An Excommunicated
by
NGUYEN MANH TUONG

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A FEW NOTES FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

It is, indeed, a great privilege for us at BichHop Publishings to have the opportunity of making available this English version of Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong’s book *An Excommunicated*, written and published in French more than fifteen years ago under the title *Un Excommunié*. The foremost reason for this challenging task is our wish to promote a greater knowledge and understanding of Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong, not only among his fellow countrymen but also to other literary circles outside Viet Nam. The English language is now an international vehicle of communication, and it is our hope that this effort of providing an English version of Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong’s book will surely help people throughout the world know and appreciate the kind of life and ideas he lived through.

Nguyen Manh Tuong is an outstanding witness of his time with an exceptional intellect which goes well beyond the borders of his native land. With two doctorate degrees in Law and Letters from the Université de Montpellier at the age of 22, his case is quite unique for a Vietnamese and even rare for French nationals! Nguyen Manh Tuong’s fight for what he believed to be his country’s independence and sovereignty against foreign presence is an interesting lesson for explaining the fratricidal conflict between Vietnamese from the 1950s to the 1970s, then followed by his intellectually unyielding struggle in the 1980s and 1990s for human rights, dignity, freedom and democracy against political oppression and social discrimination, together with extreme physical hardship, is an extraordinary, tragic but enlightening experience which is worth sharing with others. To read the book “An Excommunicated” is quite an exciting adventure of the mind when one tries to understand Nguyen Manh Tuong’s thoughts and feelings but it is equally an enriching, beneficial and most entertaining journey.
To translate is always to betray a little and we do not have the ambition of escaping from this inherent difficulty when dealing with languages, especially with Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong’s tremendously emphatic manner of expression, almost a kind of speaking language to a friend but with its touch of elegance from *La Belle Epoque* and its fashionable style of writing so rich in reminiscence of words and terms from the French literature of the “entre les deux guerres,” the between-war years of the 1920s and 1930s, a remarkable period with highly distinguished French writers and thinkers, with Nguyen Manh Tuong among them. The only way to do justice to the numerous writings of Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong is for us to encourage and welcome comments from his former colleagues, students, friends, acquaintances and readers who might have known him well, are more familiar with his works, and possess a deeper comprehension and surely a better knowledge of his inner thoughts and sentiments.

There is always an endless quest for improvement and, therefore, we wish to express hereby our profound appreciation for any assistance, suggestion and advice which may help make this first English version of Professor Nguyen Manh Tuong’s book “An Excommunicated” more meaningful and useful to the public at large.

BichHop Publishings is totally free of any affiliation to any trends of thinking, whether political, social or literary. Its sole purpose is to create opportunities for ideas and thoughts to flow and interact freely among all the people of goodwill in the world.

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by

NGUYEN MANH TUONG

Author’s opening remarks:

“The conditions for the drafting and typing of this manuscript took place clandestinely and in isolation. Consequently, with regard to the mistakes and errors therein, I humbly present my apologies to all those who are interested in my thoughts and writings, and wish to undertake their publications in France.”

N. M. T.
PHOTO OF LATE PROFESSOR
NGUYEN MANH TUONG
(Circa 1995)

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FIRST PART

THE RISE TO THE CAPITOL

A few months after Dien Bien Phu I was summoned to present myself to the Northern underground organization. I thought that I would have to attend a political course, as usual. Our leaders were very concerned about their task of educating the masses and liked to evangelize to the intellectuals by instilling them into Marxist-Leninist notions which they believed to have the monopoly. By playing this trump card of theirs, they thought they would be able to impose respect to the intellectuals and, in that way, liquidate their own complex of inferiority. It was quite naïve but all the great men must have their naivety. Therefore, I braced myself to spend many long hours of listening to some stumbling orators who would not prevent me, in my usual chosen little dark corner, from yawning if not sleeping, and dreaming whatever could please me. But the resounding victory that we had achieved recently did lead me to think of something. My anticipations were confirmed when I saw a thousand cadres belonging to various services gathered in the Tan Trao region. Then we knew that we had to learn “politics” - that was the established word, in Viet Nam everything was “politics” - which would regulate the ceremonials for the return of the resistance government in Hanoi. The colonial troops were clearing off and had to hand over to the proper administrative agencies the premises with their equipment and even the Vietnamese personnel who were employed there.

The studies which we had been invited to undertake were about our attitude with regard to the civil servants who were assigned to transmit to us the services where they used to work during the time of French occupation. Our secret agents in Hanoi had already set up the file of the cadres staff, with their curriculum vitae, family status, attitudes about the Resistance, feelings about their French superiors and about France, as well as their capabilities and aspirations. Such information proved to be
precious and helped us assess the level of trust that we could give to each of them, the support that we might have from each of them and what could be expected from them. Thus, we did not have to venture into unknown territory where we could stumble over obstacles, and fall into traps.

But the sensitive question was to find out how to behave with these people whose sentiments were hidden behind the screen of politeness and smiles. Members of the Resistance must watch themselves with vigilance about their language, their way of looking at people, their gestures, in order to avoid expressing the slightest hint of contempt or condescension for their subordinates. The high dignitaries of the Party had also understood this and worked out their attitudes; unfortunately, the pack of valets making up their following did not fail at any time to display a ridiculous and harmful haughtiness. They glorified themselves for having endured pain and sickness in the resistance underground, and wanted to be paid back for their sacrifices by the unfortunate people who did not have the chance to participate in the Resistance! The harm caused by such criminal recklessness was very great. The gulf between the two sections of the population deepened even more. Among the dissatisfied, there were those who emigrated abroad, depriving their own country of their belongings, of their patriotism, offering their possessions as gifts to the countries which gave them shelter and the conditions to edify a new life much more suitable to their desires and wishes. Others, already worked up by an endless fire of hatred against communism, were looking for the right opportunity to exacerbate their resentment, constitute secret associations, establish relations with our enemies overseas, received financial aids, advices and even military support from them, with the aim of fomenting disorder, uprisings and, if possible, even a coup d'Etat. The majority of the population stagnated in indifference, wait-and-see, without much thinking or looking forward to a change of regime; they remained silent, observed, listened, refrained themselves from taking any action or showing any enthusiasm in the work given or assigned to them. Whenever an activity was done heartlessly, without joy, without enthusiasm, it could not generate effective results, and all the more so when the socialist government in spite of its proclamations – which turned out to be laughable bragging - was incapable of giving its civil servants the vital minimum of

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subsistence. These government employees, previously well paid by the French colonialists, were able to hang on to their sumptuous salaries for a while. But a few good souls among them, who were duly “advised” and given chapter and verse by the authorities, gave up under either threats or wonderful promises and initiated a motion for the equalization of the remunerations, not in the sense of bringing up the low wages but that of pushing down the high salaries. In order to make their colleagues eat humble pie, the instigators of this motion whispered into their ears: “During the Resistance, we did not have to confront hunger or cold, to risk death; we led a warm, happy and comfortable life in our homes. Is it not logical, reasonable that we give up our prerogatives, and reduce our incomes to the levels of our colleagues in the resistance? We will thus accomplish a deed of justice, we will manifest our capability of accepting a sacrifice, we will no longer be the object of other people’s scorn, we will bring about unity in the body of civil servants and, equal to one another, we will toil together for the task of national reconstruction.” More than one person was shivering from the cold while listening to these words which were inspired from high above, and all felt in their mouths the bitterness of an unknown gall. It was the taste of misery in which all the government employees were rotting!

For their part, the population themselves nurtured in their hearts a friendly curiosity for us. The same blood was flowing in our arteries, our past provoked in us the same pride and the same humiliation. Dien Bien Phu inflated our hearts with the same exaltation, the same enthusiasm. But, whatever, the resistance underground was a separate world, members of the resistance made up an original humanity, probably afflicted with customs and habits which could surprise a civilized society. One may not go so far as to think of us as savages without the use of a comb or rubdown with Eau de Cologne for our hair, or toilet soap for our skin, savages without knowing the proper way to manipulate forks and knives, but one would look at us wide-eyed while offering us flowers: one was waiting for our moves and words to see if it would be proper to give us sympathy or simply some frightened deference, if not to say indifference!

The foremost difficulty was to make contact with the intellectuals in Hanoi who had already been warned against

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communism, but their expatriation would cause considerable prejudice to our country if deprived of the grey cells which will surely benefit the foreigner instead. It was in this sector that it was necessary to avoid the blunders made by the cadres who have come out from the molds of education by the Party, and due to their presumption, arrogance, and lack of culture in the intellectual and social field!

But, according to the leaders’ assessments, the worst catastrophe would be the one which was threatening the cleanliness of the soul of the resistance cadres who, during more than a decade, had benefited from the education of the Party. When they arrived at the resistance underground, all of them or almost all of them were carrying the stigmas of the bourgeois, reactionary civilization! The stains which had soiled their spirits more than their bodies, degraded them, misrepresented their perceptions, distorted their judgments. It required many long years of Marxist studies, yearly courses in politics, criticism and self-criticism, manual labor, and frugal “Spartan fillings,” to clean their suppurating wounds, to cure them of their disabilities, if not to give a new virginity to their human metal, a guilelessness which made them malleable in the hands of their leaders!

Now that they were going to return to their old place of infection, the Party, which was imitating China, and tried to spare them of the “sugar-coated balls,” to equip them with the condoms against the political SIDA with its deadly infection, as in the case of the ordinary AIDS. What temptations would assail these Saints Antoine released in the capital? A gourmet dinner with champagne, French liquors, English cigarettes, languorous Strauss waltzes, seductive looks and captivating smiles of an alluring beauty could lead astray the savage coming out of the jungle into the maze of evil and make him sell his soul to the devil!... But were the wisdom and motherly foresight of the Party capable of containing the black tide of the repressed desires the compression of which intensified the explosive power? In those years of disgrace in 1989-1990, public opinion in the whole country was shocked with indignation and horror in face the cynic criminality of the licensed members of communism, the high dignitaries of the Party and of the State who, by their gangster-like looting and highway robbery, had gulped down billions from public
funds to satisfy their despicable passions. Never before, under any regime, such a scandal had happened, and the face of the Party was reddened by shame and blackened by mud! The sugar-coated balls had a swell game against the political education!

On October 10th, 1954, at 10 o’clock in the morning, The Resistance made its solemn entry into the recaptured capital. The military units opened the march, with the unfolded flags and rolling drums! The civilian cadres, standing on their trucks, saluted the crowd that were massed by the roadsides, shouting hurrahs at the top of their voices and waiving small paper flags. All the houses were decorated and a frenzied jubilation stirred up sparkles in people’s eyes. Now and then, the parade made stops for young girls to present flowers to the soldiers. The popular enthusiasm reached its highest peak: it was filled with sincerity and warmth! Even those whose hearts trembled a little with some regret for the masters of yesterday, who provided pleasant relationships through their generosity and civility, applauded the victors of Dien Bien Phu: their feat warmed up Vietnamese pride and restored the national reputation!

During a fortnight, the cadres were confined to the premises for their stay. We did not know the reasons for this. Was it due to security requirements? Besides the sugar-coated balls which one might have thought that they would violate our regenerated candor, was there a fear that the firearms of the fanatics or spies could bring an inglorious death to the lives of the beings that the Party had spent a decade to educate and turned them into the servants of communism? Was it a kind of fantasy which had sprouted in the mind of some leaders who were filled with the superpower of the Party and wanted to be obeyed blindly by their subjects? Whatever! Whether it was to ensure our physical security or to remind us that we were just vulgar pawns in the hands of the leaders, we bowed down to the despot’s dictates which we executed, like robots, without trying to comprehend the why of things. While we could have gone home, in Hanoi, to finally find good lodging and soft bed, we were forced to sleep on the bare floor, rolled in a straw mat, not different from the convicts who were waiting for the hour to put their heads on the bloc of the guillotine! We continued to be fed with the “Spartan fillings” of the resistance underground and, once the meal finished, we went to
wash our bowls and spoons at the faucet! It did not make any sense to impose such inhuman cruelty which was to prolong for another fortnight the separation between the members of the Resistance and their families which had already lasted during ten years? Just a few additional hundreds of steps and the kids would have been able to hold the parents in their arms and weep together because of the dreadful separation which they felt having lasted an eternity. Was the commonly held opinion not right in saying that the communists were heroes with tearless eyes and a heart in which the sense of the family had disappeared and been annihilated by the fervor that inflamed a dehumanized soul for the sake of a doctrine or religion?

As far as I was concerned, if, on the one hand, I was thrilled by the joy of setting foot on the ground of my native town which reminiscence had haunted me throughout my absence, on the other, I was languishing in sadness for not being able, in the first moments of my return, to see again my parents who were reaching the age that made it pressing for them to cast a loving look at their eldest son, knowing well the risks he had to endure for so long, and contesting neither their necessity nor their legitimacy.

Our misfortunes ended when I was notified that I was assigned to reception the Faculty of Law. Once the ceremony had been completed, I immediately rushed home where I found my parents who were in tears with joy to see me alive!

The next day, I gathered my entire staff in my director’s cabinet, an enormous room, of great stature, located on the right side at the top of a monumental staircase, facing the large auditorium where, ten years ago, I used to give my lectures and annual conferences intended for the general public.

The teaching staff had disappeared, except one, Dao Ba Cuong. The others had taken the road of emigration to go to France and were enjoying a luxurious career of jurists. I was left with three secretaries and a driver who took pride in having successfully salvaged his truck from the investigations by the colonial police. While waiting for new orders about the Faculty, whether to reorganize or disband it, we were not killing ourselves with work, particularly, after having put order to the Library and
shelved the manuals of law lectures by the side of the *Dalloz* and *Sirey* Repertories, the volumes of which used to impress very much the laymen. I tried hard to reduce the number of hours for the presence of my secretaries to only two but we could not stay there longer simply to do nothing or yawn for all day long – collectively, of course – according to communist practice. Therefore, in order to avoid the stress of idleness, my collaborators asked me to initiate them to Marxism. Nothing could upset them more than having to listen to some oafs holding forth about Marxism and displaying an arrogance good for some slapping in the face by others. I assured my interlocutors by reminding them that the empty barrels make more noise, most of the people who cited Marx have not read him and, if by any chance they happened to have a peep at the “Capital,” they could not understand a thing! The best proof being the fact that the enthroned Marxists were committing formidable errors which caused suffering to the people and provoked doubts about the knowledge of the doctrine which they claimed!

Since I had not obtained any certificate in Marxism, or gained any grades in this field, I felt too much respect for the doctors *Marxism* to interfere in their specialty. I just limited myself to satisfying the curiosity of my collaborators. I presented them with questions to which they easily gave answers. And thus, by an effective “maieutics” I was able to pass on to them the little Marxist knowledge I had acquired during my ten years of stay in the resistance underground. I made it clear to them that the Marxism I possessed and transmitted to them had the weight of less than an ounce but would allow us to unmask the learned blockheads *Trissotin* and disentangle the errors of the certified Marxists.

Time dragged on. The Party procrastinated and delayed its decision to either reopen or close the Faculty. I understood these hesitations. During many years of having practiced law at the Courts of justice as an attorney designated by the State authorities, and also thanks to the follow-up contacts with the so-called responsible officials, I was able to assess within the maze of their subconscious their sacred horror about the law! First, during the time of their clandestine agitation, the revolutionaries had hard time with the colonial legislation and magistrates. Therefore, they linked together their sufferings and sacrifices with the Judiciary

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and the Law which they considered as instruments of oppression in the hands of the capitalists. However, had they pushed their curiosity to consult the Soviet legislation and law, they would have seen that the instruments of oppression against the working masses could perfectly be turned into the means of defense and protection of the State and the Revolution against the bourgeois reactionaries. This only needed a change of hands and objective!

But, in my opinion, the communist hatred of the law has a more profound reason! There is a difference of viewpoints between the politician and the jurist, difference in mental habits and intellectual practices.

Politics is a world with fuzzy frontiers which one can cross without a passport and often without even knowing it. The ground is unstable, covered with sandy dunes which the winds shift at will, with marshes where the deadly sinking must be avoided! Here is the triumph of ambiguity. The imprecision of action and language allows the most diverse interpretations, often contradictory ones. The traveler who ventures into it must renounce the need for logic, clarity and precision, must think in the present time without reference to the past or future, must ban all morality or sentimentality and, above all, must profess a sharp and dynamic sense of opportunity!

The world of the judiciary, on the contrary, is surrounded by mountains and rivers which act as natural borders. Here, there are geometric rigor, rational logic, Cartesian precision and clarity. Between legality and illegality, there is a clear line of demarcation, as the one between white and black. Terminology identifies the ideas, defines the content, and does not permit any margin of shadow to float around them and make it possible for the equivocal to hide or a verbal act of magic to be pulled, a juggling of words! Legal reasoning provokes the clash of ideas, and the award belongs to the person with logic firmly based on the principles of law, on legal texts devoid of vain “logomacy,” in the cold serenity of the dialectics, under the freezing sun of reason!

Therefore, the two worlds confront each other in an irreducible antagonism. While the politician affirms his voluntarism, the jurist prevails in his rationality. One of them is posing the problem in the
concrete, proceeds with an analysis of the elements, an examination of their relationships and interactions, tries to bring out a gamut of solutions from which the most advantageous is chosen, and makes use of his power to carry out its execution. Such a person is not tied up by any principle, obligation, believes he is free like a wild horse galloping in the steppe, powerful like a tornado releasing its furors, decapitates the roofs off the house and drowns the fishermen in the abyss of the sea. Carried away by such a delirium, the political power takes advantage of favorable conditions to play its trump card and manifest an unbridled will. But his opportunity collides with the rigidity of the judiciary and the rule of law: therefore, he decides to sweep away the legislation and trample on the law; however, he continues to have the sleep of the Just because, in the resistance underground, the State only talks to the trees and animals of the jungle since the people, who are moved by a patriotic goodwill and aware of their duties, do not disturb the rulers’ rest.

But everything has changed after the return to Hanoi. Here, the urban opinion has retained its turbulence and even its silence which is bothering the authority. Such opinion manifests its respect of the legislation and the rule of law. Whenever its interests are harmed, it knocks at the doors of the attorneys, and the Bar Association is the rampart for justice and legality. To show its goodwill, the communist State does not see any inconvenience to keep the Bar Association since the Bench, once replaced by members devoted to and educated by the Party, decides on the outcome of any lawsuit. The internal problem can be resolved without much difficulty. But, after the return to Hanoi, the whole world is interested in Viet Nam which now have relations reaching beyond the “brother” countries to reach the capitalist ones as well. The latter have expressed passionate taste for the rule of law and are setting up agreements which are signed in a legal framework. Besides, the international institutions and organizations are looking intensely at Viet Nam and are capable of making it benefit from their favors or bear their disadvantageous decisions. By the international route, the rule of law has made its tempestuous way into the Vietnamese existence and the rulers are forced to take this into consideration.
Following Dien Bien Phu, everybody knows that Accords have divided Viet Nam into two zones, the one in the North subject to the communist Government, the other in the South put under the pro-American government of Ngo Dinh Diem. These Accords, however proper in their legal form, violate the will of the people who, since time immemorial, have always lived in a unified State. Soon, armed resistance is organized throughout the region against the ruling power, to make its first steps towards the reunification of the country. In counter-attacks, the government in the South imprisons the intellectuals, lawyer Nguyen Huu Tho and professor Pham Huy Thong, accused of being the heads of these movements, and organizes bloody repression against the population suspected of nurturing favorable leanings for the unification of the fatherland.

The cause for the unification of Viet Nam must be pleaded before an international forum and world public opinion must be informed of what is going on in South Viet Nam. In 1956, the Association of Democratic Jurists convenes it Congress in Brussels. The opportunity is magnificent, and the Vietnamese rulers set up a delegation to go to Belgium to plead our cause. In my functions of President [Batonnier] of the Bar Association and Vice-President of the Association of Vietnamese Jurists, I am promoted to be the head of the delegation which also includes the catholic lawyer Nguyen Huy Man, President of the martial Court, and Bui Lam, a high Party dignitary and assessor of the martial Court. Our mission is to get from the Congress a resolution approving the struggle of our people for the reunification of the country.

When the Sabina plane puts us down to Brussels, the day has reached its sunset. A secretary is meeting us at the airport and takes us to the hotel. The time to refresh ourselves and change clothes, we then go to the immense and radiantly lit restaurant. All the round tables, set with spotless napkins and decorated with flowers, are occupied. We are the last ones to come and sit at the unique table still vacant. With dinner done, we find ourselves in the hall and are approached by a delegation: that of North Korea. We sympathize quickly with our colleagues: our two countries have to bear the same fate.
The members of our delegation share the task of contacting the other delegations and obtaining their interests in our cause. Personally, I have to make a courtesy visit to the President [Batonnier] of the Bar Association of Brussels and discuss with the Presidium of the Congress to include our problem to the agenda. I am met by an opposition with a polite refusal: the working program is already too heavy and, furthermore, the Congress has given itself the duty of safeguarding peace and not of supporting armed struggle, even for a just cause! I am not losing courage and seek to convince the Heads of the delegations, those I consider to be the most influential, of the necessity to take into consideration a matter which is dear to our hearts. Our efforts are finally crowned with lukewarm success: the Vietnamese problem is included in the agenda but at the very end of the list! We are distressed. Experience about international congresses has taught us that, when they are nearing the end, a great number of the delegations have already picked up their return tickets and packed their suitcases! It is with a rather heavy heart and depressed faces that we are attending the closing session. We have surely made the trip for nothing. What would we say to our leaders?

A surprise awaits us. When the last intervention has been read, the Vietnamese delegation is invited to take the podium. We have not expected such a gracious gesture since closing time has arrived; I simply take the floor as soon as the presidium announces that the closing session will be prolonged for fifteen minutes... My heart is overwhelmed with joy and beating wildly, and it is with a voice filled with emotion that I go on to develop my thesis.

A struggle, even an armed one, with the aim of rooting out the wrong, or eradicating injustice, oppression, barbarism, and all the obstacles blocking the way to the progress of peace, very much constitutes the prelude, the first stage of the journey to reach peace and to safeguard it. Latin wisdom teaches us that, in order to have peace, one has to prepare for war. Is it not that no antinomy opposes war to peace, that when a war of aggression is killing the peace, a just war is, on the other hand, the means to acquire peace, to win it and protect it. Only a bleating, infantile pacifism institutes between war and peace a struggle in-contrario, an irreducible antagonism, as between day and night. Who can
accept such an absurd viewpoint of things? I present the sentimental, racial, historical, linguistic, economic and social reasons which campaign for the just cause of the Vietnamese people.

In my peroration, I address my audience in the following terms: "Dear Polish and Hungarian friends, only yesterday, you were suffering from the tearing up of your countries; dear Korean and German friends, you are presently victims of the same misfortune! But luckier than us, you do not have to see with your own eyes the contortion of the faces, to hear with your ears the screams of human beings with the same blood running in your arteries, the same heart sharing your loves and hates, of those who are now twisted in pain in the hands of the executioners!

"I do not know if, among the colleagues who are listening to me, there are people who have to witness through their professional obligations the execution of their clients. It was during the time of the colonial occupation. The Court in Hanoi condemned to death a Chinese pirate who, in the Ha Long Bay, had killed a dozen passengers on a motor launch. I was assigned for his defense and had to be present at his execution. His face of a brute did not inspire sympathy, but his final look, when he put his head on the bloc, did give me feeling of pity. I looked away when the blade fell and neatly cut his neck. The blood gushed out, the head dropped to one side and the body to the other, into two coffins filled with sawdust.

"Well, dear friends, this guillotine, dated from the last century, is now used to cut the throats not of criminals but of patriots who are fighting for the reunification of their fatherland and, even more so, to terrorize the population and curb their patriotism!

"And the Hien Luong river, with such a gentle name, which splits up Viet Nam in two, is it not but a sword plunging into the live flesh of our people, taking apart families that, from one side of the riverbank to the other, cannot see themselves with eyes flooded by tears. The river is not moving water but tears of women and mothers, and also the blood of all those who, at the risk of their lives, try to cross over that river and have fallen under the bullets of the patrolling swift-boats.
Dear colleagues, in the course of our careers, we have had more than once the opportunity to assist espouses in divorce. At the preliminary session of conciliation in the chambers of the President of the Court, you surely do not forget the depressed appearance of the parents, and even more so the eyes filled with distraught and tears of the children looking at the father then the mother, again from the mother to the father, with a certain feeling about the painful tragedy caused by the separation of their parents, the breakdown of the family's happiness, the drama of the mounting sufferings which will sweep away a human community which members, only yesterday, endowed the home with noisy joy but tomorrow will go and weep each one in his or her corner over the irreparable misfortunes. How can an attorney remain unmoved by the disintegration of a family, especially when the burden of sadness falls on the children?

"All the more so, dear colleagues, in Viet Nam right now, it is not a single family that is stricken, but millions who are lamenting in distress, in anguish! The 17th Parallel is not an abstract line, of a purely geographic nature, but a Hertzian wave which is diffusing throughout our country and the world the moans, complaints and cries of millions of people who are torn apart from one another, without any plausible reason, and who accuse the human cruelty of having imposed on them the martyrdom of separation and solitude! The same wave is broadcasting the shouts of anger and hatred of the patriots who, by tens of thousands, have died under the bullets and on the scaffold, solely because they wish to realize the dream of a life in a unified country, in pace with themselves and with others!

"I just pronounce a sacred word: Peace. We are gathered here to assume the guard for Law and Peace. It is in the name of this Peace that our delegation has been denied the inscription of the Vietnamese problem into the agenda of the Congress. Certain comrades, surely motivated by good intentions, but concerned more with the sounds than with the profound meaning of words, have claimed that an armed struggle cannot be supported by a Congress for the defense of Peace! Fortunately, they have returned to their senses in time and common sense has triumphed; here I am at the podium to present my wishes to your
high consideration for support to the efforts provided by our people of establishing peace in Viet Nam by way of reunifying our fatherland!

“We understand well that, following the heavy sacrifices endured during the Second World War and particularly after the proclamation by the atomic bomb, the times of the Apocalypse have come, humanity - which is paralyzed with fear – now feels the pressing need for peace and for its safeguard! But this fear, turning into obsession, the War-Peace antinomy being spread among the population, is being simplified through its vulgarization, is becoming hazy, is reinforcing the opposition between the two terms which forbids the dialectical passage from one to the other, in both ways. The ordinary people cling to the superficial aspect of things and set up an insurmountable barrier between the vocabularies, one denying the other! It belongs to us to overcome an approach which is purely phonetic and semantic, to penetrate into the living and moving content of the terms, to conceive them in their concrete realities and their mutations! We have mentioned the Latin saying: *Si vis pacem, para bellum* [if you want peace, prepare for war] must be understood, not in the sense of a harmful council, but one which has no frontier between peace and war.

“We can remember that in 1938 Neville Chamberlain brought back to London the Munich Agreement and declaimed that peace was saved! Error: that peace was only the prelude to the war which broke out in the following year! On the contrary, when a war is carried out with irrefutable legitimacy, with the aim to defend the just cause, against a foreign aggression, to regain the independence of a State and the freedom of a people, to suppress the division of a country into two zones and to transform the tears of suffering into tears of joy, is such a war not the prelude of an equitable, stable and proper peace which brings and reunifies scattered family members back to their common homes, ends the weeping of the innocents, makes the withered flower of the smile blossom again on their lips, returns happiness and hope to their hearts, enables the martyrs regain the taste of life, be reborn to the human condition! In the language of the humans, or at least of our souls, this kind of war calls itself PEACE!
“Is it not our duty, we, the democratic Jurists, to facilitate the establishing of such peace on earth by giving support to the struggles having this final outcome, and magnificent conclusion: I take the liberty to submit this problem for your high consideration! It is hoped that our people will not be deceived in their aspirations and receive from you a precious encouragement which will allow them to provide new efforts, to bear new sacrifices for the sacred cause of justice, the rule of law and peace!”

Our efforts are crowned with success and we obtain the resolution expected by our people!

On the way home, we are invited by the Czech delegation to stop over in Prague for some working sessions. We acquiesce to its desire.

**Dialogue with the Czech Jurists**

The exchange of views is done in French and concerns the bar association which is a problem of great concern for many jurists in the communist world. Our host opens the discussion:

- In a country where there is the functioning of the separation of powers, the judiciary power, through the intermediary of the Courts of Justice, applies the law and punishes the delinquency. But, in order to set into motion the judiciary activity and obtain the application of the law, in all conscience and responsibility, the ordinary people are not capable of defending their interests. Therefore, there is a need for them to have recourse to the good offices of the bar association, all the more so when the State intensifies its coercion, when the social relations are complicated, increasing in numbers and intersecting among themselves. The first problem that we raise is to know whether it is necessary, or fitting, to be granted an authorization by a political Organ for the exercise of the profession of lawyer.

- I am in the position to satisfy your curiosity. In France, in 1931, when I took the oath before the Court of Appeal in Montpellier, no authorization of any kind was required. In order to undertake a
profession considered liberal, it would be ridiculous to alienate one's liberty to beg for some sort of authorization.... Even the matter of nationality was not necessary, at least for those who were called French subjects. The only two required conditions were: a law degree, this is to say, proof for a minimum judicial education and no criminal record, that is to say again, proof of good morality.

- That seems to be judicious. Why then, in the communist countries, does the political power have the pretension of putting the hooks on the bar association and rule that the profession of lawyers is subject to its goodwill?

- That can be explained. In a communist country, the Party possesses the monopoly of power. At all times, during the period under absolute monarchy as it is under Communism, the possessor of power never accepts any sharing of it! To perpetuate the function, maintain it with its privileges, expand its range to infinity, drill its depth to the extreme limit, in short, set up a tridimensional despotism, the most complete autocracy possible, the sharpest, the harshest, the most absolute of any other thing in the world, and in history. Under such a regime, liberty is an aberration, an insanity which must be extracted from the people! Therefore, there is no career whatsoever in the liberal professions, no lawyers, no medical doctors, only civil servants on the State's payroll and executing punctually its orders! Since the Party and its head can neither ensure their omnipresence nor exercise their omnipotence, they are forced to have recourse to the services of people whose unique virtue, if there is virtue here, is to obey blindly, automatically the master's orders! The resulting effect being that all those who are holding positions in the administration, from the highest to the lowest levels, excel not by their knowledge or competence but through their lack of culture and ignorance! In some countries, the ministers of Education have not even graduated from their secondary grades, the ministers and vice-ministers of Justice have never attended a Faculty of law. How, then, in such conditions, can a genuine bar association function? Enslaved completely to the ruling power, a bar association cannot fulfill its traditional mission.

- How can this happen?
In the first place, the ruling power chooses the persons to be assigned to the bar association: most of them are retired civil servants with starving pensions at a few illuminated youngsters just out of so-called law schools where the teachers with some scant knowledge of the Russian language dispense a varnish of soviet legislation. This bunch of people provides the State with a crowd of obedient valets in style. Likewise, those who are tormented by a certain desire of independence are immediately expelled from the bar association and lose a large portion, if not to say, the totality of their incomes. What else is needed to demand from these people an unchallenging servility?

