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Postwar restoration and preparations for collectivisation

Introduction

Vietnam is one of the most bombed countries in world history. After three decades of war (1945–75), Vietnam inherited a devastated economy, society and ecology. Rural destruction in the southern half of Vietnam was especially severe, and thousands of villages were heavily affected by war. Millions of hectares of agricultural land were bombed repeatedly and, by 1975, according to a Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) report, 560,000 hectares of cultivated land had been left untended.¹ One and a half million buffaloes and oxen were killed.²

The south faced another postwar problem: massive urban unemployment. During the conflict, large numbers of rural refugees were moved or fled to cities and towns, where they often worked in military-related sectors of the economy. At war's end, a majority of these refugees and soldiers and civil officials discharged by the government in Saigon were unemployed. According to VCP reports, the total urban population in 1975 was 7 million, of whom about 3 million (30 per cent) were unemployed.³ So, after the war, central

1 ĐCSVN (2004), Báo cáo của Bộ chính trị tại Hội nghị Trung Ương Đảng lần thứ 24 [Report of the Politburo at the 24th Party Central Committee Conference], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 36, 1975* [Party Document: Volume 36, 1975], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 318.

2 Quang Trung, Agricultural collectivization, p. 155.

3 Ibid.

and local authorities emphasised the consolidation of political power and economic restoration. Inherent in these policies, however, was preparation for collectivisation. In other words, after the war, the VCP focused simultaneously on establishing its authority, restoring production, implementing land reform and solving other postwar problems.⁴

This chapter examines the implementation of these policies in the first few years after the war ended and prior to intense collectivisation of farming. In particular, the chapter focuses on the consequences of war and how local governments in parts of the Central Coast province of Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng (QN-ĐN) and the Mekong Delta province of An Giang struggled to consolidate their political power and implement these policies and how local officials (who were policy implementers) and peasants reacted to them.

By comparing these two regions, the chapter reveals differences and similarities in their postwar conditions, which led to differences in the form and magnitude of peasants' and local cadres' politics and attitude to state policies. It shows variations in policy implementation and explains how local conditions affected the implementation and performance of national policies.

Postwar policies in the Central Coast

Rebuilding the war-torn economy

The Central Coast was the worst affected region in southern Vietnam in terms of lives lost and social, economic and ecological destruction. One province in that region was QN-ĐN (which was divided into two separate provinces in 1996). According to Quảng Nam's Department of Statistics, more than two-thirds of QN-ĐN's agricultural land was abandoned and uncultivated in 1975, thousands of people had been killed or injured and unexploded mines littered the countryside. More than three-quarters of all villages had been destroyed, forcing peasants to flee and live together in a few refugee areas, bringing economic activity to a standstill. Therefore, after the war, the province 'faced a severe food

4 See ĐCSVN, Resolution No. 247/NQ-TW.

shortage and acute unemployment.⁵ A large proportion of arable land was uncultivated. An article in the *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper in December 1975 summarised the situation in verse: ‘fields in rural areas lack draught animals; gardens were abandoned, houses were empty, and the people were prostrate and hungry’ (*đồng quê vắng bóng trâu cày, vườn hoang nhà vắng dân gầy xác xơ*).⁶

Despite heavy destruction, the authorities in QN-ĐN rapidly consolidated their power in all parts of the province. By September 1976, according to the former provincial chairman of QN-ĐN:

[A] complete system of revolutionary authority was quickly built from province to district, commune, ward, subcommune and subward. The revolutionary authorities swiftly controlled and managed all urban areas and large rural areas.⁷

At least three factors helped the new authorities in QN-ĐN consolidate their power. First, large rural parts of the province and the wider Central Coast region were under the influence of the Việt Minh during the war with France (1945–54) and then under the National Liberation Front (NLF) during the war against the US-backed government in Saigon (1954–75). Despite the ‘liberated areas’ (*vùng giải phóng*) being reduced significantly in the late 1960s, the NLF still controlled many remote and mountainous rural areas economically and politically. In the liberated areas, the NLF was able to carry out its policies and campaigns.⁸ This familiarity and strong relationship with farmers enabled the new authorities to control and successfully deal with postwar society.

Second, QN-ĐN and other parts of the Central Coast region did not face huge problems filling government and party positions thanks to the large number of local revolutionaries who survived the war and others who returned there from northern Vietnam. During the war,

5 Cục Thông Kế tỉnh Quảng Nam [hereinafter CTKQN] (2005), *Quảng Nam 30 Năm Xây Dựng và Phát triển [Quảng Nam's Socioeconomic Development over the Past 30 Years]*, Tam Kỳ: Cục Thông Kế tỉnh Quảng Nam, p. 22.

6 Đồng quê vắng bóng trâu cày, vườn hoang nhà trống dân gầy xác xơ [Fields in rural areas lack draught animals; gardens were abandoned, houses were empty, and the people were prostrate and hungry], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 15 December 1975, p. 1.

7 Hoàn thành thắng lợi về vang nhiệm vụ xây dựng đất nước, xây dựng chế độ mới, con người mới Xã hội chủ nghĩa [Completing the task of building the country, the new regime and new socialist men], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 8 September 1976, p. 1.

8 Quyết thắng trên mặt trận nông nghiệp [Be determined to win on the agricultural front], *Quảng Đà*, 30 April 1974, p. 1; Lời kêu gọi ra sức gia tăng sản xuất, thực hành tiết kiệm [Do the best to increase food production and be thrifty], *Quảng Đà*, 30 April 1974, p. 2.

the NLF in QN-ĐN had recruited a large number of revolutionaries who operated locally or were sent to the north for training. Despite the surrender or killing of many revolutionaries from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, their numbers were still considerable. Quảng Nam's records show that, during the war, Bình Lãnh (a mountainous commune) suffered severe destruction. However, at least 25 revolutionary soldiers and 20 other revolution-supporting families still lived in the Bình Lãnh commune.⁹ Likewise, Thăng Phước commune in Thăng Bình district was reportedly 'wiped clean' (*bị xoá trắng*) of its revolutionary base, but after the war, the number of surviving revolutionaries was sufficient to fill key positions in the communal and subcommunal authorities (*chính quyền thôn*).¹⁰

Finally, the flattened, war-torn society and economy made it somewhat easy for the new authorities to exert their power without confronting strong resistance from opposition groups.

Along with consolidating their power bases, the new authorities in QN-ĐN focused on solving the problems of refugees, unemployment and production. According to the *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper, after the war, the province sent 400,000 refugees back to their home provinces (Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên Huế). QN-ĐN also sent 700,000 refugees in urban areas back to their rural homes. In dealing with unemployment, the new authorities decided to move large numbers of unemployed people in urban areas either to the new economic zones in the Central Highlands or to rural areas.¹¹

In rural areas, the new authorities focused on restoring agricultural production and preparing for collectivisation and socialist large-scale agriculture. This work included restoration of abandoned land and reclamation of new land (*khai hoang, phục hoá*), redistribution of landholdings (*điều chỉnh ruộng đất*), improvement of irrigation (*làm thủy lợi*), extension of cultivated areas (*mở rộng diện tích canh tác*), field transformation (*cải tạo đồng ruộng*) and intensive farming.

9 Tỉnh Ủy Quảng Nam (2003), *Quảng Nam Anh Hùng, thời đại Hồ Chí Minh, Kỳ Yếu 6/2003* [*Quảng Nam is a Hero in the Age of Ho Chi Minh*], Tam Kỳ: Tỉnh Ủy Quảng Nam, pp. 319–21.

10 Toàn xã Thăng Phước làm ăn trong các tổ đổi công thường xuyên [The whole population of Thăng Phước commune is organised into regular labour exchange teams], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 23 May 1977, p. 4.

11 Nhân dân tỉnh ta chẳng những đánh giặc giỏi mà còn giàu nghị lực và tài năng sáng tạo trong xây dựng lại quê hương giàu đẹp [Our province's people fought the enemy and are building the country well], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 29 March 1976, p. 3.

Land restoration and redistribution

Land restoration

Soon after reunification, the new authorities in QN-ĐN launched a campaign to ‘attack weeds in fields’ (*chiến dịch tấn công đồng cỏ*) and ‘remove unexploded landmines’ (*tháo gỡ bom mìn*). The *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper in March 1976 reported that authorities had mobilised thousands of urban youths to work in rural areas. In addition, they mobilised thousands of army engineers (*công binh*) and former guerillas to remove the mines littering the fields. Within a year, the province had restored more than 26,000 hectares of land, accounting for about half of all abandoned land and one-third of the province’s agricultural land.¹² Within two years, the province reportedly restored to productive use 50,000 hectares of previously abandoned land.¹³

Because the authorities were able to mobilise large numbers of rural and urban people, good progress with land restoration was made in many areas. An example is Điện Bàn district. It had 114 subcommunes (villages), 93 of which were completely destroyed during the war. Many people faced hunger, and weeds had taken over their land. The district’s new authorities mobilised everyone to turn 4,600 hectares of abandoned land into cultivated land. Former guerillas and local militia removed 20,794 landmines, during which 19 people were killed and 34 were injured.¹⁴

People from Hiễn Lộc village in Bình Lãnh commune, Thăng Bình district, recalled that they returned after the war with ‘two empty hands’ (*với hai bàn tay trắng*). During the war, many working-age men had died, so many families returning to their villages were in a situation where ‘a son had lost his father and a wife had lost her husband’ (*cánh con mất cha, vợ mất chồng*). Moreover, many families lacked the tools necessary for making a living and wild metre-high weeds had taken over their fields. Bombs and rockets had destroyed some of their land, and landmines remained in some rice fields. A widow with three children remembered:

12 Ibid.

13 Hội nghị tổ đổi công toàn tỉnh thành công tốt đẹp [The conference on labour exchange teams achieved good results], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 25 June 1977, p. 3.

