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Vietnamese Communist Party leaders' reasons and objectives for post-1975 agrarian reform

Introduction

After the military victory of April 1975, southern Vietnam was under the control of Hanoi's government in general and the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) leaders in particular. The VCP very quickly decided to remake the south in line with the socialist north. They called for a 'socialist revolution' or 'socialist transformation and building' in the south, a key component of which was the socialist transformation of agriculture.

According to Đặng Phong, the Secretary-General of the VCP, Lê Duẩn was the principal architect of North Vietnam's economic model during 1960–75 and unified Vietnam's economic model from 1975 until his death in 1986. Therefore, Vietnam's post-1975 economic model in the south was heavily influenced by Lê Duẩn's thoughts and North Vietnam's model.¹ Postwar 'economic problems and the reunification of Vietnam after so many years of war', Christine White contends, created 'an unfavourable context for an open, innovative, and creative approach to experimentation with alternative routes to socialism'.²

1 Đặng Phong, *The Economics of Vietnam 1975–1989*, pp. 72–3.

2 White, C. P. (1988), Alternative approaches to the socialist transformation of agriculture in postwar Vietnam, in D. Marr and C. White (eds), *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 134–43.

This chapter will not focus on internal debates and decision-making processes at the top level. Instead, it examines the main reasons the VCP decided to carry out this process in the south. It also explores the development model the VCP pursued and its rationale. In particular, it examines the original objectives, content and steps of the post-1975 socialist agricultural transformation and socialist building. Before examining these, however, it is essential to provide an overview of pre-1975 land and agrarian reforms and their legacy.

Overview of southern Vietnam's pre-1975 land tenure and agrarian reforms

In precolonial times, Vietnam had three intertwined and competing forms of landownership: state, village and individual.³ Large portions of village land were communally owned, inalienable by law and periodically distributed among the male inhabitants. Those who were outsiders or not born in the village were excluded from a share of communal land.⁴ From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, Vietnamese territory gradually expanded to the south and reached the vast plains of the Mekong Delta. To encourage this southward land reclamation, the state allowed peasants to claim and own as much land as they wanted. This led to a land tenure system in the Southern Region that was different to that in the rest of Vietnam. Private land became dominant while levels of communal land were insignificant.⁵

French colonial rule brought about a major upheaval in Vietnam's land tenure system. French policies favoured large landowners at the expense of traditional small landowners. The French government granted large tracts of land—whether free, at cheap prices or at auction—to French colonists and their Vietnamese collaborators.⁶ By the 1930s, all regions

3 Vũ Huy Thúc (1979), *Tìm hiểu chế độ ruộng đất Việt Nam nửa đầu thế kỷ XIX* [Examining Vietnam's Land Tenure System in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century], Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, p. 11.

4 White, C. (1981), *Agrarian reform and national liberation in the Vietnamese revolution 1920–1957*, PhD thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, p. 28.

5 Nguyễn Đình Đầu (1992), *Chế Độ Công Điền Công Thổ Trong Lịch Sử Khẩn Hoang Lập Ấp ở Nam Kỳ Lục Tỉnh* [Land Tenure System in the Southern Region of Vietnam in the History of Land Reclamation], Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Trẻ, pp. 61, 82; Vũ Huy Thúc, *Examining Vietnam's Land Tenure System*, pp. 215–16.

6 White, *Agrarian reform and national liberation*, pp. 31–2.

of Vietnam faced a severely unequal pattern of landholding distribution. In the Mekong Delta, a small group of landlords owned much of the land and tenants farmed 80 per cent of cultivated land.⁷ In 1953, near the end of colonial rule, the Bảo Đại government put forth an agrarian policy to compete with the Việt Minh's agrarian reforms. The land reform decrees (*cải cách điền địa*) that were issued advocated rent reduction, security of land tenure and modest restrictions on the maximum size of holdings.⁸ This reform was unsuccessful, however, because the Bảo Đại government made no serious effort at implementation.⁹

After the collapse of French colonialism in 1954, Vietnam was divided until its reunification in 1975. In the north, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam pursued land redistribution and agricultural collectivisation. Land reform was carried out vigorously and violently between 1953 and 1957, with fields redistributed more or less equally between all farming households.¹⁰ Land reform was considered a necessary and immediate step towards collectivisation.¹¹ By 1960, North Vietnam had completed collectivisation.¹² In the south, Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm also considered land reform a top national policy when he came to power. His Ordinance No. 57 (22 October 1956) called for land redistribution by limiting maximum holdings to 100 hectares plus 15 hectares of ancestral (patrimonial) land (*ruộng hương hỏa*). Any holding in excess of that limit was subject to expropriation (*trúất hữu*).¹³ Ordinance No. 57 was supposed to affect 2,035 Vietnamese landlords (including 12 in

7 Callison, C. S. (1983), *Land-to-the-Tiller in the Mekong Delta: Economic, Social, and Political Effects of Land Reform in Four Villages of South Vietnam*, New York: University Press of America, p. 39.

8 Trần Phương (1968), *Cách mạng ruộng đất ở Việt Nam [Land Revolution in Vietnam]*, Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, pp. 247–8.

9 Prosterman, R. L. and Riedinger, J. M. (1987), *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 120.

10 Wiegiersma, N. (1988), *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution—Patriarchy and Collectivity in the Rural Economy*, New York: St Martin's Press, p. 139.

11 Moise, E. E. (1976), Land reform and land reform errors in North Vietnam, *Pacific Affairs* 49(1), pp. 70–92.

12 Kerkvliet, B. (1999), Accelerating cooperatives in rural Vietnam, 1955–1961, in B. Dahm, V. J. H. Houben, M. Grossheim, K. W. Endres and A. Spitzenpfeil (eds), *Vietnamese Villages in Transition: Background and Consequences of Reform Policies in Rural Vietnam*, Passau, Germany: Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Passau, pp. 53–88.