Furthermore, the “people’s defending officials” – appellation given to them and to remind them well that they are not lawyers with legal knowledge who are exercising a liberal profession - neither have the right, - nor possess the material means – to set up a private practice. They are part of a corporation having an office which is used as a place of work and reception of the clients. People just rush to each consultant as a swarm of flies does with a lump of sugar. The rates for the “fees” are set by the State. This organization responds to a double requirement. First, the principle of collective work is applied in this case as everywhere else. Then, the gathering in corporation is to the advantage of the Party direction that puts in its own creatures and names the President [Batonnier] of the Bar Association who, of course, is one of its dignitaries, completely devoid of any legal knowledge but an expert in the art of command and even of military command.

Why is the Party so keen about the bar association?

First of all, it is because any ruling power is conditioned by a certain trend, a vocation for absolutism. But the communist ruling power is much more subjected to this than others. To affirm its domination - which they may well be aware of its precariousness - communist power invents all sorts of subterfuges which include among others the collectivization of properties, but even more so that of people. By putting people together people in a common organization, the Party controls them more easily, more effectively, and obtains an economy of personnel composed of Argus and Cerberus henchmen. Besides, by depriving men of their use of
reason and speech, the Party reduces them to the ranks of beasts, infuses in them the conditioned reflexes which turn them into robots. It is not without reason that *Circé* transforms his prisoners into pigs endowed with the unique behavior of jumping on their trough at a given signal. All the holders of power dream of possessing the wand of the magician.

But, if the Party is exercising an extreme rigor on the lawyers, it is before anything else because the lawyers are intellectuals and an object of hate by the autocrats, because the lawyers have a mind which thinks and a mouth which talks, and these two attributes indispose the rulers, complicate their functions, upset their planning. Yet, among the crowd of intellectuals, the lawyers stand out by their legal knowledge, fluency, handling of discussion and critique and, furthermore, they have the sense of dignity, honor and responsibility. They situate themselves at the antipodes of the robotic fauna which all the autocrats feel the obsequiousness of flunkies. And, then, in the exercise of their profession, quite often, the defense of their clients before the penal jurisdictions leads them to an attitude of disrespect, even of insolence, in any case to that of opposition against the governmental legislations and politics. With regard to the popular masses, while the “people’s defenders” blend themselves into the multitude of the bowed heads, the lawyers themselves stand up to the height of their statures and draw attention and, therefore, become subject of the rulers’ hatred. They follow the example of *La Bruyere* and put themselves on the side of the people.

- Can it be said that the lawyers constitute a group apart in the world of the intellectuals?

- God protect them! They have the shortcomings of the intellectuals, do not seek sacrifices, do not have the vocation of martyrs, avoid the coups, and often fall for opportunism. But, as intellectuals, they are democrats and democracy flows in their blood. I think I am able to affirm that the bar association is a criteria of democracy, that in a country where such a criteria prevails and a bar association of authenticity functions, democracy triumphs.

- Tell me, how can such a system exist?
- It is easy to understand. In the exercise of its activity, and enjoying the freedom of speech, this is to say, the freedom of opinion, the lawyer denounces the arbitrary of the authorities, the injustices of the legislations. No autocracy accepts the authorities to be questioned, the insanity of the legislation be exposed. It is only in the democratic countries that the people can see such a spectacle.

- But is it possible for a bar association, that is aware of its duty and able to brace up its courage, to demonstrate democracy and make the wheels turn?

- A good question! The bar association can only fulfill effectively its role as far as possible only when it has, facing it, a Bench with its independence proclaimed by the Constitution, and itself also conscious of its duties. The Bench must be fearless as well as upright, manifesting a fierce resolution to apply the law and defend justice, without any concern about career interests or personal fortune to be fed by corruption. The Bench and the bar association, with honor and dignity as their essential virtues, are the two pillars of democracy.

    The Bench and the bar association rejoin themselves in the same conception of their professional obligations, in the same respect of the law and legality.

- But the judiciary power only controls the execution of the law and sanctions the violations. It merely represents the third of the democracy.

- Furthermore, by itself, it is defending democracy only at the structure to which it participates. Democracy, which consists of “the government of the people by the people for the people,” concentrates itself in the hands of the legislative power which draws up the law, and of the executive power which enforces it. The danger may come about when both of them claim the right, through their privileges, of putting themselves above the law. The fundamental principle of democracy proclaims equality for all under the law. The corollary is the coexistence of the three branches of power in their interaction of check-and-balance, with
the mutual exercise of control and neutralization among themselves in a certain way, forbidding any one from going astray of the right path, falling into deviations and marginalizations, in order to guarantee the triumph and stability of a Government by the people and for the people.

Thus, the fracturing of power in three does deprive the dictatorship of the possibility to concentrate all power in the hands of one single person. The risk of economic and social catastrophes caused by the political monopoly of the Party, or more precisely by its head, is avoided or reduced to its strict minimum.

The Czech jurists are astounded by this intrusion of politics and monopolistic power into the rule of law and by the Party’s seizure over the State, thank us for having dissipated their anguish. Previously, they were able to observe the harm but could not carry out the analysis of the causes, due to the fact that, in their closed world, they could not receive any information from the outside, and were looking at a population bent on their knees before their idol and singing together the same litanies to the glory of their master; they did feel the peril in a confused way but did not see the remedy to dispel it. At least, they now have a glimpse of the medicine for the illness with the ravages that they can observe. We have opened their eyes and brought to them the gospel of democracy. We have lit the fire of curiosity in their minds, they will search for ways to feed their thoughts from their research works, and when we part we nurture in our hearts the hope that they as well as their people will see the dawn of true democracy shines at the horizon!

Dialogue with the Soviet Jurists

Arriving in Moscow, on our way home, we are received by the democratic soviet jurists. Being the head of the delegation, I am put up at the Hotel Metropole, facing the Bolshoi. The apartment assigned to me is sparkling with ancient luxury. Cristal chandeliers shed light on sumptuous furniture of the tsarist epoch, but the bathroom is shining with modernity. A Zim Zis automobile is put at
my disposal and in which I can even lie down on the ideally soft back seat. However, I am somehow apprehensive to speed at 120kms per hour although my driver is highly experienced and has full control of the steering wheel. Still, he often smells vodka…

We are worked up by curiosity and wish to be informed of important problems. But we have to curb down our curiosity since we know that, in our communist world, it is improper to ask questions which our interlocutors are embarrassed to answer. The rule of silence applies to them as it does to us. Therefore, as usual, we abstain ourselves from questioning, we restrict ourselves to just listening to a report duly read and read again, surely corrected by the “responsible people” of the Party. One can easily know in advance its color, tone and content. After the usual diatribe against the rotten capitalism, comes the lauding of the success gained by communism and, particularly, the execution by one hundred per cent of the annual plan, and finally crowned by the praises for the Party and its leader. But this time, our soviet hosts have broken the tradition. First, there is no report on the activities of the jurists. Then, it is proposed to us to discuss the problem of State Responsibility. Astounded, we almost jump out of our seats. It is the first time that these two terms State and Responsibility are linked to each other, and that the problem about the responsibility of the State is raised. We ask ourselves if the ideas of the XXth Congress of the Bolshevik Party have made their way and if the influence of Khrushchev has gained around in the country. Whatever! We are happy that our conversation with our soviet colleagues starts under such auspices. There is nothing more attractive than to stroll along the paths of heterodoxy and toy with a heresy which, a few years back, would have led us straight to the execution stake or a prison in Siberia!

Our soviet host welcomes us with a smile: - “I see in your eyes a flash of surprise. Yes, very much so: we will discuss about the problem of State responsibility. When Stalin was still alive, this subject was taboo and one would run great risk by making a slight allusion to it: The State was never responsible for anything. Now, we are less tied up and can, within our circle of jurists, discuss many issues!”

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- We congratulate you for this and are happy about it. May we also, in the near future, enjoy full and complete freedom and have free-speech in the course of our discussions!

- Even today, as we are in a closed salon without any indiscreet ear listening to what we say, we can have free rein to our thoughts.

- Strange epoch, strange world! The jurists are behaving like conspirators, trying to hide themselves from the policemen and spies. But they are conspiring for law and justice. It would be extenuating circumstances in case they were to be arrested and arraigned before a court.

- Or aggravating circumstances when facing the communist judges whose intransigence, as it is well known, is caused by their sacred horror of law and justice.

- We are now at the heart of our subject. If the communist State, as in the time of absolute monarchy, declares itself irresponsible of its activity, it rests with us to dwell on the gravity of this problem. Man distinguishes himself from the animal and puts himself above the latter, thanks to virtues which are his own. But conscience, dignity and honor are related to morality and concern the individual being. The more his soul is enriched with moral values, the better he obtains respect from others. But the city, which honors the holiness, does not demand its members to come in. The community life, in which the human contacts take place and social relations are organized, demands that each person must be responsible, if not to say for his thoughts and feelings as long as he keeps it deep down inside himself, for at least his actions to the extend that they cause prejudice to the material, corporal and moral interests of the people around him. Public order can only be maintained if any violations of the law and damages to other people’s properties are punished and compensated. Thus, in the civilized world, it is very much this individual and personal responsibility which constitutes the corner-stone of the social fabric.

But the permanent danger which hangs over the States in the world is the fact that all the despots on earth are putting
themselves above their people, giving themselves privileges which monopoly they hold, setting themselves above the law and professing irresponsibility, that is to say, refusing to accept that their wills and acts could be subjected to discussions and critiques, that their errors be acknowledged and chastised.

- The despot is like the wife of Caesar: above all suspicion. Messalina, nevertheless, roams the streets of Rome at night! Of course, no despot proclaims his irresponsibility for he knows well that irresponsibility is the prerogative of children and lunatics. Even then, if the word is not used, this does not mean that the thing does not exist. In spite of his dull origin and lack of culture, as in the case of the despot, he is unaware of the abnormal aspect of the situation. In order to justify his privilege, he claims superiority: he exalts with connections which he claims to have with the supra-terrestrial. He declares himself the “Son of Heaven,” the “Chosen by the Lord” or considers his own self as the incarnation of the State. Louis XIV declares: “the State is Me!” Four centuries later, De Gaulle, to whom the people want to award an honorific distinction, will say: “The State does not give itself a decoration”!

- By acquiring, cheaply and without proof, a divine origin or an identity of pure abstraction, by personifying the State, the despot imagines that he is above the people and, therefore, exempts himself from all responsibility. Communist despotism prides itself of atheistic materialism, does not claim having divine origin. It does not pretend to incarnate the State either. Popular forces have hoisted it up to power.

It would be interesting to analyze the process, which is not the same as the one at the time of absolute monarchy.

- In the 17th century, in France, when the monarchy just gained a difficult victory over the feudalists, due to disruptions provoked by the system of feudalism (which did not yet accept defeat) and also by the bourgeoisie which was enjoying full ascent together with its voracious greed, the power of the State came down to earth from heaven. The emblem of the “Sun-King” [Roi-Soleil] was only the representation of the royal aspirations and did not carry any meaning from heaven. Louis XIV declared “The State is Me!” But,
when he considered himself the incarnation of the State, he did not acknowledge his duties with the people. *La Bruyere* and *Fenelon* denounced the horrible poverty-stricken conditions of the people but the monarch did not feel responsible for this situation. The historic words which he declared only maintained one single idea: he was firmly determined to use his personal power to quash any hint of rebellion, kill the infectious germs of dissension and division which were wearing down the still wavering unity of the country. The enthroning of Louis XIV was regulated by the dynastic laws, but the political struggle which he undertook against the feudals was supported by the people, and the financial, intellectual and “parliamentary” bourgeoisie that took the direction. If he were not the victim of his own vain silliness, had a perception which was more concise and precise with regard to his present and future interests, he would have relied on the people, and France might have made the saving of a revolution.

- As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, the people have got out of the hardships which inflicted the masses at the end of the reign of Louis XIV. He was even given the benefit of enjoying the glory and greatness of a Superpower. But God knows at what price for this! Since the death of Stalin, thanks to the more or less orchestrated indiscretions, and also thanks to the lamentations of pain and outcries of hatred from thousands and thousands of families, throughout the country, who weep for their children or husbands executed or persecuted to death in the jails and prisons of Siberia, the truth about Stalin has become known. The revolutionary State, which just came into being, was staggering, and its enemies, from within and outside, aspired for its doom. It was necessary to have a man of iron fist to guide its steps, to enable it live on and grow. The results have exceeded its hopes. From a weak State, economically poor, backward, he has turned it into a military power capable of defeating Hitler’s fascism and into an economic power as well which has occupied one of the forerunning places in the world. Stalin has well deserved the gratefulness of the people who have lived the most glorious hours of their national history. Unfortunately, he has also committed monstrous crimes of which the files are piling up year after year.

- The process by which the communist despot in Viet Nam has acceded to power took place in the usual manner. The multitude
of the masses in the countryside, worked up by the agitators, have become aware of their misfortunes and understood the causes for this: the feudal exploitation and colonial oppression... On August 19th of 1945, taking advantage of the favorable historical circumstances on the international stage and, on the other hand, the catastrophic famine which has decimated the population, the agitation is pushing the survivors to rise up and destroy their enemies, to conquer through fierce struggle what is needed to feed and clothe them. The targeted objective is simple, concrete, it seems to be modest but, nevertheless, the communist despots have failed in their attempts to reach it. However, the slogan: "Rice to fill the stomach, warm clothes to fight against the cold" is sufficient to make the masses of peasants fanatical and prompt them to follow the revolutionaries. Therefore, the revolution triumphs thanks to the support of the popular forces. But the revolutionaries feel the necessity to confirm their victory, to legalize their power under the cover of elections for the National Assembly. It does not matter that the quasi-totality of the electorate are illiterate and ignore the meaning of the voting to which they are invited to participate, they give in to the call made through skillful propaganda and go to the polls. The legal formalities are honored, "democracy" rules and the revolutionaries are gloating for having sealed their union with the people.

- Is there a need for anything else?

- Apparently, that is enough. But one must go beyond the appearances and try to get hold of the reality of things. Although the voters may not be able to read or write, they have given their votes and expressed their will. It is here that tragic misunderstanding, as some people call it, bursts out. The communists have imagined themselves as having conquered the hearts of the people. But it is an illusion that sooner or later they will have to get rid of. The good reason for this being that, in 1945-46, the number of people - less than the number of fingers of your hands – who, back from Moscow or China, consider themselves having some vague and cloudy knowledge of communism.

- But to whom have the people given their votes?
- The answer you will get is that the people have given their votes to Ho Chi Minh, not to the communist who has well hidden his game and does not make any allusion to the struggle of the classes, but to the scholar of traditional billing, with the unavoidable goat-beard, who has only one word in his mouth: "National Union, Great National Union" which means that he places himself at the antipodes of the class struggle. Some old and well-informed communists have even whispered that he should have done his self-critique before Stalin! Whatever happens, the name of Ho Chi Minh has become a talisman which prevents misfortune and brings happiness. His personality cult is set up, he is idolized, his name is put on everything, his authority is used to make the masses eat humble pie as much as possible (1). Thus, is it not the myth of Ho Chi Minh expressing a nationalist rather than communist meaning, while the Party – intentionally or not – tries to pull the blanket to its side and grabs the benefit of the popular trust!

- This is a misunderstanding but why is it tragic?

- It is so because the Party, deluding itself about its own self, thinks that it can edict its policies, products of its childishness, voluntarism and subjectivity, violates the laws of science, turns its back to reality, and sooner or later will precipitate the country into poverty and the people into misfortune. Besides, with the belief that it is invincible, the Party thinks it can tyrannize people, plays with their lives, indulges in injustices and acts of inhuman cruelty, as in the course of the agrarian reform, the painful souvenirs of which cannot be forgotten in the people’s memory. Therefore, the problem concerns the responsibility of the State and, more precisely, the despot that is governing it.

(1) Even in the last epoch of his life, when he was assigned to his little wooden house at the edge of the Botanical Gardens, and even after his death, in his grey mausoleum, locked up inside his crystal sarcophagus, Ho Chi Minh has served as a sacred relic, offered to the devotion of the masses, to the curiosity of the pilgrims; his prestige is still exploited to impose on the people measures which may well displease him.
The examination of history in the world and in time reveals constant traits which must be remembered. Firstly, even in the ancient epochs of absolute monarchy, the role of the people is predominant, even if it does not play at the fore of the political stage. All the coups d'Etat, all the revolutions, can only succeed with the support of the popular forces. Marxism is right when it proclaims that history is made by the masses. The doctrines, theories, can be drawn up in the brains of the individual beings, but the acts, in their effectiveness, are subjected to the capability and dynamism of the masses. The Marxists teach such a truth, but the despots forget or neglect it. The enthroned despots move away and isolate themselves from the masses, no longer listen to their voices, grievances and aspirations. They cause damage to the interests of the masses, turn a deaf ear to their complaints and claims, and even kill among themselves.

Therefore, it must be recognized that reciprocal obligations are generated between the despot and his people. The people hoist the despot to power but, he is there, he has to respect the interests of the people and, within his possibilities, must increase their interests both in number and importance. A *synnallagmatic* contract is created between them, not in written or verbal but tacit form, based on historical and social tradition. As soon as the despot has violated his obligation, causes prejudice to the interests of the people, he has freed the people of their commitment, is exposing himself to sanctions taken by the people which may go as far as capital punishment.

Furthermore, in the course of his reign, no despot can fail to do both good and bad. But all the good deeds that he can offer to the people cannot exonerate him from the responsibility of his bad doing. It belongs to the people to pass a sovereign judgment on whether the good or the bad prevails. If the good wins, and the scales tip considerably to his side, then he will rightfully earn the gratitude of the people, and be in the Parthenon where future generations will honor his memory! But, if the scales dip all the way down with the bad, then, in the course of his life, he will be overthrown and, after his death, his name will be cursed forever!

The case of Stalin is typical. He has done a lot of good things as well as a lot of bad things. But no one dare make an accusation
against him for the bad things he did because the risk is too big. Worse still, people compete in praising him! But now justice is beginning to perform its task and the principle that we are formulating comes from the bitter and painful experience which we have lived through. From now on, no despot can claim that the good he has done should dissipate from people’s minds the responsibility for the crimes which have unleashed horror in the honest souls. Such a responsibility is penal. Various circumstances may lessen or aggravate the fault but cannot dismiss it!

- It is not the despot who is judged here, it is the man who has to answer for his crimes. But, when it concerns the faults and errors which are related to a line of action or policy, the devastations can be widespread and disastrous, the responsibility of the despot is nevertheless considered only political… No wonder, on the scales of human values, the lives of people weigh much heavier than the material properties that they possess. However, there are cases when one deplores a person’s loss of life caused by negligence, carelessness, or even the intentional offense on the part of an administration within the competence of the State. Of course, if the defendant acts intentionally, he has to bear the personal sanction provided by law but, often, does not have sufficient funds to pay damages to his victim or the latter’s next-of-kin. The State assumes an indirect responsibility, by the fact that it is concomitant, and the culprit is acting within the limits of the competency given to him. Otherwise, it would then be a collective damage caused by an administration that, in the execution of an order given by the State or the despot, is causing prejudice to the material interests of one or several private citizens, without intentionally doing harm, therefore, the State normally must make compensation for the damages incurred by its employees. In France, the principle concerning the administrative responsibility of the State and its administrative collectivities is recognized. There are administrative courts with, at its highest level, the State Council [Conseil d’Etat] that is enjoying the right to cancel totally or partly any administrative decisions which cause prejudice to the interests of the private citizens. Unfortunately, and I do not think that I am making a mistake in affirming that, in the communist world, the States refuse to assume an administrative responsibility and do not organize any administrative jurisdiction with the power
to judge the State and administrations, in their attributes and administrative competences. Therefore, it is an immense domain in which the despot and the State act the role of Caesar’s wife. The under-despots and mini-despots take advantage of this situation to oppress and exploit the people with whom they have daily contacts.

- The domain of political irresponsibility is even larger and the resulting damages are immeasurable and irreparable. The State is only an emanation of the Party and the despot holds in his hand all the power! The people are represented nowhere, and their tongues are severed. All the organizations are made up of creatures belonging to the Party, or to its devotion, and all of them are exercising the wooden tongue and offering to their Master the bended back. How is it possible in such conditions for a voice to be heard and asking for the overthrow and replacement of the despot, or even, to put forth a suggestion, to offer an advise, in view of stopping a racing car moving at breakneck speed on the path of the bad? Everything is decided at the shop and back-room of the Party, the Holiest of the Holy surrounded by the impenetrable Great Wall of China!

One cannot talk about responsibility, law, when it concerns a tiger ready to devour the set prey. Never before in the history of the planet, has it been seen that the thunders of Zeus and the magic wand of Circe are held together by one single hand, that such a perfect apparatus for domination and coercion has been set up and functions with terror to lubricate its wheels! Furthermore, at least up to now, no communist despot has ever been subjected to popular condemnation. They die in their beds. If voices are heard in the corridor of his death chamber, they are not singing the glory of his cold cadaver but trying to divide up his looting remains and, all the more so, to exchange some yelling and find out who will succeed him!

Our analysis has resulted in recognizing the failure in the responsibility of the communist despot while exercising the tri-dimensional activity of his power. It must be understood that the irresponsibility of the Master is due to, first of all, the sophistication of his methods of constraint and coercion, and also the inertia of the popular masses. If the mouth is muzzled, the hatred always
boils in the heart; however, no one claims responsibility for the fate of the fatherland and dares hoist the banner for the revolt. The eastern peoples have simmered, during many long, long centuries in a comfort-zone where warmth and pressure are maintained by the authorities that have successfully infused into the soul of the masses the feelings of bulimia, apathy, a gloomy and heavy indifference to everything and everybody. The sense of responsibility is what is most lacking in the people! The dignitaries give the example, make abuse of their powers, for frivolities and embezzle public funds, practice corruption and despotism. Their example is followed by their off-springs. In the hospitals, the sick are dying for not having money to bribe those who have the duty of providing care to them. At the examinations and competitions, the subjects of the tests are sold to whoever is able to buy them. Everything is there for first come first served. The wind of irresponsibility blows over the whole country and the performance records of delinquency, cynicism, are broken! Immorality turns innocence and honesty into derision.

The irresponsibility of the leaders, in all the domains of political and administrative activities, does not constitute an abnormality. It adorns society with its crown of shame!

- You are in agreement with us. But what are you getting at?

- We want to stress that the triumph of irresponsibility cannot last forever. We do not wish to be fortune-tellers or prophets. But life has taught us a lesson of dialectical change: from the worse, the best will come. Whenever a bad thing has been pushed to its utmost degree of intensity, it will by itself produce its own cure.

- Explain yourself, and give us reasons to hope!

- There is no witchcraft here. Our revolutionaries exhort the people to insurrection, make them feel shame because of their inertia. A worm, the most insignificant animal reality, twists itself when it is tramped upon. To what extent will even the vilest people accept to be exploited by the feudalists and oppressed by the colonialists?
Such language castigates those who are entrenched in their lethargy, their cowardice. Let a “favorable” situation come! A famine which scatters the blackened cadavers in the fields and on the village paths! With all the weights, misery and death bear down on the living skeletons that will stand up and unleash their attack against the bastions of feudalism and colonialism. The Revolution scores an irrefutable victory.

There you are, we can ask ourselves whether or not the leaders will, after having made some concessions, continue to cling to their political monopoly and irresponsibility, continue to isolate themselves from the world, to push misery to its extremes! There is the time when millions of people can no longer remain with their folded arms, but will have to march against despotism and autocracy. Let us remind ourselves that people make history, do and undo power! Since the Party is no longer doing its duty, no longer carrying out its obligation to work FOR the people, it will be put back to its place BY the people who are taking back in their hands their own destiny. The tacit contract between the holder of power and the people is severed. The triumph of the Law without any logomachie or vain words! After the reign of irresponsibility, the accession of responsibility will begin its dawn.

- Perfect! This is within the logic, the norm. But, from our viewpoint, the problem may be looked at from another angle. The legal optic has its reason for being. But, the value of the social optic must not be denied either. You know that, in no other country, under no other regime, has morality been praised to the skies. Facing the rotten and agonizing capitalism with its corrupted rulers, the revolutionaries are posing themselves as incarnations of virtue, exalting the purity of their feelings, the spotlessness of their souls, the holiness of their morality and customs. The figurehead of the communist vessel is represented by Ho Chi Minh with his now legendary apparels, the two faded kaki outfits and sandals made out of old tires. Indeed, the miserable proletarians seeking the peasant masses to their cause, have fair game in obtaining the support of people who share with them the same conditions and same aspirations. As for those who have the means to enjoy life, the task of impressing them is done by the personality of Ho Chi Minh, whose goatee beard of the traditional scholar can seduce and carry them away. Therefore, it
is in a unanimous upsurge by all the people, uplifted by a common enthusiasm, that the revolutionaries pursue their struggle and achieve victory.

Through the trial, the thinking heads begin to realize that the revolutionaries, whose patriotism and heroism deserve praise, lack the culture and talent to lead the people to higher destinies! The often disastrous errors which they commit raise doubts about their intellectual faculties, but do not tarnish, lessen the trust that people have for their morality. Unfortunately, due to the irresponsibility for their power, which opens the door to all kinds of offenses and crimes, the dignitaries of the Part, whose signatures have their worth in gold, allow themselves to be infected by the virus of money and let themselves sink deeper and deeper into the stinking marshes of vice. Their subordinates, encouraged by the impunity of the Greats, will be their accomplices, and organizing themselves into gangs. The time will come when the gangrene will infect the Party in its ongoing endeavors: it will no longer enjoy the popular trust which it has given so much time to win over. Already devoid of talent and culture, and now without public confidence which is used as sole foundation for its domination, which was gained by its morality and will be lost by its immorality, I will present itself to the people as a poor and naked tramp, and we doubt that it would be able to retain its political monopoly. It is possible that the leaders of the Party may not be implicated in the same manner as their collaborators, but they have to be held accountable for the latter, and this responsibility, by other person’s action, will cause the ruin of the Party which credibility will be dissipated by the wind of bitterness and contempt blowing throughout the country. As long as the guilt is limited to isolated cases or a small number of its members, the Party will sweep them under the carpet in order to preserve the whiteness of its ermine! But when the scandal reaches outrageous proportions and it is no longer possible to hush it, the Party will be compelled to lend a deaf ear to the political complaints. It will seek the degrading silence of convenience rather than the bursting into great daylight of multiple lawsuits with fallouts which will forever discredit and destroy its prestige from head to bottom. Whatever solution that the Party may then take, it will lose on two accounts. The political will give way to the moral, and the moral will call on the participation of the law to put a close to a past of sufferings in
order to open at last an era where the lights of reason and justice will again shine on the reinstalling of the Law and the proclamation of State responsibility and of those who personify it.

Of course, this is not for tomorrow but it is worth our time to wait for it!

Let us hope that what you are saying is true. Let us hope that the day when we celebrate the return of the law and justice in the communist world will not be too far away!

When we part, we shake hands for the last time, we look in each other’s eyes and feel that we all share the same thought. The same ideas meet and similar feelings are in communion: “We, the intellectuals, are a bunch that are cursed by those who hold power and, particularly, the communist despots. They are passionately filled with discipline, while our blood is boiling with indiscipline. They are the ones who delight in seeing bowed heads, breathing the incense of flattery, performing the illusionists’ tricks, setting up acts of grandiose spectacle. As for us who have very stiff necks, we keep the face upright, the look straight forward, the observing eye and the critical mind. Instead of saying stupid things to please, we prefer to keep a silence which is known to be reproving. We see clearly through the eyes of the magicians, we can perceive the hypocrisy in the formalism, we can guess the knives hidden in the sleeves when they are doing their bowing and scraping. It must be recognized that we are impossible people. Furthermore, we do not know where we will be or what we will become tomorrow!”

The looks that we have exchanged with one another are filled with meaning. We know that we have understood one another.

Our two delegations are in agreement about the same wish to be conveyed to the Soviet and Vietnamese communist Parties:

“Allow us to present you with our wishes and propositions. The power which has been conferred to you must not be used to quash the people, to persecute and to batter the people: whoever claims the right assumes obligation, whoever claims power assumes responsibility. If you want the people whom you govern respect
order and live within the legality, on your part you have the duty to ensure their well-being, to guarantee their happiness. Should you succeed in this, your glory will prevail over centuries and you will enjoy the eternal gratitude of the people!

But if struck by folly, insanity and madness, you let yourself plunge the people into poverty and misfortune, practice despotism, injustice and inhumanity, then you will not last long! Even if you die in your bed, the people's malediction will exhume from your grave your decomposed cadaver and give it to the jackals and vultures! Your name will be nailed down in History, your memory will be stained by an ignominy which will never be removed by the centuries to come!

In Rome, when the victorious general received the honors of triumph, to help him sober up from the intoxication of the applauds, a slave was put by his side on his chariot to whisper into his ear: "Remember that you are a human being!" Likewise, the Law murmurs to the ear of the Political "Your role is to serve and not enslave the people!"

Back in Hanoi, we are warmly congratulated for the unexpected success which we have achieved at the Congress in Brussels. A dinner is given in our honor by the minister of Foreign affairs.

It is during such events that we are informed of the arrests in South Viet Nam of two leaders of the Movement for the Safeguard of the Saigon-Cho-Lon peace: lawyer Nguyen Huu Tho and professor Pham Huy Thong. The father of Prof. Thong, Mr. Chan Hung has designated me as counsel to defend his son. The Foreign Affairs Minister and the President of the Supreme Court encourage me to accept this new mission. I send a telegram to the Court in Saigon to inform it of my assignment and request it to let me know the date of the trial. But the government of Ngo Dinh Diem refuses to let me enter Saigon. Fortunately, the matter does not have any further doing, and the trial does not have to take place because the accused have escaped from their prison.
SECOND PART

THE TARPEAN ROCK

1.

THE NHAN DAN AND THE GIAI PHAMS

Upon my return to Hanoi, I am submerged by “honors”. Dean of the dying Faculty of Law, Vice-President of the Association of Jurists, President [Bâtonnier] of the Law Association, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy, professor at the University in charge of courses in European Literatures, member of the Central Committee of the National Fatherland Front, as well as member of the Committee in Hanoi for the same Front, and member of Friendship Associations of Viet Nam-France, Viet Nam-Soviet Union, member of the Committee for the defense of peace in the world, President-founding member of the Doan Ket [Unity] Club of Intellectuals,… Enough to fill both sides of a business card! ...

These “grandeurs of the establishment” do not bother me, my modesty does have to suffer from it, and I do not feel either larger or diminished. I know well that it is just for the show, and there is no need to be either glorified or offended by it. The communist regime practices a passionate cult of formalism: It fills its world with parodies. The most pompous and high-sounding titles do not adorn living beings but puppets with human forms that are manipulated by someone among them, or behind them, or above them. The actors who are performing on stage belong to the outdated world of the dumb movies. Since the silent cinema and communism came to be about the same epoch, it can be asked which one has influenced the other.
I have asked myself why am I given all these gravies. Is it because I have been a figure with qualification or representative of something? I do not think so. Such a concern has never crossed even lightly the minds of the leaders. They imagine that, by installing a certain guy in a high place, they can transform him into a high-caliber personality and, likewise, by pushing well-known personalities into darkness they can neatly disrupt the respect that those people enjoy from the public. But that is an error. Many people benefiting from the favors of the Party are sinking into the insignificance of the anonymous, even in the full splendor of their functions! On the contrary, the personalities whose talents and virtues are enjoying public sympathy continue to be honored by public esteem, even when they are not invested with any shining role!