14 Điện Bàn: Cả huyện là một công trường [Điện Bàn: The whole district is a working field], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 11 August 1976, p. 1.

After the war, I took my three children home with two empty hands, no rice [*không lúa gạo*], no buffaloes. It was so miserable [*cực khổ lắm*]! This village was full of wild weeds and trees. We had to restore the abandoned fields by exchanging labour with others [*làm vãn công với người khác*]. At that time we were afraid of mines exploding in the fields but we still tried to do [land restoration]. I was not afraid of death but worried that if I died, who would take care of the children? My sister-in-law died of a mine exploding when she was hoeing an abandoned field at that time.¹⁵

Villagers in Hiền Lộc recalled that the land tenure system had totally changed because farms had been abandoned for many years. The previous landlords had fled. Large areas of land now seemed to have a kind of common ownership. People restored any plot they liked as if it were their own. Some restored as much land as their families could manage. Those who came home first could select land close to their houses. Those who came later had to cultivate land further away.

While people restored some of the land on their own, the new authorities mobilised villagers to rehabilitate the remaining abandoned land. The new Thăng Bình district authorities mobilised villagers from less war-torn communes to help residents in heavily damaged communes. A former Bình Lãnh commune official recalled that people in Bình Nguyên, Bình Tú and Bình Trung communes who lived in or near the district centre came to help restore the fields in Bình Lãnh. After land restoration, the commune authority, through the local farmers' associations (*ban nông hội thôn*), reallocated land among households according to the number of people in their immediate family (*theo nhân khẩu*).¹⁶

The situation in Thanh Yên village in Bình Định commune (Thăng Bình district) was similar. After the war, returning residents found the place devastated, and weeds and bomb craters riddled their land. Local authorities mobilised people to restore abandoned land. Youth associations and former soldiers in the Saigon regime were mobilised to lead the campaign by restoring 'difficult' fields littered

15 Mr Đố in Hiền Lộc village recalled that he returned home from Đà Nẵng city later than other people so he was forced to cultivate land far from home that other people disliked (Author's interview, 14 October 2005, Bình Lãnh).

16 Ibid.

with landmines. Commune authorities and local farmers' associations reallocated all restored unclaimed land to households according to their needs.¹⁷

Land redistribution

After land restoration in QN-ĐN came land redistribution, for which—unlike in the Mekong Delta (see next sections)—there was no strong resistance from a landed class. At a conference to sum up the implementation of land policy and the LTTT (Land to the Tille) program in QN-ĐN on 30 July 1976, authorities announced that the province had 'successfully completed land redistribution to peasants':

[O]ne year after starting to implement a new land policy, the fields in our province actually returned to peasants [*ruộng đất về tay nông dân*]. Basically, there is no more exploited class or landlords. Feudal exploitation has permanently been eliminated.¹⁸

According to authorities, the province had redistributed 19,547 hectares of arable land to 47,000 landless people. About 1,710 hectares had come from 'land donations' (*hiến điền*) and expropriations of land from landlords and 'lackeys of the imperialists' (*tay sai của Đế quốc*).

According to party researcher Lâm Quang Huyền, 'by May 1976, the former zone V [*khu V cũ*; in the Central Coast] had solved [its] land distribution problem.' Huyền reported that, according to the data from 61 communes and seven wards of nine districts in the Central Coast, the local authorities had appropriated 18,027 hectares, accounting for 31 per cent of the total arable land. This land was then allocated equitably to 34,875 land-poor and landless peasant households (containing 192,107 people).¹⁹ The composition of appropriated land is displayed in Table 3.1.

17 Author's interviews, October–December 2005, Thanh Yên.

18 Ibid. At that time, the total agricultural land in the province was about 90,000 hectares.

19 Lâm Quang Huyền (*The Land Revolution in South Vietnam*, p. 180) also mentioned that Bình Trị Thiên province had retrieved 12,737 hectares of land and granted it to 40,609 peasant households.

Table 3.1 The composition of appropriated land in 61 communes and seven wards in the Central Coast region

Type of land	Area (hectares)	Proportion (%)
Communal land (<i>công điền công thổ</i>)	4,515	25.05
Landlords' and rural capitalists' land	4,330	24.02
Rich peasants' land	1,717	9.52
Religious land	1,541	8.55
Other	5,924	32.86
Total	18,027	100.00

Source: 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. 180.

In areas that were heavily war-damaged and where local authorities played a major role in restoring abandoned land, land redistribution was more extensive than in areas less affected by the war. For example, in Bình Lãnh and Bình Định communes in Thăng Bình district and Duy Phước commune in Duy Xuyên district, authorities redistributed equitably a large proportion of restored and communal land (*công điền*) to landless and land-poor households.²⁰ In addition, land redistribution happened gradually as families with more land lent some to their relatives and neighbours.²¹ Meanwhile, in Hòa Tiến commune of Hòa Vang district, where levels of abandoned land and land restoration were more modest, local authorities granted only 'communal land' to peasants. They did not touch private land until collectivisation started, so inequitable land distribution remained.²²

Other postwar economic restoration

With only 90,000 hectares of agricultural land—accounting for less than 10 per cent of natural areas—and a population of 1.5 million in 1976, QN-ĐN province had a low level of agricultural land per capita. In addition, most agricultural land was sandy and poor and

20 Xã Duy Phước trước bước ngoặt lịch sử [Duy Phước commune and its historic turning-point], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 24 September 1977, p. 1. One *sào* is equal to 500 square metres and 1 *thước* is equal to one-fifteenth of 1 *sào*.

21 Author's interviews, October–December 2005, Bình Định.

22 Hòa Tiến: 1,057 hộ tự nguyện đưa 379 ha ruộng đất vào làm ăn tập thể [Hòa Tiến: 1,057 households voluntarily put 379 hectares into collective farming], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 4 October 1977, p. 1.

had inadequate irrigation.²³ During the war, QN-ĐN's economy had depended heavily on imported commodities and food and foreign aid. The province produced only about 95,000–100,000 tonnes of food, falling short of its annual consumption of 450,000–500,000 tonnes.²⁴

After the war, food security was the provincial leaders' main concern. To ensure self-sufficiency in food production, provincial leaders urged 'party members, cadres, and people to facilitate food production and economise to the maximum [*thực hành tiết kiệm tối đa*]'²⁵

In late 1976, the *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper launched a column called 'The People's Forum' to discuss whether or not QN-ĐN province could resolve its own food problems. Several articles in this column came from state offices at provincial, district and commune levels. Most agreed that the province could feed itself. The methods for this included 'irrigation' (*thuỷ lợi*), 'intensive farming' (*thâm canh*), 'adopting new seeds' (*áp dụng giống mới*), 'developing subsidiary crops' (*phát triển cây màu*), 'increasing the number of crops per year' (*tăng vụ*), 'expanding agricultural land' (*mở rộng diện tích*) and 'transforming and designing fields' (*cải tạo đồng ruộng*).²⁶ Provincial leaders eventually asserted that the province could ensure its own food supply and they set a target to produce 500,000 tonnes of staple food in 1980. The plan called for an expansion of agricultural land, from 50,000 hectares to 140,000 hectares, extending irrigated areas from 21,000 hectares in 1976 to 60,000 in 1980, moving 160,000 people from lowland areas to new

23 Phần đầu mở rộng nhanh diện tích canh tác [Strive to extend cultivated area], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 26 June 1976, p. 4.

24 CTKQN, *Quảng Nam's Socioeconomic Development*, p. 22.

25 Đẩy mạnh sản xuất và thực hành tiết kiệm giải quyết vấn đề lương thực cấp bách trước mắt [Increase production and be thrifty to immediately deal with urgent food shortage], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 16 February 1976, p. 1; Nếu cao tinh thần tự lực tự cường trong sản xuất và xây dựng quê hương [Be self-reliant in ensuring food production and building the country], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 29 September 1976, p. 1.