13 Quang Trung (1987), Agricultural collectivization and rural development in Vietnam: A north/south study (1955–1985), PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, Amsterdam, pp. 141–2; Trần Phương, *Land Revolution in Vietnam*, pp. 252–3; Callison, *Land-to-the-Tiller in the Mekong Delta*, p. 43.

the Central Coast) with holdings of more than 100 hectares, and 200 French landlords. In other words, 650,000 hectares of land were to be expropriated.¹⁴ However, by the end of 1967, only 275,000 hectares had been redistributed, to 130,000 families, accounting for less than one-eighth of South Vietnam's cultivated land and one-tenth of its tenant farmers.¹⁵

Following the fall of the Ngô Đình Diệm government in November 1963 and amid growing insecurity and political instability, successive governments in the south made no further efforts towards land reform until Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's tenure in 1967. On 26 March 1970, backed by the United States, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's government launched its Land to the Tiller (LTTT) program, in the hope of gaining peasant support against the growing National Liberation Front (NLF). The LTTT program was similar to distribution programs carried out years earlier in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.¹⁶ By February 1975, some 1,136,705 hectares—nearly half of the rice-growing land in the south—had been redistributed. Under the LTTT program, 77 per cent of tenants became landowners.¹⁷ In addition to the Saigon government's land reforms, the NLF carried out rent reduction and land redistribution in areas under its control, which were known as 'liberated areas' (*vùng giải phóng*). NLF reforms also contributed significantly to the rise of middle landowners. By 1969, middle peasants made up about 51–87 per cent of the rural population in NLF-controlled areas.¹⁸

14 Trần Phương, *Land Revolution in Vietnam*, pp. 265–72.

15 Prosterman and Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, p. 126.

16 Wiegiersma, *Vietnam*, p. 191.

17 Callison, *Land-to-the-Tiller in the Mekong Delta*, pp. 327–32.

18 Elliott, D. W. (2003), *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930–1975*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, pp. 1, 451. According to David Elliott, to analyse the politics of land, the VCP developed several class categories for rural society, including landlords (*địa chủ*), petty bourgeoisie (*tiểu tư sản*), capitalists (*tư sản*), rich peasants (*phú nông*), middle peasants (*trung nông*), poor peasants (*bần nông*) and landless peasants (*cổ nông*). Middle peasants were those who owned sufficient land, farm animals and tools to support their families (p. 459).

In summary, between 1945 and 1975, land tenure patterns in the south gradually changed as a result of reforms carried out by the Việt Minh, governments in Saigon and the NLF, and also as a result of the transformation of rural society during the war.¹⁹ By 1975 in the Mekong Delta, 70 per cent of the rural population were middle peasants who owned 80 per cent of the cultivated land, 60 per cent of the total farm equipment and 90 per cent of draught animals.²⁰ Unlike the agrarian sector in North Vietnam, which, at the beginning of the land reforms was dominated by landlords, the agrarian sector in the Southern Region was dominated by middle peasants who engaged largely in commercial agriculture. This large cohort of middle peasants wanted to continue to farm their own land and sell their own crops. They proved resistant to the post-1975 land redistribution and collectivisation in the south.²¹

Meanwhile, in the Central Coast region, the significant factor transforming the land tenure system was war rather than any pre-1975 reforms. The war had disrupted or destroyed any positive effect of land reforms carried out by governments in Saigon or the NLF. It had caused a large proportion of rural people to live in enclosed camps and much of their land had been abandoned. After the war, many peasants returned home without capital, draught animals or farm tools. Thus, soon after reunification, the agricultural sector in the Mekong Delta had reached a higher level of economic development than that in the Central Coast. The social structure and rural economy in the Mekong Delta were more diverse than in the Central Coast. These regional disparities contributed to differences in peasants' behaviour and the results of post-1975 agrarian policies.

19 Grossheim, M. (1999), The impact of reforms on the agricultural sector in Vietnam: The land issue, in B. Dahm, V. J. H. Houben, M. Grossheim, K. W. Endres and A. Spitzenpfeil (eds), *Vietnamese Villages in Transition: Background and Consequences of Reform Policies in Rural Vietnam*, Passau, Germany: Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Passau, p. 97.

20 Ngo Vinh Long (1988), Some aspects of cooperativization in the Mekong Delta, in D. Marr and C. White (eds), *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 169.

21 Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, p. 4.

Post-1975 agrarian reform in the south

Soon after the war, at the 24th plenum of the Third Party Congress, in September 1975, the VCP began planning how to bring the south into line with the north politically, socially and economically and make the whole nation socialist.²² At this meeting, the party released a resolution that outlined the 'ongoing tasks of Vietnam's revolution in the new age', one of which was to 'accomplish national reunification and take the whole nation fast, vigorously and firmly to socialism.'²³

On 25 April 1976, the official political reunification of the country came about through a national election to establish a unified National Assembly.²⁴ At the first session of this new assembly, in June 1976, General Secretary Lê Duẩn clarified the tasks of economic reunification for both the north and the south of Vietnam:

[T]he north must continue speeding up the task of building socialism and improving socialist production relations; the south must proceed simultaneously on the task of socialist transformation and the task of socialist building.²⁵

The aim, according to party leaders, was to transform non-socialist elements into socialist ones, replace private ownership of the main means of production with public ownership (collective and state) and eliminate perceived 'old' and 'backward' institutions and build 'new and advanced' ones. Socialist building meant establishing new, socialist production relations, new productive forces, new super-infrastructure and a new culture.

22 The Third Central Committee was the committee formally chosen at the time of the third party congress in 1960.

23 ĐCSVN (2004), Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24 của Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương ĐCSVN, số 247/NQ-TW (ngày 29 tháng 9 năm 1975) [Resolution No. 247/NQ-TW (29 September 1975)], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 36, 1975* [Party Document: Volume 36, 1975], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 369. I used the electronic versions of the VCP's documents (*Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập*) downloaded from the party's website: www.vcp.org.vn (accessed 13 February 2006).

24 Phạm Văn Chiến (2003), *Lịch Sử Kinh Tế Việt Nam* [History of the Vietnamese Economy], Hà Nội: NXB Đại Học Quốc Gia, p. 152.

25 Lê Duẩn (2004), Toàn dân đoàn kết xây dựng tổ quốc Việt Nam thống nhất, xã hội chủ nghĩa [Calling for the whole country's solidarity to build a socialist and unified country], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 140.

To build socialism in the rural south, as in the north, the post-1975 government called for socialist transformation to establish large-scale production in agriculture. This transformation had two main components: land redistribution and collectivisation. The former was considered a temporary measure while the latter was the end goal of socialist revolution in the countryside.