Is the Party having views on me and would like to inflate me, and turn me into one of these clowning monkeys doing numbers on the circus arena to provoke the laughter of the kids? Already in 1951, in the northern underground movement, in the midst of the resistance war against colonialism, I was proposed to join the Party, but I declined that honor. In 1946, before going to the underground movement with my parents and family, I donated all my properties to the Revolution and to the People. During the entire period of the Resistance, I accepted all the sacrifices and exercised my double profession of professor and lawyer in the service of the people. Member of different Vietnamese delegations, at four international Conferences, Dalat in 1946, Peking in 1952, Vienna in 1953, Brussels in 1956, I have played an active role and obtained some modest successes... It is possible that the Party may wish to congratulate me by promoting me to functions which are honorific but at last honorable as well. But I already know that the Party has a very short memory and forgets easily the achievements to which it gave recognition in the past once one is subject to its anger. Even communists with high notoriety, who had shared time of imprisonment with the presently enthroned leaders, were not able to have mercy from the latter’s intransigence and cruelty.

In the ruling committees of the mass organizations, it is the habit of the Party to put known intellectuals as assistants to the Party members who take the wheel and drive the car. The
puppets who sit at the Presidium, proclaim the opening and closing of the meeting, are applauded feebly and applauded back also in the same feeble manner. This practice has become routine, and is indicative about the kind of close collaboration between the intellectuals without-a-party and the communists. I have well understood this and am not surprised about it. I am waiting for the Buddhist wheel of human vicissitudes to turn on and have me ready to face misfortune with a lively heart.

It is at that time in Hanoi that the intellectuals are going through a crisis of enthusiasm. The movement of the “Hundred Flowers” is surging across the Vietnamese territory. People who, until then, have been suspicious and doubtful about China – but not about its cuisine and tea – unaware of the going-on behind the scene, throw themselves into the movement wholeheartedly. Without reliable proof, precise information, they immerse themselves with delight in the high tide of euphoria, and the democratic fury so long withheld and compressed is now exploding itself into daylight in streams of vivid colored rays of light, showers of blue sparkles. A newspaper appears: the NHAN DAN (Humanism) is quickly grabbed by the readers. Then a magazine is published, the “GIAI PHAM(s)” (Beautiful Works.) The boiling minds are projecting fireworks.

It is then that Nguyen Huu Dang comes to interview me for the NHAN DAN and solicit articles by me for the GIAI PHAM. I have known Nguyen Huu Dang since he came to visit me sometime ago and took me to meet President Ho who asked me to prepare the thesis that the Government was going to defend at the Dalat Conference in 1946. He (Dang) is a communist that I can trust. At that time, I do not frequent the Vietnamese writers and journalists, due to the lack of time and opportunity. Therefore, I have not met any of the associates of the Nhan Dan and the Giai Pham(s) and have not attended any of their meetings. But, since I have been informed of the trend of the movement and the direction it has adopted and is defending, I willingly accept to make a modest contribution to this movement which is answering my wishes and aspirations.

In 1928, during my second year at the Faculty of Law, I have my first contact with communism which, at that time, is solely
soviet and is babbling its first words. In two hours of lecture, the professor in political economy teaches us the basics of the Marxist-Leninist economy. Afterwards, during the ten years in the anti-colonialist resistance, I also learn about Marxism. The speakers modestly call themselves “rapporteurs” coming back from either Peking or sometimes Moscow. Their methods of study and teaching retain my attention for they allow me to know the characteristics of the communist mind. The course in Marxism is divided in lessons and each future “teacher” becomes specialized in one of these. They absorb the knowledge instilled by the Chinese and Soviet teachers, turn it into the content of a 2-hour lecture which they draft and submit to their responsible officials for the critique. Then, when they give their lectures, they simply read their texts, without adding anything of their own, in the fear of committing any ideological improprieties and deviations which would cost them dearly!

I have learned two things: the professor is lacking in personality and individuality. He is a simulator and can easily be replaced by a tape-recorder. Secondly, the communist mind carries out an operation which is completely its own: it encloses itself within a small area of land, digs in depth, without any concern whatsoever for what the neighbors are doing!

I am fairly intrigued by this working method and have the curiosity of finding out how communism would train the medical doctors. A young man is chosen, one who has revealed himself to be intelligent and capable, in the course of learning the alphabet, but very much inflamed by his fervor for the Party. He is to be trained a military surgeon specializing in the operations of the arms and legs. During at least five years, he would serve as nurse, then assistant, in the sector of the countryside hospitals, butchering hundreds of limbs and ending up with some knowledge of the anatomy to help him find his ways with the muscles, tendons, arteries of the arms and legs. But his competence stops there and his knowledge does not go beyond that.

Thus, the Vietnamese communist education does not waste its time in giving theoretical lessons and providing general knowledge to its students. They learn “on the job,” in the concrete, and, instead of pushing their curiosity to an immense field, they choose
a hole, bury themselves and dig in it as much as they can! The particular is preferred to the general, the depth to the extended. In the hurry, time must be saved, and one has to train not "an honest man who knows everything and is serene" but a man of the trade and for just one trade alone! It must be recognized that this is in the logic of things: communism, wishing "to catch up with capitalism" and be in tune with modernity, cannot have the luxury of interesting itself in the general culture and producing "minds that can think."

The courses in Marxism which I have attended do not serve me much. What I know of it, I find that through the life I have led in the communist world since 1946. The relationship I have had with the men, the observations that I have made on the Party and its policies, on the State and its institutions, the opinions that I have heard, the spectacles that I have witnessed, together with the inspirations from the thoughts which feed my wakes and furnish my solitude, all these constitute the best approach that I have about communism. Generally speaking, people who are concerned with such a problem are usually driven by their passions and adopt categorical positions. They are For or Against communism! Personally, I think that such attitudes lack in relevance and justice, in nuance and objectivity. The Party is not pampering me, the "honors" which it has bestowed on me are merely window-dressing and have not brought me or my family any advantages of a substantial nature such as those given by the Party to people who know how to coax it, worship it and bring to its lips the silly smiles of satisfaction. On the contrary, although I have given undeniable evidence of my patriotism, have served with loyalty the people, the Party is condemning me to a journey in the desert, already for thirty five years and I will give a painful account of it in the coming pages. It will be acknowledged that I have the legitimate right of exercising revenge for the suffering I have borne. All the enemies of communism are waiting for me to unleash my furors against that communism of which I have been the victim. But people must forgive me! I have adopted the attitude of the philosopher: to understand and not to judge. Comprehension requires the examination of a certain thing in all its aspects under two angles: the qualities and shortcomings, the recto and verso, the good and bad. It leads to justice and the intellectual is only concerned with being just!
There is no need to reiterate that the communists have participated in the struggle for liberty and national independence. Indeed, it is not the first time that the country has been victim of a foreign aggression and it is not the first time that it has come out of it gloriously. The people’s patriotism, therefore, has been the constant factor and profound cause for victory. But the popular forces do not constitute the instrument for national liberation. This instrument only reveals its value and efficiency in expert hands to handle it and bring out the best effect of it. It is in the honor of the kings who have known how to appoint military leaders whose genius and competence enable the soldiers to manifest their heroism and will for sacrifice. These three assets are of equal importance, and it is from their simultaneous interplay which results in triumph. It would be both unjust to award the merit to the communists and deny their contribution to the final success. What matters is not to elevate too high or minimize the role of communism, but to situate it at its place where it belongs!

However, under the direction of the Party, the adhesion of the people to communism produces in the long run disastrous consequences. The first monumental error, unforgettable, has been that of the Agrarian reform which, not only provokes the massacre of tens of thousands of innocents, but also diminishes the prestige of the Party, and compromises the dogma of its infallibility. Eyes open, distrust arouses the examination of the Party’s policies, and the “thinking minds” get out of their lethargy to assume a relevant critique of the Party’s platforms and viewpoints before anything else.

Personally, my observations, analyses and reflections allow me to reach a few conclusions with regard to the errors of the Party. First, what strikes even the uninformed people is the total, servile, submission to the Soviet and Chinese big brothers! This complete abdication concerns not only the ideology, which the Vietnamese communists advocate the Soviet and Chinese orthodoxy and defend with intransigence and harshness against the slightest expression of disrespect or discord, but it also manifests itself even in the manner to dress, to have public or private meetings, the forms of courtesy address and savoir-vivre etc… Viet Nam is losing its personality to become the reflection, the similes of the Soviet Union and China.

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The similitude is first expressed in the economic field where one can find the same policies of planning, the arbitrary fixing of prices, the State monopoly in the sectors of production, domestic and external trade, the policies for the grabbing of all the profits, compensation of all the losses, the choice of employees and the calculation of their remunerations. The omnipotence and omnipresence of the State over the country, everywhere, the suppression of all initiatives and all private interests, the absence of any competition, any relationship between the costs of production and the selling prices, will sooner or later lead to economic stagnation, to the coming decline of the economy which is totally regulated by politics and turning its back to all the laws, value and efficiency which have been demonstrated throughout many centuries.

Furthermore, never before have contempt and hatred of the law been displayed with such insolence. The State is an emanation of the Party. It is forbidden to have any incursion or even a look into the legislative and judiciary domains. The principle about the infallibility and irresponsibility of the leaders open the door to all kinds of fantasies, insanities, liberties, and consequently to criminal acts by the cadres at all levels, by all the members or creatures of the Party. Never before have the people been condemned to a more degrading and harmful silence, for it deprives the rulers of all the suggestions, propositions, views and advises that the people can offer for a better management of the State and improvement in the conditions of the State’s subjects. Unfortunately, the laws “voted” by the people’s assemblies, the courts set up by the Government, are aimed at one and only objective: bring to heel the people and maintain them under unconditional subjection by the authorities, whatever they may be and however extravagant their wishes. Nevertheless, in order to fool public opinion in the country and abroad, it is proclaimed endlessly that everything in Viet Nam is done by the people and for the people!

The scientific laws, the realism in the structuring of the economy are disdained. The infallibility and irresponsibility of the leaders, which cause the uselessness of the institutions in the legislative and judiciary systems, are proclaimed. All this harmfulness is crowned by a law which, under a metaphysical
appearance, overrules politics and the economy: the law of change. The communists pride themselves in their observations on the dialectics of change which they teach to their disciples. But, in fact, they do not give two hoots about it. They just sink into their armchairs of leaders, make the superb declaration that they will die there where the Party has installed them! The profane quickly understands that the fight for power, particularly for the supreme positions, is ferocious, that the autocrat will not renounce his seat at his free will! Consequently, the gerontocracy has become a communist directive. But it is very much in the sectors of the economy, of production and trade that this law of immutability reveals all its disastrous inconveniences! In the modern world, where the techno-scientific revolution is in full swing, the modes of production, transport, telecommunication, information, movements of people and goods are changing so quickly. It took several millenniums for agriculture to enable people to establish their settlements and human civilization to initiate its evolution, and many centuries for the discovery of new sources of energy to generate the civilization of the mechanics and permit the growth of industry under multiple forms, it has taken only about three centuries for science and technology to reveal the secrets of the macrocosm and microcosm, to discover unbelievable raw materials, to ensure the marvelous triumph of the electronics and data processing. Greek philosophy has given a striking picture of the mobility of things when it declares that one never bathes twice in the water of a river; on the contrary, the communists persist in denying change, in defending the permanence of their economic and political institutions, in taking roots in their place.

Facing such a situation, what can I contribute to the movement of the Hundred Flowers? I am not opening a debate on the great problems. I stick to points of detail, but they constitute the criteria of democracy: I wish that the despot loosens a little his harshness, that he does not put a muzzle to the National Front of the Fatherland, that he no longer demands the judges to ask for orders from the Party with regard to the judgment of a offense or crime. Just minor matters, and as people say, nothing to make a fuss about it! I am not a fighter, even less a daredevil. I have no taste for the polemical, all the more so when it is a fight between a wooden sword against a steel one! My other colleagues, professors at the University, historian and sinologist Dao Duy Anh,
philosopher Tran Duc Thao, literary critique Truong Tuu, adhere to the same trend of democracy and keep the same reserve with the authorities that are well known by everybody for their vocation of executioners, medieval inquisitors, all crudely camouflaged under the make-up of ideas about the class-struggle, and the defense of the Marxist orthodoxy.

The Vietnamese intelligentsia, especially in Hanoi, in its great majority, - at least, among those using the pen and concerned with liberty and intellectual honesty, including the non-demobilized military writers – the Army, as it is known, being the bastion of the revolutionary spirit in its purity and authenticity – have stood up in unison at the call of democracy and are denouncing the political tyranny on the intellectual activity.

However, soon afterwards, Viet Nam learns with horrifying astonishment about the massacres, in China, of the Hong Ve Binh [the Red Guards] ordered by the ruling authorities.

The information reaching Viet Nam indicates that the "Cultural Revolution" is merely a trap for the liquidation of the enemies of the Maoist regime. They, of course, include the intellectuals who are naive enough to believe in the words of the communist dictator and sing the hymn of democracy devoted to the dominating powers in the Celestial Empire, but also communist militants with spotless past who are unwilling to accept the influence of the Great Tiller! Hordes of Red Guards spread out all over the territory and, overheated by the hatred against the enemies of Communism, release their violence turned fanatical by wonderful promises. They attack unarmed innocent, victims of an inferiority complex with regard to the murderers whose furor and ferocity are endlessly stirred up by the authorities. Blood flows freely, and the Chinese humanity skips over a red tide which wets its feet, while its eyes are inflamed by the red light coming from the flags, banners and standards which are gloating over the houses and public buildings. But, when the genocide comes to an end, with no more throats to slit, the Red Guards, in their turn, have to expiate for the blood-thirsty ardor by falling under the bullets of the machine-guns, in the common graves, by the order of the monster that wishes to erase the living proofs of his abominable crime! In the world beyond, assassins and victims meet and shed together
their bitter tears over dead illusions and betrayed faith! The Cultural Revolution drops its curtain over the death of the people of culture and the death of Culture itself.

In Viet Nam, the trial begins and involves writers, journalists, teachers, whose sole challenge is to gibe at the manias and ridicules of the communists. They are accused of shooting arrows of the mind against public power and force. These recalcitrant people are charged with opposition to the Party and counter-revolutionary infection. But in the arsenal of repression there is no text which deals with such a delinquency. Whatever! One can quickly be worked out. But a repressive text providing the application of punitive action cannot be made retroactive. No problem! The text will be antedated and the trick is done! As in the Ancient City, the law is a secret which the priests and judges retain the monopoly. What can be more appalling than a practice used thousands of years ago be revived by the communist State that tramples on the law and only seeks to neutralize, annihilate people suspected of lukewarm feelings towards the Party, in disregard of any justice and equity! Why at all bother about a text when one has power in hand?

Such a logic gives off a smell of the jungle, of tribal savagery. What jurist true to his function would accept to quell his conscience, to curb the upsurges, in order to comply with the desire of the political authorities from which he expects wonders? Yet, there is always one to be found and willing to accept the degrading task of condemning the intellectuals, and that one knows well the latter’s innocence before the law. This magistrate, the most typical of the valets of his kind, has the following portrait!
2.

A VIETNAMESE MAGISTRATE

He was born in a province which has provided the country with revolutionaries. In the modern Vietnamese society, the spirit of one’s regional roots has again taken its flight. Each locality is boasting about its products, natural resources, the success of its agriculture, of its handicrafts, its budding industry and, naturally, its great men! Formerly, the emphasis was given to the poets, generals, and the state-men who had served well the monarchy and the local population. Now, the fashion has changed. Revolutionary values are exalted and “heroes” are turned into gods and able to claim over thirty years of Party membership. Each year, the Central Committee invites them to formal ceremonies and, at least once, people of the same province are gathered for friendly meetings and sometime feasts.

He bears a skinny face with salient cheekbones hardened by austerity. His eyes lack of brightness and his smile always appears to be forced, deprived of any joy. His thinness of an ascetic, likely the fruit of an existence of average condition without luxury but free of shortages, does not predestine him for feminine conquests but rather makes him more suitable for studies and working wakes. One can suppose that he has made the company, not of nice and fresh faces, but of those jurists ever compiling the Repertoires of Dalloz and Sirey. Although still young, he moves around with the severity and dignity of a money-lender. The astrologers can predict for him a future of magistrate: never, is he without a leather briefcase always filled with papers and books! He has done good legal studies and has earned his license en droit, bachelor-in-law.

At the time when he acquires his diploma, his classmates, most of them, have chosen careers in the colonial administration and, particularly, have become auditors or customs inspectors, clerks at the first instance courts and appeal courts of the French judiciary. There, they enjoy substantial salaries, the possibility of living in the cities and lead a pleasant life. As for our magistrate, he has opted the career of a mandarin which may not provide more freedom but
dispenses much more considerable incomes thanks to the wonderful corruption monies heaped on him by his subjects.

Evidently, the mandarin’s career, which is ridiculed at will by jeers from the satirical magazines *Phong Hoa* and *Ngay Nay*, does retain some semblance of prestige, not due to the ridiculous qualification of “father and mother of the people” but due to the advantages provided by wealth: a luxury villa in Hanoi, brand new automobile, banquets at the great Chinese restaurants in the Street of the Sails, big feasts in the night-clubs where young and venal beauties call themselves “singers” and offer their clients nothing more than the song of their nudities!

Therefore, our hero turns himself into a mandarin, he accepts to be the hard head for the reporters filled with modernity and to join a hierarchy in which order and discipline often impose vexations and even humiliations. People do not think that his choice for the mandarin profession results from the passion of lucre, the thirst for corruption-gifts. It seems that he has left behind at his county the good souvenir of the mandarin “with integrity.” For what reason, then, has he opted to become a mandarin? The taste of authority, ambition of a career, respect for ancestral and family tradition which honors “the good father and mother of the people” and, may be, there was one in the history of the family? Does it really matter much for what reason? The essential thing, which deserves consideration and is later on repeated, is the fact that our hero goes about with his important functions at the Tribunal of Hue!

The triumph of the Revolution tolls the bell for feudalism. The throne of *Bao Dai* collapses in general indifference. The career of the mandarin dies out, by lack of candidates, the worm-eaten contingent of cadres crumbles away. The “father and mother of the people” are now trying to be forgotten and put on a new skin after having extorted so much money from their children and displayed so much servility to their superiors, both French and Vietnamese. The metamorphoses are sometime amazing.

Our jurist, then, leaves the career of mandarin and chooses to join the Bench of the people’s democratic Republic! His choice is significant and reveals a certain side of his soul: the need and
thirst for authority and power under their two aspects: kneeling down before the superiors but trampling down on the subordinates.

Since he has been promoted judge at a “popular” tribunal, I often have the occasion to plead before him, in both civil and penal cases. I have not failed at any of these occasions to decipher the character. I notice a certain tone in his voice, together with a certain movement of his eyebrow, a certain look shooting out from his eyes, all these make me think that our magistrate is thinking very highly of himself and despises people who have not reached his intellectual and social level. In the course of some encounter with a political notable, from whom he is waiting for an instruction, I have noticed that under the deference which he is displaying, he is concealing a certain pride that he has of himself: he feels he is superior to his interlocutor, and the often sharp answers that he gives back amply show this! He is endowed with dignity and character, and does not accept to be trampled on. Perhaps, like La Bruyere, is he cursing the fate that forces him to be at the service of those who do not measure up to him. He is struck by a complex, alternately, of inferiority and superiority which is condemning him to hostility against the Greats and to hatred against the little ones. He covers himself with the authority of the former in order to exercise his own authority over the latter. Confirmed in his function of member of the Appeal Court of Hanoi, and while waiting for a promotion to the Supreme Court, he is quenching his thirst for the third-rate honors by getting himself into the ‘socialist’ Party created by the communist leaders in order to fool public opinion at home and abroad, give itself a cheap certificate of “pluralistic” democracy and rally the intellectuals to the communist cause! He even succeeds in having himself nominated secretary of this Party’s Committee in Hanoi, and its representative in Ha Noi’s Central Committee of the National Front of the Fatherland. The ambitions and opportunism, which insatiable thirst cannot be satisfied by all these “institutional grandeurs” that he covers himself, draw up with precision the psychological profile of this Vietnamese Julien Sorel who is hanging at the tails of the communist leaders, without obtaining any of their favors and protection.
The communist Party is shrewd: within the policy of Unity and Concord which it advocates by the intermediary of the National Front, very much to conceal its secret purposes as well as manifest publicly its tolerance, it refrains itself from making the entire class of mandarins its enemy to death. It distributes to them a few caresses and smiles to calm down their worries and, even, turns a few of the members into government officials. It cannot find more zealous persons than those with a "stained" past who feel the compelling need “to redeem” themselves! No woman can display louder prudery than an old lady-sinner. And, while securing the devotion of people who have “sinned,” the Party is able to prove its extended viewpoints, its tolerance, its absence of prejudices and vindictive intentions.

But the beneficiary of the “Let’s be friends, Cinna” does not feel much assured for that matter! Therefore, in order to give himself some respect as well as provide some pledges to his new masters, he plays a double game: authoritarian in public, but obsequious when meeting with the chief! The more he is obsequious in private, the more authoritarian he is in public. But he does not fool anybody, not even himself!

Our magistrate makes himself known by the judgment of a unique trial in the judiciary history of the civilized world. Sometime after the return of the Revolutionary Government in Hanoi, it has been decreed in the high spheres to indict before the criminal court a professor-of-letters considered guilty for having corrupted the souls of his students by explaining to them “The Isolation” [L’Isolément] by Lamartine. Since Socrates, everybody knows, when the City wants to condemn an intellectual to drink the hemlock, it accuses him for having corrupted the youth! Communism has revived a practice of over two millenniums old. At all times, the autocracy dreams of shaping the people to its image, especially the youth bearing the future. Adhering to its political line is the educational line, its corollary. The School is given the mission of forming the people who, tomorrow, will become the ones to carry out the politics of the governments. Any deviation perpetrated in education incurs the same gravity as that of a deviation in the political line proclaimed by the leaders.
This is in the logic of things! But what is disastrous here is that such logic bears the dead-weight of something which has been obsolete for more than two thousand years! Who dares to claim that communism is making \textit{tabla-rasa} of the entire past? I do not raise the problem as to what objective must education be aiming at, the man or the City? I take note here only of the fact that the communist education gives itself the duty to form the man for the City, so that he must devote himself totally to the service of the City, and enables it to reach its aims.

In such conditions, the man formed by the education of the City is merely the tool of its policy and nothing else! One would like to know what kind of socialism that is, one which does not exist anywhere else, except in the minds of the theoreticians. Whatever! The leaders, who are priding themselves on realism and materialism and condemning idealism under all its forms, do resort to their imagination in order to edify the prototype of socialism. Drawn into a boundless eclecticism, they insert, in the human prototype, all possible virtues: to be read in the legislative texts, the administrative circulars, are those long paragraphs with their eulogistic styles which relate the vagrancies of the communists in the kingdom of the utopia! Among the features, which characterize the socialist man of the morrow, the emphasis is given to the joy of living, \textit{la joie de vivre}, the optimism. If it were true, socialism would bring happiness to the being, he would blossom into the \textit{joie de vivre}, in optimism. Have the leaders anticipated that the existence under the socialist State will be gloomy under the weight of the constraints and interdictions which tie up the individual, darken his days and push him towards sadness and despair? In spite of everything, there is an undeniable fact: in the eyes of the communists, the dejection, apathy and pessimism constitute the proofs of moral decadence, political deviation, reactionary error, counter-revolutionary mistake!

The unfortunate thing is that, once installed into power and waiting for the introduction of the required reforms, the leaders proclaim the keeping of the \textit{status quo}. While the elite and most of the cadres from the colonial regime have migrated overseas, those who have remained continue to keep their functions and benefit from their old remunerations, and this has created frictions between the \textit{“collabos”} [collaborators] and the \textit{“maquisards”}.
[Resistance fighters]. This is the case of the teachers. The professors in sciences do not run into any risks until further notice, since science is not suspected to be reactionary. However, the professors in letters teach romantic poetry as before, since the scholastic program has not been changed. As Lamartine opens the series of the great romantics, there is no question for him to be eliminated. Therefore, our defendant explains as usual the Isolement, analyses the state of a depressed soul, unsatisfied, weary of a world born from the 1789 Revolution and, in his melancholy and loneliness, and yearning to fight into a different universe where he would find hope and love...

At the time, the on-going slogan is to remind that the “enemy is everywhere and is hanging up its creatures everywhere”. The maintaining of the general security demands vigilance in a state of alertness, the sending of professional spies to all the meetings, as well as the mobilizing of amateur and bona-fide spies to wander around continuously in the streets, pavements, public gardens and squares, in all the coffee-shops movie-houses and theaters, in each communal dwelling or building of collective use. All the private mails are listed and checked, the postal censorship functions night and day, all the radio-sets are under watch, especially at the hours of broadcasting by the foreign stations. In the services, in addition to the agents in uniforms, there are in each working room the concealed spies who are all ears and eyes. The exchanges between people, particularly with a foreigner, are subject to a vigorous control, and no one is surprised that the mail gets lost on its way and never reaches its destination! If the professional spies, who have taken courses, completed further training and acquired a long and rich experience, do not come to the attention of the people they are tailing, on the contrary, the amateur-spies, who wish to score good marks with their local authorities, are easily revealed and get more than one trick played on them. The whole of Hanoi offers a spectacle of Punch-and-Judy show or of mimes where people gesticulate, have fixed looks, play deaf and dumb, act like robots moved by springs hidden inside the body. But, behind the scenes, in the back-shops, at the sidewalks, in conversations between two people, the ironical pretenses regain life, the face recovers its expressive mobility, the smiles are lit up in the eyes and blossom on the lips, and, to take its revenge on the prolonged silence and deliberate
inertia, people thrash about like the devils, burst out laughing by mimicking the tone or mania of a leader.

In the Schools for higher studies and the Faculties, each class, each course, each year, has its spies among the students’ body. More than one resistance fighter-teacher is spying on his colleagues, whether “collabos” or resistance fighter, and denounces to the proper authority the ideological errors and deviations perpetrated by the professors who drew their remunerations in the past from the budget of the Government of Indochina and now continue to earn the same salaries paid by the Government of the Resistance. They are despised solely because they have not endured the sacrifices of the resistance underground, but are subject of jealousy due to the high standard of living that they are able to enjoy. It is felt that this injustice must be ended. Since it is necessary to spare the State and the Party the shame of contradicting themselves and not keeping their words, some “understanding” “collabos” are bribed to take the initiative of asking the Party for an “equalization” of wages. How can the leaders remain untouched by such judicious, rational and sincere “petition” which exalates the fresh fragrance of union and concord fitting the line of the national Front? In spite of the modicum of the financial gain obtained for the State treasury, always in shortage, and the grumblings of the formerly privileged persons and particularly their ladies who are compelled to tighten their belts, the atmosphere is joyful: The State receives a drop of water in the sea of its permanent deficits, the former resistance fighters are happy to see a little bit more of social justice squeezed into the services, and the ancient privileged class, after having endured the night of August 4th, from then on can raise high their heads and mix on an equal footing with their colleagues of the resistance.

It is in such a general euphoria that the trial of our professor, who is accused of having corrupted the youth and perverted their souls, begins. He is advised against taking an attorney for his defense because a good lawyer, and a well informed one, is a rare bird, and all the more so when there is one, he is the bête noire of the communists who have the sacred horror of the law and the lawyers!
Even for those not used to descend to the depths of reflection, to find the why of things, people have felt the significance of this trial. Its aim is to offer to people attending it a stimulating show about the good administration of justice by the rule of law and equity. It is typical of a certain conception concerning the government and administration invented by communism, according to which all the activities of the State must serve the education of the people leading to the cult of the Party, its leaders and communism which they claim to personify. The laws and decrees which are promulgated, the courses which are dispensed in all the premises of the schools, from the elementary to the superior studies, the public conferences which are given by the licensed speakers, the articles and books which are published, the trials which are judged, the plays which are presented in the theaters, the films which are projected, the meetings which are organized, the declarations which are made to the press, all these must conform themselves to the line of unconditional, absolute and tyrannical devotion to the Party. The party is not a party like any other, it is THE Party and must always be spelled with a capital P. All the Resistance fighters have lived in the underground, have been taught in such a manner, understand the reason why, in order to be admitted into the Party, one is ready to accomplish all the sacrifices and, when need be, commit crimes. Each being undergoes a molding or remolding process, during which he is initiated, regardless of all traditional human traditions, to the worship of a unique god, in whose name the most monstrous ideas and most abominable actions are permitted! Man is deformed, transforms himself into a live robot with all his energies from the heart and soul working for the triumph of the instinct and bestiality, that is to say, that of abjection and horror.

The resistance fighters attending the trial know in advance the process. They know that the magistrate who is presiding the session carries the heavy past of a mandarin and, although he has given to the Party unquestionable guarantees for his devotion, has never been able to accede to the honors that he aspires and must mope and stagnate in a mediocrity which is not even gilded. When he is acting as a judge, it is felt that he is afflicted with an internal contradiction. On the one hand, after having done his studies, obtained his law degree and practiced his job of mandarin, he is equipped with an equitable knowledge and moral
judgment. But he wants to be forgiven for a "criminal" yesterday – according to the communist viewpoint – to give himself a new virginity, in order to enter into the cleanliness and whiteness of today, and to attain a shining tomorrow, more fitting to his aspirations and hopes. He projects the image of a wriggling worm not knowing how to move forward or backward. At the start of his life, his choice for the career of a mandarin tells amply about the lowness of his intentions and the culpability of his desires. A capitalist boss who exploits his workers condemns them to poverty, to the exhaustion of their strength. But the mandarin who embezzles the money of his subjects exercises his ruthlessness over a much greater area of criminality, with each district covering a population of several thousands of people. To flatter the mandarin, the peasants call him "the father and mother of the people." But, between themselves, they qualify him parasite of the people. It is then understandable that our magistrate bears in his conscience the remorse of his past. He is aware that many eyes are watching him and, it is not without reason but with the aim of testing him, that he is given the affair of judging an intellectual who is opposing the political line of the Party. Such a situation does not allow our judge to maintain the impartiality which must be the rule.

- Defendant, do you recognize that you are guilty of having taught to your students a philosophy of dreariness, despair, pessimism, while "our" Party is committed to the propaganda of optimism, hope and the *joie de vivre*?