26 Tỉnh ta có khả năng tự giải quyết lương thực hay không? [Is our province able to solve our own food problem?], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 22 November 1976, p. 1; Nhìn lại diện tích đất đai để thấy rõ khả năng tự giải quyết lương thực [Re-examining agricultural areas to evaluate our capacity for dealing with food problems], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 26, November 1976, p. 1; Nước và sản xuất lương thực ở tỉnh ta [Irrigation and food production in our province], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 18 December 1976, p. 1; Vì sao tỉnh ta đặt vấn đề giải quyết lương? [Why do we pay great attention to solving the food production problem?], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 22 December 1976, p. 1.

economic zones in mountainous areas, increasing subsidiary crops to 30 per cent of total food production and expanding the area of new spring–summer rice crops to 15,000 hectares.²⁷

QN-ĐN's leaders considered irrigation an important first measure (*biện pháp hàng đầu*). In November 1975, they launched a widespread campaign to expand irrigation, mobilising people to dig ponds, build dams and canals and use manual pumps to water fields.²⁸ Within the first three months of 1976, QN-ĐN had mobilised the equivalent of 111,850 days of labour to repair 363 dams and 132 canals totalling 131,905 metres. In addition, the province started five large-scale irrigation projects, including the 'Phú Ninh great irrigation dam' (*Đại công trình thủy lợi Phú Ninh*) in Tam Kỳ district and Trường Giang and Cao Ngạn dams in Thăng Bình district.²⁹

Villagers in Hiền Lộc and Thanh Yên villages recalled that, soon after reunification, each family contributed months of labour to build Cao Ngạn dam in Bình Lãnh commune and Phước Hà dam in Bình Phú commune. Later, authorities mobilised village youth to build another great irrigation dam, Phú Ninh, in Tam Kỳ district. One woman in Hiền Lộc village told me she had to contribute three months of labour to the construction of Cao Ngạn dam and many days for the other dams. When undertaking this work, she had to carry her own food.³⁰ Some peasants in Hiền Lộc said governments in the French and American times had attempted to build these dams but were unable to pay for labour and the use of private land. Under the revolutionary authorities, however, land belonged to everyone (*của chung*) so it was easier to build dams, roads and other infrastructure that required vast tracts of land.³¹

27 Hồ Nghinh: Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng vượt bậc phát triển sản xuất nông nghiệp [Hồ Nghinh: Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng has made great progress in agriculture], *Nhân Dân*, 8 March 1977, p. 5; Nghị quyết hội nghị Ban chấp hành Đảng bộ tỉnh khóa 11 [Resolution of 11th Provincial Party Executive Committee], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 12 March 1977, p. 1.

28 Đẩy mạnh công tác thủy lợi nhỏ để phục vụ sản xuất xuân hè và hè thu [Extending irrigation for the spring–summer and summer–autumn crops], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 8 March 1976, p. 1. Bình Dương commune in Thăng Bình district was considered an exemplary case because it had dug 2,200 ponds (*giếng*) from which to water its crops. On average, each labourer had dug one pond.

29 Toàn tỉnh sôi nổi ra quân làm thủy lợi lợi [People in the province are extending irrigation], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 12 May 1976, p. 1.

30 Author's interview, 15 October 2005, Bình Lãnh.

31 An elderly man in Hiền Lộc village referred to Phú Ninh dam as *Ba kỳ dam* ('the three periods dam') because it was initiated by the French, continued by Saigon's government and completed by the new government (Author's interview, 17 October 2005, Hiền Lộc).

Dams took over large amounts of peasants' land, but I found no evidence of strong resistance, although some peasants did express dissatisfaction with the policy. An article in *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper (on 29 September 1976) told how the party cell of Hòa Nhơn commune in Hòa Vang district overcame peasants' 'backward thoughts and superstitions' when it decided to open a canal through hills and villages to divert water from the river to rice fields. Many peasants refused to participate in the project. Some elderly people were afraid the dam would 'break down the heart of their village land' (*đứt con đất của làng*) and upset 'the spirits of the land' (*Thổ địa quở phạt*). Some worried about the loss of their land and their family's tombs. Other residents doubted the success of the project. To overcome these objections, the party cell organised meetings to 'fight and criticise feudal thoughts such as selfishness and superstitions'.³²

As well as more irrigation, local authorities wanted new rice seeds used and more crops per year. To solve food shortages in the interval between the winter–spring and summer–autumn crops (*chống đói giáp hạt*), the province launched a campaign to adopt a new spring–summer rice crop (*vụ xuân hè*).³³ Such a crop was new to many peasants in QN-ĐN who had previously cultivated at most only two rice crops per year. However, adopting the spring–summer crop achieved good initial results.³⁴ Some years later, many of the irrigated areas of QN-ĐN also cultivated a third rice crop each year.

Peasants who had been under the influence of the Saigon government's rural development program were familiar with the adoption of new rice seeds. For example, QN-ĐN peasants in Điện Quang commune in Đại Lộc district, Điện Minh and Điện Phương in Điện Bàn district and Hòa Nam and Hòa Xuân communes in Hoà Vang district had used chemical fertilisers, new rice seeds and farm machinery even before 1975.³⁵ However, the majority of peasants in the province still grew traditional rice varieties and had rarely used chemical fertilisers or human manure (*phân bắc*: literally, 'northern manure').

32 Be self-reliant in ensuring food production, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 29 September 1976, p. 4.

33 Tăng vụ sản xuất xuân hè [New additional spring–summer crops], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 16 February 1976, p. 4.

34 Vụ sản xuất xuân hè thắng lợi [The spring–summer crops have a good result], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 7 August 1976, p. 1.

35 Những mùa lúa đầu tiên [The first rice crops], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 19 April 1976, p. 2.

As an additional step towards increasing rice production, authorities in QN-ĐN called for the removal of tombs from agricultural land.³⁶ Although this policy touched a sensitive aspect of peasant culture—which considered ancestral tombs immovable—it encountered only modest resistance. For example, people in Điện Bàn district ‘spent 100,000 working days to remove 90,000 scattered tombs, extending 80 additional hectares of agricultural land.’³⁷ Despite dissatisfaction with the policy, few Điện Bàn peasants openly objected. Many, though, criticised it in private. Similarly, in Duy An commune, Duy Xuyên district, peasants mockingly said ‘even the dead aren’t allowed to rest’ (*người chết cũng không được nằm yên*). However, authorities were finally able to ‘convince’ these peasants to accept the policy.³⁸

According to the *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper, postwar economic restoration policies achieved good results. From mid-1975 to the end of 1977, the province expanded its cultivated areas (*diện tích gieo trồng*) from 96,000 to 183,337 hectares, equal to the figure in 1965. Production of staple food also increased, from 149,062 tonnes in 1975 to 300,000 tonnes by the end of 1977, showing the province would be able to overcome food shortages and produce its target of 500,000 tonnes by 1980.³⁹

Building the foundation for collective farming

While carrying out postwar economic restoration policies, authorities also created labour exchange teams (*tổ đổi công vẫn công*). This policy seemed to fit well with local practices in which reciprocity and mutual assistance were still popular among villagers. Also, before 1975, and especially during the Việt Minh period, revolutionary authorities in many areas of QN-ĐN had organised peasants into labour exchange teams and even some collectives.⁴⁰

36 Ủy ban nhân dân ra chỉ thị về công tác quy hoạch mồ mã và nhà cửa của nhân dân [The Provincial People’s Committee issued a directive to reallocate tombs and houses], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 28 August 1976, p. 1.

37 Điện Bàn: The whole district is a working field, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 11 August 1976, p. 1.

38 Duy An lập khu nghĩa địa mới [Duy An has established new graveyards], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 5 April 1976, p. 2.

39 Gióng đường cây thắng lợi [Be victorious in agriculture], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 26 April 1977, p. 1.

40 Ngành nông nghiệp tỉnh Quảng Đà tích cực chăm lo vụ mùa tháng 8 [Agricultural sector in Quảng Đà is positive about caring for August crops], *Quảng Đà*, 20 June 1974, p. 1.

Soon after the war, Điện Bàn district, for example, formed 598 labour exchange teams to help with land restoration.⁴¹ Likewise, peasants in Hiên Lộc and Thanh Yên villages, Thăng Bình district, recalled that, to undertake land restoration, subcommune farmers' associations organised them into labour exchange teams, each comprising 15–20 neighbouring households.⁴² Most of these labour exchange teams operated in an irregular and seasonal manner (*tổ đổi công không thường xuyên, thời vụ*) and for specific tasks such as preparing fields and harvesting. They were dismantled when the specific task was completed.

Local authorities successfully organised peasants into 'regular labour exchange teams' (*tổ đổi công thường xuyên*) in some parts of QN-ĐN. For example, Sông Bình subcommune (Đại Quang commune, Đại Lộc district) formed regular labour exchange teams for land restoration, production and irrigation. Some 160 households in the subcommune were organised into such teams, each comprising 12–14 households and one or two buffaloes. Members of these organisations exchanged labour among themselves in their everyday production activities. Men were often in charge of hoeing and ploughing, while women did lighter work such as transplanting and harvesting. Those who did not have draught animals could use the team's buffaloes.⁴³ Another example is Thăng Phước commune in Thăng Bình district, whose land had been abandoned for 10 years. Most of its men died in the war, and women and the elderly made up its workforce. To cope with such difficulties, local authorities quickly organised peasant households into 39 regular labour exchange teams.⁴⁴

At a conference of labour exchange teams in June 1977, QN-ĐN leaders (*hội nghị tổ đổi công*) praised the role of labour exchange in 'training peasants to work collectively' and solving their postwar problems. Leaders criticised these organisations, however, for 'developing unevenly and unsoundly' and operating according to simple, unfair and irrational methods (*chưa công bằng, hợp lý*). Therefore, they called for the upgrading of simple labour exchange teams into a higher-level organisation called a 'production team working according to norms

41 Điện Bàn: The whole district is a working field, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 11 August 1976, p. 1.

42 Author's interviews, October–December 2005, Thanh Yên and Hiên Lộc.

43 Tổ đổi công vẫn công ở Sông Bình [Labour exchange teams in Sông Bình], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 8 May 1975, p. 2.