Post-1975 land reform in the south

Despite inheriting a land tenure system that was more or less equitable and dominated largely by middle peasants, the VCP decided to carry out land reform in the south. It gave several reasons for this reform. First, it was aimed at eliminating the social base of potential opponents such as landlords, rural capitalists and rich peasants. Resolution numbers 247/NQ-TW (29 September 1975) and 254/NQ-TW (15 July 1976) and Directive No. 235/CT-TW (20 September 1976) stressed the 'elimination of the vestiges of colonist and feudal exploitation of land', 'nationalisation of farms and the land of foreign capitalists', and the 'expropriation of farms, the lands of comprador capitalists, and treacherous landlords' and of landlords who had fled abroad.

Second, it was aimed at fulfilling the promise of the LTTT program, which the party used to attract peasants' support during the war. The party called this 'completing the remaining task of land revolution in the south' (*hoàn thành nhiệm vụ cách mạng ruộng đất ở Miền Nam*).²⁶

Third, the party also wanted land reform to resolve postwar economic problems, especially food shortages. After Vietnam's reunification, both China and the United States cut their food aid to the country, so the party had to make food security and self-sufficiency top priorities. Land reform therefore aimed to increase food production and facilitate solidarity among peasants. The party's Directive No. 235 (dated 20 July 1976) stated:

26 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 247/NQ-TW, pp. 368–406; ĐCSVN (2004), Nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị số 254/NQ-TW (ngày 15 tháng 7 năm 1976) về những công tác trước mắt ở Miền Nam [Politburo Resolution No. 254/NQ-TW (15 July 1976) on ongoing work in the south], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 200–25; Ban Bí Thư (BBT) (1976), Chỉ thị 235/CT-TW của Ban bí thư Trung ương Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam (ngày 20 tháng 9 năm 1976) về việc thực hiện nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị về vấn đề ruộng đất ở Miền Nam [Directive No. 235 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee Communist Party of Vietnam on the Implementation of the Politburo's Land Resolution in the South], 20 September, Hà Nội: Ban bí thư Trung ương Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam, p. 2 (provided by a former staffer of the Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south).

Resolving the land problem in the south is aimed at not only eliminating the vestiges of feudal and colonist exploitation and making the landless and the land-short have means of production to make a living but also facilitating peasant solidarity and production ... [Therefore,] in areas where the land problem is basically resolved, [we] can just carry out land reform in some necessary cases, not undo and do it again. In areas with vestiges of feudal and colonist exploitation, [we] will attempt to address that fast, definitely by 1976. Note that when sharing land to peasants, [we] must avoid dividing land into small parcels that are unfavourable for production.²⁷

Finally, as in other socialist countries, Vietnam's post-1975 land reforms were temporary and preparatory measures towards collectivisation.

However, instead of taking a more radical approach, as in the north in 1953–57 (and as occurred in China in the 1950s), the government of reunified Vietnam took a more moderate and gradual approach in the south, although the content and emphasis of these reforms varied over time.²⁸ There are at least three main reasons the VCP chose this approach.

First, according to VCP accounts, party leaders recognised the positive legacy of previous agrarian reforms and admitted that 'the landlord class had already been largely eliminated' and 'the majority of land now belonged to peasants.'²⁹ One party scholar also noted that, by 1975–76, thanks to land reforms between the 1950s and the early 1970s, middle peasants (*trung nông*) made up the majority of farming households.³⁰ So, although party leaders knew that land and machinery were not distributed equally, especially in the Mekong Delta, the tenancy problem had already been largely eliminated in the south and certainly was not as serious as it had been in the north during the 1950s.³¹ A government report said tenancy remained a problem in only a few

27 BBT, *Directive No. 235*.

28 Nolan, P. (1976), *Collectivization in China: Some comparisons with the USSR*, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 3(2): 192–220, at p. 203. From 1975 to 1978, the authorities emphasised eliminating exploitation ahead of land redistribution. However, when collectivisation in the Mekong Delta failed to achieve its expected goal, the party attributed the failure to the incompleteness of land reform. Land redistribution (*điều chỉnh ruộng đất*) was therefore given prominence in the early 1980s, touching not only upper–middle peasants, but also middle peasants.

29 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 247/NQ-TW, p. 382.

30 Lâm Quang Huyền (1985), *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam [The Land Revolution in South Vietnam]*, Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, p. 189.

31 Lê Duẩn (1980), *Cải Tạo Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa ở Miền Nam [Socialist Transformation in the South]*, Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, p. 74.

rural areas that had previously been under the prolonged control of Saigon's government; the tenanted land accounted for only about 1 per cent of total agricultural land, and the land rent was about 20 *gia* (400 kg) of paddy per hectare.³²

Second, as well as fulfilling its political objectives, the party tried to minimise any negative economic effects of reform. A radical reform program could cause chaos and a significant fall in food production. This is why VCP leaders often emphasised land reform be carried out by 'negotiating with each other', 'helping and unifying each other', 'being affectionate and rational' (*có tình có lý*) and 'allowing cultivators to continue to farm on parts of their current land' (*giữ nguyên canh là chính*). Party leaders argued that this approach could avoid disrupting agricultural production, strengthen peasants' solidarity and make collectivisation easier.³³

Finally, although I found little evidence in official documents, it seems the party had learned a costly lesson from the radical land reforms in the north and did not want to repeat it in the south.³⁴ Party leaders still classified rural capitalists, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants as the 'exploiting' class and considered wage labour a capitalist form of exploitation.³⁵ Party leaders retained their objective to eliminate the enemies of socialism in the south, as they had in the north in the 1950s, but this was to be achieved in a quieter and more gradual way. The method was similar to that of re-education camps from which thousands of ex-government officials and supporters were quietly and discreetly sent to prison.³⁶

32 Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp Miền Nam [hereinafter BCTNNMN] (1984), Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất trong nông thôn Nam Bộ [Report on Land Redistribution in the Southern Region], January, Hồ Chí Minh: Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp Miền Nam, p. 3. *Gia* is often used to measure paddy weights in the Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*). It is equal to 20 kg; therefore, 20 *gia* is equal to 400 kg (ĐCSVN, Politburo Resolution No. 254/NQ-TW, pp. 214–16).