- Your Honor, how can I know that the Party is teaching to lead a life in joy, in hope and optimism? To my knowledge, the former civil servants retained in their functions by the communist government have never learned, or read anywhere, that the Party teaches such a philosophy of life. Even if this were true, I doubt that such an education can produce its fruits. Indeed, the domain of feelings is not subject to the jurisdiction of the temporal power. The inside world ignores the laws of logic and reason, the constraints of the law, justice and even of morality! A feeling is born, prospers, declines, fades out, or transforms itself according to the impulsions, excitements, assaults from the outside realities and the personal subjective characteristics of the "moral ground," if I may so say it, which is pertaining to the human being that is

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receiving in his own way the calls of the surrounding environment and responding to them in his personal manner. It is a domain where power measures its vanity by its commandments and lowers its arms, in despair! Politics may wish to bring hope, optimism and *joie de vivre* to people. But if the deeds do not follow the words, if the concrete does not bring about the abstract, nothing is done except the pursuit of ghosts! Hope cannot exist when there is no reason for hope, and nothing to hope for. Optimism and the *joie de vivre* can only penetrate the hearts if there are everywhere order and prosperity, the minimum of freedom and rights which the life of a civilized person demands. One must be crazy like Don Quixote to be fooled by a *Dulcinée* with a wrinkled face and a toothless mouth. An intellectual as insignificant as one of my caliber, cannot accept that the Party promulgates a line to be followed, made up of hope, optimism and *joie de vivre*. It is simply a wish and the realization of which depends on the Party. The main count of accusation, on the basis of which I am dragged to sit in the box of infamy, does not have a leg to stand on. I do not consider myself guilty of having caused prejudice to a political line which normally and craftily cannot be made to exist. Besides, I would be happy to know by what article in the penal code, which does not yet exist, am I indicted in justice!

- Let us not play games on words or throw blows to one another among ourselves with articles of the Code. The facts are evident. Yes or no have you explained to your students the work *Isolé* by Lamartine and given a eulogy for this poet? Yes or no have you advocated the poetry of weariness, despair, pessimism and, consequently, corrupted the soul of the youth that, at the call of "our " Party, have risen united as one single man for the restoring of liberty, independence, and national honor?

- Your Honor, I have not done any legal studies, but all the intellectuals know that any criminal indictment must give reference to a text of the Penal Code which specifies the nature and conditions of the offense. Furthermore, they also know that politics and law are two different domains, like dream and reality. It is permitted for politics to dream since it works on the future, but the law is set on solid, current and concrete bases because it operates in the present to maintain and establish an actual situation which fits and responds to the wishes of the people. A
confusion between dream and reality, which may effectively well be the present case between politics and law, will constitute a backward jump of several centuries into the past.

The indictment is now slightly changed. I am not launching an attack against the line of the Party, but I am making an eulogy for a romantic poet, I am advocating the poetry of weariness, despair, pessimism! I allow myself a remark: the intellectuals worth of the name do not make the eulogy of anybody and do not advocate anything. These two terms must be excluded from any act of accusation against them: it is impertinent, in the etymological sense of the word. For the good reason that such an attitude is always humiliating and hurts the intellectual in his dignity. Even when making their praises, the intellectuals refrain themselves by some unknown prudery and always keep a certain reserve. The smiles and kowtows are not part of their outfits, but make up the weapons of those who have given up their self-respect in order to glean some miserable advantages. I repeat: I am not making the eulogy of any person, not even a leader praised by everybody. I do not advocate any doctrine, even if millions of people in the world carry it out by singing it. No, I analyze, explain, try to help my young listeners understand a state of mind that no dictator, no dictatorship, can erase, since it has existed for more than a century now. Politics can only exercise its power on the present time and sometime on the future, it has to admit its powerlessness on the past.

Therefore, the state of the romantic soul has existed and, if you permit me an incidental thought that everybody can prove its truthfulness, continues to do so at certain ages and in certain conditions of life. Only the experienced revolutionaries, the “dried-eyed stoics,” pretend to ignore the tears of human distress, in order to lift themselves to a super-humanity!

Your Honor, I am not defending myself, I am only trying to respond to your accusations. I know in advance the fate that awaits me: no one has ever come out of the revolutionary tribunal to go home. I could have listened to the session of the trial. I could have simply pleaded guilty and, by the leniency of the Party and my own efforts, promise that I will not spare any efforts to improve and purify my brain to be in the line of the Party. But I
have wished that, at least once, the voice of an intellectual is heard in saying a word of truth, and enables the present and future generations to have a precise and correct idea of what revolutionary justice is."

What the accused is not authorized to do is to convert the magistrate, a former mandarin still fresh of the revolutionary anointment, to a more complete view of reality. No, the way to attain honor is not that of honors, all the more so when they do not even add up to a mere tip, a promotion in the hierarchy, but only consist of a smile that the master bestows to a good valet who has just done for him an assigned service. In fact, may be against his will and after having suppressed down winces of conscience, the magistrate has condemned the professor to four years in prison.

During these four years of detention in a far-away province 200 kilometers from the capital, the wife of the condemned does not only goes about diligently with taking care of the housework and her off-springs, now deprived of their paternal help, but each month, at least once, she also has to cycle a round trip of 400 kilometers to bring a few niceties to her husband, to reassure him of the fate of the children, to give him courage in bearing the privations and sufferings, in hoping for the return of justice, law and humanity among men.

This trial is not unique in the records of revolutionary justice, as one can easily think about it. It would be interesting to search in the archives – if any and conserved – of the courts in the capital and provinces, the documents, revealing the manner in which justice is administered by injustice, how to carry out the reign of a sham and loose public order by way of illegality and terror, by using the services of valets who are not even rewarded decently! And all this in the name of the Party and the Revolution! Never before has communism been mistreated so much by its defenders!
3.

THE THUNDER ANNOUNCING THE STORM

On my way home and during the sleepless nights following the trial, I devote my thinking to the event which is matter of concern for public opinion. Having lived many long years in the communist society and with the opportunities to frequent the leaders, I know that they tolerate neither negligence nor lack of foresight in the exercise of the functions and accomplishment of the acts. Everything is carefully studied, discussed, tossed around in all directions, in order to know if the act to be carried out is beneficial to the interests of the Party. Improvisation and individuality are viewed with horror and, therefore, an acute sense of responsibility is given recognition. Unfortunately, this responsibility, being collective, is equivalent to irresponsibility. Above everything else, it is important to bring out the deep meaning of this trial, the very first one of its kind, in contradiction with the official proclamation about not making use of vengeance, hostility, jealousy against those who have not carried out the resistance, when a teacher of quality is simply blamed for corrupting the youth by a philosophy of weariness, despair, and pessimism. What is more serious is that the offense cited by the public Ministry is not a common offense provided by the penal law but a moral and political offense that all modern civilizations have set outside the judicial competency of the state. Therefore, are the Vietnamese leaders making a mockery of the policy they have promulgated and, at the same time of the international public opinion as well! In defiance to the entire world, do they want to affirm the principle of their authority in all domains, that of an omnipresence which either shuns the violation of a solemnly given word or shows an open disdain of the international practice to respect the legality and the limits of courts’ competency? Or, in the blind faith of their omnipotence, and, by presumption or equally lamentable ignorance, have they decided to strike a big blow, bring to heel the intelligentsia, cool off its combative ardor, curb its demands and condemn it to silence or the wooden-tongue which would facilitate their task of administrators, flatter their vanity and taste for formalism, in offering to the eyes of the locals and the tourists a spectacle of the
intellectual masses falling in close ranks around them and shouting their fidelity to the Party?

The second order of reflections, which is bothering me, concerns the personality of the magistrate to whom is given the task of proceeding with the condemnation of the guilty intellectual. In spite of the reverberations generated in the country, the Party is washing its hands in all serenity: it is an intellectual who is judging an intellectual. It is a family affair, and I respect too much the independence of the Bench to tilt one way or the other about the trial! It is a wonderful hypocrisy to avoid all the silent or spoken critiques on this judge whose unconditional subjection to the Party is well known!

Everybody is aware that, formerly, the mandarin was enslaved to a bi-cephalic authority: on the one hand to the French Governor [Resident de France] and on the other to his Vietnamese hierarchical superiors. He is compelled, in the events of all festivities and anniversaries, to offer to his protectors gifts commensurate to their ranks and, therefore, priceless! Since his salary is modest, he is obliged to make his subjects pay the price! Thus, he is putting his hands in the coffers of the landowners and even the purses of the peasants whose poverty becomes heavier, causes bankruptcy, sickness and sometime death! One must be equipped with a really dirty soul, covered with mud, to enter the mandarin’s career, to feed on the suffering of the innocent people and drink their tears. Ecce homo!

Right after the Revolution, he decides to give himself a new skin and seeks admission to the judiciary corps. Those who have seen him sit at the Bench in Hanoi, and observed him in his spoken words and gestures, quickly perceive that he is suffering from an internal contradiction? He lacks the naturalness and ease! Is it a surprise? He knows that communism nurtures a comprehensible hatred against the mandarin, since the latter personifies feudalism and exploitation and will always be the enemy of communism. The mistake committed for having steered his life toward the career of a mandarin is as colossal as that of Eve for having picked the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. To atone for the mistake committed, the mandarin is strangling his conscience in order to obtain the good favors of the Party,
executing blindly its orders and condemning innocent people who are accused by the leaders of imaginary offenses not provided by law! But the violated conscience is struggling frenetically, tensing up the emaciated face of the mandarin, he feels uneasy as someone being observed by countless eyes, hunted by invisible phantoms! But he is ridiculing himself at will when he imitates the flatterers, the expression "OUR" Party wants to come out from his mouth, it breaks into pieces as the shell of an egg does in contact with a spoon! …

The clap of thunder announcing the storm has sounded. The communist Machiavellianism has decided to have an intellectual be judged and condemned by an intellectual. It is a fratricidal fight, a fight of cocks, but a combat in which, on the one side, one enjoys all the advantages of the authority, force and the law which he uses to serve his intentions, and, on the other side, the other fights with his bare hands, his sole weapon being the just cause and the sympathy of the masses. The Party has the last word but its victory neither enhances its prestige nor consolidates the faith which it expects from the people. The reason of the wolf does not cut down the sympathy for the lamb!

The clap of thunder which has broken out in the troubled sky has generated the sought after effect: a split has taken place, the subjected persons applaud, put to work their wooden tongues and wag their tails! To them are given the privileges and sinecures, the choice positions, the profitable trips abroad, to finalize contracts which fill the pockets of the Vietnamese emissary but burden the Vietnamese production with obsolete equipment abandoned long time ago and often out-of-order! The people, already in rags, are paying by themselves all the costs of the swindle, the breach of trust, the theft perpetrated with full impunity by those who pretend and honor themselves to be their servants! The others, whether resistance fighters or not, filled with honesty, disgusted by the cynicism of the "people's servants" who are establishing a new form of exploitation, that of communist exploitation, and who are, in spite of this, always placed at the right side of the Lord; therefore, the others who are chocked by the ignorance, candor, and credulity of the leaders, and in some cases consider the cause has been lost and the State rotten, emigrate abroad, in search of a new society where more legality, morality
and also prosperity can prevail. They can have other people benefit from their knowledge, experience, and cast a look of sadness and bitterness on the Vietnamese ship of State with its ingrate and criminal sons who are drilling holes in its hold to sink the vessel.

As for the rest of the people, who are filled with a silent but dynamic patriotism, with honesty and righteousness, they analyze the decline of the economy and the poverty of the masses, try to diagnose the illness in order to find the cure. The only error they have made is to believe in the sincerity of the originators of the “Hundred Flowers” Movement and to commit themselves entirely to discovering the causes and sources of the misfortune which is hitting the people. In the last analysis, appalling are the sufferings that have resulted from the political mistakes and brought about by an ignorance which can only rival with presumption. Previously, people even refrained themselves from making a remark, out of wisdom and caution. But now the kick-off has been given, by the whistle of the Party itself, which is tuning its behavior to a “brother” Party, the shooters are having their hearts content and marking the scores under the applauses of the spectators. It is too good to last. At the half-time break, the sensible minds are already concerned with the counter-attack by the communists.

Sometime afterwards, the reaction begins. It starts with a meeting, which takes place about a hundred meters from my place. Imbued with a feeling about my smallness and modesty of my functions, I am not infected by the virus of megalomania, the brimborions who are considering themselves as the heights of the Everest since the August Revolution. Thus, I believe that, in an audience of a thousand persons, a fellow not gifted with illumination would only be a shadow among shadows and could slip away or not make an appearance, and no one notices his absence or presence. Therefore, I think that I can go about with my occupations in peace and quiet. Great is my surprise when I see a messenger of importance arriving at my house, the Director of the Institute of Languages in person, who comes to invite me to go to the meeting! In order to notice my absence in such a crowded gathering, I must have been ear-marked and looked for in the assembly. One can bet big that it is not to hoist me to the pedestal that people are worried for not seeing me there. The
experience that I have acquired during the long years of living in
the resistance underground enables me to guess the worse as far
as I am concerned. The meeting will serve as a bullfight where I
would be the bull thrown into the arena, in the midst of the
matadors assigned to slaughter me and who have received all the
explanation about the strikes to be made as well as the ultimate
recommendations.

The one who is holding forth is an assistant-minister of a
certain ministry which I can no longer remember and about whom I
have the “token honor” of having him among my former students.
Since the time, when drafted into a team for the agrarian reform, I
have heard young children accusing their fathers of abominable
crimes, on the orders of the communist cadres, and have
understood that the Confucian morality which used to fill the
Vietnamese soul with its scent is well dead! I am not surprised to
see a student prepare the putting to death of his former teacher
and convince the matadors of the necessity for the final
deathblow! But having drained the cup to the dregs, I have felt the
gall of bitterness plunging my soul into sadness!

But a fighting bull does not succumb immediately under the
blows of the banderillos and picadors. It is fighting to its last
breath, playing with the matador’s red muleta cape and, when the
final and decisive blow comes, it gives a last look at the heavens
to make them witness the barbarism of politics and money which
is carried out by human cruelty to kill ruthlessly innocence and
weakness!

For some time the rumor has circulated in town that the Party
does not tolerate criticism, even when they are pertinent and
judicious, which are launched by the writers, professors,
journalists, who have committed the deadly error of believing that
the hour for the cry of victory for communism has resounded. The
canons are ready to fire on the participants of the “Hundred
Flowers” Movement and, beyond them, against all the intellectuals
suspected of refusing to kneel down before the Marxist-Leninist
gods. Should they raise their voices or confine themselves into
silence, they will feel the heat of the fireworks. It is now or never
the occasion, not to win them to the sacred cause of communism,
but to quash them by terror, by applying ruthlessly a heavy and

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merciless hand against the principal culprits who will pay for all the others!

Strict justice requires legal proceedings, initiates a trial, sets up a file, and allows the accused to explain and defend himself, as well as the judge to apply the law and respect his conscience... but this is a bourgeois practice which causes useless loss of time and, even more so, it does not ensure the pre-eminence of the rights of the Party in its governmental hegemony. The law and legal procedures are inventions of the insane minds which complicate and delay the administrating of justice as conceived through the communist perspective. The fundamental, inviolable, immutable dogma, which must fill the mind of everybody, rules that the Party is the unique holder of Truth, that it is right against everybody else, that the duty and obligation of each and every "subject" is to fight for the triumph of the Party in what it thinks and does, to accept all the sufferings, all the sacrifices, - even that of one's life, if need be – in the name of the Party, for the Party! The capitalists talk about Reason of State, the communists do it about Reason of the Party, but these two reasons merge in the same practice of hasty, summary justice, that of the Executed by firing-squads carried out by a bourgeois government to make an example and glorify itself during World War I! The religion of communism and the cult of the Party do not tolerate any discussion, any critique about the dogmas which proclaim their permanence, their invincibility, and burn to the stake of heresy the bourgeois notions of Law, justice, and innocence. To the good listener, greetings!

Consequently, when that bunch of damned intellectuals allow themselves to doubt about the truths taught by the Party, to voice remonstrance, it is necessary to deal with them by quick, summary and well organized justice similar to the one at the time of the Agrarian Reform. The scenario has already been set in advance, such as the place for the trial, the appropriate timing, the roles of the accusers, the points on which they have to throw the anathema, the details, whether true or false, for the closing speech of their prosecution heavily filled with partiality, iniquity, prejudices and affirmations devoid of proof and consequence. The condemnation is studied: the death sentence is not pronounced, but there are a thousand other ways to do this in Machiavellian,
tortuous, diabolical manners in silence and at night... All these reflections, prompted by the experience I have acquired, rush to me when I enter the meeting room.

The “rapporteur” (according to the Vietnamese communist terminology) begins to swing the censer under the noses of the intellectuals. They are the cherished children of the Party! During the anti-colonialist war of resistance, they chose the right path: behind the revolutionaries and in the ranks of the people, with whom they shared destitution and servitude, they have hoisted themselves to the peak of grandeur by offering their talents and experience to the service of the Fatherland. Glory to the intellectuals, the worthy sons of Viet Nam and of the people!

(The audience listens to this praise with caution. They have already heard the communists sing the eulogy of the intellectuals, each time the latter had the opportunity to do so, although they have martyred the former one by one secretly, and victimized all of them! For once, the Party is saying something true, but one can understand that it is done by diplomacy. The hunter gives a gentle look and affects good-naturedness to get close to his prey, but to kill it by a shot in point-blank. The intellectuals, who have been admitted into the Party, have heard and learned these words: they have been duly educated to make use of them at all times whenever they wish to coax their fellow-associates in asking for a concession or a sacrifice of some sort. That is what the speaker is doing. He continues to give to the stupid asses the carrot while waiting for the blow of the stick.)

“Why are the intellectuals the cherished children of the Party? It is because they have stayed many long years in the Resistance underground, benefited from the education of the Party, learned about Marxist-Leninism, understood and implemented the promulgated policies, and had the chance to live in the society of revolutionaries, because they have been in communion with the masses of workers and peasants in their poverty and hopes, have acquired in their society the qualities of endurance, patience, sacrifice, abnegation which strengthens equality in poverty and privations.
The world of the underground fighters has formed men of high morality, with outstanding virtues, a pure and noble soul, madly faithful to the Party and people, tough like hardened steel, fierce enemies of the bourgeois, of their reactionary concepts, of their ways of life enjoying coziness and luxury in the shameful exploitation of the proletariat's poverty, men who are forcefully determined to move forward to socialism, to the brilliant horizons of happiness and peace! What an exalting spectacle to see an entire humanity clothed in the same kaki uniforms, wearing the same sandals made out of pieces of discarded old tires, receiving monthly the same quota of rice, fed with the same tubers and water bindweeds, talking the same language, motivated by the same political ideal, taking place on the same stage. A magnificent, wonderful unity links the party to the people, the cadres to the masses!

(The speaker is right. It is possible to feel exalted before this unity with its base of uniformity, mimicry, psittacism, silent coercion, and forced hypocrisy. It is undeniable that, during this decade, the moral atmosphere has been excellent, the established practices have their purity, and the security is assured. At night, one can cycle or travel without risk. Equality which is prevailing among the cadres has eliminated the jealousies, discouraged career-seeking and opportunism. All those who have lived in the Resistance underground have retained the souvenir of a honeymoon between the communists and the intellectuals.)

Once the carrots have been distributed, the blows of the sticks begin to come. The thrashings of green wood are whipping the backs of the cadres in the entire apparatus of the State. Actually, before coming back to Hanoi to occupy the executive posts in the administration, all the civil servants were obliged to undertake courses to stimulate their vigilance against the “sugar-coated bullets” which might be shot at them and hit them should they give in to the temptation of an easy life in corruption and debauchery!

"Unfortunately, the lessons were fruitless. In urban life, which is infected by the virus of moral decadence and human degradation, the favorable conditions for the perversion of the beings are prospering. The cadres fall for the seduction of the
senses and become prey for all the vices. Giving free rein to crazy spending and living it up in high style, they have irrepressible needs for money and try to get as much of it as possible. Therefore, they commit all kinds of offenses and crimes and thus, according to what the communists are saying, the exclusive monopoly in the world belongs to the Chicago gangsters. The essential thing is the ability to acquire, by all means and at whatever cost, fantastic sums of money sought for a consuming thirst! Inextinguishable, alas! We are distressed”.

(In the audience, there is a semblance of sighing and it is said: “Whose fault is it? You should cry out tears of blood. The good reason being that you do not apply the Marxism you have taught. First, because you forget the principle by which anything can turn around in the opposite direction: the good can turn to the bad, quality to default, virtue to vice. You naively believe in the student whose progress you have lovingly followed, to whom you have awarded a certificate of virtue and considered worthy to be placed in positions of responsibility. The ancient philosophers teach the flow of things, the perpetual becoming, exactly like your Marxist followers, who profess the dialectics of change of things in their contrary. You prevail in your materialism but you confine yourselves in the platonic idealism by believing in the eternity of Ideas, the world and men. Yes, these individuals that you have trained, accepted in your ranks, who are asserting their faith in the Party and communism, whose fawning makes your face light up with satisfaction, you give them the good communist god without demanding from them any confession! You invest them in sinecures and privileges where they are assaulted by such temptations which are even unknown to Saint-Antoine! You fail to watch them, surround their activities by a minimum of fences, help them from falling into the trap of the devil and concupiscence; you believe in their holiness! You are teaching the masses that our friends are always friends, our enemies will always remain our enemies, that the communist doctrine is bathing in the water of Jouvence [Fountain of Eternal Youth] and will eternally conserve its beauty and youth. You see yourselves as the Adonis, the ones you have imposed themselves for the respect of the masses, hoisted to their pedestals, you believe that they are

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endowed with immutable youth, permanent beauty, stable intelligence, that defy time, are immune to the vicissitudes of age, body infirmities, free of all the physical shortcomings and moral weaknesses!

Therefore, your fundamental, unforgivable error, has been for not having adopted the philosophy of mobility and change, and consequently, for having neglected the impacts of your thoughts and acts.

The second enormous error that you have committed is to blame others for everything and nothing about yourselves. Your presumption is inadmissible and disastrous because the people you have condemned refuse to recognize the pertinence, aptness of your accusations which are too partial, linear, unilateral, and stand up against the punishments which you have inflicted on them. But there is something even more serious! You do not see your share of responsibility, you do not admit your own mistakes, deficiencies, errors which are provoking, by the fact that you hold power, effects which harmfulness is multiplied ad infinitum. When you do not know and have not learned anything from your personal shortcomings and incorrigible prejudices, from the preconceived judgments which are elaborated by your mind but not sanctioned by reality, the dreadful, deplorable and disastrous outcome is the fact that you will relapse again tomorrow into your culpabilities and make them even more serious!)

While such reflections pup up in the minds of the listeners and lead to whispered exchanges of opinions, the speaker raises his voice to begin his closing speech for the prosecution:

"If the moral degradation of the human person already constitutes a painful drama for the Party and the intelligentsia, the desertion of the ideological platform by the participants of the "Hundred Flowers" Movement is even more tragic. What has been demanded? The eviction of politics from the intellectual activity and the introduction of democracy into the national life.
"But is democracy lacking in Vietnam? People who claim this should go back in time and compare the situation before and after 1945. Previously, just at the very eve of the Revolution, famine caused the death of two million peasants. The two most populated provinces in the delta, Thai Binh and Nam Dinh, were decimated. Millions of peasants, emaciated to become living skeletons, dragged themselves on the roads. They were seeking not rice but anything edible to alleviate a little the burning fire in their stomachs. People flocked from everywhere to the towns, in the hope of picking up something which could prolong life just for a short moment! But the dying simply collapsed and the cadavers lined the roads and streets. Now, such a spectacle, which wrings the heart, has disappeared: one does not even see a beggar put out his hand in the streets.

"Previously, a people who pride themselves on a millennium tradition of culture and glorious literature, were suffering from illiteracy. Now, everybody reads the newspapers and all the children go to school, even in the most remote hamlets of the highlands. School attendance is impressive, people who work in the day are taking up evening classes and the Universities, all over the country, are welcoming students of both sexes and dispensing to them modern high learning.

"Previously, production was reduced to agriculture and handicraft; now, the factories are sprouting everywhere and the industrial production, in its process of growth, gives birth to a working class which numbers are increasing day after day and which quality is improving continuously!

"Previously, in the countryside, the mandarins and notables sucked the people’s blood, drove them to the worst of poverty. Now, at all levels, the people’s assemblies, composed of the majority of peasants, administer the country and proclaim the right of the people to be the master of their destiny.

"Previously, we were the slaves of the colonialists, now, we constitute a free and independent country and, after Dien Bien Phu, our word bears weight in the world. All the peoples of the Third World envy our prestige.
“Is there more to be said except that our people decide of their fate without any foreign interference, that they enjoy, therefore, their freedom and independence in the governing of the country, the organization of production, the administration of justice, which no longer depends on the jurisdiction of the colonialists’ courts, in the defense of the territory which is no longer put in the hands of foreign mercenaries… So, I ask you: feudalism and colonialism have vacated the place; who else but the Vietnamese people to take their places? And what are the people doing when they hold their fate in their hands? They structure the State and make it operate BY the people and FOR the people. Is it not, yes or no, democracy?

“Are you questioning me? What is communism doing in Vietnamese democracy? Well, let me answer you. You have a baby who is trying to walk. Is there not the need for you to guide it so that it does not trip and fall? - You are the new owner of an automobile which you do not yet know how to drive. Is there not the need for you to ask for help from a driving-school to teach you handle the steering wheel, avoid running on the pavement and cause an accident?

“With your permission, let us go back in time. In 1945, the juncture of events, in the country, makes it possible to hope for the re-conquest of freedom and independence. Yet, the people, who were decimated by the famine and deprived of all political experience, cannot by themselves carry out this task of Hercules. Even the patriotic and courageous revolutionaries are heading towards an inescapable failure should they commit their forces without any command or operational plan in a blind combat. The right cause by itself is not enough. A thoughtful directing is required in order to avoid the recurrence of the tragedy of the Nghe Tinh Soviet. Our Party has done nothing except assume the direction and responsibility of the revolutionary movement. You know what magnificent results have come out of this. The collaboration between the ruling Party and the people has turned out to be fruitful and efficient. It is not within our power to deny these prestigious victories or erase such a glorious past!

“Therefore, in our county, the Party and the people, communism and democracy, are related together. History has thus
decided, let us respect its will. Furthermore, from the time the Party has led the people, guided their steps, lightened their path, should the people not congratulate themselves: the collaboration has turned out to be beneficial, and our country is able to enjoy a legitimate pride for the sensational and unexpected victories that we have won under the aegis of communism. The past vouches for the present and future. The two friends have got along well, is it then necessary, reasonable, to put an end to a situation which excellence is evident to everybody?

"Furthermore, with regard to those who demand the end to the tutelage of the Party over the people, have they asked themselves what will happen to the country if the Party gives up the leadership of the people? What other political party could take the place of our communist Party? You know well what is and what is worth a political party in the capitalist world. Each party defends its own interests and, in a subsidiary manner, those of the people who have voted for them. The professional politicians do not shun any turpitudes, any ignominy to fill their pockets and impose their selfish and greedy aims over the will of the people. They have little concern about the scandals of which they are the objects, and even the unspeakable sanctions which are condemning them? They are more than ready to make off, to take the road of escape and restart a life of luxury abroad. At the time of the French occupation, there was the intrusion of political customs from capitalism: you know too well the actions in the past of the corrupted politicians who placed their gold and funds, stolen from the people, in the Swiss banks, had themselves built luxurious villas overseas, as fallback points. They had planes ready for heir escape, taking with them tons of gold which can assure them and their off-spring a magnificent future! Do you want to entrust the fate of the country, as well as that of yourself and children to such unsavory characters?

"If you feel that the people need leadership, can you have any better choice than our Party that is crowned with prestige, filled with glory, sparkling of purity, and having members who compete among themselves in revolutionary fervor and socialist faith?"

(During a pause, the listeners exchange their opinions in whispered voices: - The reasoning which we just heard can only
convince the public of a fun fair, of average culture, not versed in
analysis, unaccustomed to reflection, ready to swallow anything.
Of course, the people must be led. But the problem of leadership
raises two questions. Firstly, is it necessary, recommended to trust
the leadership to a single organ or individual, whose competence
would cover all the fields of the national activity? Let us admit that
there is no universal genius: a good general may, if need be,
command a brigade of nurses for the putting in place of the anti-
pregnancy coils to fertile women. But the management of the
economy and organization of the production demand the
possession of very specialized knowledge and experience. The
intellectual masses cannot be subjected to the hegemony of
persons who are just more or less literate. Yet, the Party retains
for itself the monopoly of leadership in all the domains!

Secondly: to whom must the leadership of the people be
attributed? Usually, it is the people who choose, elect their
representatives and recipients of their mandates, oversee and
control the behavior of the latter to who they give the order to act
in their interests and for the realizations of their aspirations. This
is the principle of democracy: that is to say, government BY the
people and FOR the people. Yet, in Viet Nam, as in the entire
communist world, it is the Party that claims for itself the political
monopoly of power and the overall direction of the Government.
The Constitution can provide a division of power, assign the
executive power to the Council of ministers, the judiciary power to
the Bench whose independence is theoretically assured, but, in
fact, the branches are riddled with communists who run them in
the way desired by the Party. So, this kind of "democracy" being
glorified by the communists is only a masquerade which provokes
hilarity but, at the same time, alas, the ruin of the country and the
increasing, irreversible poverty of the people!

The most elementary and natural human rights are not granted;
even individual freedom in the country is not respected. Not only
can the Party order its police to carry out arrests of people and
their detention forever, without having to go through any court of
justice, but also for some leaders of the top echelons together with
policemen at night to get into the homes of their political enemies,
take them away, handcuffed, and put in prison for life, without any
judgment, in the secret jails from where they will only come out as
corpses. One has to wash one’s dirty laundry in the family and, since there is so much dirty laundry to be done everyday, one feels the necessity to decree that the Vietnamese world is a closed one, as in the case of the entire communist world. Inside, one can give free rein to unimaginable insanities, barbaric persecutions, and abominable follies. No one can have a look inside the racket [gehenne] where apocalyptic crimes are perpetrated and dishonor the human being. Likewise, on his part, the despot does not tolerate any suggestion, counsel or proposition, does not accept any criticism, and does not want to look at his devilish face in any mirror, he is struggling with himself in his labyrinth where he is suffocating from his errors and crimes.

Has the speaker been able to guess our reflections? May be. In any case, he goes on with his usual diatribe against capitalism. Concurrently with the eulogy in honor of socialism:

"Are you denying the good deeds of socialism in our country? It is thanks to the Party that we are enjoying the good things presently. I grant you that the Party has not been elected by the people but due to its past of revolutionary combat, the sacrifices that it has accepted, the victories it has achieved, it has received the support of the people and has shown itself worthy of this! Its interests have merged with those of the masses, it has worked for the common good and imposed itself to popular admiration by its wisdom and morality. An identical purpose, a communion of interests has created indissoluble bonds. The Party and the people have boarded the same vessel and are heading for the same haven of grace. The people understand and approve that the Party is isolating itself in its activity, organization, functioning, in it promotions as well as condemnations, in the elaboration of its line of operations and diplomacy, and the people understand the necessity of secrecy in which the Party has surrounded itself for the good of the people! They do not only understand but also give the Party their approval!

“Is there anything which should be envied from the bourgeois democracies? A plurality of parties which are opposing one another in their appalling struggle for their selfish and private interests, which forget the interests of the State and neglect those of the people, provoke the financial and political scandals, and
finally exploit the people, aggravate poverty, plunge the minds in an understandable sadness and pessimism!

"Do we, the intellectuals, envy the bourgeois democracies for their full and complete freedom in the field of intellectuality, in research and in creativity? I am asking you: do the editors favor the publication of works of value, of high nobility of the soul, or products which sell well because they flatter the bestial instincts of the human being or popularize tendentious, unjust and unilaterally denigration of Marxism and of socialism? Do recognize that the thirst for lucre darkens the conscience, it degrades the minds which are overcome by partial and unilaterally linear subjectivism, demeans and prostitutes the human beings. Would you like us to sink into such latrines where the air is polluted by the stench of capitalism?"