44 The whole population of Thăng Phước commune, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 23 May 1977, p. 2.

and contracts' (PTWCNC) (*tổ sản xuất có định mức, khoán việc*).⁴⁵ According to the guidelines, a PTWCNC was based on individual ownership of land and other means of production, but management was similar to that in a collective organisation. For example, officials kept track of labour exchanges through work-points, norms and contracts, and they distributed state agricultural inputs to each team.⁴⁶

Establishing the PTWCNCs was the 'first step of collectivisation', and the aim was to 'facilitate peasants' solidarity', 'improve collective work', 'establish state and peasant relations', 'make peasants familiar with collective work' and 'select and train cadres' for ongoing collectivisation.⁴⁷ However, unlike with a simple labour exchange team, building a PTWCNC required training cadres and peasants.

By October 1977, QN-ĐN had trained nearly 9,000 cadres; some districts had completed the training of all cadres and were preparing to establish PTWCNCs before the winter–spring crop of 1977–78.⁴⁸ However, there were also some difficulties in building PTWCNCs. For example, Đại Lộc district selected Đức Phú subcommune in Đại Hiệp commune in which to build pilot PTWCNCs. To ensure success, the authorities had to do a lot of preparation, such as organising policy, studying training (*học tập chính sách*) for cadres and peasants and preventing peasants from selling draught buffaloes and farm tools. Authorities were able to mobilise 97 per cent of households into 33 PTWCNCs, but these organisations did not function well. Cadres were confused about management (*lúng túng về quản lý*) and unsure how to make norms and contracts and calculate and determine workdays among households.⁴⁹ Similarly, An Bình subcommune (in Tiên Kỳ commune, Tiên Phước district) faced difficulties managing its PTWCNCs. Peasants were

45 The conference on labour exchange teams, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 25 June 1977, p. 1.

46 Xây dựng các tổ sản xuất có định mức khoán việc [Establishing production teams working according to norms and contracts], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 22 October 1977, p. 3.

47 Bản hướng dẫn nội dung xây dựng tổ đổi công có định mức, khoán việc [Guidelines for establishing production teams working according to norms and contracts], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 29 June 1977, p. 1.

48 Establishing production teams working according to norms and contracts, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 22 October 1977, p. 3.

49 Đại Lộc xây dựng các tổ sản xuất có định mức khoán việc [Đại Lộc is establishing production teams working according to norms and contracts], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 26 October 1977, p. 2. In June 1977, the provincial authorities released a directive forbidding merchants from purchasing and slaughtering draught animals (Nghiêm cấm thương nhân mua trâu bò để giết thịt [Prohibiting private merchants from purchasing and slaughtering livestock], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 24 September 1977, p. 1).

confused about how to work according to norms and contracts. Some complained that the procedures ‘coerced, humiliated and restricted’ people and ‘did not raise their enthusiasm.’ One peasant complained that, ‘without norms and contracts, I can work with all my heart. Now under the norms and contracts, I do enough to just achieve satisfactory results according to the contract!’⁵⁰

By the end of 1977, when collectivisation began, QN-ĐN had built 4,524 simple interim collective organisations, of which nearly 80 per cent of peasant households were members. Of these, 2,625 were PTWCNCs, although 42 per cent of them were below standard.⁵¹ Among the places in QN-ĐN without any PTWCNCs were Hiền Lộc village (Bình Lãnh commune) and Thanh Yên village (Bình Định commune).⁵²

Generally speaking, by late 1977, authorities in QN-ĐN, particularly in Thăng Bình district, were able to accomplish most of the intended preparatory measures for collectivised farming. The story is different in the Mekong Delta’s An Giang province.

Preparing for collectivisation in the Mekong Delta

Consolidating local authorities

After the war, An Giang province and other parts of the Mekong Delta were under the control of the new military administration (*thời kỳ quân quản*). It took a year for the new authorities to consolidate a civilian government in An Giang and other provinces.

According to the documents relating to Chợ Mới district’s party committee, after the war, the new district authorities faced many difficulties in controlling society and consolidating their power.⁵³

50 Bình An xây dựng tổ sản xuất có định mức khoán việc [Bình An is establishing production teams working according to norms and contracts], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 24 April 1978, p. 3.

51 Tỉnh ủy mở hội nghị bàn về cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp [Provincial Party Committee opens conference on socialist agricultural transformation], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 22 February 1978, p. 1.

52 Author’s interviews, August–November 2005, Hiền Lộc and Thanh Yên villages.

53 Đảng Bộ Chợ Mới (2000), Trên mặt trận bảo vệ an ninh tổ quốc [On the national security front], in *Chợ Mới 25 năm xây dựng và phát triển* [Chợ Mới’s Socioeconomic Development over the Past 25 Years], Chợ Mới: Đảng Bộ huyện Chợ Mới, p. 44.

According to a former official of Long Điền B commune, after 30 April 1975, Bảo An soldiers (of the Hòa Hảo religion) and soldiers and officers from Saigon gathered in Chợ Mới district and fought against the revolutionary force for a week.⁵⁴ Assessing the difficulties of Chợ Mới district in the first few years after reunification, a former party secretary there reported that

eighty per cent of the population was religious; most of them were the Hòa Hảo. Twenty thousand Saigon soldiers gathered here ... forty per cent of the population were landless and land-poor.⁵⁵

The authorities considered the large number of former Saigon and Bảo An soldiers in Chợ Mới a political and military threat.

Another difficulty authorities faced was a lack of local party cadres to fill new positions. This was the situation in Chợ Mới district and many other parts of the Mekong Delta.⁵⁶ During the war, local networks of southern cadres had been destroyed and many revolutionaries killed, especially through the American and Government of South Vietnam Phoenix program.⁵⁷ After the war, party organisations in An Giang were weak, and 17 communes had no party cells. Most surviving ex-revolutionaries came from remote districts such as Tịnh Biên, Tri Tôn and Phú Châu.⁵⁸ Villagers in Chợ Mới called their area a 'white area' (*vùng trắng*), which meant no Communist Party cells operated there until reunification. By mid-1975, Chợ Mới district had only 58 Communist Party cadres—insufficient for establishing a new local authority. Therefore, 40 party cadres were sent from nearby Sa Dec province.⁵⁹ In assessing the situation of the party organisation in Chợ Mới district in the first few years after reunification, the secretary

54 Author's interview, 16 June 2005, Chợ Mới.

55 Qua hội nghị công báo hoàn thành cơ bản hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp ở Chợ Mới: Bài học gì được rút ra [Report from a conference announcing the completion of collectivisation in Chợ Mới: Lessons learned], *An Giang*, 15 April 1985, p. 1.

56 Phạm Văn Kiệt, Peasants are eager for collective farming, p. 28.

57 Beresford, M. (1988), Issues in economic unification: Overcoming the legacy of separation, in D. Marr and C. White (eds), *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 107; Hicks, Organizational adventures in district government, p. 120.

58 Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh An Giang [hereinafter UBNDTAG] (2003), *Địa Chí An Giang [An Giang Province]*, An Giang: Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh An Giang, p. 349.

59 Ban Chấp Hành Đảng Bộ Huyện Chợ Mới [hereinafter BCHDBHCM] (1995), *Lịch sử Đảng bộ huyện Chợ Mới [The History of Chợ Mới Party Cell, 1927–1995]*, Chợ Mới: Ban Chấp Hành Đảng Bộ Huyện Chợ Mới, p. 169.

of An Giang commented that ‘the party bases [*cơ sở đảng*] were small and thin [*mỏng*]. Mass organisations and communal and hamlet authorities were inadequate and weak.’⁶⁰

In the first few years after reunification, many communes in Chợ Mới district had no party cells or only weak ones. For example, in 1977, Long Điền B commune had a new party cell with only three members—one was the secretary of the cell, one was the commune’s chairman (*chủ tịch xã*) and the other was the commune’s chief police officer (*trưởng công an xã*), who had just become a party member. At the hamlet level, new authorities selected some trusted local people to work as chiefs (*trưởng ấp*) and members of managerial boards and peasant associations.

A majority of local cadres in Long Điền B commune were not ex-revolutionaries. They were selected thanks mostly to the revolutionary merit of their parents, brothers or even distant relatives. Long Điền B residents remembered after reunification new local cadres often called themselves ‘ex-undercover revolutionaries’ (*cán bộ nằm vùng*) or ‘meritorious for having hidden Vietnamese communist cadres’ (*có công nuôi cán bộ*). In many cases, the new cadres were exaggerating. One elderly man, a former chief of the Saigon government’s local militia group (*dân quân tự vệ*) in a hamlet in Long Điền B, commented that the local chief had been a member of his staff during the war. After reunification, the man was made hamlet chief thanks to the revolutionary merit of his brother-in-law, who lived in Đồng Tháp. The man often claimed that he had previously been an undercover revolutionary, but many people did not believe him.⁶¹ Some local people added that, due to lack of revolutionary merit, many of these cadres tended to work to gain political merit (*lập công*). Some said that, while these cadres tried to comply with official policies, they also pursued their own interests.

Building the foundation for collective farming

While establishing a new government, leaders in the Mekong Delta also began to build the foundations for collectivisation. In the Central Coast region, the first stage had been to create labour exchange teams. In the Mekong Delta, however, the first step was to create ‘production

60 Huyện Chợ Mới hoàn thành hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp [Chợ Mới district has completed collectivisation], *An Giang*, 4 April 1985, p. 1.