33 BBT (2004), Directive No. 235, pp. 279–80.

34 I found little evidence of this in official documents. In interviews, however, many local cadres, including former cadres of the Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south, said these things to me (Fieldwork in Vietnam, May–December 2005).

35 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 247/NQ-TW.

36 Thompson, L. C. (2010), *Refugee Workers in the Indochina Exodus, 1975–1982*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.

Socialist transformation of agriculture for collectivisation

Because the post-1975 agrarian reform was a key component of the socialist revolution, it is difficult to separate it from other economic and social reforms. To understand the rationale for or original objectives of this transformation in the south, it is necessary to examine them in the context of the overall socialist revolution.

According to party accounts—such as the second plenum's resolution of the fourth Communist Party Congress, the Secretariat's Directive No. 15/CT-TW (4 August 1977) and the Politburo's Directive No. 43/CT-TW (14 April 1978)—the objectives of socialist transformation in agriculture, or agricultural collectivisation, included 'taking agriculture into socialist large-scale production'; 'eliminating exploitation and the causes of exploitation, backwardness and poverty'; 'facilitating the collective mastery of the labouring people and developing agricultural production'; 'building up technical bases and bringing advanced science and techniques into production to increase productivity'; 'improving step by step the living standards of the peasants and constructing a new way of life in rural areas'; 'contributing to the reorganisation of productive forces at the national level'; and 'contributing to meeting the essential requirements for food and food stuff, industrial inputs and exports, and making agriculture a favourable base for socialist industrialisation.' The following sections will pinpoint in detail each of these objectives.³⁷

37 ĐCSVN (2004), Nghị quyết Hội nghị lần thứ hai của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khóa IV, số 03/NQ-TW (ngày 19 tháng 8 năm 1977) [Resolution No. 03/NQ-TW of the Second Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party IV (19 August 1977)], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977* [Party Document: Volume 38, 1977], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 298; ĐCSVN (2005), Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư số 15/CT-TW (ngày 4 tháng 8 năm 1977) về việc thí điểm cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa ở Miền Nam [Secretariat's Directive No. 15/CT-TW (4 August 1977) on experimenting with socialist agricultural transformation in the south], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977* [Party Document: Volume 38, 1977], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 741–7; ĐCSVN (2004), Chỉ thị của Bộ chính trị, số 43/CT-TW (ngày 14 tháng 4 năm 1978) về việc nắm vững và đẩy mạnh công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp ở Miền Nam [Politburo's Directive No. 43 on intensifying agricultural transformation in the south], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 39, 1978* [Party Document: Volume 39, 1978], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 183–91.

From small and spontaneous to large-scale and planned production

The resolution of the fourth Communist Party Congress highlighted the role of agriculture in Vietnam's new era: 1) producing sufficient food for the consumption needs of the whole society and for food reserves; 2) supplying raw materials for industrialisation; and 3) producing for export.³⁸ The party believed collectivisation and collective ownership would make it easy to plan production at regional and national levels. It would also be easy to construct large areas of concentrated and specialised agricultural production. Through large-scale production, it would be possible for agriculture to adopt new and modern techniques and use science to push intensive farming (*thâm canh*), increase the number of crops per year (*tăng vụ*), expand cultivated areas (*mở rộng diện tích*), expand irrigation (*thuỷ lợi hoá*), increase mechanisation (*cơ giới hoá*) and adopt new seeds (*giống mới*).³⁹ The combination of all these factors could give Vietnam a modern and productive agricultural sector that guaranteed sufficient food production for the whole society plus surplus for industrialisation.

According to party leaders, the south would play an important role in fulfilling these new tasks because it possessed an abundance of fertile land, farm equipment and skilled labour, especially in the Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*).⁴⁰ The south, according to one study, had about 3.2 million hectares of cultivated land compared with 2 million hectares in the north. Moreover, the south had the potential to expand its agricultural land to 10 million hectares, compared with 4 million hectares in the north. Of this, the Mekong Delta would be able to extend agricultural production to 1,032,000 additional hectares of land; the South-Eastern Region to 779,000 hectares; the Central Highlands, 1,366,000 hectares; and Zone V of the Central Coast, 652,000 hectares.⁴¹

38 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 03/NQ-TW of the Second Plenum.

39 ĐCSVN (2004), Nghị Quyết của Đại hội Đảng lần thứ IV của Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam (ngày 20 tháng 12 năm 1976) [Resolution of the Fourth Party Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (20 December 1976)], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 930–2.

40 Phan Văn Đáng (1978), Tập duyệt di lên hợp tác xã nông nghiệp [Experiment with agricultural collectives], in Võ Chí Công et al. (eds), *Con đường làm ăn tập thể của nông dân* [The Collective Farmer's Way], Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Tổng Hợp Thành Phố, (TP) Hồ Chí Minh, p. 110.

41 Nguyễn Trần Trọng (1980), *Những vấn đề công tác cải tạo và xây dựng nông nghiệp ở các tỉnh phía Nam* [Ongoing Tasks for Transforming and Building the South's Agriculture], Hà Nội: NXB Nông Nghiệp, p. 182.

Despite placing a high value on the south's agricultural potential, party leaders strongly criticised it for 'individual farming', 'fragmented landholding', 'unequal development' and the influence of capitalism.⁴² They argued 'the fragmentation of agricultural production results from small-scale production, individualised farming aimed at fulfilling subsistence and narrow demands of local markets'.⁴³ Individual farming was 'spontaneous, unplanned' (*tự phát, tùy tiện*) and 'fragmented' (*manh mún*). It had 'a low level of specialisation and cooperation' and was 'technically backward'.⁴⁴ Moreover, the individual farming system, party leaders believed, had 'backward' production relations that hindered adoption of modern techniques and better use of land.⁴⁵

In general, according to the party, the south had high agricultural potential that had not been fully exploited. The task was therefore to transform the old system of agriculture into a new one of 'planned, concentrated and large-scale production', 'specialisation' (*chuyên môn hoá*), 'cooperativisation' (*hợp tác hoá*), 'linkagisation' (*liên hiệp hoá*) and collectivisation.⁴⁶

Eliminating exploitation and its causes, poverty and backwardness

In the view of party leaders, land redistribution would provisionally eliminate exploitation in farming but would not eliminate the causes of exploitation.⁴⁷ A party scientist even argued that 'eliminating the feudal land tenure system and implementing the slogan "land to the tillers"

42 Ibid.

43 Hồng Giao (1984), *Đưa Nông nghiệp lên một bước lớn Xã hội chủ nghĩa* [Taking Agriculture One Step Towards Socialist Large-Scale Production], Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, p. 23.