(In the audience, opinions are exchanged from one listener to another: "Our speaker, like all communists, lacks the sense of nuance, justice, and objectivity. He condemns in bloc capitalism, as he advocates in bloc what he calls socialism. We are not denying the crimes of capitalism and its politicians. But there are advantages which make it attractive, in spite of the vices which are infecting it. All the more so, generally speaking, it respects and carries out the natural laws of man, which constitute the criteria of civilization in human society. No social and political regime can pride itself to be perfect, because whatever comes out of man's mind and hand possesses obvious defects, together with its qualities. The error would be to pronounce a unilaterally linear judgment which considers only one aspect of reality.

Therefore, if there are intellectuals who are defending political pluralism, although it permits the proliferation of the inestimable bunch of "politicians," it is because the logic of reality commands, if it wants to reach a beneficial efficiency, that it perceives the multiplicity and contradictions of the problem in question. Pluralism admits the coexistence of adverse opinions, dissimilar truths, and, in its essence, it bears the meaning of democracy. The communist party cannot accept this. It clings to its political monopoly, considers itself the unique holder of all measures having a democratic nature. Pluralism becomes the battlefield where democracy and communism are confronting each other.

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It can be understood that communism is not only happy to enclose its world but also wants to maintain, within its closed world, absolute secrecy about the entire activity inside the Party. If it were the case of an ordinary political party, as in the capitalist world, such an attitude would be nothing but normal. But here, it is the communist Party that is holding power and governing the country, in autocracy and dictatorship. All of its decisions concern and interest the entire people, not only in its line of conduct and policies, which are destined to be published, but also in the promoting of its dignitaries and superior cadres within the State apparatus. Each personality follows an ideological and social tendency which is known to public opinion, therefore, its promotion or disgrace makes it possible to predict in which direction the Party goes. Since it is hiding its game, it is shutting the doors of its council chamber to outside curiosity. But the best guarded secrets, sooner or later, leak out to the public, thanks to the indiscretion of some people who are fed in the inner circles and know their ways around.

Besides, certain facts brought to the knowledge of the public are highly eloquent. It goes without saying, the disposal of the secret funds, the formation of the secret services, the organization of the secret missions, fall under “Top Secret” and are kept as the great mystery. Very few of the initiated are aware of this.

But certain patent facts light up the reflections of people. The public know that the crooks of daylight robbery have impressed the very high ranking dignitaries with the mirage of high-profit making by the economic enterprises. The dignitaries, like phalenes, just burn their wings by the fire of wonderful hopes. They have given gorgeous and royal treatment to the wise-guys, have spent millions to finally put them in jail. But no proceedings have ever been instituted against them, the peasant’s credulity of the tricked dignitaries gives cause for general hilarity, it has been decided to better hide the affair under the bushes and avoid the ridicule for the victims who have been caught by the luring mirrors! Too bad for the State budget since those responsible for it scrupulously observe the order for silence, to avoid exposing the Party to the public scorn! But, for one affair becoming known to the public, many other deplorable stories have been buried inside the closed-door world and by Reason of the Party! It is whispered
that all the deals inside and outside the country, all the contracts, between the State and the foreign Governments, which come under the authorities of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, allow the licensed cadres to receive commissions, discounts and tips which enrich them, the cadres and their families to enjoy throughout many generations. Even the individuals who have been unmasked and subjected to the secret justice of the Party only risk a maximum of a re-assignment, demotion, at worst, expulsion from the Party or from the function, without having to make restitution of the wealth stolen from the people.

But there are facts which cannot be thrown away into the depths of the wells of scandals. First of all, they are the ravages of NEPOTISM and then those of CORRUPTION. Nepotism is practiced directly by the Greats or, indirectly, by their henchmen inflamed with the interested zeal to please the masters! That is how the blue-blood children go abroad for their studies, then come back to put their behinds in the directing seats of public Services where it only suffices to know how to sign one’s name in order to pocket fantastic salaries and commissions. And never mind that the chariot of the State gets bogged down in the grooves and tumbles downhill with its economy, its wheels in the air! But it is very much because of the corruption that the State is tottering! The corruption manifests itself under multiple forms, the principal ones are direct or indirect thefts of the State properties, embezzlement, the making and use of forgery, land grabbing of public domains, the use of public premises for private purposes. To this multiplicity of forms of corruption is added the rapidity of the epidemic. The Greats give the bad example and the impunity which they are enjoying in pushing the little ones to set their feet onto the path of lucre without risk. And, sooner or later, immorality gains ground on the surface as well as in depth. Never before in any country, even in a capitalist one, has such an astounding spectacle been observed, but how demoralizing as well: to see the entire Administration of the State drowned in venality. With regard to the ordinary employees, the low levels of their salaries can explain the progress of their guilt which is encouraged by the behavior of the big shots who are beyond the reach of the law and respect of the Bench through Party discipline and in the hope of rapid promotions. Immorality, like a black tidal wave, submerges and swallows up all the organs. The frightened consciences fly off
swiftly to the stratosphere, far away from the stinking miasma in which the State is rotting and agonizing, composed by the limitless and arbitrary power exercised by the people holding it! When the degeneration of the State and the decline of man come into play, with their interactive effects, and join their efforts in the same direction, the hour for debacle will not take long to strike.

The self-serving explanation about the political monopoly of the Party is admissible when it claims its prestige, morality, glory, to impose itself on the people and acquires their trust. Unfortunately, the dialectics of mobility and change which it teaches but does not apply to its personal use in the elaboration of its line of conduct and decision making, its partiality in laying into its enemies who, by the way, could be its friends tomorrow, its stubbornness in fixing enemies and friends in the eternity of platonic ideas, its refusal in listening to different sounds of the bell, in accepting the reality and its demands, in trying to know itself and correct its mistakes, all this will lead it to an unavoidable disaster which it needs to assess in advance the gravity.

Instead of bringing down the ax of the executioner on the heads of the intellectuals whose only crime is to love their fatherland and people, the communists must know that the only enemies they have are just themselves. Their enemy: it is their subjectivism which, excessively, makes them believe that they are gods endowed with superhuman infallibility, installed in heaven, above the world of reality, legality, the rule of law, justice and equity. Their folly is to believe that they are always right. Even and especially when they are wrong! This illness requires hospitalization in a psychiatric clinic!

This exchange of impressions is carried out in a low voice for not lacking in politeness to the person monopolizing the talking and avoiding to alert the snitches and jailers who have slipped in with the assembly.

The speaker has begun the last part of his speech:

- "Dear comrades, what I want to stress here is that democracy, etymologically speaking, is merely the government BY the people. However, for us communists, we understand it in the sense of
government FOR the people. Let us have a look around us and admire the exalting spectacle of happiness! The kindergartens are welcoming the children while their parents are at work, and giving them all the necessary care. The children who are of school ages are flocking to the schools. The studious youth are attending courses at the University and are devoting their leisure time to enrich their knowledge at the libraries. They are benefiting from free education, as the case of the sick who are receiving medical care, hospitalization and costly operations without having to pay anything. The medias and State publications are diffusing a healthy and moral culture which teaches the love of socialism and peace. The cinemas and theaters offer to the masses entertainment of quality which uplifts the mind and forms good citizens. The stores of the State are overfilled with food and consumption goods. The security is assured: no abject crimes, hold-ups, racketeering; the streets are clean, the people are courteous, the kids are well-behaved. The Brother countries cover us with a moving look and grant us all the necessary aids. Abroad, we enjoy an admiring prestige. We do not know the social ills, such as prostitution, drugs, and gambling dens. Giving tips is unknown to us. All the cadres and employees pride themselves on honesty and purity: they are not corrupted and do not accept “bribes.” We do not know what the future will have in store for us, whether or not we will always continue to receive the same brotherly assistance from the socialist States. But, for the moment, we are leading a healthy and happy life, although we are still listed among the poorest nations according to the international classification! But no wealth can compensate for the wonderful chance of having a glorious fatherland, an honored Party, an unshakable faith in socialism! Are we not proud to be the sons of a Viet Nam which fate is envied by the world?

“Why is it then that there are intellectuals who are naïve enough to demand freedom and democracy as if we were deprived of them? Obviously, we have our conception of freedom and democracy, which bear the communist mark and the seal of the Party. Obviously, these intellectuals constitute only a small group. Just look at how the intellectual masses despise the renegades and pity their blindness, how the people look at those sick persons who are infected by the virus of capitalism. The popular masses know better than anyone else the debt they have
with communism: the dignity of man, the happiness to be master of one’s destiny and that of the country, the glory for having defeated colonialism at Dien Bien Phu.

“We, communists, and our people do not consider the intellectuals to be at fault as enemies to be liquidated, but as misled and sick persons, terribly backward about a modern world which believes that the future of humanity is in socialism. I am asking these retarded persons: on which side is the truth? The side of a handful of backward persons or that of the entire people, among whom stand the quasi-unanimity of the intellectuals? Yes, the entire people have lined up under the banner of Ho Chi Minh and the Party."

“The truth is on the side of the people! And the people have approved and supported Ho Chi Minh and his Party. Therefore, we decree that those who deny the truth of the people are the enemies of the people. They better consider this as said."

- There is no doubt possible, it is a declaration of war. The canons will thunder. There is no need for sophism. The truth is not on the side of force.

- The silence of the people does not mean their acceptance of the positions taken by the Party. In the course of the agrarian reform which was aimed at beheading the class of landowners, and that of the real estate reform at uprooting the city property owners, the people have remained silent. They are used to it, having been trained to keep their mouths shut. The Party has acknowledged its errors in the Agrarian Reform; in the future, it will proclaim its errors for the real estate reform. The silence of the people does not mean its adhesion but rather the opposite, generated by fear. The communists know this well. That is why, in order to impose themselves on the people, they take cover behind the authority of Ho Chi Minh.
- We know what importance the communists give to the expression "enemies of the people". In advance, we feel sorry for the fate of the comrades who are qualified as "retarded" or "misled". If they are not taken to the scaffold or execution stake, they will die of a longer death, more painful, but discrete, in secret isolation. Whatever, over the heads of the most courageous or most naïve of us, the aim is to bring down the intellectuals themselves and reduce them to absolute silence, in lieu of a free, consenting acceptance of the communist despotism. From now on, the three "enemies" of the Party have been liquidated: no more landowners in the countryside, no more real estate owners in the towns, no more intellectuals worthy of the name in the whole country! The Party can give free rein to its fantasies and aberrations.

- Yet, what crime have these unfortunate friends of ours committed? They are not contemplating any exclusion of the Party from the political life, not even to overthrow it. They simply dream of asking it, the ruling Party, in view of improving the political environment, to accept and carry out a few reforms which will benefit not only the people but also the Party itself. It is, therefore, sophism to declare that the people support the Party and those misled are enemies of the people. The communist breathes with lies, hypocrisies, but his capital error is to seat his tyranny on illusory appearances which he interprets in his own way and makes use of it to annihilate the people he labels his enemies.

    The sword of Damocles is hanging over the heads of the intellectuals and the authorities in power can choose either the psychiatric hospital, or the slow death with life imprisonment in an anonymous jail, or even a simulated accident with no one responsible for it.

    I know the fate which awaits me, similar to the others who are involved in the same efforts of making an opening to breathe at last some fresh air. We have been fooled in a vile manner by these leaders who are well versed in the art of laying traps, and setting up ambushes, to kill people they say are their enemies! Machiavelli, should he return to this world, must attend the school
of the communist leaders, whose tortuous barbarism and inhuman ingenuity are without precedent in the history of the world.

4.

THE FIRST BULLFIGHT AT
THE NATIONAL FRONT OF THE FATHERLAND

I am in the first batch. Each accused has to appear before a tribunal composed of members of the organization in which he has carried out his activity. While I am cycling from my home to the headquarters of the National Front of the Fatherland, at the invitation of the Party, I try to imagine how the session for my judgment will take place. Apparently, it is for self-criticism that I have to present myself. In fact, it is a political jurisdiction that I have to deal with. The Party has designated those who will sit behind a long table covered with a green cloth and play the role of the public ministry that does not deliver any indictment but presents me with questions which are aimed at proving my culpability. The interrogation is done in public, and the main charges are chosen for their contents and for the “jury” that has formulated them. The scenario has been studied and worked out in the smallest details. The judgment is not pronounced at the end of the trial. It is the Party, in the back stage, which will draw up the content. The targeted objective is to “educate” the accused, so that he can attain his redemption, and the public as well, so that people do not make the errors which are blamed on the culprit.

Therefore, one attends a trial and not a session of self-criticism, as one enjoys calling such a meeting. The communists know, among other talents, how to invent euphemism. It is always the same art of playing the double-game, to lie not to oneself but to others, to falsify the truth, to try and dazzle people. The methods that they make use of are tortuous like the head which has given birth to them. The same word is always repeated in their language: “education”. Each act which is carried out, each activity
which is organized, must serve the same aims: teach the masses the way to behave in life, as communists!

But when the Front is set up as a Court of justice to judge a peer, a difficulty presents itself: the Front is composed of notabilities having different social tendencies, which embody the entire people in their diversity and plurality. The common characteristic of all these persons is that they are not communists, have not been admitted into the Party. Only the President of the Central Committee of the Front is a high dignitary of the Party. But all the cadres in function in the Secretariat are young, dynamic communists, with sharp eyes but only open their mouths to make reports to the responsible people of the Front. Whenever, at the suggestion of the Party, the Front votes for a certain decision to approve one policy or another, the Party believes it is having the entire people behind it, although the people have never chosen the members of the Front and have never given them any mandate, different from the National Assembly which derives from elections more or less operated by remote control. Since the communists have an unbridled, morbid taste for appearances, and the Front is offering the consent of the people to the Party, the leaders are showing ostensibly, officially and solemnly, much consideration for the Front. All the more so since the latter does not exercise directly on the masses, does not receive any complaints, critiques, and even ignores them, and, consequently, does not run any risk of being disapproved by them. Between the Party and the Front, there is an exchange of politeness, courtesy, popular diplomacy, platonic formalism, all the things that both are mutually content with!

Therefore, I am asking myself who will play the role of prosecutor and throw at me an indictment in the form of questions concerning my ‘errors’. The catholic prelates, the Venerable monks, certainly have authority but they are difficult to indoctrinate. The delegates of the Syndicates, women, youth, peasants, are lacking in authority and self-confidence to assume the task. Thus, there is an intellectual, Dr. Pham Khac Quang, a dignified and honorable intellectual that I know. The communist maneuver is to give the sword of the striker to a person whose relations with the guilty person make it possible to deliver the decisive and meaningful blows in a political manner. Children were
mobilized to accuse their fathers in the agrarian reform, tenants to accuse the real estate owners, the angelic intellectual to accuse the satanic intellectual! It is in the communist logic of things!

The Central Committee of the Front holds its sessions in the great hall of the building which was formerly reserved for the Ambassador of Nationalist China, in the Trang Thi Street. I had occasions to go there often and participate in meetings at the time when I was in the group of the Elected that were placed on the right side of the Lord. I know all the “peers” there, those who are now deciding about my fate!

This time, I am entering the meeting hall like a bull being thrown into the arena. It is, indeed, an arena for all the tables are lined up along the walls to provide a free area in the middle of room. Behind the tables are gathered a multitude of people, some are seated if they are Committee members of the Front, others are standing if they are only rubbernecks, most of them are journalists or people affiliated to the mass organizations. It is the public for a bullfight, thirsty of strong emotions, and burning by a desire to watch the unfolding of a spectacle with an indescribable originality!

Similar to the bull entering the arena, I look over the entire assembly. While the people who are standing open wide their eyes and eagerly tend their ears, my “peers” sitting behind their tables seem to be somewhat uneasy in their function, one which they are not accustomed to. If the questions that they put to me are already earmarked by those “in power,” they cannot conceal their embarrassment by their tone and elocution. I cannot refrain myself from feeling sorry for them to be trapped in a false situation.

The questions abound around the first charge:

- “Comrade, are you aware of the wrong you have caused to the Revolution and to yourself by letting the text of your conference appear abroad?”

- I reject this assertion. To date, I have never let my writings appear abroad. It is without my knowledge and against my will that this has happened. When the Movement of the Hundred Flowers
broke out in Vietnam, comrade Xuan Thuy, Secretary General of
the Front, asked me to give a conference on democracy in Europe
and in France. It was in this very hall that I gave the talk, in the
presence of comrade Truong Chinh, Secretary General of the
Party, and other members of the Central Committee of the Front,
who are judging me now at this hour, and during a whole day,
three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. It is
at this period that the Party sees itself compelled to recognize its
errors in the agrarian reform and to undertake the reshaping of the
Party. The word of Truong Chinh has tolled the knell for the entire
people to be plunged into sadness and mourning: “we strike
ourselves by striking others”! A colossal error has cost the lives of
dozens of thousands of innocent people. Thousands of widows
and orphans, draped in white cloth, have come to my lawyer’s
office, from all parts of the country, asking me to rehabilitate the
memories of the victims and to raise the responsibility of the Party,
of the guilty ones. To my great regret, I have told them that such
an action is well beyond my abilities, because the problem, being
political, does not come under the law and the ordinary
jurisdictions. But the chock which I feel is like a blow of the
sledgehammer to my head and it is difficult for me to stand up. I
say to myself, and everybody is doing it with me, the repetition of
such catastrophes in the future must be prevented. Such
massacres can never take place in a so-called “bourgeois”
democracy for the law administers power and sets up around the
rulers effective barriers capable of opposing their folly generated
by an infantile voluntarism and an autocracy which has put out the
eyes in modeling its conduct to that of a “brother” country.

The dramatic circumstances in which I was invited to speak,
the presence of a public already adhering to the democratic ideas
but with little knowledge about the legal regulations making up the
foundation and framework of the democratic activity, directed my
expose. Since I gave my conference before the authorities of the
Party and the Front, I have exercised restrain of my passions and
language, so as not to infringe on the principles of savoir-vivre and
of courtesy which have guided my relations with the authorities.

I did not have the habit, or the time, to draft my conference, as I
used to with my teaching courses and speeches for the defense in
court. It was because of the implorations by Xuan Thuy and Duong
Bach Mai that I agreed to write down on paper the ideas for which my audience congratulated me. One would like to read the text to feed one’s reflections. I had two copies typed out which I at once sent to the Secretariat of the Front. Therefore, I wish to insist on two essential points: it is not me who had the initiative of the conference, it is not me who decided to have it in written form. In these two circumstances, it was at the invitation of the authorities of the Party and Front that I carried out these two actions. Without any premeditation. My good faith is, therefore, total.

With regard to the fact that a copy of my text has been taken and sent abroad, in this time of the cold war, the slightest mistake and error of communism is exploited without any decency, I cannot be made to bear the responsibility for this. No proof has been and will ever be provided about my culpability, or any secret meeting with a foreign agent, or the handing over a copy of my conference by me to anybody whatsoever. But, according to a well established habit among us, instead of trying to establish the responsibility of the offense, or the lack of attention, the carelessness, in the ranks of the members of the Party and of the Front, those who have received or assumed the transmission of the document and who, whether knowingly or not, have scattered around papers considered of little importance, instead of questioning themselves, prefer to incriminate someone else. That is easier, but it is contrary to the rules of law and justice!

So, I take the liberty of asking you: which is the most serious, the errors perpetrated by the Party in the agrarian reform and of which it has beaten its breast, or the negligence of someone who has dragged around the document relating such errors, or more exactly implying them? In both cases, I am in no way responsible for it and I request you to take note of it.

- Well, then! Let us move on and deal with another problem. What opinion do you have of the Front? In what way do you want to improve its structure and functioning? What we are deploring is that a member of the Central Committee of the Front is launching attacks against it. The game is not well played. Are you not aware of the wrong that you are causing us, according to the common popular saying, when we expose the deformity of our
bare back to public scorn? Is it not better for the family quarrels to be discussed outside the public arena?

- I think that your blames have mistaken their destination. It is to the Party that you should have addressed them. In the course of the struggles “in the family,” in the agrarian reform, do you not remember that we received orders to set the children up against the parents? The anathemas, totally made up from nothing, came out of the mouths of the off-spring that were well trained, had to bear the seal of the undeniable truth! Consecrated in its notability by the ruling authorities, and included in your honorable company, but not to my wish, I did not take much time to find out the nature of the Front, the function to which it has been imposed and carried out splendidly at the great satisfaction of the leaders, although without any impact on the people. It is a construction of cardboard which has been erected by order of a movie-director and, once the filming sequence has been shot, it will be broken up and thrown to the garbage dumps. It is a head filled with logic and formalism, creating whole sets of symmetric arrangements, systems of artificial balance with fake windows, and taking the initiative of being a pendant with the National Assembly. The latter, made up of “elected” members from the territorial constituencies, normally limits itself in the legislative function. In fact, this legislative function is shared with the Council of Ministers that carries out not only the laws voted by the legislative Assembly but also the decrees, circulars, as well as legislates and governs the country. These two organizations differ from each other by the fact the Assembly gathers the “elected” members from the entire territory of the country while the Front brings together members that have been chosen in the masses and reflects the social, professional and religious tendencies. But both of them meet each other in the same attitude for the Party, that of subjection, agreement without any reserve whatsoever with whatever its decisions may be, in the absence of any discord or noisemaking. The Assembly performs its voting by the show of hands, while the Front does it by bowing their heads and dropping down their hands. But both of them also manifest the unanimity of their views with the leaders and enable the latter to light up their faces with a big smile of satisfaction. The Party considers itself the holder of the truth which the two organizations assume its diffusion and propaganda, each one in
its own sphere of influence, and areas of activities. These are the two crutches which help the Party maintain its march.

Comrades, I have never been invited to present my candidacy to the legislative elections and, if I am present in your honorable company, it is not over my dead body but according to my wishes which are excluding all political glory and looking forward to nothing else but the ability to seclude myself inside a timely anonymity suitable for my intellectual activities!

Once incorporated into the Front, I soon realize the falseness of the position which I am made to occupy, as well as the perfect uselessness of the role attributed to the Front. All the laws and policies are published in the press which is of the State and makes it its duty to do so, and are broadcasted the whole day long throughout the country, so one must be at the same time both deaf and blind for not being aware of this! The Front does not have the need to hold meetings in order to make known to the public the texts which everybody has read or heard of. But, if the Front no longer plays the role of a loud-speaker, what service could it then give to the Party and people?

It could exercise for the Party the function of counselor about the laws and policies that the Party has elaborated. Having gathered in its ranks the representatives of all the social tendencies, it could give pertinent and judicious opinions about propositions or projects which have been submitted to it. Unfortunately, whether because of the instruction it has received or by its own initiative, for understandable reasons in any case, and it would be inappropriate to dwell upon, the Front always adheres to the theme of the report made in the presentation or that of the reporting official in charge of giving some explanations. After having attended some of these meetings, I cannot prevent my memory from rushing back to the times of my youth when I enjoyed going to the street, Rue des Cantonnais, located between the Silk street and the Sugar street, to look at the ceramic dolls with their heads always bowing and their hands hanging down, in a sign of assent. What idea had germinated in the mind of the artisan who shaped up these fat-bellied figures to which a unique and same gesture was given? Was it to express contempt, to convey the bantering and rebellious vigor of the people against the
mandarins whose activity was reduced to the unique gesture of submission and obedience? When a person is transformed into a metronome, a robot, imitates the mechanism of a production line, it can be said that life has dried up from its source, that the same mechanism repeating itself ad infinitum is a forerunning sign of death. Bergson teaches us that movement in its multiple expressions is a criteria of life, that automatism which is paralyzed in the identity of a gesture characterizes matter. On the one hand, mobility, change, plurality, are attesting the presence of life. On the other hand, immobility, inertia, the immutable, are signaling the progress of matter. The struggle between life and death, between spirit and matter, is the struggle between what is moving, transforming, diversifying in its multiplicity and what always remains at the same place, an identical, unchanged, invariable position and condition. To curb, stop the advance of matter, safeguard life in its blossoming and the spirit in its activity, laughter offers an effective and salutary cure. I am not guilty of committing impropriety for laughing at others but I have laughed a lot at myself when I have to bow my head and drop down my hand.

An examination, even a preliminary one, of the structuring of our State permits us to think that our leaders have the choice between two attitudes:

Either formalism, which pleases itself with a superficial approach to the beings and things, finds satisfaction in the flattering appearances, accepts the unanimity of the bowed heads and dropping hands, enjoys only one sound of the bell, the concert of praises, gets drunk on the fragrance of the censers, with eyes closed in beatitude! In such conditions, the Party can continue with the sleep of the just, leaves everything in its status quo, whether beneficial or prejudicial to the people and, consequently to the Party whose political monopoly proclaims the responsibility.

Or the leaders concern themselves with assessing the hearts and the backs of the people, searching for the truth hidden by the smiles, salutes, bowings and unanimity of the applauses. But how to find out what the people are feeling and thinking? Quite simple, really. They must be given free speech, the ability to bare what they have dissimulated up to now in the secret thoughts of their inner selves. Once various opinions are expressed, the leaders
have the possibility to rectify their erroneous and incomplete views, to perfect their decisions and make them adequate, opportune and beneficial.

I beg you, Comrades, to notice that I am not pleading for democracy, since it has taken 200 years for the people of Europe to accede to it, according to some competent persons. I am not demanding either for communism to withdraw from the political life, although, alas, the loss of prestige and decline in credit which have stricken it since immorality and corruption are characterizing greatly many of its members who often occupy high positions. I only wish that our people are able to raise their voices and say what they think about all those who are concerned with their fate, in the present and future. Only then will a sincere and advantageous cooperation unite the Party and the people, for the benefit of both the Party and the people! Capitalism must not be given the monopoly for the application of the natural rights of man in the City. But all the more so, let us not kill ourselves for words, by going to the extreme of a ridiculous logomania. The terms capitalism and socialism do not have any meaning by themselves but depend on the tastes and preferences of those who use them. In the mouth of a “socialist,” according to a habit which is not only inveterate but no less ridiculous and childish, the qualification of “capitalist” refers to anything horrible, and whoever has been given such a certification of infamy, his fate is done. Whenever a policy of cannibals is involved, the quarrels no longer limit themselves to only matters of grammar, as Montaigne has thought, they lead to bloodshed and death!

The habit of always bowing one’s head in assent, using one’s hands to only applaud, opening one’s mouth just to agree, all this provokes the stiffness of the mind, switches off the liveliness of intelligence, suppresses the reflection of critique. In our life now, certain words are putting us in a trance, for example: reactionary, counter-reactionary, critique! You have used the word “critique” to qualify quite harmless propositions that I have addressed to our leaders, in the Front. You know well what this means: it is the death penalty which is facing me!

- Oh no! Do not exaggerate here! We simply want to say that you have found something faulty about the organization of the Front.
Such an attitude surprises us! For quite some time now, we have accustomed ourselves to respect the Party, follow its orders, because the military and political successes it has gained have won our trust, as well as that of the entire people! We have been made to look not through our own eyes but those of the Party. Well equipped with its Marxism-Leninism, its experience, the aid from the brother-countries, the Party has demonstrated that it has the authority and is justified in enjoying the credit that we are offering it! Our wisdom is to shape our judgment on its model and to this day we can praise ourselves for doing so! Thus, we must admit that we do not understand you!

- As for me, on the contrary, I understand that my observations are chocking you. I, therefore, deduce that the fate which is awaiting me is not the one that I can dream of. Whatever. I have eyes to see, ears to listen. Yet, what I have seen and heard fill me with dreadfulness! I can see to what future we are heading, and the tremors of my conscience prevent me from sleeping. In order to find the serenity of my soul, I have searched, among the causes of the ill that is eating us away, which one would be the most urgent, and what would be the effective cure for it. I want to repeat once again, so that no misunderstanding is made about me and my opinions are not falsified for the purpose of condemning me easily, I am asking for just one thing: that our leaders, in observing the Marxist-Leninist line to which they claim to adhere, allow the people to open their mouths and say what they think. The leaders must know that there are quite a number of people who dare not loosen their teeth, that the forms and appearances, which are giving them a puff of pride, are merely a masquerade disguising their ideas and feelings. The leaders have come to reject what they believe to be inadmissible but they must also think about what is coming ahead, if the little which is left runs counter to the interested lies of the flatterers or inconsiderate persons, and clashes with the views of the Party!

In this crusade for the triumph of the truth, Comrades, you have a role to play. It rests with you to wake up from your lethargy, come out of your silence, once you have lent an ear to the inner voices that you try to suppress, it is for you to throw a line to your conscience which is drowning. You will then realize that it is in your interest, in the interest of the Party and people, that I hope for
us the establishing of freedom of opinion. You have your responsibility before the people and History, as the Party has its responsibility, as each mind has to think of its own! I take the liberty to remind all of you, you yourselves, the Party, the intellectuals, of this essential truth; I shall surely have to bear the inescapable and painful consequences which will not fail to happen and punish me for having wished to safeguard my honor and dignity.”

5.

THE SECOND BULLFIGHT
AT THE UNIVERSITY

Back to my home, in the silence of my solitude, I try to remember the hours that I went through, to draw the lesson from them. This is the first time that a conflict opposes me to the leaders. It is the first time that communism is carrying out a trial of an intellectual. Up to now, I have always remained silent, and all my revolts against it, however blatant they may be, have limited their excesses to the inner world. Even at the peak of the agrarian reform, when the barbaric crimes hurt me by their sight, wrung my heart, I had the wisdom and strength to hold myself back, knowing that the same cataclysm was raging all over the country, and aware that the isolated voice of an insignificant intellectual would not be able to reach a power so well hidden in the most impenetrable mystery! A passionate but mute witness of the disastrous errors and mistakes of the rulers, I have learned that the ears, which are open to flatteries and praises, are closed to remarks which are always considered to be disagreeable and, even more so, when they are critiques which are invariably accused of being “reactionary.” Armed with vigilance and lucidity, I have navigated through the reefs and, up to now, have been able to avoid a wreck. If, in the course of the first half of my life, I endeavored in climbing up the hills of the Mediterranean culture, in the second half of it, I have been trying to stand up on my legs under the bursts of communism. It is the great adventure of my life, and my thoughts, in both acts and feelings, I have been
conditioned by the tempestuous gusts from the whirlwinds in which the hazards of existence have imprisoned me. I have sharpened my look-out and foresight to protect me from the faux-pas, avoid the tricks and traps set under my feet. I know that, among the intellectuals, I am in the grinder of the policemen who have to tail me, that a couple of “watchdogs” have taken residence in a room nearby my home to keep an eye on people visiting me and on my mail, to listen to my conversations and the radio broadcasts which happen to be my preferred choices.

