



Vietnam Democracy is published monthly by the Free Vietnam Alliance (FVA), a coalition of 35 Vietnamese democratic movements worldwide. Its purpose is to inform the international community of news and developments in Vietnam – especially those that do not make it to the outside world – and to share the Vietnamese effort and dream for democracy. We welcome all support and comments to make this a valuable forum.

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Worldwide Support for Religious Freedom in Vietnam

Vietnamese in Vietnam and abroad along with their religious leaders have joined in an intense campaign for worldwide support of religious freedom in Vietnam. Started by a courageous Catholic priest, Father Nguyen Van Ly of Nguyet Bieu parish in Central Vietnam, the movement has gained attention across the world with:

- Great rallies in various major cities around the world
- Petition drives gathering tens of thousands of signatures of support for the cause. The petition drive also spread like wild fire on the Internet by the Vietnamese Youth Network, collecting more than 17,000 signatures within the first two weeks.
- Appeal for support from governments of nations, religious leaders around the world, and especially from the Vatican.

A Show of Faith for Vietnam Hundreds Flock to Westminster Rally Calling for Religious Freedom in the Country.

By JENNIFER McKIM The Orange County Register

WESTMINSTER, USA Jan. 7, 2001 — Le Tanner said his father was shot dead in 1975 while trying to protect a fellow Catholic in Vietnam. So the 36-year-old Garden Grove resident was especially moved Saturday to join hundreds of others in Little Saigon calling for religious freedom in the homeland he left in 1989.

"I feel this is a personal cause," Tanner said through a translator. "I'm here to support religious freedom for the people of Vietnam."

Tanner, his wife and three children attended a boisterous rally on a sunny afternoon to kick off a statewide drive to collect petitions demanding religious freedom in Vietnam.

The rally, sponsored by the Vietnamese American Interfaith Council, brought together hundreds of residents, area politicians and religious leaders who called for freedom, marched and listened to speeches from religious leaders contacted by phone in Vietnam.

Young and old, protesters of many faiths said they hoped their unity and voice would help garner worldwide attention to a situation they say is reprehensible.

They also hope to show solidarity with protesters in Vietnam - led by Catholic priest Nguyen Van Ly — who have been battling with the government over religious rights since December.

“Why do people get beaten up just to practice their faith?” asked Diem Do, 38, a Placentia resident and event organizer. “My biggest fear is that people outside feel things are fine and dandy in Vietnam. They are not.”

The Vietnamese government calls complaints about its treatment of religious groups slanderous.

But the U.S. State Department said in a September report that the Vietnamese government continues to significantly restrict activities of unauthorized religious groups.

The report said religious groups “faced difficulties in training and ordaining clergy, publishing religious materials and conducting educational and humanitarian activities.”

Neil Nguyen, an attorney from Orange, said he felt empowered by the protest and what he said is growing activism among young Vietnamese.

“We just need time. We’ll make a difference,” said Nguyen, a bearded, bespectacled activist who led protest chants in Vietnamese.

Luc Van Vu and his wife drove from Culver City to attend, hoping the United States would take notice and consider heading back to Vietnam to fight for religious freedom.

“It happened once,” he said.

Daniel Do-Khanh, an Irvine attorney, said he was impressed by the attendance of people whose religious convictions drew them together.

The interfaith council represents Buddhists, Catholics, Baptists, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. Some observers said the rally drew a new group of faces to Westminster, known for activism since thousands took to the streets in 1999 to protest communist icons displayed in a local video store.

Tanner was touched. He was 11 when his father was shot after a march to protest the beating of a fellow Catholic. While he has attended many anti- communism protests, Saturday’s was the first directly related to religious freedom. “I’m very excited that people want to help,” he said.

Thank-you Letter from Father Nguyen Van Ly

Following is the translation of Father Nguyen Van Ly’s letter, thanking and requesting for continual support from everyone for his struggle to bring Freedom of Religion to Vietnam.

This letter was distributed after the news that the Vietnamese Communist Government had sent an official letter to the Vietnamese Bishops Council, the highest office of the Vietnamese Catholic Church, and demanded the Council order Father Nguyen to silent his calling for true Freedom of Religion in Vietnam.