61 Author’s interview, 29 June 2005, Long Điền B, Chợ Mới.

solidarity teams' (*tổ đoàn kết sản xuất*). The different names reflect social and economic differences between the two regions. In the Mekong Delta, labour exchange among peasants had not been as common in previous decades as in the Central Coast. Instead, in the Mekong Delta, land-rich peasants had often hired the land-poor and landless to work for them. The term 'solidarity' reflected the Communist Party government's desire to unite these two classes of villagers.

According to official guidelines, each production solidarity team should farm 30–50 hectares. The authorities expected that, in so doing, cadres and peasants would learn to exchange labour (*vấn đổi công*) and work together collectively. In practice, many production solidarity teams did not operate this way. Villagers in Long Điền B said the production solidarity teams in Chợ Mới district often had 200 to 300 hectares—virtually the size of a hamlet. Moreover, many production solidarity teams did not exchange labour. A former production solidarity team leader said peasants refused to farm that way, wanting to hire labour as they had previously, rather than exchanging it, because the latter method was unknown and considered inferior.⁶² Therefore, although production solidarity teams existed, people farmed no differently to before—as individuals, not as teams. One local cadre described this as 'each person cultivated his own land and paid his own fees' (*đất ai cấy làm phí ai cấy trả*). The production solidarity teams played only an intermediary role between the state and peasants. The teams were in charge of delivering agricultural inputs and other necessary goods from the state to peasants and collected taxes from peasants for the state.⁶³

In 1976, Chợ Mới district established 105 production solidarity teams in 101 hamlets, but their quality was low. Chợ Mới's party cell reported:

In 1977, the district party committee realised that in reality peasants in these organisations still farmed individually. In other words, these organisations were in fact just fuel-delivering teams [*tổ xăng dầu*]. Therefore, the district's party committee decided to establish a committee for agricultural transformation [*ban cải tạo nông nghiệp huyện*] and immediately selected several cadres to go to the provincial capital for training.⁶⁴

62 Author's interview, 25 June 2005, Long Điền B.

63 Author's interview, 15 June 2005, Long Điền B.

64 Report from a conference, *An Giang*, 15 April 1985, p. 1.

By 1978 An Giang province had established about 300 production solidarity teams, 528 by 1979 and 1,528 by 1980. Most of these organisations, according to assessment reports, were ‘inadequate in quality and scale’ (*không đúng tính chất và quy mô*).⁶⁵ Hoping to improve their quality, the vice-chief of An Giang’s committee for agricultural transformation in June 1981 ordered the teams to be made smaller.⁶⁶ However, the situation did not improve much because local leaders were preoccupied with land redistribution and other issues.

Prohibiting non-resident cultivators (*cắt xâm canh*)

Compared with other regions of the south, the Mekong Delta (especially the western part, Miền Tây, where An Giang is) was among the least affected by the war. Thanks to a relatively peaceful life, abundant natural resources and previous agrarian reforms, food production in many parts of the region had exceeded consumption needs. Previous reforms, especially the LTTT program, had almost eliminated big landlords, establishing a solid institutional foundation of small and family-owned farms;⁶⁷ and the rural population had diverse occupations, including growing commodity crops, working as labourers, engaging in petty trade and other non-farming work. This made the social structure and economic activities of the Mekong Delta more diverse than in the Central Coast and other regions of the south.

Another feature of difference in the region was that peasants’ farming and production activities extended beyond their villages. Many peasants had land in their own hamlet as well as in distant communes, districts and even other provinces. In Chợ Mới district (An Giang), more than half the peasants also had fields elsewhere. Most of their ‘outside’ land was in Long Xuyên quadrangle (*Tứ Giác Long Xuyên*) and the Plain of Reeds (*Đồng Tháp Mười*), which local peasants called ‘big fields’ (*đồng lớn*). A former district official mentioned that the combined area of agricultural land Chợ Mới’s peasants had outside the district exceeded the district’s total agricultural land. Most peasants who had

65 Sở Thông Tin Văn Hóa An Giang [hereinafter STTVHAG] (1978), *Thông tin phổ thông* [General Information], Vol. 9, Long Xuyên: NXB Sở Thông Tin Văn Hóa An Giang, p. 9; Phong trào hợp tác hóa tiếp tục đi vào chiều hướng ổn định và phát triển theo hướng phương châm tích cực và vững chắc [Collectivisation continues to progress positively and firmly], *An Giang*, 7 June 1981, p. 2.

66 Collectivisation continues to progress positively and firmly, *An Giang*, 7 June 1981, p. 2.

67 Callison, *Land-to-the-Tiller in the Mekong Delta*, p. 328.

land in 'big fields' possessed more than 100 *công* (10 hectares) of land; despite growing one 'floating rice' crop (*lúa nổi*) a year, these peasants annually carried home thousands of *gia* of paddy.⁶⁸ Many peasants in Long Điền B recalled that, before 1975, farming was a profitable job and they enjoyed a high standard of living. Even agricultural labourers who did not have land earned a 'sufficient' livelihood (*sống thoải mái*) working for the land-rich or in fishing and non-farming occupations.⁶⁹

As in many other authoritarian states, Vietnam's new government attempted to remake the complex rural south so it would be easy to manage the population and production system in line with its existing socialist model of administration.⁷⁰ To deal with the complexity of the rural south and restrict landed peasants from cultivating beyond their own villages, officials in Hanoi issued Directive No. 235/CT-TW in September 1976:

For land of non-commune residents [*đối với ruộng đất xã này xâm canh xã khác*], if it belongs to labouring peasants [such as poor and middle peasants], let them continue to cultivate it; if the land has been classified as land under confiscation [such as the land of rich peasants and landlords], then grant it first to current cultivators of the land who have farmed the land for a long time and now do not have enough land.⁷¹

The Politburo's Directive No. 57 (15 November 1978) clarified that land confiscation would apply to the land of non-resident rich peasants, rural capitalists and upper-middle peasants. For the land of non-resident labouring people, local authorities should either mobilise landowners to the site of their land or give them other land (in their village) in exchange.⁷² In light of these directives, the authorities in An Giang and elsewhere in the Mekong Delta implemented a policy of prohibiting 'land occupying' or 'non-resident cultivators' (*cắt xâm canh*), which meant many peasants in the region, including middle peasants, had to give up much of their 'outside' land.⁷³

68 Author's interview, 3 August 2005, Long Điền B. One *công* is equal to one-tenth of 1 hectare. One *gia* is equal to 20 kilograms.

69 Author's interview, 17 August 2005, Long Điền B.

70 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

71 ĐCSVN, Secretariat's Directive No. 273, pp. 280–1.

72 ĐCSVN (2004), Chỉ thị 57/CT-TW về việc xóa bỏ các hình thức bóc lột của phú nông, tư sản nông thôn và tàn dư bóc lột phong kiến [Directive No. 57 on eliminating exploitation 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, p. 474.

73 Huỳnh Thị Gấm, Socioeconomic changes in the Mekong Delta, p. 88.

Villagers in Long Điền B commune, Chợ Mới district, recalled that this was one of the most controversial postwar policies they faced. It encouraged 'cultivation close to the residential area' (*liền canh liền cư*) and people were not allowed to farm outside their residential communes or districts.⁷⁴ According to some former local officials in Chợ Mới district, this policy enabled the new authority to control rural society and food production and procurement. They also argued that, if people were allowed to move freely, the local authorities would not be able to mobilise people into collective organisations. Moreover, these policies were a first step towards land redistribution and collectivisation. Prohibiting non-resident cultivators helped authorities appropriate the land of non-resident land-rich households and give it to land-poor and landless households in each commune.⁷⁵ In addition, the policy also helped to identify land for state farms (*nông trường*), district farms (*nông trang*) and other state organisations.

Under the non-resident cultivator prohibition, many peasants in Chợ Mới claimed to have lost land, in Tứ Giác Long Xuyên and Đồng Tháp Mười, to newly established state farms, collectives or production units. Many expressed their dissatisfaction. Some peasants resisted quietly by abandoning land and refusing any other land in exchange.

Mr Ph, a farmer in Long Điền B commune, Chợ Mới district, recalled that he had owned 7 hectares of land in another district of An Giang, Châu Thành, since 1952. After 1975, he continued to till the land for two years until a state farm was established and he was expelled. He said he felt sad to lose the land, but could not do anything about it. He returned home to borrow 5 *công* (0.5 hectares) of land from his relatives from which to make a living.⁷⁶

Mr H, who lived in the same hamlet as Mr Ph, had possessed 20 hectares of land in Thoại Sơn district of An Giang since 1954. He said a state farm appropriated his land and offered him other land in exchange, but he was very upset and refused the offered land. Eventually, he decided to abandon the land and returned home to 'raise ducks and chickens and work on a few *công* of land around the house.'⁷⁷

74 Author's interviews, August–October 2005, Long Điền B.

75 Author's interviews, 20–29 June 2005, Long Điền B.

76 Author's interview, 3 August 2005, Long Điền B.

77 Author's interview, 4 August 2005, Long Điền B.

In general, peasants were submissive and kept their true feelings private. Most claimed they feared the new authorities because they did not yet know the laws properly and, even if they tried their best, those in power would control the situation.