But, this time, I have been caught in the trap of circumstances. I am one of the victims of the communist deceit which has launched the Hundred Flowers Blossoming movement, not to liberate the intellectuals from the chains which tie them up but to unmask the naïve ones who think that the time has come for them to engage in the free expression of their democratic aspirations. It is impossible for the political monopoly exercised by the communist party to accommodate itself with the democratic liberties! Whatever recognition of democracy is given by someone, the culprit will receive the worst sanctions from the rulers. This is precisely the way in which my “Comrades” of the Front have understood what my crime means. Whether the popular masses are able to lift themselves to the highs of democracy or have to waste decades, or even a century, in order to accede to its meaning and apply its principles, come what may! I am simply demanding for the freedom of opinion, and already presenting myself a renegade, enemy of communism. The leaders have understood my subtlety: if the common people were able to say what they think of the policies and decisions of the Party, it would be absolutely impossible to achieve the unanimity of approval about them and, certainly, in this first apprenticeship of learning about democracy, the critiques overwhelm the praises. What would then become of the Party’s political monopoly, and to what extent would the discredit be about the insanities of the leaders?

In obeying the instructions given by the leaders, my “Comrades” of the Front can kill two birds with one stone: not only are they trampling on me, but they have also learned, for their own account, to condemn any deviation in the meaning of democracy, and condemn it in all those who are the victims of it!
I wholeheartedly feel sorry for my Comrades of the Front.

They all are honorable personalities who have never asked to join the honorable company. They have been incorporated at the invitation of the leader whose policy of national union for all the citizens, whose dream of a united people in independence and freedom, would ally all the votes. Their political, social, sentimental, religious tendencies may vary but they all meet in the same aspiration, on the same ground of understanding. Such an assembly, by virtue of its mixed nature, the diversity of opinions on the part of its members who are designated by the State and not representing anybody, is certainly lacking in force, in cohesion, and can only play the role of a walk-on. The formalism, for which the communists in power have an unbridled taste, compels the State to rest on homogeneous structures, acquire a nice appearance, but be empty in content, devoid of any competency, and from which the leaders do not ask for anything else but the unanimity of applauses for their decisions.

Summoned to condemn one of their peers, my “Comrades” of the Front feel that they are shut up in a false situation. The bullfight which they are forced to watch is not a party of pleasure. I do not know what kind of bitterness is chilling their faces and putting out the light in their look. I have had occasions to chat with them and, since they know who I am, they have confided in me, particularly the dignitaries of the Catholic Church and Buddhist pagoda whose idealism cannot accommodate the atheistic materialism of the communists. Already at the time of the anti-colonialist war of resistance, in Phát Diệm, the struggle of the Catholics against communism has shed the blood of a district chief. Later on, the Union of Religions for the destruction of Communism (Liên tôn diệt Cộng) was the object of a sensational trial in Thanh Hoa, some time just before Dien Bien Phu.

Among the members of the Front and the Party, people know what to expect from the opposing camp. Therefore, the religious members in the Front are on the grill: the masses do not understand them, consider them as renegades and apostates, because they have made a pact with the communists. The latter, in spite of the bowings and protestations of trust for them, suspect
the former's latent and inner hostility. During the meetings of the Front at the headquarters of its Central Committee located in Trang Thi boulevard, nothing amused me more than to observe the mime show which took place under my eyes and put forced smiles here and there. And here they are, called upon to deal the deathblow to a poor devil of intellectual whose fate is identical to theirs since, like them, is not enjoying the smell of holiness of the Party due to his democratic aspirations; to judge and condemn him, they well understand that they are judging and condemning themselves. The inhumanity of the Party bursts out in the gesture of Pontius Pilatus: the washing of the hands for I would be condemned by my own peers, and the same comedy is again played at the University and at the Socialist Party, in the second and third bullfights! And with one stone, the leaders are killing two birds: the delinquent is punished, but those who are chastising him must draw the lesson for their own sake! No occasion is wasted to educate the people!

All these thoughts run through my mind during the night, following the first bullfight at the Front. The next day, I have to present myself for the second bullfight at the University. The bull is not allowed to catch its breath. The toreadors, picadors and matadors take turn to bully it while waiting for the final blow of the kill. Nevertheless, I do not feel discouraged, or desperate, or even tired! I am undergoing trials that nobody could have thought of up to that day. Under the blow, I can measure my strength of resistance, and curiosity has taken over depression! Disregarding those “peers” who are going to agitate the red muleta piece of cloth in front of my eyes, I am in the attacking mood!

It is in this state of mind that I arrive at the University.

By the sight of the impressive number of bicycles filling the immense courtyards, the audience must be large. No wonder! Different from the first one, the second bullfight is open to the general public: anybody can come and watch it. The students, who are in the thousands, the teaching staffs of several Faculties, including those of Medicine and Chemistry, the journalists enticed by the putting to death of a well-known intellectual in Hanoi, and the whole crowd of rubbernecks and peasants, are massing in the room, corridors, to the point that the air has become difficult to
breath and the traffic impossible! This time, the judges are not sitting behind a table. They take turn to preside from the podium where, at the time of the capitalist domination, I used to give my lectures and conferences.

I ask myself what is the motivation for organizing such a grand spectacle? While the last recommendations are given, behind the scene, by the directors, to the accusers, I believe I have found the reason for the blatant publicity which has attracted such a multitude. The reason offers a double aspect: one is the concern for the individual being accused, the other is the interest for the judges and listeners!

I remember that during my ten years spent in the underground movement, each month, I went to a province to defend pro-bono people being prosecuted, in a trial of importance which could last the whole night. During the day, the loudspeakers, within a radius of 10 to 20 kilometers announced the opening of the trial. The rubbernecks cycled dozens of kilometers to watch a rare show, even unique, in the locality. The ringing bells of the cycles made quite a deafening din. The passer-byes, women, children, youngsters, walked in long lines across the fields, each group carrying its small lamps. It was a festivity to go to!

In Hanoi, the newspapers, radios and loud-speakers are having free rein to tease the curiosity of the people. The name of the accused also contributes a lot to this. Therefore, I understand that, if in the bullfight organized at the Front there was an intention to spare somehow my sensitivity by keeping that meeting in a muffled discretion, in tune with the Front, this time it is with the purpose of having the scandal explode in the open by drawing my name into the mud, trying to convince me about the gravity of my crime and to justify in advance the punishment which will be thrown at me.

At the same time, it is also intended to intimidate the masses, to "educate" them in the sense of an unconditional submission to the orders and decisions of the Party, in the respect of the communist orthodoxy. Any infraction to this sacred principle will be penalized with extreme severity, notwithstanding of whatever
eminent services have been given by the culprit for the cause of the fatherland and the revolution.

At the foot of the presiding podium where I had the best moments of my life, I now come to live through the worst of it. Indeed, I realize that the purpose is not only to punish me, - oops, sorry, to educate me - but all the more so, it is to humiliate me, to demean me in two ways: I am forced to take the position of an accused at the foot the platform where I used to stand at the time of my splendors, and listen to the invectives and diatribes of fellows who are not my peers as in the case of the Front, but some young novices picked up from who knows where and seem to be or were among my students. I do not bother listening to the insanities uttered by those who are criticizing me, I make abstraction of the actual milieu where they are holding forth and trying to pierce me with their arrows, and I let my mind go back to the time of the agrarian reform when the landowners were persecuted, humiliated and considered to be enemies of the people and the revolution, as I am now!

But I have the benefit of a treatment for which I am grateful to my tormentors: if they are inflicting me with the moral tortures, they are sparing me the physical sufferings. I have not been secluded in a prison, I am not wearing muddy clothes due to sleeping at night on the hard, I do not give off the repulsive smell of the beasts in their cages, I am not fed with rotten vegetables swimming in the dishwater and served in the pig-troughs, I do not drag my feet with chains around my neck and ankles, under the booing and spits of the mob whose hatred has been heated white hot. No, I lead my life, in a normal way, within my family.

But the tortures of the humiliation that I am made to bear are no less than those of the martyred landowner before being executed.

Only yesterday, before the coming of communism on the Vietnamese territory, traditional morality taught the young to respect their teachers, to love them and respect them even more than their own fathers. The honor of giving care to the human plant, so that it can produce flowers and fruits, shapes the soul and the life of the teacher, who has the duty to himself, as well as to his students and to the entire people, and that of nurturing the
purity of his heart. The writings of the ancestors, which are preaching the moral values with their nobility recognized by the entire world, are now thrown to the pyres. Morality is no longer taught in schools, and, nowadays, the children are instructed to insult their teachers! Marxism-Leninism has replaced morality and taken over the human plant, the stunted only generates poisonous flowers: the immorality develops its cynicism, the criminality widens and deepens its sphere of activity, the entire society emits a rotten smell not known before. Communism vehemently denies that it has wanted such a state of affairs and, as everybody else, deplores it, but cannot reject the responsibility for it due to its political concepts and social structures.

I have not retained, or wanted to remember, the names and features of the rascals who, on order and by command of the authorities, have thrown their dribbles on my honor, no more than a passer-by would stoop down to chase away a yapping dog at his feet. After all, these poor blokes are more to be pitied than blamed, they want to be in the favors of the Greats and then clear a way in life. I forgive them and, all the more so, because the qualifications that they heap on my person do not damage the credit I am enjoying among the intellectual and popular masses. I am waiting for the day – which will come – when the Party acknowledges its errors as it has done with the Agrarian Reform. I am consoling myself by saying that the people do not judge the crime of lese-Party in the same manner that the communized fanatics are dreaming of a beautiful future by using with unsuspected vigor the wooden tongue and the polishing brush! I feel happier than the landowner for I am spared of the monstrous accusations heaped on me by my own children on high order from above!

I despise too much my detractors to respond to their attacks. I have engaged the discussion with only two of them, one being a student of mine, and the other an elementary school teacher who, by shameful maneuvers, has obtained a lectureship at the University, and this is because the problems they have raised deserve to be examined.
6.

TWO HUMANITIES

My colleagues and I, we used to call this student the Japanese poodle, due to his light complexion, flat nose and slightly wavy hair. We did not take much time to spot him out. Whatever we had said in our lectures, in addition to the lessons, the discussions we had done in the corridors while waiting to return to our lecturing podiums, all of these things were duly noted and faithfully reported to the proper authorities. We already knew that the spies polluted among the students. But the Japanese poodle was the most dangerous of all because he took his task to heart, fulfilled it conscientiously and, even invented stories whenever needed in order to enhance or aggravate the misunderstanding which weighed on our relations with the political Commissar who was on duty in the Faculties. I, therefore, lent my ears to his words.

- Professor, you know that the political plate-form means in our State, especially in the field of teaching. I would not make an insult by believing that you do not know anything about this. You are a heavyweight intellectual, you have given all your properties to the Party before going into the underground resistance. You have been assigned to important missions. Consequently, you know the importance that the Party has put on the problem of education. Your mission is to form the communist man of tomorrow who will bring his contribution to the great endeavor for the edification work of our country. Our President Ho Chi Minh has recognized the difficulties of the task of teaching: "It takes ten years for the planting of a tree, it requires a hundred years to form a man." Indeed, in order to form a man in the way the Party wishes, it is necessary to justify for oneself the possession of a good political plate-form.

- My young friend, I do not know from whom you have obtained the information about my past. You have probably put me in your grinder to give me a certain importance which flatters me. But, please allow me to make a few rectifications. Firstly, I am not a heavyweight intellectual since I am only 1.60 meters in height. Thus, I am a pygmy among the great men of our country. But,
being a dwarf that I am, I have applauded the August Revolution together with the entire people of our country and, from the early times, the early calls, I have given myself to my people. If I admire and respect the revolutionaries, if I am grateful for the sacrifices that they have made and the success that they have gained in the course of their heroic struggles for the freedom of the people and the independence of Vietnam, I must confess to you that I do not know the Party to which I have not sought to be admitted, and the rites and mysteries of which I have not been initiated to, and this has caused my tongue to be stiff whenever I have to cry out the slogan "For the Party". All the things that I have done, the donation of all my properties and services, I have offered them to the people.

There is nothing here but logic. I invite you to think for a moment about the origins of power. Power is conquered by either peaceful or violent means. But, by whatever way it is established, power has the imperative need to justify itself in the eyes of those who hold it or who are subjected to it. Yet, the holding of power can only be done in one of the following two ways: one can claim the mandate from either heaven or the will of the people. Theocracy or democracy, these are the two possible justifications for power. From the moment that the seizure of power is done by force, it can claim neither support from heaven nor that of the masses. Thus, it is compelled to have an alternative reaction for its own defense as a justification that it does not feel necessary or no longer has the need for, since there is nothing to be justified and what matters is simply to carry out one’s defense. But against whom is the power defending itself? Against the people and another political formation. Against the rivalry of another political organization, the power is proclaiming the monopoly of its direction. Against the people, it is structuring a State, with its apparatus, organs, and functioning, with the mission of executing its orders and setting up social and professional organizations to include in its networks the entire population, in terms of activity, age, sex, faith, a population which spirit, heart and action are controlled by the power. But, since the power adopts decisions, decides on attitudes, and undertakes measures for the benefit of its own privileges and interests which must be hidden from public curiosity, it must seal itself inside an impenetrable secret and shroud itself with an unfathomable mystery. The pyramidal form of
power triumphs everywhere, in the agency layout of the State and its services, and in the organization of society with all its ramifications. All over the country, from the level of the communes and districts to that of the ministries and central services, what is needed is to put members of the Party in the positions of command, surveillance and control, and, thus, through the Directorate of Personnel which nominates all the civil servants and through the Ministry of the Interior and the Police, calm then prevails and the leaders are able to have a really good sleep.

- Professor, it can be seen that you are devoid of any political plate-form since you are concerned more with appearances than with the realities, and you are digging a gap which does not exist between the people and the Party. Our Party does not claim to be of divine origin: such an idea alone is comical for it is outdated and obsolete. Obviously, the Party has not been raised to power by way of elections, that is to say, BY the people, and considers itself compelled to maintain its mechanism and functioning in secrecy. But I must ask you to go back to the time when the doctrine and the communist parties took over power. The ideology that they were advocating clashed head-on with the existing political positions, for it aimed at the destruction of capitalism and all the political parties born from such a regime. Since then, all the governments subjected to capitalism have carried out a fight to death against communism which, to defend itself, has confined itself into hiding. The habit of secrecy and mystery has become rooted in the communists. Furthermore, the Party is similar to a family that does not want its intimacy to be known. It is for the same reason of self-defense against the enemies of communism that the State has given to itself a pyramidal structure and put its members at all the heads of the pyramids. As you can see, even when it has taken power, the struggle continues between itself and capitalism. Consequently, more than ever, it has to keep its projects in the dark and maintain a good hold on the State that it governs in order to protect itself from the blows of the enemies at home and abroad. The historical circumstances in which the party was born dictate its way of being which shocks you but can be understood. The criteria for the happiness of the people, is it not order and security? So, our leaders are not the only ones to have a good sleep, the entire people are also benefiting from the same privilege. Democracy does not only mean government BY the
people but, even more so, FOR the people. From that viewpoint, no other democracy is comparable to ours, since our leaders are concerned with only one thing: the good of the people!

- You are talking about gold! For the time being, the health of our country seems to be good. But an analysis in depth, in the infrastructure of the State and society, reveals the faults and vices which, sooner or later, will make our concerns legitimate.

The political monopoly of power to which the Party is hanging and clinging, in the long run, will have disastrous effects. Firstly, when all the positions of direction, whatever their importance, must be taken by Party members. We know well that our leaders, as well as their subordinates, cannot claim the possession of adequate culture and knowledge which would enable them to fulfill legally and responsibly the functions assigned to them in a modern and ever complex State, in which ignorance and incompetence must admit their helplessness. But, if these public servants who are burdening the administration and technical services with their incompetence, causing irreparable losses to the State Budget, they are also breaking down the prestige of the Party and its credit by all kinds of offenses that they are committing: theft of public properties, corruption, embezzlement, fraud, forgery and use of forgery... The monopoly of power generates the abuses of power and pushes the holders of power on the slope greased with vice and criminality. The trust of the people for the Party decreases and is further eroding itself everyday, and is fading out slowly.

The economy, which is organized and managed by a voluntarism of bad taste, will sooner or later produce its disastrous and catastrophic effects. In the absence of competition, production is standing around, and keeps on repeating its errors and mistakes, the merchandises are stockpiling and deteriorating in the warehouses, just good to be thrown away one day as garbage. The manpower, both manual and intellectual, poorly paid, stagnating in poverty and lassitude, is drowning its dynamism in the tide of bitterness and despair. The currency is falling down, the printing plate of banknotes is rolling without interruption, and inflation is getting more and more serious everyday. The secret funds are getting larger endlessly and the leaders are wasting fantastic amounts in shameful expenses!
The intelligentsia, despised and reduced to occupy low level functions, cannot give the full measure of their knowledge and talents which they ask to offer to the service of the people. They are criticized for their bourgeois and little-bourgeois origins and connections, their inclinations for critique and democratic tendencies. Such an attitude for them is unforgivable in this age of the technological and scientific revolution!

These analyses and observations led me to sound the alarm during a Conference I made at the request of the Front. I did not try to open debate on the merits of democracy or to undermine the foundations of the on-going communism. Having seen that, in the relations between the Party and the people, the current of autocracy is flowing from the top to the bottom, and when the waters are collected in the sink below, they turn out to be foul with all kinds of dirt which make it improper for domestic uses. I am not asking to cut the flow, to block the source, but only to be able to treat the liquid and make it clean.

Besides, I notice that the administration of justice is faulty by its lack of independence and freedom, leading to the punishment of offenses even quite severely, while they cannot be justified for any penalty. On the contrary, there are crimes which are provoking scandals and have not been punished. Such situations are revolting to the public conscience and general opinion. Subjected during millennia to feudal despotism, the Vietnamese people have not benefited from ideal conditions to accede rapidly to democracy, but that is not the problem there. The problem is the request, without touching anything about the apparatus of the Party and the State, that the people have the possibility to reach the ruling authorities and submit their grievances and remarks. It is, if one may say so, the problem about freedom of opinion, the exercise of which will strengthen the ties between the Party and the people in a two-way dialogue, not only will it permit the interlocutors to understand one another but also avoid errors that the Party would have committed if the voice of the people had reached it in time. Freedom of opinion, by its nature, does not possess a democratic or socialist meaning, but any government that is concerned with acting FOR the people must make it its duty to promulgate it. If all these quarrels are about grammar, why then
should there be a fight about words? Is there a need for happiness to wear a socialist or capitalist label?

- Professor, this is what constitutes your error. We have already suspected that you are lacking a political platform. Now, we know it for certain. First of all, you separate the people from the Party, and this is contrary to everything that the Party has ceaselessly proclaimed. The communists understand democracy in the sense of an action FOR the people and have tried to do everything in order to serve properly the people's interests, not in theory, on paper, but in the reality of things. Then, you see a \emph{logomania} which we consider having the utmost importance. We are not fighting about words. The bourgeois vow us to hegemonies, they profess endless hatred for us. They plot for our death. Their hostility against us is carried out on the international scene by the cold war which is freezing all relations of union between the States and those of friendship between the peoples! The word “capitalism” condenses all this content, hits the mind and points the finger at the enemy who wants our death and whom we have to kill. In the face of capitalism, this is abhorrent to us and vice-versa, we have erected socialism which embodies our hopes and dreams, is showing us the way to take and attain the happiness of our people and of the proletariat world, which symbolizes the future of humanity. As you can see, they are not words but two conceptions of life, two modes of existence, two slogans of struggle. In contradiction to what you are thinking, the socialist happiness is the opposite of the capitalist happiness, because it is that of the workers who, at the sweat of their brows, conquer the joy of life, while happiness in the capitalist countries is the result of exploitation, soaked with the tears and blood of the poor! Well, you are demanding freedom of opinion for the people. Are you aware of what this is all about? It is an open door to all kinds of raving generated by ignorance, incomprehension, ill-will, partialities, and sometimes insane fantasies. Many people, paid by the enemy, take advantage of this to rail against communism and sow animosity, hatred against the leaders. The entire society then suffers from the resulting violence and disorder. You are lacking a healthy platform, as all the intellectuals do, and are obsessed by your prejudices, your perceptions and reflections are erroneous.
As for us, the young communists, we have faith, in communism and the Party. It is the Party which has eyes and ears for us, endows us with the faculty to think and feel, forms and makes us worthy to be the architects, builders, and members of the society of tomorrow, that of the triumphant socialism. It is our Truth, the Truth. We make up the new humanity, which cardinal virtues are discipline, obedience, the spirit of sacrifice. We do not discuss the orders, we execute them, if need be, at the expense of our immediate interests, without hesitation, with closed eyes.

- Yes, you belong to a humanity different from ours. For us, intellectuals, we have the shortcoming of trying to understand before acting, to weigh the pros and cons before taking a decision, to have a look with sufficient vigilance capable of piercing through the wineskin-bags filled with vanity and vainness, and of grasping quickly the ridicule of people and the pomposity of speeches. While genuine feelings move us, the pantomimes of the hypocrites lift up our vigor, and we are horrified by the crimes of the Greats. We are defending ourselves with our skepticism, we are attacking with our irony. Our critical mind saves us from the errors. Our humanity is located at the antipodes of these green novices whose suppurating fanaticism distorts the face and denatures the heart.

A dramatic silence overcomes the room. The audience is holding its breath, so as not to miss any single detail of the joust between the two humanities. When the poodle gets down from the podium, the person succeeding him is a teacher.

There is a span of thirty years between them, but both belong to the same humanity of the four-legged species with a wagging tail which constitutes its distinctive sign. He has been a secondary school teacher at a certain establishment in Central [Vietnam]. But, at the time of the Japanese occupation, he was seen having his picture taken all dressed up in the mandarin’s ceremonial dress, with the ivory plaque well placed on his thrown-out chest and beaming face. It can be noticed that he has achieved the dream of his life. Then, during the anti-colonialist resistance, since the mandarin status has lost its prestige and been erased from the social map with the bones of its featherless members buried under the ruins of the feudal monarchy, our dignitary of the Court of Hue has carefully hidden his tunic and ivory plaque somewhere, and
manifests a virulent anger whenever somebody reminds him of his past, whether to flatter or accuse him. Defrocked, he has felt the necessity of having a new skin. Back to the teaching profession and, using the bowings and sugary smiles, he does not miss any opportunity to provide menial services to the despots under whose orders he is serving and gaining their favors. He has climbed up one by one the steps of the administrative hierarchy in the field of teaching. After the Geneva Agreements, when the resistance government has returned to Hanoi, and the doors of the Faculties have reopened, he manages to have himself assigned to the post of lecturer without having to justify himself by any university degree or research works which, usually, are required of candidates for teaching in high studies. But the practice, which continues to prevail without end in the Vietnamese communist State, is to promote to functions of responsibility the fellows whose competence only consists of a favorable judgment and esteem by the ruling authorities. One must be a serious ignorant to congratulate him for his stylish bearing in his mandarin’s outfit as shown in an old picture which, in the past, he used to distribute to the families of his acquaintances to remind them that he used to belong to the nomenclature of the Court of Hue. He must be biting his fingers now for having given in to the impulsions of his vanity, been photographed and having the image of his grandeur diffused to everybody!

7.

TWO CULTURES

If my Japanese poodle raises the antagonism between the two humanities, the two-legged being that is making a smile with his mouth, similar a dog waggling its tail, provokes my surprise. It is, indeed, a big one for me to see coming down into the arena a fellow who, always, is having an eye on the Party without much result and has remained up to now a no-party man. Would this be a challenge with a twinkle of hope in his eyes, should he come out of it victorious, to be accepted in the ranks of the Party and achieve the burning ambition of the opportunists among whom he is already a shining member? Would it not be at last a way for him
to quench his thirst for being able to reprimand publicly a University professor in front of his colleagues and students and, for a moment, chase away the inferiority complex of a poor creature that is aiming its craving at an objective which is out of its reach? Is it to demonstrate to everybody that, in the world of the no-party fellows, it is possible to find the best, represented by the accuser who has received the benediction of the Party, and the worst, incarnated by the accused who is under the threat of being stricken by the wrath from Heaven? Is it not because in this essential debate about the relations between the Party and the Intelligentsia, between politics and the grey cells, the leaders are reluctant to intervene directly and prefer to give the honor and assignment to a no-party man to defend communism? Of course, the Party could have chosen a better lawyer but, may be, those it has contacted have declined the offer of siding with the Party and standing up against the intellectual masses whose democratic aspirations are known to everybody.

My accuser launches his first broadside:

- Dear colleague, in your lectures about the literatures of the West, why have you given so much importance to the capitalist authors and writings? The socialist literature is shown to be the poor relative. You give the impression of leaning too much to the side of our enemies.

- My dear eminent colleague, your observation is hilarious and I think that if you wish to avoid sullying your renown, you should have abstained from making such an observation. Nevertheless, in consideration for what I believe to be a distraction of your noble spirit being intoxicated by the ethylic fumes of politics, I wish to remind you that western literature has existed for millenniums while the socialist literature is about one century old.

It is my turn to point out how the term "enemy" that you have used is out of place and improper. This word is part of the political vocabulary which has been used immoderately by some leaders. It does not have any literary meaning and, even in the field of politics, has become obsolete currency, is no longer legal tender. You have followed the courses in dialectical materialism and know that everything changes, that the enemy of yesterday can become
the friend of tomorrow, and vice-versa! A professor in literature does not lean either to the side of the enemy or to that of friends. The great authors of literatures in the world are neither friends nor enemies of anybody, they are the friends of man whom they seek to know and cultivate. Let us not inflict the political manias to the study of literature!

- We have now reached the heart of the problem. How are we going to regulate the relations between politics and culture? We are in the presence of two cultures: the communist culture and the intellectual culture. Both aim at the forming of man. What do you think of the communist culture?

- The communist culture develops the forming of man from the present image of the best communist personalities, loved and respected by the people who dream of imitating them. These personalities are endowed with undeniable virtues at the highest level of their human quality. These virtues are the love of the fatherland and people, the spirit of sacrifice and courage which despise death and tortures, and faithfulness in political camaraderie. Unfortunately, so many noble and precious virtues are handicapped, in their exercise, by the lack of culture and inexperience in the management of the country and of man. The communist has a pure soul but, since his knowledge is limited, he is indulging himself in strictness and the intransigence of his judgment of man, in voluntarism and subjectivity about his structuring of the economy. He has the taste for simplification and standardization, for oneness to facilitate his task in the governing of the people and things. In his rapports with the intellectuals, he is helpless about an inferiority complex which is stiffening his attitude, he is expressing himself through forms of protest about friendship and trust, but is feeling within himself distrust and antipathy. He is of a human variety that is unknown in Vietnamese society. If the popular masses idolize him – at least as long as he preserves the purity of his feelings and the morality of his conscience, and safeguards his honor and dignity - , the intellectuals maintain a certain reserve and much vigilance in order not to be impaled on the sword which he has readily bared, ready to pierce through the careless or naïve who may contradict him.
If communism is forged in the revolutionary struggle, which has eliminated the militants without certain virtues and retained only those who possess them, such virtues should serve to shape the typical image of the communist, the intellectual is formed by the studies he has done and by the way of life he has had in the urban environment, where the working proletariat, barely coming into the world, is still searching for his way and learning his role. The colonialist Security and police, as well as the colonialist School, isolate the intellectual from the revolutionary world, make him impervious and un receptive to revolutionary politics. Formed in such conditions, the intellectual becomes impregnated with the qualities and imperfections of the capitalist education. He opens his mind to the democratic influences, converts himself to the gospel taught by the philosophers from the century of Enlightenment, adopts the ideology of the bourgeois revolution of 1789, and considers the enjoyment of man’s natural rights as criteria for any civilized society. He acquires, therefore, the bourgeois virtues but, without the benefit of the communist education, he is limiting himself to a comfortable existence, afraid of disorder and violence, and manifests his horror for any kind of politics, particularly one of the red color! He is filled with the precious qualities in the world of thoughts, he artfully practices introspection, analysis, logic, and applies his gifts for critique. He has given himself an abstract conception of man removed from the social and historical contingencies, from the struggle of the classes. That is the reason why his capital vice is the fear of violence and politics. Therefore, in his contacts with the communists, is he not eventually struck by an inferiority complex: he feels being small, weak and coward before the heroes who have faced death, with eyes inflamed by the hatred of oppression and injustice.

Thus, on both sides, an inferiority complex is surely exercising all its weight on the relations between each other. Thus, the resulting results lack of naturalness, warmth, sincerity, intimacy, mutual and friendly confidence. Politeness is superficial, courtesy is sheer diplomacy and reserve. Each one is afraid of the other’s contempt, and the common interests are in jeopardy!

But the intellectual must accept the inevitable. He must admit that the communist direction is beneficial to the people, the
revolutionary formation of our leaders has enabled them to gain victory in their encounters with the nationalist Party that has gone down because of its notorious incompetence, doubtful morality and unbridled passion for lucre, and has been discredited forever in our country. It is a victory of the communist culture that has made the revolutionary man a strong man like hardened steel.

- You are kicking an already open door. The communist culture is forming man for the revolutionary struggle, the intellectual culture is forming man for the cogitation of research. But the communist culture must not annihilate the intellectual culture. Between these two cultures, peaceful coexistence can come about and, better still, a beneficial collaboration for the respective interests of the two groups and of the entire people.

- Very well. There is no question for the communist to kill the intellectual. The door is always open for conciliation, for mutual understanding. The communist can, and even must, require the help of the intellectual in his management of the economy, the administration of the country, and the execution of the law... Such a collaboration is necessary and advantageous for the country.

- But this is not done in the country. The positions of direction and responsibilities are always assigned to members of the Party, and all of them do not excel much by their competence and honesty. The opportunists, who are having their eyes on these posts, turn their backs to the people from whom they do not have much to expect, and are looking to the Party that is holding the horn of plenty and distributing the favors, sinecures, honors and priorities. In the underworld resistance, the admission to the Party was carried out under conditions of extreme hardship and saluted by the unanimous applauds of the entire people. Now, the game of intrigues and the explosion of selfish and shameful ambitions are going full swing, the admissions are multiplying themselves, and quantity is detrimental to quality. The enormous power that the Party has taken on itself is leading to disastrous abuses: corruption is reaching the cadres and a wave of immorality and delinquency is invading entirely the State.

So, in view of such a tidal wave which is threatening the country with an irreversible catastrophe, I am asking you: "Is it not

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permissible for the intellectual to present the Party with this problem?"

- I am not aware of the Party's opinion but I think that the intellectual has nevertheless the right to refer his worries to the leaders. The essential thing here is the respect for the forms, and everything must take place in privacy since it concerns a family quarrel.

- In the face of the imminence of the catastrophe, the intellectual feels having the duty of formulating the problem of communism in all its magnitude, in order to find a solution.

Well, there are the facts which require and demand reflection. The Party is an institution which birth, organization, functioning, have been done outside of the people, devoid of any permanent and regular control. Everything undertaken by the Party takes place in absolute secrecy, as in the mafia. If it were a society or private association, set up to serve the interests of its members within the legality, there is nothing to say. But this Party has the pretension to rule, and actually rules the people, its decisions are legally binding and must be applied throughout the entire country. Mandated neither by Heaven nor BY the people, the Party is governing the people. In fact, there is not much to argue about that, the elections which have taken place are sometimes entirely rigged, by way of suggestions, counsels and pressures to have the people elect individuals that they do not know and to whom they refuse to delegate any power whatsoever. For its defense, the Party proclaims that it is acting in the interest of the people, FOR the people. The people are thus reduced to a under age minor or a handicapped who is fed without being asked about his or her desires or wishes! Worse still, the people are forbidden to express their opinions, the regime is generalized by the wooden tongue and the bowing of the head. Around the fortress, the deep moats, the high walls, the corps of guards are protecting the sleep of the lord, the members of his family and courtesans, against the inadmissible intrusion of complaints and sobbing cries by the louts who are proclaiming their miseries and misfortunes.