Nguyet Bieu, Hue, January 11, 2001

Respectfully Sent to:

His Holiness Pope John Paul II

Most Reverend Cardinal, Minister of Proselytization

Most Reverend Cardinal, Chairman of the Vietnamese Bishops Council

Most Reverend Bishops of the Vietnamese Bishops Council

Most Reverend Leaders of the Buddhist and Hoa Hao Buddhist Churches inside and outside Vietnam

Most Reverend Pastors of the Protestant Churches inside and outside Vietnam

Most Reverend Leaders of the Cao Dai Church inside and outside Vietnam

Reverend Directors of monasteries, Zen centers, religious institutes inside and outside Vietnam

Reverend Monsignors, Fathers, Clergies inside and outside Vietnam

Brothers and Sisters, Fellow-Citizens inside and outside Vietnam

People of Goodwill around the world

Dear Holy Father, Reverend Leaders of the Churches, Brothers and Sisters of goodwill,

I am a humble priest of the Hue Archdiocese of the Vietnamese Catholic Church. Since 1975, I have struggled in various forms to obtain freedom of religions for all faiths in Vietnam. Recently, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Vietnamese Martyr Saints on November 24, 2000, I reissued my 1994 statement on the condition of religions in Vietnam and 4 appeals for religious freedom in this country. Like a child facing the vastness of life, I know the task is much higher than my humble shoulders. The irresistible calling in my heart, however, has pushed me beyond my fear to take up these actions. Now, with God’s blessings in the global communication network, news of my effort has been distributed and received widespread approval around the world - either by open support or silent agreement - from all Reverend Leaders of the Churches and people of goodwill.

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank the Holy Father and the Reverends of all Churches and all concerned Brothers and Sisters who have prayed and supported me in one way or another. Please continue your praying and support so that I would have enough humility, resiliency, wisdom, and courage to carry on this struggle to the day real and full freedom of religion for all returns to Vietnam.

It is extremely difficult for me to contact the outside world at this time. I, therefore, could only send this letter via the Internet and beg the Holy Father and all the Reverends for forgiveness for this inappropriate way of communication. I respectfully request those who have the resources help me with the translation and distribution of this letter.

I respectfully thank you and bid goodbye.

(Signed and sealed)

Thaddeus **Nguyen Van Ly**

We Must Work for Our Own True Freedom of Religion

Whereas:

1. By nature, no dictatorial regimes in the history of humankind ever voluntarily loosen their grips on any individuals or associations that might become a threat to their illegitimate power.

2. If the religions in Vietnam today simply sit still and hope for new laws and regulations from the atheist Communist Government to hold religious activities and to expand their congregations as needed then those new laws and regulations will never come.

3. If the religions in Vietnam today simply want to practice and develop their own churches within the boundaries set by the dictatorial and totalitarian regime then those religions have not only submitted themselves to the unjust and autocratic power but also abandoned or obscured the holiness, freedom, strength, salvation, and guidance they represent. The seriousness of the loss depends on the length and the level of submissiveness in each case.

4. During the reign of a dictatorial and totalitarian power over the entire people of a country, religions are the main - sometimes the only - place to shelter and support those souls in desperate needs of freedom and justice. At the minimum, people should be able to find [in these religions] the support for the spirit of defiance [to injustice]. This spirit exists naturally in all people of culture and conscience.

5. If the religions in Vietnam refuse to assert their superb and salvation values to history, to their people, and to humankind then sooner or later, these religions will lose their own values and disappoint everyone who came to them for guidance. They will also face contempt and end up in the junk yard of history.

6. The time to wait, to endure, to build potential, etc. does have a limit. The over-extension of the days of slavery mean the religions have lost either all the rare opportunities or all of their [moral] strength.

7. Freedom is the sacred right the Creator has endowed all human beings with. This right is inherent to each individual as proclaimed in the United Nations' Proclamation of Human Rights on 12/10/1948. And the fact that people know they themselves must work to regain that sacred freedom [once lost] is a great happiness and honor for themselves and their organizations.

Therefore, as a unwavering fighter for Freedom of Religion in Vietnam for 25 years, I continue to call on :

1. All religions in Vietnam to follow the examples of the

Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam which organizes a Buddhist Institute at the Tu Hieu Pagoda in Hue City. Since its inception in 1975, this Institute has been completely independent. Monks who wish to study here need not apply for permission [from the Government]. Any time the authorities came to check their residency registration and consequently send them home, they would comply but return soon after that and resume their study. [The Institute] organizes training classes for clergies to be ordained for the First Rank without informing or submitting application for permission to the Vietnamese Communist authorities. The Institute also ordains clergies to Second and Third Rank without informing or asking for permission from any secular authorities. The faculty and administration of the Institute consider the learning and training as the sacred matters between each individual and the Buddha, his teaching, other clergies, and the Church. It is not the business of any secular authorities. The Venerables of the Institute do not see the need of asking permission for someone to sit and breathe - during meditation - or to read and compose poems - during the learning of the Teaching in verses. Why couldn't other Zen centers, main seminaries, institutes, convents, etc. apply the same formula? The courage and humility to learn from others are the strength of those with great mind and knowledge.