Some peasants, however, reacted strongly and openly confronted officials. For example, Mr Ba G in Long Điền B, who lost more than 10 hectares of land in Thanh Bình district of Đồng Tháp province one year after reunification, complained to the commune chairman:

In my opinion, what you did was unconscionable. In the past, we endured the war with you to cultivate on the land, as you know. We used to have meals and drink with you. We lived with you for many years, suffering a lot from wars. Many people had died in this place during that time. Now you say we usurped the land and you expel us!⁷⁸

He cried for hours before the chairman, but the chairman remained silent, doing nothing to help him. Finally, knowing that it was not possible to change the situation, Mr Ba G decided to abandon his land and offered a mocking goodbye to the official:

[Y]ou often said that you liberated us from the yoke of slavery, but now you put us with another yoke, the yoke of no land with which to make a living!⁷⁹

A woman in Long Điền B who lost 13 hectares of land in another An Giang district shared her story:

After reunification, the authorities planned to establish a state farm on the peasant land. We complained to the commune authorities. In response to our objection, the commune secretary organised a meeting with us. She, the commune secretary, suggested exchanging our land. I got angry and said, 'Whose land? Peasants' land or your land? If it is your land, we will take it but other people's land we refuse.' I turned back and said to the crowd: 'Those who do not want to exchange land, raise your hands.' They all raised their hands ... a man from the crowd stood up and said, 'I come from communist areas but I haven't seen anyone like you. Now we do not have any land to till.' The commune secretary could not do anything but withdrew in silence ... Then, our small group, about 20 people, went to the district authorities to complain. They said they would consider our petition

78 Author's interview, 30 June 2005, Long Điền B.

79 Ibid.

and would resolve it gradually. But nothing had been resolved until Mr Nguyễn Văn Linh ascended to power. As a result, I had to go around and work as a wage-earner for seven to eight years.⁸⁰

This ‘prohibition’ was controversial not only among peasants in Long Điền B, but also with many other peasants in the Mekong Delta. They argued that peasants in the delta had always enjoyed ‘freedom’ over where they resided, in selecting their occupations and in seeking new economic opportunities. Many peasants in Long Điền B commune recalled that people became sick and died due to depression after losing their land. A former cadre of a production unit in Long Điền B said:

Southern people valued their land highly: ‘First are children, second is land [*nhất hậu hôn nhì điền thổ*].’ Because many suffered a lot to accumulate the land during the wars, when losing their land, they were so sad that a few of them suffered mental sickness, even died of mental depression.⁸¹

Villagers considered the prohibition an ‘odd’ policy (*chính sách kỳ cục*) imposed from the north. Land occupation meant occupying the land of others (*xâm lấn*), but in reality people put great effort into reclaiming and improving their land rather than taking land belonging to others.⁸² Mr H. H. in Long Điền B recalled losing 2 hectares of land in Long Điền A, a nearby commune, and a commune official began working on his land. Mr H. H. said:

They [local officials] told me that I was not allowed to cultivate the land because I was not a commune resident. One had to cultivate where one lived. I argued that now the north, the centre and the south were united into one country, people had the right to cultivate anywhere. I did not steal anybody else’s land!

He failed to convince the officials, although he was later granted a few *công* of redistributed land when he joined a production unit in Long Điền B.⁸³

80 Author’s interview, 10 August 2005, Long Điền B. Nguyễn Văn Linh was the VCP’s general secretary from 1987 until 1992. Local people often divided the period 1975–90 into two phases: Lê Duẩn’s phase (*trào Lê Duẩn*) and Nguyễn Văn Linh’s phase (*trào Nguyễn Văn Linh*).

81 Author’s interview, 20 September 2004, Long Điền B.

82 Author’s interview, 4 August 2005, Long Điền B.

83 Author’s interview, 9 August 2005, Long Điền B.

A report of the Communist Party's Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in 1984 recognised the shortcomings of, and variation from one area to another in the implementation of, the prohibition policy. Some local authorities implemented the policy correctly by encouraging peasants who had land in two different areas (*hai nơi*) to choose only one. But in general, many local authorities were often confused about how to resolve the problem. Some considered non-residents' land 'invaded' (*coi xâm canh là xâm lấn*). They implemented the policy incorrectly, and non-resident peasants were often coerced into abandoning their land, even though they had not been given land in exchange in their residential area.⁸⁴

First land redistribution

The VCP's Resolution No. 24, Directive No. 253/NQ-TW (20 September 1976) and Directive No. 28/CT-TW (26 December 1977) called for land redistribution with the aim of 'eliminating vestiges of feudalism' and the 'exploitation of land'. In response, An Giang and other provinces in the Mekong Delta implemented these policies but often interpreted them to mean 'mobilising land donations' (*vận động hiến điền*) and redistributing land among peasants in the spirit of 'sharing one's rice and clothes' (*nhường cơm sẻ áo*).⁸⁵ A former member of the Provincial Committee for Agricultural Transformation remembered emphasising the 'sharing of one's rice and clothes' rather than 'eliminating exploitation' during reform in An Giang from 1976 to 1980. The provincial authorities also paid great attention to the economic objectives of the reform.⁸⁶

According to a Chợ Mới party cell report, during the period of military control (May 1975 to February 1976), the district 'confiscated 2,214 hectares of land abandoned by reactionaries who had left Vietnam'⁸⁷ and temporarily granted land to 3,760 landless and land-poor households.⁸⁸

84 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*, p. 17.

85 These terms can be found in Tài liệu hỏi về hợp tác xã nông nghiệp [Inquiry about collective farming] in STTVHAG, *General Information*, p. 9. Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp An Giang (1978), *Báo cáo tình hình cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa* [Report on Socialist Agricultural Transformation], 13 December, Long Xuyên: Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp An Giang; Công tác điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở quê nhà [Land redistribution in rural areas], *An Giang*, 6 September 1982, p. 1; Trích diễn văn của đồng chí Lê Văn Nhung [An extract from Lê Văn Nhung's speech], *An Giang*, 10 May 1985, p. 1.

86 Author's interview, 31 May 2005, Long Xuyên.

87 Many of them were 'boat people' who fled Vietnam by sea after the war.

88 BCHDBHCM, *The History of Chợ Mới Party Cell*, p. 173.

Afterwards district authorities emphasised ‘land redistribution’ (*chia cấp ruộng đất*) in the spirit of ‘sharing one’s clothes and rice’ among the peasants. However, the authorities persistently pressed land-rich households to share any land in excess of their farming capacity with landless and land-poor households.⁸⁹

People in Long Điền B remembered the land policy as being one of ‘sharing one’s rice and clothes’ (*chia cơm sẻ áo*) or ‘land sharing’ (*tràng trải ruộng đất*). A former commune official who had been in charge of Long Điền B’s agricultural transformation said the first post-1975 land policy he carried out in his commune was ‘land redistribution’ (*điều chỉnh ruộng đất*). In his opinion, the land reform was aimed at ‘lifting the poor up and taking the rich down so that the two classes became equal to each other.’⁹⁰

Although local authorities carried out land redistribution by ‘mobilising’ (*vận động*) the land-rich households to share some of their land with land-poor and landless households, they faced strong resistance from land-rich peasants and even from some of the intended beneficiaries. A former vice-chairman of Long Điền B commune recalled:

Land-rich people were dissatisfied with the policy. Even now they still curse us; a few carried long swords to the field to resist sharing their land. But because people at that time feared the new authorities, they did not dare fight us violently. Meanwhile, [poor] peasants were so heavily influenced by capitalist and feudalist thoughts that they refused to receive redistributed land. People said it was weird to take others’ land. It was a difficult time for us. Some cadres did not want to share their own land but we did not dare discipline them because our staff members were few. We also did not dare touch land of higher officials for fear of their revenge [*sợ bị trừ dập*].⁹¹

To overcome peasants’ resistance, Long Điền B commune authorities decided to carry out land redistribution in a way that tackled the ‘easiest first, hardest later’. They focused on redistributing communal and religious land first and then mobilised individuals who had more land (such as more than 10 hectares). At the same time, commune authorities implemented other policies such as adopting high-yielding rice, increasing the number of crops per year (*chuyển vụ*), building

89 Ibid, p.173.

90 Author’s interview, 29 July 2005, Long Điền B.

91 Ibid.

production solidarity teams and monopolising the supply of fertilisers and fuel to peasants. These policies also facilitated land sharing among peasants.⁹² A former commune official recalled:

Due to a shortage of fuel for using water pumps, people had to water their fields by scooping. It was impossible for those who had more than 50–100 *công* [5–10 hectares] of land to manage all their land. Therefore, we mobilised those who had more than 50 *công* of land to share their land with others. If they were able to manage all their land, they would not need to share it. But if not, the land would be shared with the land-poor and landless households. No land was allowed to be uncultivated.⁹³

As mentioned, however, land redistribution was not well received even by some land-poor peasants. Some beneficiaries refused to accept redistributed land because they felt ‘weird’ (*kỳ cục*) about taking others’ land or were afraid of hurting others’ feelings. Some did take the redistributed land but did not dare accept a large amount because they were afraid of being unable to grow high-yielding rice. Some others said they took redistributed land because they did not want to be moved to the new economic zones. An elderly man in Long Quới II hamlet, Long Điền B commune, described his discontent:

The policy of sharing ‘one’s rice and clothes’ was not suitable for people here. A majority of peasants did not want it. Those who had more land did not want to share some of their land because they had accumulated it with sweat and tears [*bằng mồ hôi nước mắt*]. Those who did not have land did not want to take the land of others. They feared that, when receiving land, they would have to adopt new rice seeds and two rice crops per year with which they were unfamiliar and would be unable to make it profitable.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, some land-rich peasants managed to avoid land redistribution by dividing their fields among their children and relatives. Local officials also encouraged them to do this.⁹⁵

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Author’s interview, 16 June 2005, Long Điền B.