Is the communist culture trying to encourage lies and hypocrisy, to legitimize fraud and deception, to fool the people?
- That is what you say, but personally, I see things from a different angle. First of all, in the political domain, a decision once taken may not produce effects in the immediate but in the long term. Without falling into the error of wanting to consider all things under the angle of eternity, it is undisputable that the time element must play an important role, for a backward people, to whom the rulers want to make the promise of a radiant future. The people need time to understand and absorb the novelty of the principles, be able to climb the echelons of social progress. My opinion is different from yours. Wherever there are elections, I affirm that democracy exists, since everything is done BY the people. And, when a party leader does not fill his pockets, does not accumulate a private capital, I affirm that the policies he promulgates are working FOR the people.

- Masquerade, dear colleague, masquerade. The rigged elections do not prove democracy. The Party does not round up its capital, but the purses of quite a number of its members are swelling, while waiting for the gangrene of corruption to reach all those holders of some shred of power! You say that everything is done BY the people. Well, let me ask you: were the people consulted on the major policies of the Party: the agrarian reform and the collectivization of land, the planning of the economy and particularly the orientation of the country toward socialism? NO, and no. The political monopoly has closed the country from the outside world and shut the mouth from all opinions. The natural rights of man, which are enjoyed by all the civilized people, are unknown, and it is forbidden to just ask for its exercise, and even to talk about it. You must be seeing things which do not exist, through your faith about political convictions which the rulers have sown into your brain. At the event of the August Revolution, the entire people rose up to re-conquer their independence and freedom. They put their trust in the word of the communist leaders, all filled with a glorious past of sacrifice for the fatherland. But afterwards, in the stride, the people have found themselves under the imposition of the so-called popular democracy, then that of socialism. We are no longer worshiping Confucius, while conserving the noblest values of Confucianism, we have been converted to the religion of the Marxist trinity: Marx-Lenin-Stalin, whose portraits hanging from the high peaks are keeping watch on
communist orthodoxy in the audience! When and how have we been consulted about our desires and wishes? This has not been done, the Party is our sight, decides for us, and orders us to adopt its views which, it is said, must bring us a future of light and happiness. That is how the communist culture has formed our leaders and wants to form us. It criticizes western culture for having conceived the abstract man, cut off from realities and groups severed from the class struggle which must bring about happiness for all, by renovating society and rebuilding another one. Western culture will accuse communism of having formed a human type burning with ardor and political furor, following on the leaders’ heels, closing their eyes and ears to the realities of the outside world, and keeping their mouths shut for any criticizing aspiration. It is surprising that this man, baked in the communist oven, has alienated his individuality, and even his personality, and substituted a double of himself whose reactions are under remote-control from the outside. A Western legend has presented a man who has sold his soul to the devil. The communist man, born from the communist culture, has sold his soul to the Party.

- Let us suppose that it is even so, I do not see what harm that could be? Would you push the tyranny to the point of forbidding everybody from seeking the truth and, once the person has found it, from following it all the way? The Christian sees in Jesus Christ his truth, the Buddhist recognizes in Buddha his truth. Why do you not admit that the communist man finds his own in the Party?

Each person is looking for salvation wherever he or she can find it. We are those who have known their revelation on the road to Damascus. That of communism.

8.

THE THIRD BULLFIGHT AT THE VIETNAMESE SOCIALIST PARTY

If the organizers of the bullfight at the University hope to have me come out of it humiliated, degraded, they are mistaken.
Except for a few spies, snitches who have mingled themselves in the crowd, as it is usually the case in all communities and meetings, the multitude have rallied to my side and are displaying for me respectful sympathy in their looks which are warming up my heart. No one dares to manifest his feelings otherwise, either by the mouth or hands, due to the fear of being spotted by the policemen and exposed to their bothering. The political fanaticism has been met by a bitter failure and the leaders have drawn a lesson from it.

It is for this reason that the bullfight at the headquarters of the Socialist Party proceeds, if I may so say it, in privacy. Nothing is abnormal at the end of the day. What is unusual is this privacy aspect which is different from what happened at the University, where any joker, with some instruction and knowledge of boot-kicking with me as aim, can get himself in the seat and throw out his diatribes. In the meeting room devoid of participants, there are only me and my three judges who are sitting behind a table covered by a green sheet. I am facing them, seated in a chair. I have the impression of going back to the time when I had to defend my thesis for the doctorate-in-law, or was candidate for some examination session. In fact, I soon realize that I am facing the court of the Party which has been gathered to judge in secret a comrade who has committed a serious fault, the scandal of which has tarnished the Party, and causing it considerable damage.

In 1951, in the underground resistance, Dang Chau Tue, a member of the communist Party, came to ask me and another person, Dr. Nguyen Xuan Nguyen, to submit our applications for admission into the ranks of the Party. Our behavior and activity in the Resistance was noticed in the high spheres. Since the communists are very keen about formalism and suffering from the mania of collectivizing people like properties, each one according to his age, sex, professional activity, in order to incorporate them in the mass organizations, to educate and manage them better, and, on the other hand, they do not tolerate that the intellectuals enjoy individuality and freedom, they want to dragoon the intellectuals into the Party, the high instance of which and its governing role should be flattering to the latter. In fact, at the time, the ambitious, the opportunists, were dreaming of being present in the communist ranks and carried out more than one act of lowness
in order to be well considered in the eyes of their recruiters. Yet, at the same epoch, quite of number of intellectuals found unbearable the leaders’ narrowness of mind and character of intransigence, left the ranks of the resistance to go back to Hanoi, and from there taken off to better horizons. Consequently, without any consultation between us, Dr. Nguyen and I considered that the “honor” given to us was merely an act of mistrust about us: the intention was to have us in a tighter grip through a closer surveillance by the cells of the Party and to prevent us from making off should we have some idea about that. We both declined the invitation which was extended to us. But the leaders did no accept that we could remain outside an organization. They then proposed that we join the Socialist Party. Finally, in order to be left in peace, we resigned ourselves to accept the proposition. It would not be wise to show opposition by an absolute and categorical refusal to the wish of the Party, especially in the underground resistance, when invisible eyes kept a watch on our movements. The risk would have been too great.

But what is that Socialist Party in which we have enrolled ourselves? From all that I am aware of personally, it is a group of intellectuals, the best known among them have been Nguyen Xien, a former professor with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics, and Hoang Minh Giam, former graduate in Pedagogy and teacher at a private school bearing the name of Thang Long. It seems that both of them were contacted by the communists by the time of the clandestine underground. Therefore, from the first day following the Revolution, Nguyen Xien has found himself assuming the presidency of the Administrative Committee of the Bac Bo (North Viet Nam) and, likewise, for Hoang Minh Giam to become adviser to Ho Chi Minh before being promoted to be Foreign Minister of Viet Nam. I vaguely know that they are the leaders of a leftist party, with delegates at the first National Assembly who have attracted public attention by the red ties they wear during the meetings. In the resistance underground, I have learnt that this party, decorated with its “socialist” label, has gathered a group of intellectuals among the members of the resistance who consider themselves to be a party of intellectuals, although their early members that I happen to meet in the course of my peregrinations while carrying out my task as attorney appointed by the court, are manual workers without any intellectual culture. Back in Hanoi, in
addition to the cell of educators, with most of them being school teachers, there is another cell of medical doctors and pharmacists, and a third one of engineers and technicians, together with a fourth one which operates by the recruiting of craftsmen and low-level public servants for the localities, and finally a fifth cell composed of jurists, former graduates of the Hanoi Law School, with most of them having been mandarins in the provinces before being reclassified in the career of judges of the Vietnamese justice.

Prior to the Movement of the Hundred Flowers, which has turned out to be a devastating cataclysm in the intellectual world, the attribute “intellectual” used to fare rather well. The Socialist Party claims for itself a certain superiority over the Democratic Party which brings together the “bourgeois” people, the industrialists or traders, who have abjured their old faith, donated their fortunes to the State, and taken their seats at the National Front of the Fatherland. Does such pluralism of political parties mean that the communists are professing democracy?

Alas, nothing of the sort. In this domain, as in others, they bluff shamelessly, try to daze people, and go to great length in the art of make-up and travesty. At first sight and in public meetings, the communist Party shows some deference to the two brother parties. From the height of a wall, above the two crossed flags of the Soviet Union, with its sickle and hammer, and of Viet Nam decorated with its gold star, the trinity of Marx, Lenin and Stalin is overhanging the bust in plaster of Ho Chi Minh, and is looking down movingly over the spectacle of reciprocal smiles and bowings that are lavishly dispensed by the three Parties among themselves and which are apparently united in a threesome offered to the admiration of the masses!

Nothing can be more significant: the set, the scenery, the priority. At the supreme summit, there is the communist Doctrine represented by the dead deities: Marx, Lenin, Stalin. Lower down, the national flags, and, further down, the national leader. At the peak of the pyramid, on the throne is the political doctrine of the proletarian internationalism that is ruling nations and peoples. One can argue long on the principles, play games with words and terms, get into a brawl by throwing punches from the texts, the
logomania may go on indefinitely, but, a return to the basis of facts will lead in the end to irrefutable conclusions. In Viet Nam, in all public meetings, the setting which has just been described gives proof of the hegemony of politics over all other human activities. It has subjected to its absolute power all the thought processes of the mind and steps of the soul, the power that rules, in totality, all the expressions of the being, it has set and imposed a scale of characterized values, according to which the proletarian internationalism enslaves the nationalism and individualism of the people.

The communist culture fashions the communist man who only swears in the names of Marx and Lenin, believes only in the Party, holder of the Truth, and displays a fanaticism impervious to reality from which he is no longer able to see the phenomena and concrete manifestations, the stranger he has become to the feelings of humanity once such feelings are condemned by the politics! Any progress in politics is paid in return by a backward step in intelligence and of the heart.

Likewise, any advance in the realm of international Marxism is equally measured by a drawback in national tradition. The wonder felt by the observer is to see the entire people, entangled in the ruts of a feudal past, falling in with the brother-countries and yelling the slogans of communism. By the side of people who are lauding the resulting efforts of the agitators, at the time of the clandestine secrecy, and of the preachers, after the triumph of the Revolution, there are others who are distrustful of the wrong doings by psittacism. Whatever, it is permissible to ask oneself to what extent is the sincerity of the popular masses rising up, especially that of the peasants, when they proclaim their new beliefs. This is seen during the collectivization of land in the countryside. The more they are applauding the Party during the agrarian reform, chastising the class of landowners and dividing up the latter’s paddy-fields among the agricultural workers, the more the masses are reluctant to enter into the agricultural cooperatives, where the nonchalance of their efforts as well as their indifference to the efficiency in production can be considered as outright sabotage! If the urban small bourgeoisie manifest an ardent enthusiasm for the welcoming of the Resistance Government at its return to the capital, they also feel in their hearts...
heavy bitterness when the collectivization of the city buildings is taking away all their means of subsistence and driving some small owners, condemned to scarcity and destitution, to commit suicide by throwing themselves into the Red River. What to say about the intellectuals who, right after their admission into the Party, are declaiming their ultra-communism in inflammatory articles, in order to give vent to their hatred against the revisionists of all kinds and, in a broad manner, all those who have felt the heat and, in one or two dozens years later, become turned coats and fall into the errors which they castigated yesterday with a virulent verve?

On the basis of these facts, it is impossible to contest the veracity, therefore, it is permitted to question whether or not the fervor of the novices is sufficiently deep, sufficiently real as one may believe it to be!

And how astounding it has been for the people to learn that popular violence is taking place in the countries of Eastern Europe! The most hardened zealots begin to feel doubt creeping into their hearts when they see the great Soviet Union tottering, that very state which has taught Marxism-Leninism to the world! Their skepticism grows when they hear the doctrinaires yelling their faith in the future of socialism and now calling socialist what they used to condemn in the capitalists just yesterday: the market economy with free competition, the law of supply and demand, free enterprise... They are asking themselves how to differentiate socialism from capitalism and how the same phraseology can change meaning so quickly. They feel concerned about a minority of countries which are still clinging to socialism, while a large number of the “brother” states have turned their backs to it, as some kind of nightmare which needs to be forgotten when waking up. As for the people, they are astounded in the face of the deluge in criminality which is drowning such a large number of members of the ruling Party whose hypocrisy has been bared.

But, in 1956, Vietnamese communism is flying high and is congratulating itself for its triumph. Particularly, the ruling Party is still conserving its purity, as far as its morals are concerned, and is honored by the people’s respect and trust. The Party is looking fondly with its contented eyes both the socialist and democratic parties, created by its weakness for formalism, that are expressing
to the best of their abilities their filial fidelity for the beloved father to whom they owe their existence. The Party has given birth to them, is raising them with the best of its red blood, providing them with magnificent homes and personnel to serve them, and, especially, has enabled them to lead a life of royalty by financing entirely their operations. All that is required from them is to play the role of understudy, to be more or less the noisy echo of the ruling Party. And these two “brother” parties are following close on the Party’s heels, like recruits marching behind their corporal.

But the joke cannot fool anybody, either locally or abroad. The pluralism which characterizes democracy does not exist here where there is only a caricature generated by the fantasies of a delirious formalism that is simply fooling itself, while believing that it is fooling others. The game has lasted for many long years and allows the leaders to seclude themselves within the beatitude of their satisfaction. Enormous sums of money have been spent to that effect and the time has come for the State Budget to ask for mercy, after having tightened its belt to the last notch! The keeping of these two poor relatives has been too costly and completely useless, it is decided that they should receive the kicks in their behinds, and they have disappeared, without any fanfare, like beggars fading away in the silence of shame with their bowls from now on empty!

It can be understood then that, in the padded atmosphere of calm and deference, where the world of the social parasites demands from its profiters docility and wisdom, the indiscretion of a “socialist” is producing the effect of a terrorist bomb! The scandal is too great to be hushed up or swept under the rug! It is not enough to bring the culprit before the jurisdiction of the Front and that of the University where he is carrying out his activity; he must also be handed to the justice of the Socialist Party to which he is a member, against his wish, for that matter! It is of high urgency and necessity that all the collectivities, in which the culprit has taken part, must dissociate themselves from the black sheep and mercilessly pronounce his exclusion, to educate him as well as others!

Therefore, the third bullfight is organized at the headquarters of the Socialist Party. Different from the two preceding ones, there is
no audience: in the silence of the twilight, I am alone facing my judges, the magistrate, former mandarin whose portrait I have described earlier, all the three of them belonging to the cell of Jurists, as I do. Three ghosts in a hell where the silence of the solitude is greeting an unexpected discretion. I am surprised by this and asking myself for an explanation. Is this an expression of pity for me and a wish to lessen my humiliation? I am not aware that pity is a natural or acquired virtue of communism, which rather hides itself behind strict intransigence, excluding clemency with regard to political faults which are causing prejudice, even lightly, to its interests.

I finally understand this change in the scenery, which goes with the one in the setting and that of the actors on center stage. I learn that the two bullfights, at the Front and the University, have produced an effect contrary to the one expected. I have come out of it, not humiliated and beating my breast, but crowned by the halo of the victor who has held his position, come hell or high water to defend his opinions in face of the attacks which are launched against him. It is expected to see a sinner who is repentant and abjuring his convictions for the sake of keeping his place in the State. But not caring much about the insinuating threats, the sword hanging over my head, I have been an intellectual who, with all kinds of considerations and nuances, has put his finger on the wound and have opened the eyes of the cowards too afraid of their masters' vengeance, trembling for their freedom and interests as well as those of their kind, bursting their own crystalline lens and piercing their own eardrums so as not to see or hear anything about the truth. It is, therefore, necessary to limit the damages by excluding the mass from listening to a speech for the defense which seems to become one for the prosecution!

I have also learned that, if the few dozen members of the Socialist Party have not been summoned – three jurists have given their resignations: Dinh Lo, Vu Nhu Giai and Nguyen Huu Dac, - that, if the session is not public in order to avoid attracting the attention of the intellectual masses, it is because in the course of the discussions between the judges and the accused, the debate would open up on the subject concerning the attitude of the intellectual in the communist world and in face of communism.

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The onlookers must not be permitted to come and know about perspectives which they have never considered before.

9.

ATTITUDE OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN THE COMMUNIST WORLD

The Magistrate who is presiding the session, and also well-known to the reader, fires the first burst. His zeal of person-without-a-party who is trying to redeem himself from a compromising past puts fire in his look, and the satisfaction to harass by his attacks against an intellectual, whose social situation provokes his jealousy, are communicating a furious tone to his words:

- Comrade, you have obtained unprecedented university successes and been invested with the trust of our leaders who have installed you in the central committees of ten mass organizations, what else do you need for your ambitions? Your pupils and students have forgotten neither the teaching you gave them, nor the gesture you made by handing in your resignation when a colonialist inspector came and caused you trouble, then by returning to the practice of law at the court where you had taken oath already by 1932 in France and where it did not take long for you to gain the trust of your clients and, thus, acquire a prominent place in society. It is known that, before going into the underground resistance, you have donated to our Party three buildings which were your entire family heritage, and throughout the ten years during the period of the anti-colonialist resistance in your dual quality of professor and attorney, you have rendered good services to our State. You could have continued to enjoy the happiness given by a well-filled way of life without having the need of throwing yourself into a political struggle in which you have put yourself in the wrong camp by hurling your blows against a Party that has always pampered you and elevated you to a rank which provokes desire in many people. That is ingratitude, surely I am not mistaken here! Have you ever thought about the correct

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attitude that you should have adopted in our communist world which is under attack on all the battlefields by a ferocious enemy? You must be aware that the attitude you have taken is causing a considerable prejudice to yourself and, even more so, to a Party that, by its exploits crowned with magnificent successes, is worthy to be honored, respected, and glorified by the people in gratitude.

That is the speech for the prosecution with me being its object and presented under the form of numerous questions. Let me summarize and condense the main themes of accusation and make it easier to go through their outline. Likewise, let me also give a summary and debriefing of the answers I have given in order to make it more convenient to grasp their meaning.

- Comrade, I do not believe you would be displeased by my taking note of the burning feelings – and surely sincere ones, I hope -, that you are nurturing for the Party. Not much can be said about the honors that the Party has bestowed on me when compared to those awarded to you by the Party for your devotion to it. I have been included in the executive committees of a dozen of mass organizations. You know, as I do, that these functions are purely honorific, with neither efficiency nor actual power, in which I only play the role of an extra, in the spirit of the National Front of the Fatherland which preaches union and concord, indefectible support and unreserved approbation for the Party. You, on the contrary, have had a striking career. If, just only yesterday, you were bogged down in the putrid marshes of feudalism, you are today sitting on the throne of the presidency of the Appeal Court of Hanoi, while waiting to have your seat tomorrow at the Supreme Court. The Party has forgiven you for your past: it has given recognition to your merits. You have done good studies in law, you are a hard worker, you have seriously boned on all the problems about which your opinion is requested, you have incarnated the spirit of the perfect bureaucrat-civil servant, with your briefcase which is always by your side and filled with papers, and your habit of taking notes endlessly. Even more so, and better still, you have demonstrated an imperturbable and shrewd perception which enables you to succeed in all the functions and careers you embrace and to satisfy your ambitions. Yesterday you were a great mandarin at the Court of Hue, today you are presiding the Court of Hanoi where you are making decisions, of
course, with the assent and under the supervision of the Party, on
the fates and even the lives of people referred to your justice. In
whichever Court you are demonstrating your talents, at the Court
of Hue as well as at that of Hanoi, you have shown yourself man
of the court, offering to two institutions which are the exact
opposite of each other, one being feudal and monarchical, the
other revolutionary and communist, the same laborious fervor, the
same devotion, the same docility! You say that my life is happily
filled. Is it similar to yours? I am afflicted with an infirmity for my
human nature does not give me the ability to play with fire and
water. A communist with a better red color complexion finds
nothing to say about your language and your profession of faith in
communism although you are not yet accepted into the Party!

Allow me to pay homage to the astuteness of your mind and
the flexibility of your character. You are always on the right side,
disregarding the vicissitudes of History, and you always win. The
“comrade” that you are judging has lost everything: the
possessions that he had acquired by the sweat of his brow and
then offered to the just cause of the Fatherland and people, his
positions at the bar-association and the University from which he
will be expelled tomorrow and which has been up to now his
livelihood!

- Comrade, you have gone off the subject. The question that I
have put to you is precise and I expect your answer to it. You are
surely aware of the prejudice you have done to our cause, that of
our communist State. You will tell me that the dirty linen must be
washed in private. Yes, it must be, but in the family! Yet, you are
putting it in display, in broad daylight! Our president, a thousand
and a thousand times respected and beloved, has reminded us
that only the buried dead and babies in their cradles do not make
mistakes. That our Party makes mistakes, that is in the order of
things! But this is not a reason for bringing out public opinion, in
the country and abroad, and even more so when this act comes
from a well-known intellectual like you.

- That the dirty linen must be washed in the family, this is correct.
But if it is accepted that the Party can make mistakes, that its
errors must be rectified, then how can these errors be brought to
the knowledge of the Party so that they can be fixed? Is there a
Service for complaints where people can bring their grievances to its door with the hope that they will reach the proper authorities? The trash cans are awaiting those papers which do not give off the fragrance of praise that the leaders like to inhale. And, even more so, does anyone have the right to profess or express opinions which do not agree with those of the Party? I want to remind you that, in the meetings of the Socialist Party, as soon as a dissident idea is showing just the tip of its ear, the Presidium hastily takes away the floor from the naïve or careless person who has thought in position to communicate his reflections to others. The ruling Party has assigned a few of its members to sit on the central as well as local Executive Committees of the Socialist Party in order to supervise and forbid any discord. The “leaders” of the Socialist Party - with you among them – know well the consequences that they can face should the slightest dissidence take place I their ranks.

- But this, indeed, is wisdom itself since the intellectuals do not know, or cannot know, how to walk straight, that they stagger every moment and need to be helped by their tutors in their correct plate-form and sane minds. Why bother about such vulgar and mean details when one is devoting all his efforts to the objective of realizing the grandiose spectacle of the people united monolithically behind a Party which is proud of benefiting from the unanimous trust of the masses inside and from the international support of the brother-countries, and from the progressive people in the world?

- I admit that I am sensitive to the beauty of this picture depicting the brotherly peoples following close on the heels of the Soviet and Chinese elders, and shouting down the agonizing capitalism and yelling out their faith in socialism. But I hesitate about having to pay for this triumph of the Marxist-Leninist Doctrine such an exorbitant, excessive and unconceivable price for the happiness of the peoples of the world, for their subjection to values which existence they have not been aware of up to now, values which cynically violate their traditional beliefs, deprive them of their most natural rights which judicious and beneficial permanence has been demonstrated by millenniums, and values which are plunging them into dreadful poverty and making them doubtful about the future. I
respect the ideas but I respect even more the individual person whose unique salvation is preoccupying me.

I want to insist on one point. My position is one with nuances. The ideas, I respect them, but I keep my vigilance and lucidity on the alert: I reserve the right to examine them, to go through them with the fine-tooth comb of my analysis, critiques and reflections, and try to separate the weed from the grass. I am not setting myself up as enemy of anything, I am striving to distinguish the best from the worst. Since individuals and peoples are filled with faults and qualities, each doctrine bears in itself vices as well as virtues. A deserved eclecticism spares us the intransigence in the attitudes, the injustice in the judgments, the fanaticism in the acts. I appreciate the Marxism-Leninism in its fertile novelties, the originality of its intellectual approaches, its dialectical perception of the real, but I am not going to veil my eyes in the face of the monumental, monstrous and criminal errors committed by those who apply it and whose lack of culture, selfishness, prejudices and shameful passions are causing injustice and inhumanity. I proceed from facts, I examine them from their genesis and results, I am taking my distance from the bended and formal logic advocated by the leaders to justify their decisions while the unique criteria to bring out the truth concerning a policy or about politics is to ask oneself whether or not the people have thereby found a present and actual improvement in their lot. Let us criticize neither communism nor the communists but only the communist leaders who, blinded by sophisticated forms of reasoning and by insane voluntarism, turn their backs to reality, make wonderful promises which are fooling and deceiving the masses, and mercilessly putting to the sword the wretched unfortunates who doubt their infallibility.

- It can be seen clearly that you have been deformed by the western culture you have received. You are falling into skepticism, you have doubt about everything, you can no longer perceive the grandeur of the beings and things, you are losing yourself in the details, and no longer see the overall and, particularly, you criticize everything. One wonders if that western culture had not prevented your steps to choose the road which could have led you to your people and fatherland.
In 1932, when I came back to Vietnam for the first time, and especially in 1940, when I published my works in French, at the time of the French occupation, the same reproaches were made against me. I will not deny that I did not attend any Vietnamese schools, carried out my studies at the Paul Bert College and, then, at the Lycee Albert Sarraut [Albert Sarraut High School] which enabled me to be holder of the Baccalaureate at the age of 16 and to obtain my State doctorate-in-Letters and my doctorate-in-Law in 1932, at the age of 22. The French and western culture has made me the man that I have become. I have acquired the qualities and faults of the French mind: the love for clarity, precision, and logic but also a critical approach to men and problems. I do not get excited easily and only give my approval in a wise manner. I bow to the real, the true, the just, but I hate hypocrisy and am filled with horror by fanaticism, I am piercing with my arrows the false grandeurs and ridiculous vanities. I detest politics because it perverts man, condemns him to lies, injustice, and cruelties which revolt the conscience. I shun power to spare myself the two equally degrading attitudes: either to lavish on it bowings and smiles, or to accept its fantasies, its whims, to share its prejudices, to side with it in all events. I take leave of the Greats and keep my distances from them. I hold on my freedom, independence of mind and action. I am fully aware of the crimes of the capitalist leaders but I am also able to see the cruelties of the communist leaders. I am stuck between capitalism and communism, I seek escape in the love of the people and traditions which grandeurs and servitudes I know well. In the present communist world, my attitude is that of a consistent intellectual, decided not to betray his vocation of a clerk.

What is making me take such an attitude? To propose that the people assume for themselves the responsibility for their own fate, that everything must be done BY the people and for the people. Whatever term is used to baptize such a system of government is of little importance. The word democracy is the best, but it only expresses one aspect of the problem: the government BY the people. The formula must be completed by proclaiming the government FOR the people. A democracy understood in this sense does not care about the epithets given to it! It does not matter whether it is called bourgeois or socialist, what is essential here is for the people to be happy and, as master of their own
destiny, they achieve the dream they are longing for, in all the domains of their activity, individual as well a social, physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual.

- You are not unaware of what is awaiting you. Our communist State tolerates only one attitude from the intellectuals. That of a person who is subjected to the politics of the communist orthodoxy, and proclaiming his faith in the party, swearing his fidelity to it, feeling, feeling and acting in the desired direction, according to the way ordained by the leaders. All those who move away from this line, fall into heresy and are punished as reactionary traitors. The last opportunity has been given to you to repent for your audacity and impudence. Make a good use of it!

- Each one bears the responsibility of his acts. If society, that is to say the people, could reach a high degree of culture, a level of enlightened conscience, the boldness of a thought which is diverging from the common path would not be punished but, on the contrary, encouraged for the progress of the country depends on it. But the history of humanity has proven that the masses are not capable of clearing a way out from the jungle of ignorance, prejudice and cowardice in order to step forward into the light and the sun. In Athens, the capital of wisdom, Socrates has drunk the hemlock to propose his example to reflection and imitation for all the intellectuals of the world, those who have to play the role of pioneers, guides, on the difficult and painful journey of the peoples of the world towards some joy and happiness.

Yet, our country has witnessed the introduction of an absolutely foreign doctrine, without any root from the national past. Great patriots, whom everybody admires and respects, support the doctrine, defend it, sponsor it, propose it, then impose it on the population, giving the assurance that it is the key which opens the gate of paradise on earth. People believe in the words of the leaders and wait for the realization of their promises. It is thanks to the consent of the people, their efforts and sacrifices, that the country has regained its independence and freedom. The working arms and the thinking heads are providing strong support to the ruling Party.
Unfortunately, the journey undertaken is not a smooth one. The leaders, priding themselves on their glorious success in the military field, for which they attribute Marxism to be its essential reason, they believe as well founded to widen and deepen its application to all fields, most of the time in disregard of science and reality, although communism proclaims to respect their teaching. The agrarian reform has opened the way to a series of enormous mistakes which the leaders must bear the responsibility. The poverty of the people has become atrocious, in spite of the boastings by the leaders who affirm the contrary.

In the face of such a tragedy, what should be the attitude of the intellectual? There are those who, covering their eyes and putting their fingers in their ears, join the choir with the multitude of opportunists and flatterers and yell: “Victory of communism, Glory to the Party!” These people harvest honors and privileges and are blessed to the third generation. The public know them and deny them their esteem. As for the minds that think and the hearts that love their homeland and people, they cannot resign themselves to endure in silence and apathy the bitterness of their disappointed hopes and flouted dreams. They raise their voices to denounce the causes of the errors and to propose alternative solutions. They are thanked by bows of knockout, life imprisonment, under the charge of renegades, traitors to the revolution and enemies of the people! Their sole consolation is to know that the people understand them, feel sorry for them, while unable to do anything for them. They have to wait for the justice to be given by history.

No sentence is pronounced. The communists have the taste for the clandestine way. All the decisions are taken and carried out in a dead silence. Nothing has transpired out to the public: the secret is well kept to avoid raising unnecessary emotions, regrettable disturbances! The communists foresee everything and act in consequence!
THIRD PART

THE JOURNEY IN THE DESERT

1.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

Thee trials: three appearances before the political tribunals of the national Front, the University and the Socialist Party. The fellows, appointed to the role of Saint-Just, have been selected through strict scrutiny. The craftsmanship here is not to put on the line members of the Party. If not, it would mean to mobilize heavy artillery against a poor and defenseless creature, to throw tanks and canons against bare-handed demonstrators. Besides, should the communists fail to be up to their task, they would lose face, and the prestige of the Party would be compromised. Therefore, it is for the better to recruit opportunists without party affiliation but bearers of a past for which they seek to atone and are readily willing to receive the gobs of spits from the intellectual masses. They are playing a rather unworthy role but the desire to re-emerge and pick up a few crumbs from the Party, is overriding the shame of becoming the horses of the circus performing in the arena at the cracking of the tamer’s whip. The Party is washing its hands, and the party will take place between the “party-less”, by a settlement of scores between “comrades”. But the chosen Saint-Just have received careful preparation, since they are the spokesmen of the Party. Should they carry out their tasks properly, the Party would win and reward its valets. But if they cannot accomplish well their mission, they will have to bear alone the weight of failure!

I am aware of this and mobilizing all my efforts to safeguard my honor in this combat between the pot of iron and the pot of clay. In observing the eyes of those who are attending my trials at the
Front and the University, I am happy to see that I have recorded victory, and this at the embarrassment of all the Saint-Just thrown into my legs and trying to bite them. Everybody has taken side with me!