2. All clergies, monks and priests to refuse to beg [the Government] for the privileges of studying abroad or any other favors as long as Freedom of Religion is still absent in Vietnam. Self-training while maintaining one's independence and peace is better than acquiring more technological knowledge at the cost of self-respect. The immediate benefit is not worth the disgrace that is indelible in history.

3. All Churches, seminaries, institutes, etc. to file the properties that have been appropriated, confiscated, forced to unfair concession by the Vietnamese Communist authorities. You can start yourselves or we can help you with the process of demanding the Vietnamese Communist authorities return those properties according to the norms of justice recognized everywhere in the world. No power on Earth nowadays has the right to usurp the properties of other people and organizations and then skillfully transfer them into the hands of a few in power. Just look at the gap between the official salaries of the cadres of the Vietnamese Communist Government and their actual wealth. We all know the fact that the Vietnamese Communists wielded the Class Struggle against the Capitalist Class just to build a new one [of their own], well protected by the laws [they authored]

4. Anyone offended by my straight words or my over-eagerness to bring Freedom of Religion to all Churches [in Vietnam] to forgive me, particularly the religious leaders. Please understand sometimes there are no other words to describe the fact of the situation. Nevertheless, I continue to view myself as just a humble priest with all of the ordinary human shortcomings.

Nguyet Bieu, Hue City, December 20, 2000

(Signed and Sealed)

Rev. Tadeus Nguyen Van Ly

Freedom is Everybody's Concern

By HIEU TRAN PHAN

The Orange County Register

Jan. 11, 2001

It sounded sacrilegious, but the question had to be asked: Why should I, or anybody in Orange County, care one bit?

That was the bottom line of my conversation Monday with the Rev. Ly Van Nguyen in central Vietnam. Since November, he has led a protest for religious rights against his nation's government. Other faiths - Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Protestant - have joined the campaign. And last weekend, more than 10,000 people signed petitions in Little Saigon to demand religious liberties for their homeland.

But why would others, who have no connection to Vietnam, care? What effect does state oppression have on people living oceans and continents away? Why is Nguyen pleading with folks abroad to spearhead the calls for reform in his country?

"Anyone with a conscience should worry," he says, "because the freedom to worship your creator is the most fundamental, intrinsic right on earth. We in Vietnam don't have the luxury to speak out, but you do."

The devil's advocate in me persists. Just what did Nguyen mean by lack of spiritual autonomy? Tourists who travel to Vietnam see citizens able to attend church, light incense at temples, keep altars in their homes. If Communist officials there are truly evil, why do they allow the masses to worship?

Because the world would rebel if they squashed religion altogether. Vietnam's leaders must tolerate minimal spiritual practice to avoid international sanctions. Besides, they know it's impossible to wipe out every underground religious movement.

They put forth their best effort anyway.

Vietnam's politburo manages nearly every facet of religion. It has established puppet governing boards for each religious body. It controls the education at seminaries and monasteries.

That's barely the whole story.

In Vietnam, the state regulates all religious publishing. It bans "unauthorized" spiritual assemblies, anything from home-study groups to pilgrimages to conventions. It tries to forbid evangelism, regularly confiscating Bibles at its airports.

Naturally, Vietnam's spinmeisters label the accusations slanderous. Yet all these violations have been documented by the U.S. State Department and reputable human-rights groups such as Amnesty International, Freedom House and Asia Watch.

The tactics have largely succeeded at silencing Vietnam's citizenry. People dare not rebel. They look at the fate of thousands who have spoken out - defiant voices like Nguyen's.

The priest, 53, has openly opposed his government since 1977. He spent almost 11 years in prison for writing and distributing material advocating religious freedom. Since the Vietnam War ended, thousands of other religious leaders have been arrested without charge, jailed, tortured, executed.