44 Trần Văn Doãn (1986), *Như thế nào là nông nghiệp một bước lên sản xuất lớn xã hội chủ nghĩa* [What is One Step of Agriculture Towards Socialist Large-Scale Production], Hà Nội: NXB Nông Nghiệp, p. 5.

45 Võ Văn Kiệt (1985), *Thực hiện đồng bộ ba cuộc cách mạng ở nông thôn* [Simultaneous Execution of Three Revolutions in Rural Areas], Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Tổng Hợp TP Hồ Chí Minh, pp. 47, 128; Nguyễn Trần Trọng, *Ongoing Tasks*, p. 9.

46 Nguyễn Trần Trọng, *Ongoing Tasks*, p. 9; Tô Hữu (1979), Phát động phong trào quần chúng thực hiện thắng lợi công cuộc cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp Miền Nam [Campaign to succeed in socialist agricultural transformation in the south], in Võ Chí Công et al. (eds), *Khẩn trương và tích cực đẩy mạnh phong trào hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp Miền Nam* [Urgently and Positively Promote the Acceleration of Collectivisation in the South], Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, p. 42.

47 Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics*, p. 10. The party believed without collectivisation a few successful farming households would end up owning much of the land, undermining the ideal of social and economic equality.

were in fact beneficial to the development of capitalism in rural areas.⁴⁸ Rural households would soon become unequal. Replacing private ownership with collective ownership would guarantee the elimination of exploitation and its causes as well as poverty and backwardness.⁴⁹ At the second plenum of the fourth party congress (6–16 December 1977), in assessing the achievements and the shortcomings of the past 20 years of collectivisation in the north, Lê Duẩn minimised the failure of the north to increase productivity and the living standards of peasants. Instead, he emphasised the achievements. Collectivisation in the north, he said, had eliminated the cause of class conflicts in rural areas, facilitated solidarity among different rural groups (such as religious and non-religious people, Kinh people and ethnic minorities) and protected the livelihoods of people, especially the elderly, infants, invalids and the families of war martyrs (*gia đình thương binh liệt sĩ*). Second, it had improved irrigation, facilitated new farming techniques and increased the number of crops harvested per year. All these factors led to ‘an increase in productivity and food production in the north despite still facing stressful food shortage in the time of calamity’. Third, it changed the face of rural society; thanks to collectivisation, cultural, education, healthcare and material conditions in rural areas had gradually improved. Finally, it played an essential role in contributing to the defeat of the American invasion and saving the country. He believed collectivisation in the south could achieve similar results.⁵⁰

Backing socialist industrialisation and ensuring food security

The leaders of some socialist countries, such as Russia and China, considered agriculture to be a source of financial surpluses for carrying out industrialisation and collectivisation as the keys to state-centred accumulation and the primacy of the growth of heavy industry.⁵¹ Post-1975 agrarian reform in Vietnam was also aimed at supporting industrialisation as well as ensuring food security for the whole society.

48 Nguyễn Huy (1985), *Mấy vấn đề lý luận và thực tiễn của cách mạng quan hệ trong nông nghiệp nước ta* [Theories and Practices of Revolution in the Production Relations of Our Country's Agriculture], Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, p. 121.

49 Đại Đoàn Kết (1977), Nghị quyết lần thứ II: Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khóa IV ra nghị quyết [Resolution II of the Central Committee of the Party IV], *Đại Đoàn Kết*, 3 September 1977, p. 11.

50 ĐCSVN (2004), Đề Cương kết luận của đồng chí Lê Duẩn tại Hội nghị lần thứ II [Lê Duẩn's final statements at second plenum], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977* [Party Document: Volume 38, 1977], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 254–5.

51 Selden, M. (1994), Pathways from collectivization: Socialist and post-socialist agrarian alternatives in Russia and China, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 17(4), pp. 423–49, at p. 425; ĐCSVN, Resolution of the Fourth Party Congress, p. 917.

During the war, both the north and the south had relied heavily on foreign aid, including food.⁵² However, soon after the war, this aid was gradually cut off or significantly reduced, and some imported foods were no longer available.⁵³ Ensuring food for the whole society therefore became a top concern of the VCP. With collectivisation, party leaders believed, Vietnam could deal with its food shortage. Moreover, collectivisation would create conditions in which ‘every labourer has a job, every field is properly used and every industry can develop.’⁵⁴

Controlling rural society and consolidating power

Party leaders attached great importance to controlling rural areas in times of war and post war. In wartime, within a competitive environment and focused on winning the war, the party had adopted policies favouring peasants’ interests, which Brantly Womack calls ‘mass-regarding in policy.’⁵⁵ However, reunification changed the context in terms of not only power relations between the party and the peasants, but also the main concerns of the party. Although the party still paid attention to peasants’ interests, its ideology favoured other matters, too—such as controlling society, land, labour, production and grains to strengthen its socialist building projects.

In other words, the primary concern of the leaders of reunified Vietnam was to control the south politically, economically and socially, to consolidate their power and reorganise production according to their socialist blueprint. Party leaders often called for a strategy of ‘holding firmly to the proletariat dictatorship’ to control and manage all aspects of society and the economy, monitoring people’s political, economic, cultural and social activities.⁵⁶ Socialist transformation included eliminating the political, social and economic bases of all perceived opposition classes. Revolutionary leader Võ Văn Kiệt pointed out:

52 Vo Nhan Tri (1990), *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 58.

53 ĐCSVN (2005), Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư số 02/CT-TW (ngày 21 tháng 1 năm 1977) về những việc trước mắt để giải quyết lương thực [Directive of the Secretariat No. 02/CT-TW (21 January 1977) on immediate matters for food processing], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977* [Party Document: Volume 38, 1977], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia], p. 2.