95 Author’s interviews, June–August 2005, Long Điền B. Local peasants said that, after reunification, they were informed that the state would take the landless and land-poor to new economic zones. Therefore, to avoid going to these zones, they had to accept redistributed land.

A former production unit cadre in Long Điền B remembered that land redistribution was primarily implemented on the basis that ‘the land-rich lent some of their fields [*cho mượn đất*] to land-poor households to make a living’.⁹⁶ Other people confirmed that, during land redistribution, land-rich peasants ‘lent’ them a few *công* of land. When lending the fields, the land-rich peasants often said:

Now I lend you the area for high-yielding rice cultivation. But if you fail to grow or the state gives up the requirement of growing high-yielding rice and returns to traditional rice [*lúa mùa*], then please return the field to me.⁹⁷

This later had unintended consequences when land disputes developed between new and previous landowners when collective farming was dismantled (discussed in Chapter 6).

Despite the land redistribution in Long Điền B from 1975 to 1978 reducing land inequality among peasants, many landless peasants did not receive any land at all. A landless resident in the commune recalled that he did not receive any land until 1982; he argued that the ‘share one’s rice and clothes’ policy benefited only a small proportion of landless households because most of the land-rich had distributed their land to their children and relatives before the state could touch it.⁹⁸ In other words, the main beneficiaries of land reallocations in Long Điền B from 1975 to 1978 were relatives of the land-rich households rather than the land-poor and landless households targeted by VCP policy.

According to a Chợ Mới party cell report, by the end of 1978, district authorities had redistributed about 3,026 hectares of land (about 10 per cent of the cultivated area) to 5,474 landless and land-poor households.⁹⁹ In general, the results of land redistribution from 1975 to 1978 in An Giang province were modest. By the end of 1978, the province had taken 20,000 hectares of land from ‘landlords and feudalists’ to redistribute among the land-poor and landless households.¹⁰⁰

96 Author’s interview, 24 June 2005, Long Điền B.

97 Author’s interviews, June–August 2005, Long Biên B.

98 Author’s interview, 27 June 2005, Long Điền B.

99 BCHDBHCM, *The History of Chợ Mới Party Cell*, p. 173.

100 STTVHAG, *General Information*, p. 9.

According to a report from the Committee for Southern Agricultural Transformation (BCTNNMN), Vietnam's Southern Region, which included the Mekong Delta and the South-East Region, had confiscated and redistributed 191,931 hectares of 'exploited' land to landless and land-poor households between 1976 and 1978. Of that amount, 'Tiền Giang province had confiscated 12,000 hectares of land from 174 landlords, 468 rich peasants, rural capitalists, and reactionaries'; Long An province confiscated 15,543 hectares of land, Bến Tre province confiscated 55,600 hectares, Đồng Tháp took 13,321 hectares, An Giang 28,800 hectares and Minh Hải 19,814 hectares.¹⁰¹ The report said:

Land reform during 1976–1978 focused largely on nationalising the land of foreign farms and confiscating land of landlords, capitalist-compradors and reactionaries ... A large proportion of this land was abandoned and occupied illegally.¹⁰²

Moreover, the report revealed that, in many locations, local authorities did not know how to use the confiscated land. Some used it to establish state farms, collectives or production units or lent it to military, state or mass organisations to produce food. Only small amounts of land were used for redistribution among land-poor and landless households, despite the fact these still made up a large proportion of the rural population.¹⁰³

According to a survey carried out by the BCTNNMN, landless and land-poor households still accounted for 18–31 per cent of the rural population and occupied just 10 per cent of the land in July 1978 (see Table 3.2).

In response to this situation, in November 1978, VCP leaders issued Directive No. 57/CT-TW, which called for the continued elimination of the exploitative practices of rich peasants, rural capitalists and vestiges of feudal exploitation. The directive reported:

In many areas of the south, eliminating the vestiges of feudal and landlord exploitation has not been carried out fully. In many areas [local authorities] do not understand clearly the need to eliminate

101 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*, p. 9. It is worth noting that this report gave a higher figure for land redistribution in An Giang (28,800 hectares) than *An Giang's* report of 20,000 hectares.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

rich peasants', rural capitalists' and some upper-middle peasants' exploitation ... in many areas, party members who have come from the exploiting class still hold key leadership positions in the commune and hamlet authorities; they have not been enlightened [*giác ngộ*] about the party, nor yet understand clearly the policy of the party-state; even some try to protect the interests of the exploiting class.¹⁰⁴

It therefore urged local authorities to 'continue to be resolute in eliminating the exploitation of the exploiting class and to share some of their fields with others'. These households were allowed to retain a limited amount of land, equal to the average land per capita in the commune.¹⁰⁵

Under Directive No. 57, the speed of land redistribution and collectivisation increased in many provinces of the Mekong Delta. However, land redistribution had not been carried out seriously, and local authorities did not follow official regulations nor were they under regular and close leadership.¹⁰⁶

Table 3.2 Social structure in seven typical hamlets in seven provinces of the Mekong Delta in July 1978

Type of household ¹		An Giang	Đồng Tháp	Long An	Kiên Giang	Minh Hải	Tiền Giang	Bến Tre
I: Non-farming households	Percentage of households	3.32	1.42	1.43	2.73	1.42	8.14	2.67
	Percentage of land	0.35	0.11	0.04	0.10	0.16	0.45	0.45
II: Poor households	Percentage of households	25.50	31.31	20.43	24.20	21.09	18.30	19.30
	Percentage of land	7.70	11.80	5.46	9.21	8.17	6.84	11.90
III: Middle households	Percentage of households	47.00	45.54	56.46	59.79	50.47	63.70	71.88
	Percentage of land	33.00	48.39	47.20	65.13	53.00	67.79	73.00
IV: Upper-middle households	Percentage of households	17.10	16.64	15.23	11.79	20.06	13.00	5.74
	Percentage of land	29.48	28.20	27.30	20.29	33.70	20.40	14.10

104 ĐCSVN, Directive No. 57, p. 468.

105 Ibid, pp. 469, 472.

106 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*.

Type of household ¹		An Giang	Đồng Tháp	Long An	Kiên Giang	Minh Hải	Tiền Giang	Bến Tre
V: Rich households	Percentage of households	7.10	4.09	6.45	1.47	2.96	1.86	0.41
	Percentage of land	29.70	11.50	20.00	5.21	4.98	4.60	0.55

¹ Type I: non-farming households; Type II: poor households, including land-poor and landless households who were engaged in wage labour; Type III: middle households who had enough land for their farming needs; Type IV: upper-middle households who had sufficient land, and some of which hired wage labour; Type V: rich households who had much land and many machines and engaged in capitalist business.

Source: Trần Hữu Đính (1994), *Quá trình biến đổi về chế độ sở hữu và cơ cấu giai cấp nông thôn Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long (1969–1975)* [The Process of Ownership and Class Structure Change in Rural Mekong Delta, 1969–1975], Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, p. 103.

Table 3.3 Landholdings in and social composition of a typical hamlet in An Giang in 1978

Household type	Number of households	Percentage of households (%)	Total area of land holdings (ha)	Percentage of holdings (%)	Per capita land (sq m)
I: Non-farming households	15	3.3	3.00	0.31	657
II: Poor households	115	25.5	73.24	7.70	1,151
III: Middle households	212	40.0	314.20	33.04	2,396
IV: Upper-middle households	77	17.1	280.00	29.48	2,774
V: Rich households	32	7.1	280.00	29.47	14,563

Source: Nguyễn Thành Nam (2000), *Việc giải quyết vấn đề ruộng đất trong quá trình đi lên sản xuất lớn ở Đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long 1975–1993* [Resolving land issues in the process of large-scale production in the Mekong Delta, 1975–1993], PhD thesis, Đại Học Khoa Học Xã Hội and Nhân Văn, Hồ Chí Minh, p. 47.

Therefore, during the period 1979–81, the 13 provinces in the Southern Region redistributed only 71,292 hectares of land, which accounted for only one-third of land redistribution during the period 1976–78. From 1979 to 1981, An Giang redistributed 6,000 hectares of land (additional to the 20,000 hectares previously redistributed), Hậu Giang redistributed 13,588 hectares and Kiên Giang 4,890 hectares.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

In summary, the land reforms in An Giang and other provinces in the Mekong Delta from 1975 to 1980 did not meet the target of eliminating exploitation and redistributing land to land-poor households. Indeed, land redistribution in An Giang from 1975 to 1980 redistributed only 26,000 hectares of land, which was just 43 per cent of the target (60,225 hectares).¹⁰⁸ Despite this, land reform had significantly weakened the landed class, undermined their capacity to produce commodity rice and transformed the existing land tenure system.