For several years now, Nguyen has served "exile" by being relegated to a small Catholic community of about 80 in Hue. The breaking point came in late November, when Communist officials confiscated church land used by Catholic villagers to plant rice. It was retaliation for Nguyen's latest proclamation against state discrimination.

Nguyen and his parishioners could bear it no more. They refused to hand over the property. They hung a banner above the entrance of their church: "We Need Freedom of Religion." They begged the outside world to support their cause.

Ever since, undercover police have surrounded Nguyen's church 24 hours a day. They trail him wherever he goes. But, I wonder, why hasn't the government hauled him to prison?

"Attention from abroad has kept me safe," Nguyen says. "That's why it's so important for you in Orange County to spread the message."

Still, being aware doesn't automatically translate into caring.

"You should be outraged," Nguyen nearly shouts, "because religious freedom is the highest, noblest liberty there is. Without it, there's no right to free speech, free assembly, free ..."

I jump in: There would also be no right to a free mind. Vietnam's government doesn't want people to think for themselves, because that would challenge its authority. Such condescension is a reviling insult.

Few things arouse more passion in us than religion. It is, for most of the world, the basis for our values, faith and ultimate purpose in life. It is nothing less than the core of many people's identity. Even I, an agnostic, can appreciate this fact.

We're fortunate, among other privileges, to decide how and whether to worship. With that freedom comes a responsibility to help others who don't have a choice.



Joint Statement By Religious Leaders in Vietnam

In response to Father Nguyen Van Ly's three appeals for Freedom of Religion in Vietnam, clergies and lay people from other faiths inside and outside Vietnam have voiced their support for his effort and protest the Vietnamese government's oppressive policy on religion.

Following is the translation of a joint statement by four religious leaders inside Vietnam on the subject.

You can find more background information at the Free Vietnam Alliance's Web site www.fva.org

Statement on the Communist Policy on Religion in Vietnam

Following April 30, 1975, after conquering the South, the Vietnamese Communists have implemented a severely oppressive policy toward religions in Vietnam:

- Many offices and properties of Churches — Cao Dai, Catholic, Buddhist, Hoa Hao Buddhist, and Protestant - have been confiscated or expropriated by the communist government for its arbitrary uses.

- Many legal decrees were issued to confine, limit, or take away religious activities in the cruelest fashion never before seen in the history of religions.

- Many plots and traps have been used to detain and jail the leadership of those religions that oppose and demand [an end to] the oppressive and anti-religion policy carried out persistently and ruthlessly by the communist government over the last 25 years (1975-2000).

- Many plots and ploys have been used to penetrate, undermine, divide, and politicize religions such as the Cao Dai, Catholic and various Protestant churches. [Particularly,] Buddhism were split into two churches: the Buddhist Church of Vietnam and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. Most recently, in May 1999, the communist government blatantly installed the Hoa Hao Buddhist Representative Council of eleven (11) communist party members to lead five million followers of the Hoa Hao Buddhism. This is a monstrous phenomenon never before seen in the history of religions.

In the face of the communist government's severely oppressive policy to suffocate religions, Churches in Vietnam have consistently resisted and demanded RELIGIOUS FREEDOM in a peaceful, nonviolent, and determined manner until TRUE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM is achieved as in the vast majority of civilized nations in the world today.

Now, with the humankind's progressive trend of [upholding the values of] HUMAN RIGHTS, the time has come for us to publicly speak up and call on the communist government to:

1) Fully respect the TRUE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM of all religions, especially in regards to the Churches' most fundamental right of independently and freely choosing, training and appointing clergies and the leadership according to each Church's needs and wishes. [The government must also respect] the RELIGIOUS FREEDOM of each Vietnamese citizen by abolishing sections relating to faith and religion in all administrative documents so each citizen can rest assured of no discrimination based on his/her faith. At the same time, [the government must allow] auspicious conditions for all citizens to live according to their faith by ending the two-faced policies in effect so far.

2) Return to all Churches the offices and properties that were confiscated, expropriated, made exclusive use of, or forced into unfair concession to the government. [These properties must be returned] when proofs of ownership are presented; or when the ownership is undoubtedly recognized by the surrounding population, in lieu of proofs of ownership which might have lost during the war.

3) Cease all plots and ploys to suffocate and annihilate religions. End all attempts to intervene in the internal affairs of religions. Disband all Committees erected by the State in the name of religions but in reality acting only as the communist government's apparatus.