54 Hồng Giao, *Taking Agriculture One Step*, pp. 26–7.

55 Womack, B. (1987), The party and the people: Revolutionary and postrevolutionary politics in China and Vietnam, *World Politics* 39(4), pp. 479–507.

56 ĐCSVN (2004), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác xây dựng Đảng, và sửa đổi điều lệ Đảng (ngày 17 tháng 12 năm 1976) [Report on building party organisation and changing party regulations (17 December 1976)], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 749, 789.

2. VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERS' REASONS AND OBJECTIVES

[T]hrough economic transformation the state consolidates and strengthens the proletariat dictatorship and collective mastery of labouring people, roots out completely counter-revolutionary forces, completes the economic unification of the country and facilitates the entire strength of the socialist state.⁵⁷

One of the objectives of socialist agricultural transformation was to bind peasants with the party-state to isolate perceived opposition groups and gain social control of the countryside. Moreover, party leaders believed that controlling peasants, their production and their produce would help them also control non-staple food producing groups and their goods in the cities. Lê Duẩn argued:

[I]f the state controls staple food, it can control industrial goods ... controlling staple food means controlling everyone's essential goods which enables control of the products of large industries, small industries and handicraft producers.⁵⁸

During my interviews, some of my respondents told me the communists controlled people by controlling their stomachs. Therefore, controlling the countryside and food production became important to the party in the post-reunification period. At the fourth party congress in December 1976, Premier Phạm Văn Đồng stressed:

[I]n agriculture, be quick to cut off the relationship between the capitalists and the peasants, organise immediately the relationship between the state and the peasants, using this relationship to help peasants develop production and request them to sell food to the state.⁵⁹

Another objective of socialist agricultural transformation was to select and purify local cadres to consolidate the power of the party-state in the rural south. During the war, many southern party cells had been destroyed. Others, especially in the 'religious areas' of the Mekong Delta, barely functioned and were considered 'thin' (*cơ sở đảng mỏng*) or 'blank' (*cơ sở đảng trắng*). Thus, party leaders called for a consolidation of the party's base and recruitment of new members in the south,

57 Võ Văn Kiệt, *Simultaneous Execution of Three Revolutions*, p. 40.

58 Lê Duẩn, *Socialist Transformation in the South*, p. 14.

59 ĐCSVN (2004), Phương hướng nhiệm vụ và mục tiêu chủ yếu của kế hoạch 5 năm 1976–1980 [Key tasks and objectives of the five-year plan, 1976–1980], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 655.

as well as the building and consolidation of political organisations, the testing of cadres and purification of 'bad elements' within state and party organisations.⁶⁰

The content and steps of socialist transformation of agriculture

According to VCP leaders, the purpose of the socialist transformation of agriculture was to carry out three intertwined revolutions in the countryside: a revolution in production relations, a revolution in science and technology and a revolution in thought and culture. At the fourth congress in December 1976, Lê Duẩn emphasised that the socialist transformation was to 'combine a revolution in production relations with a revolution in technology and science and in thoughts and culture, as well as reorganising national production and circulation'.⁶¹

The overall aim of the 'three revolutions' in the rural south was to create 'a regime of socialist collective ownership, socialist large-scale production, adoption of new technology and socialist men with socialist values and culture'.⁶²

The following sections describe these three revolutions and the steps towards socialist agricultural production.

Revolution in production relations

Post-1975 land reform was considered part of the process of establishing collective farming. Therefore, its beneficiaries would have the right to use but not to own the land. 'The state', according to one party resolution, 'does not provide a certificate of land ownership to the beneficiaries'.⁶³

60 ĐCSVN (2004), Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 273/CT-TW (ngày 24 tháng 9 năm 1976) về việc củng cố tổ chức cơ sở Đảng và kết nạp Đảng viên mới ở Miền Nam [Secretariat's Directive No. 273 on consolidating party organisation in the south], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 285.

61 Đại Đoàn Kết (1977), Nhiệm vụ cải tạo quan hệ sản xuất Miền Nam [Ongoing task for socialist transformation in the south], *Đại Đoàn Kết*, 17 September 1977, p. 14.

62 ĐCSVN (2004), Báo cáo chính trị của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng tại Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ IV, do đồng chí Lê Duẩn trình bày [Political report of the Party Executive Committee at the fourth national representative meeting], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976* [Party Document: Volume 37, 1976], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 454–608.

63 Hội Đồng Chính Phủ [hereinafter HĐCP] (1976), *Quyết định số 188/CP của Hội Đồng Chính Phủ (ngày 25 tháng 9 năm 1976) về chính sách xóa bỏ tàn tích chiếm hữu ruộng đất và các hình thức bóc lột thực dân, phong kiến ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Ministerial Council's Decision No. 188/CP (25 September 1976) on the Policy of Eliminating Land Tenure and Other Forms of Colonial and Feudal Exploitation in the South], Hà Nội: Hội Đồng Chính Phủ, p. 7.

Party leaders envisioned collectivisation requiring a prolonged political campaign and class struggle between capitalism and socialism.⁶⁴ To ensure its success, the party called for a 'step-by-step' approach to move from low to high and from simple to complicated forms of collective farming that were suitable for each region.⁶⁵ The change meant moving from 'simple interim forms of collective organisation'—production solidarity teams (*tổ đoàn kết sản xuất*) or labour exchange teams (*tổ đổi công vẫn công*)—to a medium form of collective (production units: *tập đoàn sản xuất*) and then to full collectives (*hợp tác xã*). This process is quite similar to that of collectivisation in the north, which shifted from 'mutual aid teams' (*tổ đổi công*) to low-level collectives (*hợp tác xã bậc thấp*) and then to high-level collectives (*hợp tác xã bậc cao*).⁶⁶

The resolution of the fourth party congress in 1976 was to set 1980 as the target date for the completion of agricultural transformation in the south, bringing most peasant households and their land into the collectives. In addition, VCP leaders planned to establish state farms that would occupy about one-third of cultivated areas and become dominant in production and distribution. Party leaders envisioned state farms (*nông trường quốc doanh*)—so-called agro-industrial corporations (*tổ hợp công nông nghiệp*)—being the largest production organisation in the socialist agricultural sector. They would operate like an industrial factory, relying on mechanisation, specialisation and the use of intensive farming techniques. The state farms, according to party leaders, would be expected to set a good example for agricultural collectives in the use of scientific methods of management and farming. Individual farming would be eliminated or become insignificant.