Adopting high-yielding rice and two rice crops per year (*chuyển vụ*)

VCP leaders viewed the Mekong Delta as the ‘rice granary’ (*vựa lúa*) of the country and considered the region undercultivated and underexploited. After reunification, central authorities sent a group of researchers to the region and their study showed it had great agricultural potential because ‘floating rice’ and the traditional single rice crop per year were still the main crops there. Two rice crops per year would use only about 250,000 hectares of the delta’s 2 million hectares of agricultural land. Therefore, the central government urged farmers in the Mekong Delta to adopt two rice crops per year as early as the winter–spring of 1975–76.¹⁰⁹

From 1976 to 1980, provincial authorities in An Giang pushed the adoption of high-yielding rice to replace the traditional ‘floating rice’. They considered crop transformation essential to facilitate agricultural development, land reform and collectivisation.¹¹⁰ However, the adoption of high-yielding rice and two crops per year in An Giang province and elsewhere in the Mekong Delta encountered strong peasant resistance. Peasants in the Mekong Delta had a long history of cultivating floating rice (*lúa nổi*), which had adapted well to the annual flooding and other

108 In mid-1980, An Giang’s leaders announced that the province had essentially completed its land redistribution—of 60,225 hectares (see An Giang hoàn thành cơ bản công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp [An Giang has completed agricultural transformation], *An Giang*, 22 November 1985, p. 1).

109 Phan Quang (1981), *Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long* [*The Mekong Delta*], Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hóa, pp. 77–8.

110 According to Võ Tổng Xuân, the area of land used for floating rice in An Giang before 1975 was about 180,000 hectares, accounting for the largest proportion of rice-growing land. Võ Tổng Xuân and Chu Hữu Quý (1994), *Đề Tài KX 08-11: Tổng kết khoa học phát triển tổng hợp kinh tế xã hội nông thôn qua 7 năm xây dựng và phát triển An Giang* [*KX Account 08-11: Summing Up An Giang’s Socioeconomic Construction and Development over the Past 7 Years*], Long Xuyên: Chương Trình Phát Triển Nông Thôn An Giang, p. 31.

local ecological and cultural conditions. The productivity of floating rice was lower than the high-yield variety, but more stable—around 10–15 *gia* (200–300 kg) of rice paddy per *công*. Moreover, floating rice cultivation did not demand a large investment in fertilisers, pesticides, labour and land preparation. With floating rice, a peasant could cultivate a large tract of land with little effort. Local peasants referred to floating rice cultivation as ‘caring little but getting a real harvest’ (*làm chơi ăn thật*). In March (of the lunar calendar), they sowed rice and then went home until it was time to harvest. They cultivated one rice crop a year and enjoyed a lot of spare time during which they could fish and conduct other economic and cultural activities.¹¹¹

Some peasants in Long Điền B remembered trying before 1975 to adopt high-yielding rice on parts of their land; however, they had little understanding of it. The high-yielding rice required inputs such as fertiliser and pesticides, intensive maintenance and levelling of the land, but they were unable to afford such extras. Even land-rich peasants feared not being able to manage all their fields if they were planted with high-yielding rice. A secondary schoolteacher in Long Điền B who adopted high-yielding rice in 1972 recalled:

In the past, my family had adopted high-yielding rice no. 8 [*lúa thân nông 8*] on a trial basis. At that time, the land had not been levelled [*chưa bằng phẳng*] and I was busy teaching and did not have much time to care [for it] so I grew only a small amount. Because high-yielding rice had not been adopted extensively in the field, mice and all insects attacked my crops. So, the rice productivity was poor. The highest productivity I gained was about 20 *gia* per *công* [equal to 4 tonnes per hectare], but it cost me a lot [*chi phí quá nhiều*].¹¹²

Villagers in Long Điền B commented that, in 1977, soon after people had harvested their traditional rice crop, the local authorities announced the adoption of high-yielding rice and two rice crops per year. Many people refused and continued to cultivate subsidiary crops (*vụ màu*)—mostly watermelon—instead of a second rice crop. In response to peasants’ resistance, local authorities set fire to a field to clear the land for crop conversion. An elderly man whose 3 *công* of watermelon was burnt at that time recalled:

111 Author’s interviews, June–October 2005, Long Điền B.

112 Author’s interview, 5 August 2005, Long Điền B.

The authorities did things forcibly [*làm mạnh*]. My watermelon field was growing well and nearly ready for harvest. The morning of that day, my son and I went to water the field as usual. Then in the afternoon the authorities [*mấy ông*] suddenly set the field on fire without informing me. The whole field [*cả cánh đồng*] burned. Many people who lost their watermelon crops shouted and cried [*la chửi và khóc*]. Some had lost 7 to 10 *công* of watermelon. The authorities did an odd thing [*làm kỳ cục*]. They said that they did so in order to plough the field for second rice crop transformation. However, it took three months from firing to ploughing the field. Therefore, people grew more upset.¹¹³

A former tractor driver who was in charge of ploughing the field for the second rice crop recollected:

At that time, I was a tractor team member [*đội máy kéo*]. Nobody dared to plough the field but I did. Some of my relatives criticised me and considered me a person without ancestors [*người không có ông bà*]. But I knew that we could not refuse to comply with the policy [*chủ trương*]. Adopting two rice crops per year and planting high-yielding rice were compulsory so we had to follow. When I was ploughing the fields, there were some guys who carried long swords [*dao mác*] to block the tractor's path. Frankly speaking, I did not dare plough the field without the support of authorities. At that time, officials from the commune's agricultural department, commune police and even the commune chairman himself came to support us. Without them, nobody dared plough ... those who disagreed with the policy tried to intimidate us rather than openly confront us because they too were afraid of the authorities. Everyone was afraid to upset the Vietnamese communist cadres [*nói đến ba ông Việt Cộng ai cũng sợ*].¹¹⁴

Despite strong peasant resistance, the authorities used various measures to force the adoption of high-yielding rice, such as prohibiting peasants from farming outside their residential area, land redistribution and controlling the supply of rural goods and inputs. As a result, the adoption of two crops per year in An Giang increased the area under rice cultivation from 31,509 hectares in 1976 to 79,066 hectares in 1980.¹¹⁵ In Chợ Mới district, it increased from 3,120 hectares in the winter-spring of 1976-77 to 16,430 hectares in the winter-spring of 1978-79, which accounted for nearly half of the total rice land in the district. Some communes in Chợ Mới district, such as Hòa Bình, Nhơn

113 Author's interview, 29 June 2005, Long Điền B.

114 Author's interview, 30 June 2005, Long Điền B.

115 Võ Tông Xuân and Chu Hữu Quý, *KX Account 08-11*, p. 31.

Mỹ and Hội An, had by this time completed their adoption of high-yielding rice and the two-crop requirement.¹¹⁶ Phú Tân district, in which the local authorities were weak and 90 per cent of the population was Hòa Hảo, implemented crop transformation extensively, too. The area of high-yielding rice there increased from 6,600 hectares in 1975 to 17,500 hectares in 1980.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

After the war, in response to the VCP's agrarian policies, local authorities in QN-ĐN in the Central Coast and An Giang in the Mekong Delta focused on resolving postwar problems and preparing for collectivisation. Despite Thăng Bình district being heavily damaged by the war, the new authorities there and in many other districts of QN-ĐN swiftly consolidated their power and were able to implement the main contents of the VCP's post-1975 reforms. The new authorities in Chợ Mới and other districts of An Giang still faced difficulties in building government and implementing the VCP's policies.

There are at least two main reasons for the 'better' results in implementation in QN-ĐN than in An Giang. First, after the war, QN-ĐN had a larger number of ex-revolutionaries and southerners returned from the north than did An Giang. QN-ĐN cadres at the district, commune and village level had more experience with the VCP's policies and northern collectivisation and were more loyal to the party's socialist transformation of agriculture than their counterparts in An Giang. For instance, authorities in QN-ĐN carried out preparatory measures for collectivisation forcefully and simultaneously. Meanwhile, An Giang authorities implemented these policies more cautiously. Peter Nolan also shows that the relative strength and quality of the Communist Party apparatus at the village level is one reason for more socioeconomically successful collectivisation in China than in the former Soviet Union.¹¹⁸

116 BCHDBHCM, *The History of Chợ Mới Party Cell*, p. 171; STTVHAG, *General Information*, p. 14.

117 Phú Tân đẩy mạnh phong trào hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp [Phú Tân intensifies collectivisation], *An Giang*, 27 November 1980, p. 1.

118 Nolan, *Collectivization in China*, pp. 195–7.

Second, the consequences of war in QN-ĐN were more severe than in An Giang. After the war, most peasant households in QN-ĐN were extremely poor and the social and economic structure of rural communities was flattened and relatively homogeneous. Most peasants were engaged in subsistence production and struggled to make a living. Given the extremely difficult conditions in QN-ĐN, most poor and powerless villagers tended to comply with the new agrarian policies to avoid any political, social or economic disadvantages imposed by those in power. In addition, some of the new policies, such as labour exchange teams and land sharing, seemed to fit well with local culture and practices. Because of the absence of market relations, cultural patterns of behaviour such as reciprocity and labour exchange were popular in QN-ĐN.

Meanwhile, because the consequences of war in Chợ Mới, in An Giang, were less severe than those in QN-ĐN, peasant households were better off and lived in more open, highly stratified and occupation-diverse rural communities. An Giang villagers therefore had greater capacity to evade and resist state policies that were unattractive to them. Moreover, some of the new agrarian policies—such as production solidarity teams, land redistribution and prohibition of non-resident cultivators—did not fit with local practices and conditions in which market relations and private land tenure were well established. These policies therefore encountered strong peasant resistance in An Giang and elsewhere in the Southern Region (discussed further in the next chapter).

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