4) Return freedom unconditionally to all clergies and leading lay-people who have received jail sentences or are still being detained in prison camps.

5) Respect all the provisions in the International Covenant on Political Rights of September 24, 1982 which the Vietnamese communist government has signed.

Vietnam, December 27, 2000.

- I affirm that I am a co-author of this Declaration,
Le Quang Liem (signed)
Chairman / Central Council / Hoa Hao Buddhist Church of Vietnam

- I affirm that I am a co-author of this Declaration,
Reverend Chan Tin (signed)

- I affirm that I am a co-author of this Declaration,
Reverend Tadeo Nguyen Van Ly
(signed)

- On the issue of true religious freedom in Vietnam, we have issued many documents. However, the Vietnamese communist government still shows no intention [to solve the problems]. Now that other religions have also declared the same view as ours, we are very happy to receive this Declaration.

Hue, December 28, 2000
Bhikkhu Thich Thien Hanh
(signed)
Most Venerable Chair/ Buddhist Clergy Council, Thua Thien.

Bishop John Hepworth on Vietnam's Religious Persecution

Following is our interview with Bishop John Hepworth, one of 36 Traditional Anglican Bishops around the world who oversees parishes in third world nations and has great understanding of issues in developing countries. Bishop John Hepworth is also the Chairman of the Australia Vietnam Human Rights Committee

Free Vietnam Alliance: How did you become involved in human rights activities and what brought your attention to the situation in Vietnam?

John Hepworth: I was involved in Vietnamese politics from the time of the war as a young student. Vietnam was the first country in which I became aware of human right issues. Since, I've been concerned of human rights and Vietnam. I have been following the situation in Vietnam since the end of the war with the devastating and hurtful takeover by the communists. I have become concerned not just about religious people but about all sorts of people — poets, writers, etc. Vietnam needs all people to rebuild the country but instead, I watch the communist country destroys every method and means that Vietnam might have to rebuild its ancient history and culture; and that concerns me greatly. So I became involved more and more in the problem of religious and political freedom in Vietnam.

FVA: As the Chairman of the Australia Vietnam Human Rights Committee, can you tell us your view on the human rights situation in Vietnam?

JH: The only way that you can have human rights is if each individual person is guaranteed the basic freedoms. The government should not be able to control the basic human rights of a human being...The people in Vietnam are not asking for anything more than the freedoms enjoyed by people of other nations. Catholics and Buddhists are not a threat to governments in other countries so they should not be a threat to the government in Vietnam. The people are asking to be able to express themselves, not only on beautiful things but also to express strongly their annoyance with the government, the bureaucrats, the army and the police. People should ridicule the government when it's silly and this is the healthy part of democracy. People are not free when they have a party giving a constitution and simply making arbitrary rules as it goes along. We are asking for political freedom — the

freedom to freely adopt their Constitution, to choose their rulers under that Constitution. Vietnam will remain a strange, irregular country until it adopts the rule of Constitutional law chosen by the people.

FVA: Senior members of the main religions in Vietnam have now united in their effort to demand religious freedom. This has been reflected in the joint declaration by Father Nguyen Van Ly and Father Chan Tin of the Catholic Church, Venerable Thich Thien Hanh of the Buddhist Church and Mr. Le Quang Liem of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. Is it now time for all religious denominations to take an official stand and lend support to their call? What do you think the international religious community can do to help?

JH: When religion is persecuted anywhere in the world, then it is all of us, the people of faith, who suffer in the world we live. So it is time for the leaders of all denominations in the world — Christian and Buddhist, and I would hope for Islamic leaders and Hindu leaders too to demand an end to the scandal of religious persecution in Vietnam.

The rest of the world must put pressure. We have the enormous problem at the moment of the United States' administration, the Australian government and some other governments being prepared to trade with Vietnam without making any demand on human rights linked to that trade. They have normalized relations with Vietnam. It is not surprising that after the visit of President Clinton, we have the outbreak of religious persecution. The Vietnamese government has been encouraged by high level contact with the western nations to become more outrageous in domestic policy. What we want now is for a clear statement from the leaders of the churches around the world to all the western governments to put pressure on to end what is an absolute scandal in this country.