64 Phạm Văn Kiệt (1978), Nông dân đang sôi nổi đi lên làm ăn tập thể [Peasants are eager for collective farming], in Võ Chí Công et al. (eds), *Con đường làm ăn tập thể của nông dân* [*The Collective Farmer's Way*], Hồ Chí Minh: NXB TP Hồ Chí Minh, p. 20.

65 ĐCSVN, Politburo's Directive No. 43, p. 188.

66 Quang Trung, Agricultural collectivization, p. 56; Nguyễn Huy, *Theories and Practices of Revolution*, pp. 95–6. Another interim form was the farming machine team (*tổ hợp máy nông nghiệp*) established in the Mekong Delta and South-Eastern Region. Each team had five to seven peasants who possessed farm machines. Depending on the classification of the machines (large, medium or small), these teams were organised under the direct leadership of the agricultural department of the district, the commune or the hamlet's production department (*Ban sản xuất ấp xã*), respectively. These organisations were supposed to be 'interim' or 'transitional' (*quá độ*) steps in establishing collective machine units (*tập đoàn máy*) under the control of the district's authorities or specialised machine teams (*đội chuyên máy*) under the control of collectives or production units.

Revolution in science and technology

While the revolution in production relations was to see the creation of socialist large-scale production organisations (collectives and state farms), the revolution in science and technology would modernise agriculture, which was considered essential to making collective farming superior to individual farming. Party leaders therefore stressed, as well as carrying out collectivisation in the south, 'the need to combine collectivisation with extending irrigation [*thủy lợi hoá*] and mechanisation [*cơ giới hoá*] and using modern and advanced science and techniques for cultivation and animal husbandry'.⁶⁷

Irrigation

In assessing the irrigation systems of the south, the party concluded they were too few, too small and often individually owned. War had also destroyed some. Party leaders planned to double the amount of irrigation by 1980.⁶⁸

In the Mekong Delta, the party's irrigation program emphasised improving the canal systems by dredging existing channels and making new ones, and building new irrigation systems to treat acid sulphate soil (*rửa phèn*) and retarding floods and salinity intrusion (*chống lũ, chống mặn*).⁶⁹ For the Central Coast, which had only 460,000 hectares of agricultural land in mid-1970 and where farmers relied heavily on rainfall because irrigation systems were poor, the party called for the repair of existing canals and the establishment of more dykes and water-pumping stations.⁷⁰ By 1980, the Central Coast was expected to irrigate 180,000 to 200,000 hectares of double-cropped rice fields.⁷¹

67 ĐCSVN, Key tasks and objectives of the five-year plan, p. 626.

68 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 03/NQ-TW of the Second Plenum, p. 315.

69 There were four provinces in the Central Coast Region: Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng, Nghĩa Bình, Phú Khánh and Thuận Hải (Nguyễn Dương Đáng. (1983). *Kinh tế nông nghiệp Xã hội chủ nghĩa [Economics of Socialist Agriculture]*. Hà Nội: NXB Nông Nghiệp, p. 105).

70 ĐCSVN (2004), Báo cáo của Bộ chính trị tại hội nghị lần thứ hai Ban chấp hành Trung ương khóa IV [Report of the Politburo at the Second Conference of the Central Committee, Session IV], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977 [Party Document: Volume 38, 1977]*, Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 180.

71 Nguyễn Dương Đáng, *Economics of Socialist Agriculture*, p. 42; Nguyễn Trần Trọng, *Ongoing Tasks*, p. 328.

Mechanisation

For party leaders, mechanisation meant substituting machinery for animal and human power so as to increase productivity and efficiency.⁷² The authorities also believed mechanisation would help to attract peasants, especially middle ones, to collective farming because many farming households in the Southern Region were already using some machinery.⁷³ One party scientist argued that, without 'combining collectivisation with mechanisation, attracting peasants into collectives will be difficult' because it would not be able to demonstrate 'its superiority over individual farming'.⁷⁴

To utilise existing agricultural machinery in the south, party leaders urged each district to organise privately owned machines into machinery teams (*tổ hợp máy*), machinery units (*tập đoàn máy*), specialised machinery teams (*đội máy chuyên doanh*) and collective machinery teams (*đội máy tập thể*). Each district was also supposed to build state machinery stations (*trạm máy quốc doanh*) equipped with 'large' machines (*máy lớn*) supplied by the state or bought from individuals.⁷⁵ At the second plenum of the fourth party congress, VCP leaders planned to import 18,700 large tractors, 30,000 small ones and other machinery to increase the mechanisation rate in land preparation to 50 per cent for the whole country and 74 per cent for the Mekong Delta.⁷⁶

Chemical inputs and new seeds

Before reunification, southern peasants, especially in the Mekong Delta, had used chemical fertilisers. The importation of such fertilisers in the south had increased dramatically after 1960 and reached 372,183 tonnes in 1973. The average amount of chemical fertiliser used per hectare of agricultural land reached about 120 kilograms. The greater use of fertilisers was associated with an increased adoption of new rice seeds (*lúa thần nông*) in the south, which were planted on 41,000 hectares in 1968 (accounting for 1.4 per cent of rice-growing land) and on 890,400 hectares in 1973 (31 per cent). However, the adoption of new seeds in the south was low compared with a rate of 60 per cent in the north at the same time—which party leaders used to indicate the

72 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 03/NQ-TW of the Second Plenum, p. 232.

73 Nguyễn Trần Trọng, *Ongoing Tasks*, p. 246.

74 Nguyễn Huy, *Theories and Practices of Revolution*, p. 96.

75 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 03/NQ-TW of the Second Plenum, p. 210.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

superiority of socialist agriculture. As well as the low rate of new seed adoption, party leaders criticised southern farming for using too little fertiliser, especially compared with the north of the country. They also urged rural southerners (families, collectives and state farms) to make 'green manure' (*làm phân xanh*) and 'dung manure' (*phân chuồng*).⁷⁷

The party believed that, by implementing irrigation and mechanisation and the adoption of new seeds and fertilisers, the state could gradually control peasants' production and shift them into collective organisations.

