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DMZ	De-Militarized Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FULRO	Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimés
FYP	Five Year Plan
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
NEZ	New Economic Zone
NLF	National Liberation Front
OSS	US overseas intelligence agency
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PRP	People's Revolutionary Party (southern wing of VWP, 1962–76)
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
VCTU	Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions
VNQDD	Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Nationalist Party)
VWP	Vietnam Workers' Party (name of VCP, 1951–76)
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union

attentisme
colons

non-committal or 'wait-and-see' attitude
French colonial settlers

compradors	members of indigenous population who act as agents for foreign capital
<i>corvée</i>	forced labour contribution
<i>tram</i>	species of <i>Melaleuca</i> from which oil is extracted for pharmaceutical purposes

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