Radio Broadcasts To Vietnam Run By Free Vietnamese:

1. *New Horizon (Chân Trời Mới):*
9:00 - 9:30 pm Vietnam time
on 9965 khz
2. *Radio Free Asia (Á Châu Tự Do):*
7:30 - 8:30 am Vietnam time
on 5865 khz and 7415 khz
9:00 - 10:00 pm Vietnam time
on 5865 khz, 6240 khz and 7520 khz

Vietnam slams report decrying restrictive press

Hanoi (dpa) Dec 8, 2000 - Vietnam on Thursday lashed out at an international report criticizing the lack of press freedoms in the communist state, at the same time Catholic leaders were complaining of censorship.

A release on the website of Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) took Hanoi to task for "controlling the press with an iron hand" and refusing to license publications to opposition groups.

"Such remarks by Reporters Sans Frontiers demonstrate that they do not know anything about the recent developments in Vietnam," Foreign Ministry spokesman Le Sy Vuong Ha.

"Fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and press are respected and exercised as stipulated in the Vietnamese constitution," Ha added.

Vietnam's media is tightly controlled by the state, with leaders routinely reminding editors that their role is to promote socialism.

The response came amid the recent dissemination of a report by a Catholic priest complaining that the publication of an underground church bulletin had been stopped by authorities.

In a 10-point statement faxed to the foreign media Thursday and dated November 24, Reverend Tadeus Nguyen Van Ly, of the Hue Catholic diocese in central Vietnam, said the publication of Ban Tin Hiep Thong (Communion Bulletin), had been stopped.

The Catholic church, one of Vietnam's six officially recognized religions, has unsuccessfully lobbied for permission to print the bulletin, what Ly described as "the sole official voice of the Vietnam Archbishop Council."

The first six issues of the bulletin, beginning in February, were printed in secret, he said.

"When will we have the right of freedom of opinion, freedom to express our faith, freedom to preach the Gospel and the Truth?" Ly wrote.

Ly's document was sent through the Free Vietnam Alliance, an anti-communist overseas Vietnamese group based in Paris.

Also on Thursday, U.S.-based Human Rights Watch released its own 2001 world report which criticized Vietnam for continued repression.

"The 25th anniversary of Vietnam's reunification (after the Vietnam War) saw the government maintaining tight control over freedom of expression and other basic rights," the report said.

120,000 Copies Of "Tuoi Tre" Were Destroyed

Radio Free Asia, Jan. 11, 2001

Washington, D.C. Radio Free Asia (RFA) was alerted last weekend by sources inside Vietnam when the Lunar New Year (Tet) issue of a popular Vietnamese magazine, Tuoi Tre ('Youth'), failed to reach the newsstands.

Nearly 120,000 copies of the special issue were ordered to be immediately destroyed because of an offending article dealing with "idols of youth" in Vietnam.

The article, written by Dang Tuoi, Kim Anh and Thi Ngon, was based on a survey of 200 randomly chosen youths in Ho Chi Minh City, aged 15 to 28, who were asked to name their idols and substantiate their choices. Forty-three percent (86 persons) claimed they had no idols but 57 percent (114 persons) named one or more whom they try to emulate.

Politicians led the group with 38.6 percent of the poll identifying them as their idols. What was surprising, however, was that the so-called "father of the nation," Ho Chi Minh, was mentioned only by 39 percent (21 persons) of the positive respondents, followed closely by General Vo Nguyen Giap (35%).

From Vietnam's current leadership, only Premier Phan Van Khai made it on the list with 3.2%, the same percentage as Hillary Clinton and behind U.S. President Bill Clinton (6.5%).

Businessmen were named idols by 22.7% of the positive respondents. Microsoft founder Bill Gates was a clear winner, being held aloft by almost 9 out of 10 respondents (89.5%), almost three times as many people citing Ho Chi Minh. This was, of course, sacrilegious, in the context of Vietnam, where the Communist Party Central Committee is having its eleventh plenum to decide the directions to be set forth at the Ninth Party Congress scheduled for March. One of the main mottoes held up in the last several years, which is supposed to be sacrosanct and, is for Vietnam to "follow the thought of Ho Chi Minh."

Although the magazine was recalled, Tuoi Tre did come out on Tuesday, after the offending article was excised and ironically replaced by an article on literary critic Phan Cu De, who was recently accused of buying the fake title of "academician" in Russia. Rumors are rife in Ho Chi Minh City that Le Van Nuoi, the publisher of Tuoi Tre, and his deputy, may be fired following a precedent set over ten years ago at the same magazine. In 1988, publisher Vu Kim Hanh of the same magazine was fired for printing an article about a French wife that Ho Chi Minh had in his youth, a fact revealed by a French historian and amply confirmed thereafter.