Revolution in thought and culture

Taking the south into socialism, carrying out socialist industrialisation and establishing large-scale socialist production of agriculture were decisions made by the top party leaders. To see their policies carried out, they needed people's participation, conformity and endorsement. The party realised that southerners had long engaged in capitalist production, had a private ownership mindset (*đầu óc tư hữu*) and had capitalist tendencies (*có khuynh hướng tư bản chủ nghĩa*). Leaders also believed the harmful legacies of two decades of US neo-colonialism posed great obstacles to the construction of socialism in the south.⁷⁸ For example, they believed colonialism and bourgeois thoughts (*tư tưởng tư sản*) were entrenched in the south and 'anti-revolutionary' groups (*bọn phản cách mạng*) were still active.

Therefore, the socialist revolution to determine 'who would triumph over whom', to transform private into public ownership and to replace individual with socialist large-scale production would encounter strong resistance.

To tackle this situation, party leaders set out to transform people's thoughts and culture to fit their policies. They called this effort the 'revolution in thought and culture'. A prevalent guiding slogan was a statement by President Ho Chi Minh: 'The first and essential condition for constructing socialism is to have socialist people' (*muốn xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội, trước hết cần có những con người xã hội chủ nghĩa*).⁷⁹

77 Taylor, P. (2001), *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, p. 31.

78 Hồ Chí Minh's statement on new socialists was cited in Lê Duẩn's report at the first meeting of the unified National Assembly, on 25 June 1976 (ĐCSVN, Political report of the Party Executive Committee, p. 151).

79 Ibid.

Socialist people were supposed to have the following characteristics: 1) correct thoughts and affection, adequate knowledge and the ability to undertake collective mastery over society, the natural world and oneself (*làm chủ xã hội, thiên nhiên và bản thân*); 2) high levels of volunteerism and a determination to overcome every difficulty to complete assigned tasks; 3) be honest, disciplined, skilful and productive, love working and detest living off others (*ăn bám*), and have respect for and protect public property; and 4) love socialism and have the pure spirit of the 'international proletariat' (*quốc tế vô sản*).⁸⁰

To produce these kinds of 'new socialists', party leaders called for multiple measures involving education, administration, political and cultural activities, coercion and economic incentives.⁸¹ Socialist people were created not only in the Communist Party, but also in 'every mass, economic, cultural and social organisation, in every industry and at every level of administration, in every town and village and family'.⁸² Central government and local newspapers, socialist literature and the arts were also required to serve the construction of new socialist people by 'praising good people and good merits' (*ca ngợi người tốt việc tốt*) and criticising 'negative phenomena' (*hiện tượng tiêu cực*) in society and 'the legacy of feudalism and colonialism'.⁸³

Party leaders considered local-level cadres the most important agents for the success of socialist transformation. They reasoned that agricultural collectivisation would transform the nature of production organisations and the way of life in the countryside. The requirements for managing socialist large-scale production were completely different to those of the small individual economy; therefore, cadres (including political, managerial and technical cadres) would be determining factors for success.⁸⁴

In addition to the general characteristics of new socialists, cadres were supposed to be 'frugal' (*cần kiệm*), 'moral' (*liêm chính*), 'live simple, clean and sound lives', 'fight against privilege, embezzlement, collusion and trespassing on state property' and 'repel the influence

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid., pp. 500–1.

82 ĐCSVN, Resolution of the Fourth Party Congress, p. 935.

83 Nguyễn Trần Trọng, *Ongoing Tasks*, p. 277.

84 ĐCSVN, Report on building party organisation, pp. 743, 849.

of the bourgeois lifestyle'.⁸⁵ Through mass campaigns of agricultural transformation and collectivisation, local party cells (*đảng bộ cơ sở*) would be able to identify the 'good' and the 'bad' cadres. The former would include those who were committed to large-scale production (*quyết tâm theo con đường sản xuất lớn*). The latter would be those who still harboured the 'thoughts of peasants' (*tư tưởng nông dân*) and 'thoughts of self-satisfaction and longing for individual farming' (*luyến tiếc làm ăn riêng lẻ*).⁸⁶

Party leaders also realised that, in addition to the influence of local cadres, peasants' attitudes, motivations and actions would significantly affect the results of socialist transformation in general and the performance of collective farming in particular. The results would be excellent if people 'absolutely trusted' the party's policies. Therefore, soon after reunification, the party tried to attract peasants in the south to join 'peasant associations' (*nông hội*) to educate them to 'enhance a patriotic spirit' (*nâng cao tinh thần yêu nước*) and 'love socialism' (*yêu chủ nghĩa xã hội*).⁸⁷ It would be important to instil in peasants 'socialist thought', to educate them about the party-state's policies, to give them a 'consciousness of building socialism' (*có ý thức xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội*) and to encourage them to perform their obligations to the state well (*thực hiện tốt nghĩa vụ với nhà nước*).⁸⁸

Conclusion

Soon after reunification, the government in Hanoi decided to carry out a socialist revolution in the south to reunify the country politically, socially and economically. VCP leaders considered socialist agrarian reform a key component of the socialist revolution.

85 Ibid. A former district cadre in Chợ Mới said he learnt a lesson about cadres during the campaign of collectivisation: good cadres were those who 'took care of the people but did not follow the ideas of the masses' (*lo cho dân nhưng không chạy theo quần chúng*) (Author's interview, 17 June 2005, Chợ Mới).

86 ĐCSVN, Lê Duẩn's final statements at second plenum, p. 289.

87 ĐCSVN, Political report of the Party Executive Committee, p. 564.

88 ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 03/NQ-TW of the Second Plenum, p. 290; Phan Văn Đăng, Experiment with agricultural collectives, pp. 30–1.

Driven by Marxist–Leninist doctrine and high expectations of their capacity and the south's economic potential, the VCP leaders believed they could succeed in building a centrally planned economy, socialist industrialisation and large-scale production even though this had not been fully accomplished in the north. In the agricultural sector, this vision included two main components: land redistribution and collectivisation.

To ensure the success of collectivisation, VCP leaders paid great attention to its preparatory steps: redistributing land, bringing peasants into interim collective organisations, training cadres and building the capability of the local authorities. They called for the simultaneous execution of three revolutions—in production relations, in science and technology and in culture.

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