Communist Party Veteran Call for Ditching Marxism-Leninism

Radio Free Asia

Jan. 11, 2001

Washington, D.C. - All this week the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has been meeting in Hanoi to decide the future direction of the country. In this connection Radio Free Asia (RFA) has obtained a copy of three essays contributed to the Central Committee by Pham Ngoc Uyen, 77, who has been with the CPV since the age of 14 and is now a retired veteran living in Hanoi.

In a telephone interview granted to Viet Long of RFA's Vietnamese service on January 10, Uyen acknowledged that he is author of the three essays. He wrote them, he said, in the hope of helping to remove Vietnam from its current rut.

In his essays, Pham Ngoc Uyen responds to the Party's invitation to comment on the draft political platform being considered by the Central Committee. In the first one, he says that the draft is much too long and too vague on several crucial issues. For instance, in assessing the present, the platform stops at the 1960 Conference of 81 Communist Parties, ignoring the fall of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as well as such universal trends as globalization and the knowledge economy. The platform also eulogizes socialism without describing what it is that it is praising. And when it mentions the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it says that it is only "temporary crisis" without further comment.

Uyen also says that despite praising the Doi Moi (Renovation) policy-adopted by Vietnam in 1986-the Platform fails to emphasize the policy's essential features, which amounts to a rejection of the classical Marxist-Leninist model long followed by Vietnam.

In his second essay, Uyen says that all ideologies, including Marxism-Leninism, are only the means to an end. The end for Vietnam must be happiness, progress, democracy and justice for all-including the overseas Vietnamese. He then proceeds to give a scientific demonstration of how Marx went wrong because he could not have foreseen the future, including such things as the transformation of capitalism in the twentieth century and the information age. The history of ideas, the author continues, shows that to take root in a new land all ancient religions or ideologies have to adapt themselves to the characteristics of the new territory. So it was with Marxism-Leninism when it came to Vietnam: it was Ho Chi Minh who grafted it onto the tradition of anti-foreigner resistance of Vietnam. Now that that phase is over, the author suggests, we should say: "Marxism-Leninism is dead, long live Marxism-Leninism!" and let it die a natural death.

In the third essay, Uyen tries to outline Vietnam's future. While it is always risky to peer into the future, he says, Vietnam must become a civil society with people having "the right to think differently." The future Vietnam must also be a society governed by the rule of law. To refuse the rule of law is merely to perpetuate high-level corruption and undeserved privileges.

Objections raised by the Communist Party that given too much democracy and freedom, the country would end in chaos, are in fact antiquated. Like "water, fire, robbery and war," something may be dangerous but one can always tame them. One cannot say that because fire burns one should not use it. As for democracy, "hundreds of `burning spots' all over the country, from the capital to the farthest reaches of the land, in the past as well as at the present time, all are pointing to the fact that democracy is a crying need of the entire population. There can be no political stability without real democratization of every facet of the country's life."

Excerpted from "Was the U.S. Fighting for Freedom in Vietnam or Free Enterprise?" by Jeffrey Brody, an Associate Professor of Communications at Cal State Fullerton.

"... The coming [US] congressional debate on the free-trade pact with that nation is a chance to attach human-rights conditions.

During the war, the United States pledged to fight for freedom and democracy in Vietnam. President after president characterized the war as part of the struggle between the Free World and Communism. Some 55,000 Americans lost their lives fighting to keep South Vietnam free."

...

"In the next few months before Congress votes on the Vietnam trade agreement, Vietnamese refugees, who have become U.S. citizens and have gotten a taste of democracy, plan to lobby on behalf of human rights. They want the trade agreement linked to political reforms in Vietnam...

The unanswered question in the minds of Vietnamese Americans is whether the United States cares more about free enterprise than political freedom.

The immigrants are not naive about foreign policy and domestic politics. They know the government of Vietnam won't change overnight and that Congress has been reluctant to link human rights policies to trade agreements, especially with China.

But they know that the economic situation in Vietnam is more desperate than in China and that the United States has the economic muscle to pressure Vietnam to initiate reforms.

Such reforms include releasing political prisoners and guaranteeing freedom of speech, press and religion.

There is no question the United States has the power to promote free enterprise. But does it have the resolve, and has it ever had the desire, to promote democracy in Vietnam?

This very well may be the true legacy of the war.