The next morning, while I am regaining my strength, a friend of ministerial rank arrives, in a flying visit, to let me know that in the competent circle it has been decided for my incarceration. What can I do? It is common knowledge that a very high dignitary of the Party has personally attended the arrest of other communist members who were even hardened revolutionaries whose sacrifices have filled the list of achievements that they have acquired in their lives, and whose honesty has been respected by everybody. That was the case of V. D. H., whom I had the honor to know in the resistance underground, and that of D. K. G. who occupied a very high position at the head of a zone of operations in the Resistance. If registered communists, with spotless honor, are victims of such treatment, surely for ideological interests and in the fight for power, what is there for a poor devil like me, without friends in society and protectors in the Party? I cannot dream of hiding myself somewhere since the police has put its agents, spies and snitches everywhere. Besides, I would consider such an attitude degrading: I would give the impression that I am denying my convictions and ideas. What would the communists, who used to give homage to my dignity, think?

I am resigning myself to my fate and, in anticipation of a one-way trip without return, I have filled my suitcase with underwear and woolen clothes. I have also made sure of putting in a copy of Montaigne’s Essays from the Pleiade collection, together with paper, pens, ink and pencils! I want to occupy my forced and endless spare-time with some kind of intellectual work to save myself from the insanity of imprisonment. May be, my jailers will have the humanity of not taking away this last voyage luggage which I greatly need.

I have gone inside the prisons before at the request of the accused whose defense I have assumed and, therefore, I am aware of the practices carried out in these places of detention. The tough guys or gang leaders beat up the new-comers and take their lion shares from the daily food ration of each convict, and
especially from the provisions which the family now and then sends in to him as gifts. The quantity has already been depleted in a visible manner when the bag of goods has passed through the hands of the jailers; then, not much is left after the gang leaders and their accomplices have levied their shares on him. The family’s sacrifices are used to maintain the already flourishing health of the guardians of the prison and the tyrant who, in each cell, is oppressing the unfortunates who are locked up in there. Force is expressing its violence and domination in cynicism and brutality. In its unfolding, it does not burden itself with manners, hypocrisies, and does not have to veil itself for putting people off the scent. It is baring itself in its nudity and, if one may so say it, sane frankness. On the contrary, when force is masquerading itself as sophisticated logic, hiding itself behind specious reasoning, in short, trying to justify itself not in the eyes of public opinion but in the depths of a not yet completely dead conscience, it provokes disgust and horror by its insanity.

In this evocation of souvenirs accumulated in the depths of my memory throughout my years of activities in the Bar Association, I remember the confidences I have heard on my peregrinations to the hamlets and villages. Often, during the evenings in the thatched huts, my hosts tell me poignant stories. In the twilight of the sunset, at the edge of their forests, they see lines of people marching, dragging their feet, people who are so skinny that their skeletons seem to grow out in size. One hour passes by and, in the night, a burst of shots pulls the inhabitants out of the serenity of their sleep. A massive execution has just taken place, and it is not advised for public curiosity to seek satisfaction. No one has seen or dares find out what has happened but, from one thatched hut to another, the news are passed on and people are dumbfounded by spine-chilling terror. No responsibility is attributed to the leaders who may not have been informed of the event, but the incrimination would readily be put on the zeal of the subordinates who have tried to surpass one another in the execution of the ordered tasks, and are amply exceeding the desires of the masters! Whatever, and even if the rumor is not founded, it would not be a bad thing to consider the possibility of such an eventuality. All the governments in the world, at all times, under any regimes, nurture a ferocious hatred against their enemies whose annihilation they contemplate and pursue under
all imaginable forms. Since the persecutions and executions cannot remain clandestinely and be wrapped in mystery, and, consequently cannot remain undetected by public opinion, they heap on the victims the most infamous qualifications and even subject some of them to a servile and shaking justice, in order to repress the tremors of their conscience and try, without success, to fool popular perception!

All the forced trips, by decision of the Governments, are one-way. I am preparing myself.

2.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE TRIP WITHOUT RETURN

The distinctive feature of the Vietnamese government is not to inform the people concerned of the measures taken against them. There are numerous ways to express its wish. The Front no longer invites me to its meetings. The University has taken back the bicycle of service that I have been using to go to my lectures. The Courts of justice have returned to me the letters of constitution. I understand that I have been discharged of my functions, have become a leper, a pariah, an excommunicated! Therefore, I indulge myself in philosophy to occupy my forced spare-time, for not finding a hood and a rattle to warn the passers-by to move away from my path.

I begin my cogitations from the well-known saying: mens agitat molem: the spirit moves the masses. In my young age, I was convinced of the contrary and thought that the saying was invented by an intellectual either in full delirium of vanity to confer on himself a superiority which he did not have or in a crisis of despair to overcome a growing inferiority complex. The spirit, by its immaterial nature, cannot act directly on the mass which represents matter in its full power and is only subject to the impact and effect of a material force. In all the conflicts between the spirit and matter, the antagonism by one for the other is settled by the
triumph of matter. It is in this sense that Marxism decrees that the masses dispose of a material force, and make history! But the masses cannot play such a role by using uniquely the brutality of the means from matter. Even in destruction, and more so in construction, matter has to call on the resources of the spirit to guide it in its two activities, destructive or constructive. Thus, the spirit is insinuating itself into the play of matter, inserting its influence. Only then, the spirit is moving the mass.

But the spirit can only move the mass by initiating it to its processes, by sharpening its perception to the realities, by teaching it the logic of its deductions. Better still, when the mass is properly educated, the spirit continues to carry out its mission by maintaining it in the right path. Therefore, it can be seen that the political agitators and commissars proceed with the fight against the political illiteracy, and intensify their efforts to control and keep a watch on possible deviations in order to direct the masses into the rectilinear track of ideological orthodoxy. And one can attend a wonderful spectacle to look at the entire people professing their faith in the new religion of communism, forming a monolithic bloc behind the Party, believing in its affirmations, line and policies. Never before has such a triumph of the spirit over matter been seen. The fanaticism of the masses has reached such virulence that, in spite of the disastrous realities which are proofs for the gravity of the errors committed, the degeneration of the economy and the rise of the people’s poverty, a good segment of the population – including the honest communists – persist in keeping their trust in the promises of the Party to regenerate the country and briskly lead it towards socialism which is now discredited in most of the countries which were still communist yesterday. And this at the risk of falling over into the precipice when one is on the edges of the abyss. Consequently, the problem is to find out if the political indoctrination of the masses, which has led them to myopia or even to the blindness of their intelligence, is the expression of a *mens sana* or *insane*?

What is generating horror and scandal, and bears witness to the insanity of the political mind, is the deformation of the being, of his mental habits which allow him to see only one aspect of reality, compel him to mutilate his judgment, to suppress his spirit of critique, and to reduce all spiritual activities to the unconditional
approbation of the leaders and to the condemnation without mercy of the detractors, in complete disregard of justice and humanity!

The social and historical experience has shown that as soon as the *mens insane*, of political, racial or confessional origin, acts on the masses, free rein is given to acts of barbarity which are setting humanity back to a shameful past of blood and death.

The fundamental dogma which can never be forgotten, which must dominate all conceptions of life in society, is to remind each individual that each person has his or her own truth, we must respect the truth of others, that the law, justice, morality, humanity, must never permit anybody to impose his or her truth on others. It is because the pagans refuse to admit the truth of Jesus that they condemn him to die on the cross. It is because the leaders of the Medieval church refuse to recognize the truth of a dissolute person or a free-thinker that they burn him at the stake. Freedom of opinion may be the most precious conquest of the modern world. It constitutes the sole criteria of civilization.

When one holds one’s truth, believes in its value, and for various motivations, one wants to communicate it to others, to propagate it. Nothing prevents people from propagating their own truths to others.

But what is absolutely forbidden is to use the force, violence and brutality of terrorism to overcome the conviction of others. Yet, the communist governments make the irreparable mistake of labeling the differences of opinion in the category of inexpiable crimes and punishing them heavily. The resulting effect being that people, with concern for their personal security, abstain from opening their mouths to inform the leaders of the evil effects of their attitude. The State, deprived of the support and backing by the masses, can hit the reefs and sink into the general indifference. Unless, using violence on their own account, people rise up to overthrow the tyranny and substitute to it a regime of democratic pluralism, the greatest advantage of it is to enable public opinion, whatever its diversity, disagreements, to express itself openly for the common good. Between the truth of the State and those of the masses, there can be any no possible co-existence. One party must exterminate the other.
Therefore, I know what I am risking. But the direct, immediate punishment is late to come: may be the handcuffs which must lock my wrists have not yet been forged. My extermination has been decided but the process to carry it out must be refined. Whatever, I am filling my waiting time by saying goodbye to a way of life which, tomorrow, will be buried in the past.

I then spend days and even nights with my eyesight, blurred by bitterness and often by the tears, wandering over the microcosm in which I live, days and nights that are already impregnated with the sadness of the never more (English words used by author in French text. Ed.) And here is the family furniture that I have inherited from my forebears: marble-top tables, massive armchairs, seating chairs, pedestal tables, sofas in precious wood carved by the golden hands of craftsmen from a breed now extinct. The flow of time has covered this furniture with a patina which is highlighting is brilliance. Here is the ancestors’ altar with its golden and purple illuminations, the incense-burner filled with the ashes of the stuck-in incense sticks which are twinkling in the half-light with their grains of fire when they are lit up, the flower holders and vases in porcelain China where the orchids can blossom in winter and the lotus in summer, the two hanging glass cabinets with their doors lined by the dragons in their wooden contortions, and where the curios and tea-sets are displayed… All these inanimate objects are filled with the souls of my ancestors and the years which are giving them their shining luster.

I like to remain long moments in front of my bookcase where the Greek and Latin authors of the Guillaume Collection are placed above the French writers of the Pleiades Collection. I never tire myself to stroke the volumes covered in red morocco leather which I have discovered in the old libraries of Paris or at the second-hand booksellers on the embankments of the river Seine. The shelves reserved for the contemporary authors pride themselves for understanding the works of Valery, Claudel, Gide, Montherlant, Mauriac, Maurois, Morand, Giraudoux… On the last shelf, I have placed my Columbia record-player and some one hundred records which I have brought back from France and listened to every evening, changing the musicians according to my states of mind, some Mozart when I am swinging in joy, the
Pavane for a Dead Infant by Ravel in my moments of melancholy, the Dance Macabre by St-Saens if the horrors of the world are overwhelming me, but especially, Beethoven with the Fifth Symphony which is fuelling my meditations and reveries, and the Appassionnata when I fell lifted up by the passion of life and enthusiasm to create.

I spend most of my time in my “library” where the heady fragrances of the past delight and intoxicate me. I am not a laudatory person of time past, I know how to recognize and appreciate the wonders of the present. Throughout its history, at each epoch, humanity has lived its greatesses and servitudes. Its servitudes include the crimes for which it is not directly responsible but which have sullied certain periods of its existence, its greatesses have appeared in the progress which it can be proud of and which have contributed to the good and happiness of the peoples. Time is filtering history: the servitudes are buried in oblivion, except for the monstrous crimes which revolt the conscience, and only the greatesses shining through the passing of time continue to exert their attraction on the minds that are thinking! The present brings disconcerting emotions: one can hardly have the time to marvel at the victories of science and technique, which are propelling humanity far ahead in the future, that one has to cry out in rage and anger in the face of abominable acts of certain governments that are massacring their detractors and opponents, and which unspeakable behavior throws humanity far back to the shameful horrors of the past. The present in which I live and the future which is awaiting me are, therefore, pushing me to take refuge in the brilliant past of humanity, where I quench my thirst for happiness in the enjoyment of what has been produced by the best men in order to subtract myself from the present and future anguishes which are inflicted on me by the worst ones among the leaders. But, in these circumstances where I am saying goodbye to the inanimate objects which soul is talking to mine, I feel invaded by the sadness of loving what I will never see again!

But the days pass by. No gang of jailers has come in the prison car to take me away, in handcuffs. I begin to be surprised. But I finally understand that my extermination will not be carried out by life detention in a prison or some jail. It will be done, in the
long run, by the throes of hunger. The torture is more refined since it will last for an undetermined period of time, exactly like the journey in the desert, in the material sense of the expression. Like a traveler abandoned by himself on the sea of sands, with neither food nor water, without shelter against the sun, without blanket against the cold of the night, I will drag my life until my body becomes dehydrated, bloodless, reduced to an emaciated skeleton, exhausted by thirst, hunger, the torrid heat of the sun, the freezing cold of the night, I will collapse on a dune and give my last breath. The many sufferings, all adorned with hideous masks of the dead, are surrounding me, sneering, performing a gruesome dance inside and around me, harassing me with their sardonic laughter and shooting blows, so that the expiation of my audacity for having thought differently from the Party becomes the supreme pain before death comes to sing its gloomy litanies over my whitened bones in the sand! Only an executioner endowed with a diabolic imagination can invent the torture of hunger in the capital city of a civilized country, right in the twentieth century, in the midst of a society with satiated members who are spending a fortune for a banquet. And to stir up the suffering of the “culprit” by forcing him to witness the same torture of hunger inflicted as condemnation to his wife and children, in spite of their innocence!

And the party is washing its hands! It rationalizes with cynicism: “I have an employee I am displeased with. I dismiss him. What’s wrong with that?” There is a pertinent retort for him: “This is not a simple dismissal since, in your system of State stores and rationing vouchers, a person that you have dismissed cannot buy his rice anywhere, for himself and his family, once he is deprived of money and rationing vouchers which are given only to the State employees! Furthermore, to what penal provisions, of which code, can you refer to in order to punish an offense of opinion which is not recognized by any international legislation with regard to human rights? Are you not aware of the exceptional gravity of the sanction you have pronounced in your system of communist State by playing on the confusion between the administrative and the penal? You have condemned to a long and slow death an entire family while only its head justifies your displeasure! Is such a deceit worthy of a State which considers itself “civilized”? But the lamb does not rationalize with the wolf!
The wolf can declaim that it is keen in giving liberty and happiness to the lamb, it remains the wolf, and the argument that it is using to convince the lamb of the latter’s culpability does not prove anything except its cruelty and deceit. The most sacred texts and the most solemn promises are merely tricks of illusionism which purpose is to safeguard the appearances while trampling on reality. The formalism is only prestidigitation, but an abominable prestidigitation because it aims not at amusing people but at cutting the throat of innocence.

At all times, the people, appalled by the crimes of feudal monarchy, have dreamt of justice and wished for a righter-of-wrong to come, a Bao Cong to protect the humbles from the despots. But the wish that one formulates in the depths of one’s soul never comes to be. The Greats continue to oppress, persecute, bully the weak and the innocent. In despair for the cause, since the State institutions do not guarantee justice, there are men who are blinded by their selfishness and perverted by their passions, and do not care “to give what is due to each person” and have equity prevail, the people have to call on divine intervention, on the ever-permanent justice which declares “Ac gia ac bao,” he who sows the wind will reap the whirlwind, cruelty spawns cruelty in return!

The positive minds do not like to wait for the justice of fate with its too slow unfolding! They think capable of making up for the slowness of the ever-permanent justice by elaborating a whole system of principles and organizations aimed at answering the popular aspirations. Law is the fine flower of civilization, the tribunal which applies the rules and dispenses justice, such as the Human Rights Declaration which inaugurates the era of democracy, are very much the precious conquests of humanity. Unfortunately, this magnificent apparatus only demonstrates the idealism and ingenuity of intelligence and only functions effectively when the power expresses its goodwill to have it operational. If, in the bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the people, by the voices of their representatives and the game of elections, have at their disposal the legal means to contain the overflow of power and its abuses, on the contrary, in the communist countries, the monopolizing and dictatorial power of the leaders plays with the law, only applies it for their own interests, structures the organs of
popular representation and the administering of justice in such a way that they become its docile servants. The law deprived of its force, or enslaved to the force of power, is merely a toy in the hands of the leaders and has to admit its helplessness! While waiting for the blessed ay when that ever-permanent justice functions in full swing, when cruelty receives its punishment, when the popular masses, disgusted by the leaders’ injustice, will lose patience and rise up to “make History,” the people, in the communist world, in face of the despots’ shut-out hearts and the dumb heaven not answering the prayers and aspirations of the humans, have no other solution but to retreat into their resignation and despair!

It is in this state of mind that I start my journey in the desert which is to last from 1958 to 1990, throughout some good thirty years. In the sand of despair which is drying my tears, I drag my body tortured by deprivation, a heart bleeding with poignant sadness and galling bitterness. No flash of joy has come to light up the darkness of the gehenne where I am wasting away in solitude, but trying to save myself, come hell or high water, so that I can one day cry out my martyrdom.

3. THE DRAMA OF HUNGER

Blessed are the leaders. They have spared me the regime of detention in a prison where I would have served as whipping boy for the inmate gang bosses, the heads of the cells, victim of the exploitation by the jailers and greedy hoodlums for provisions as well as brutalities. I am also spared the re-education camp where the prisoners, lined up in groups under the command of the corporals, must endure the re-education by manual work on the land. I have particularly avoided the regime of long, long term imprisonment, sometime until death, in a bare and narrow room of a police station in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by mystery and secrecy, or to be locked up then day and night without any permission to see the sun or breathe the outside air, even for one
minute, the punishment consists of undergoing forced inactivity in a perpetual night filled with the infernal uproar from the pots, pans and copper basins which the muscular arms of the jailers take turn to bang on with the aim of torturing the victim and leading him into insanity! And, while the head and ears are tortured by the endless banging of the metallic sounds which are piercing the eardrums, the stomach has to endure the painful attacks of colic and enteritis caused by the damaged food given to the prisoner. The adulators of the communists celebrate the heroism which the latter have demonstrated in the course of their imprisonment in the “tiger cages” of Poulo-Condor, and throw out sincere diatribes against the inhumanity of the colonialists. One wanders to what level of passionate and vibrant eloquence will they reach when they become aware of this regime of re-education which is destined to inspire faith in communism!

Blessed are the leaders who have spared me such sufferings. The ones that they have inflicted on me, whether from their own wish or without their knowing, are terribly much more gentle, of diabolic humanity. It’s for people to judge.

The first drama that my family and I are the victims is one of hunger!

For several months now, having been compelled to buy our provisions and goods of first necessity on the black market, we need rationing vouchers which, since my destitution, I am no longer granted and, in spite of all imaginable savings, our funds of reserves are diminishing day by day. Right from the start, in view of the increasing hardship of our conditions and the modicum of our resources, we have inaugurated the era of restrictions. First of all, we have eliminated breakfast which is a luxury of the bourgeois. Then, for our meals at lunch and dinner, meat and fish gradually disappear from our table. Our consumption of rice and vegetables become less and less at each meal. And the day has come for us to do with just a bowl of rice soup. My wife and daughter are losing weight at sight. All the light has gone out of their faces which display long and drooping features. They are asking themselves how is it possible for some women to have the need to fast to preserve their figures!
It is useless to think about borrowing money from friends for they are also going through the same fate and, like us, are getting by barely and not die of hunger. My wife thinks she may sell cigarettes at the roadside, but how to have the funds for the first investments and to oil the paws and muzzles of the policemen and tax collectors with bribes so that they would let you earn your life with difficulty? Where to find the outlet for the supplies of the goods, often by way of smuggling? If only she did not have to sell her swing machine to buy rice for the family, she could have done clothes making and sell them at the market. If she were younger, she could have cycled to the countryside to buy vegetables and resell them on the pavements of the populous quarters. But all these nice projects cannot be carried out and my poor wife is crying in grief for doing nothing to earn a little bit of rice for the family.

My daughter has taught mathematics, but forty kilometers out of Hanoi and during seven years, simply for not having her parents in the Party! She is compelled to give her resignation in order to present herself to the competitive examination at the Normale superieure (Teachers' College) where she chooses the section of Letters and French. But, after five years of studies and a brilliant success at the graduation examination, she waits for a teaching job at a high school in Hanoi. In vain! One day, there is a vacant position at the Chu Van An School. Another girl is aspiring to it. It is suggested that a competitive examination be given to the two candidates before a jury of teachers. My daughter obtains their votes. But it is the other who is nominated because her father is member of the Party. While waiting for job, she is cycling everyday twenty kilometers back and forth to undertake training as ceramics worker at a cooperative located in the suburb of Hanoi. But when the time comes, instead of giving the trainee a miserable indemnity, the trainee is obliged to pay for the expenses of the studies! She wants to make a very contribution to the family budget but desperately cannot do so.

I want to give French lessons at home. But as soon as I do this, a band of policemen, surely informed by the spies and snitches who are surrounding me, erupt in my home to inform me that under the communist regime, there is nothing private, not even the lessons which are given by hard working teachers! What
to do then? I cannot pedal a pedicab as some younger colleagues of mine are doing, not because of “what-people-may-say” which I do not careless, but simply because I have reached the age of not being able to do so: either no client would call on my services, or should there be one, the little money that I would get after one or two trips are not enough to pay for the medicines which I need to recover my strength and wilting health. Since there is no stupid profession, I do not see any shame in sitting by the roadside to repair bicycles, as the retired superior officers of the Army are doing. But misfortune dictates that my literary and linguistic knowledge makes me helplessly disarmed in the face a bicycle, like an eunuch in front of a naked woman!

At the first stages of our difficulties, an old female servant that we have taken into our service since the time of the Resistance, more than ten years ago, having understood that our financial situation is without remedy, has asked us to end her function. We have considered her as a member of the family and never thought of asking her to leave, and are determined to share with her the best and the worst. But it is she who has taken the initiative, tactfully, and there is nothing else for us to do but to accept her departure. Our goodbyes are heartbreaking. On either side, we are not able to hide our tears.

We have a dog given to us by friends. It is very intelligent and we love it madly. But it is getting on with age, and since we no longer have the means to provide it with meat and fortifying food, it can no longer stand up from its cot and looks at us, all of us, with its kind eyes of faithful animal, surely filled with tears, and profound sadness for having to leave its masters. We break into tears when it gives its last rattle of death. Of the domestic animals, we are only left with a layer-hen having an extraordinary fecundity. We cannot bring ourselves to put it to death since it has responded to our call for help by giving us an egg almost everyday. Different from a duck egg, which can be cooked and mixed with a fish sauce in which one can dip boiled leaves of cabbage, a chicken egg can be consumed only by one person. We take turn, one after another, in eating that egg which is the very last tonic food left to us! Since we cannot offer our hen any grains of either rice or corn, everyday, at twilight, when the markets are deserted of the merchants, I set out to wander around
it to pick up, unseen and unknown by the curious onlookers, the peelings of vegetables with which I feed our hen.

At such a regime, one is always hungry. My wife and daughter have their complexions becoming paler and paler, and their bodies thinner and thinner. They dare not say anything anymore, afraid of causing me sorrow, and try to hide their tears, when they are alone in the evening, in their beds. I know it but pretend not knowing anything. For my part, more than once, do I not feel my eyes getting wet. Of hunger but, even more so, of pity to see my loved ones endure the torture of having an empty stomach. To leave them my portion of rice, only one bowl, I pretend a loss of appetite and, particularly, give the pretext of having shared a meal with a friend to whom I made a visit. A repeated lie which no longer convinces anybody, but since I have persisted to refuse my bowl, they have to share it between the two of them to avoid wasting it.

I am, therefore, condemned to an almost chronic hunger. An immense lassitude, without any bearings, is spreading all over my body, like the swelling of a river over flooding the land of an entire area, leaving above water only the tops of the trees and the peaks of the hills. I feel immersed in a torpor which is piercing, now and then, in blazes, the lucidity of my consciousness. I try to get up and make a few staggering steps but to fall back right away on my couch, taken by a wave of weakness which is dissolving completely the remaining strength in my muscles. At the same time, my stomach is contracting and distending itself in periodical movements which are causing me horrible pain. The spasms which are shaking me compels me to go through the alternatives of tension and rest, before being drowned in the rising tide of unconsciousness which is depriving me at the same time both my ability to think and to feel. I come out of these crisis, with pains in the back and bruises in the soul. I have done my apprenticeship of hunger!

In such circumstances, life goes on like an automatic round-circuit chain action which turns round and round continuously on a conveyer-belt, in a perpetual movement, in the void, instead of normally having to manifest itself in a balanced layout, harmonious coordination, of the three activities seeking a live objective: that of
motion performed by the limbs, that of the mind which thinks, that of the heart which vibrates with emotions and sentiments! Now, whatever objective is lost, has disappeared, the blaze of hope, anger, hatred, bitterness, has died out, the reflections are in a whirlwind, doing a frantic saraband, gruesome dance, then slow down their fantastic ride, drag on, expand, and reach the end by fading away, like ghosts at the coming of day. The broken being drifts aimlessly, like a buoy in the sea, at the mercy of the waves and winds! He no longer lives, just lets life goes on, an invading lethargy which is rising from his feet to his head, like the hemlock, without provoking any start, any reaction either. An immense, tiring, morbid, weariness is spreading to the cells of the body, reaching the fibers of the soul, a prelude to death which is coming stealthily in muffled steps.

4.

THE TRAGI-COMEDY OF MAKING DEALS

If the drama of hunger is played by only one character and consists of a monolog disrupted by tragic silences, the negotiations which I undertake to sell the salable belongings are carried out as a tragi-comedy where laughter mingles with tears. The seller, who is swallowing his tears, and cries out within himself the sufferings and humiliations of which hunger is the major cause, does not fail to smile at the lies and mimics of the buyers who are trying to trim down the sums of money that they have to pay to get the riches, the value of which they know well and the prices of which they try minimize to the utmost.

What we are selling first are the luxury outfits which my wife and I used to wear at the time of our splendors, at banquets and festivities to which we were invited, before the Revolution came to upset the social order and tear people away from their thousand-year old traditions and habits which it considers unacceptable in a world where the holiness of the leaders and the purity of their morality must serve as model to the entire people! Our jewelry in gold has already been sold off in the Resistance underground, to permit our family hold out and remain in it. But, back in Hanoi, our
relatives and friends have showered us with luxury clothes: tunics in silk, satins, brocades, velvets from China, clothes that my wife no longer has occasions to wear. For myself, I have brought back from my missions to Peking, Vienna, Brussels, custom-made suits by master-tailors suppliers to the staffs of the embassies.

Now, the customs have changed. All the women are parading in the uniform imposed by the feminine cadres of the Party: the white shirt and black trousers. All the men are dressed up in the outfit launched by Stalin and Mao, then by the Vietnamese communist leaders and cadres: jacket with an upright collar, wide trousers. The women’s tunic and white trousers, the men’s collar and tie are condemned by the communist rigor as bearing the mark of the capitalist bourgeoisie. One can either laugh or cry about this. One laughs for seeing the entire population display the obviously simple and inexpensive uniform, which kills the individuality of the human beings, their personality, the distinctive features which permit how to understand them, to sympathize with them and even be in communion with them. It is impossible for a foreigner, or even a local native to differentiate people, one from another. One laughs at the masquerade, but one can perceive the grandeur. The whole people, who are enslaved to the will of a leader to the point of obeying him, even in his whims and fantasies, constitute a monolithic bloc with a crushing weight and excessive mass. The grandeur of it is undeniable, as much as the danger it represents to the peoples’ security and to world peace! In Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy, only the army and the youth put on the uniform, and the crimes perpetrated by fascism still fill humanity with horror and abomination. How to measure the apocalyptic damage caused by the people marching in militarily step on the order of a master whose exorbitant power, with neither restrain nor limitation, can generate an insane megalomania and bring about a catastrophe of planetary magnitude.

One laughs and cries. But, worse still, one feels sorry for the people who are condemned to the domestication of the intelligence, the suicide of the soul and of the heart!

Therefore, I understand that I will not obtain much from the sale of luxury clothes in a capital city ruled by the communists’ rigor in the wearing of clothes. There are no shops for used clothes in
Hanoi. The masculine and feminine uniforms, cut out from cheap fabrics, locally made, do not last long and, when one gets rid of them, one is throwing away just rags to the garbage cans.

I go to a tailors’ cooperative: they politely decline my offer: “We know well that your clothes have great value. But to whom can we resell this kind of outfits which no one wears anymore? All that we can do with them is to cut them up and turn them into children’s clothes. But that would be a shame! The ordinary cadres do not have the money and, even if they had, they will not give their children such clothes, fearing to be criticized by their colleagues who would detect in them the germs of capitalist infection! As for the children of the Greats, they are dressed up like princes by the care of the cadres working in the field of diplomacy and foreign trade, and bringing back from their missions abroad the gifts offered to the Greats from whom they solicit favors and protection!”

I have been hanging around the streets for days, dragging my bundle from the Hue street to the Silk street, then from the Sugar street to the Cotton street. No one wants my used clothes. Finally, when I land at the Sails street, my pitiful look catches the attention of a good woman who asks me about the cause for my troubles and problems. It is she who has saved me by giving me the address of a theatrical group that may be interested in buying my used clothes to dress up the male and female actors when they have to perform on stage. I have taken the advice and at last manage to liquidate my bundle.

I have brought myself to do some thinking. I do not know whether or not the cloth makes the monk, but the costumes, which I used to put on at the time when I was enjoying a minimum of independence as part of my behavior, cannot be turned inside out to become outfits for the valets. And, since it is not within my means and capabilities to play the role of an understudy or actor, these clothes may as well be worn by professional comedians whose double life takes place during the day in society and at night on the stage, between the real and the imaginary. This is in the logic of things!
I have also learned from the wardrobe keeper of the theater who has bought my clothes that, nowadays, a young lady of good condition, who is getting married and wishes to wear a nice outfit, is unable to acquire one due to the lack of money. So, what can she do? She comes to the theater to rent for one day a nice stage dress in order to appear like a legendary princess or the daughter of a Great! A young girl gets married only once in her life. She can be excused for committing an innocent cheating, the only effect of it is to elude for a few hours the realities which prose is insipid and deadly boring, to escape into a poetry of dream which is dissolving the unfulfilled desires, and to permit the human being to lie to oneself. All the societies in the world abound with the Emma Bovarys who burden the heart with unsatisfied hungers, set up in contrast to the miseries in which they are languishing a somewhere else brightened by joy and freedom. In Viet Nam, each person is suffering from dichotomy between the automaton that plays, on the outside, the game of orthodoxy to avoid the punishment by the community and assert his qualities of sly comedian, and the living character who, in the inside, is covering his repressed hopes with shadows and silences, his disappointed wishes, his thirsts aspiring to quench their fires by some mysterious springs which no political lynx is capable of detecting.

The used clothes, even of luxury, junked out at low prices in a country subjected to strictness and poverty which are freezing the most legitimate desires, cannot feed my family for long. The saving of each bite at its highest level can only help us not to die of starvation, provided that we accept to have blurred eyesight, unsteady walking steps, the heart out of breath, and to bear the painful cramps of the stomach which is grinding emptiness. The water bindweeds which we use most of the time for meals are making our complexions pale. People believe that we are sick with malaria. It is better to let them think so: we are thus spared of the shame of having the empty stomach!

After the clothes, come the turn of the linen, china and silverwares. It is easy for me to wrap up the twenty four napkins and the two tablecloths in their dazzling white color adorned with embroideries of dragons and unicorns. The two sets for twelve settings each, one for oriental meals, with its assortments of bowls, saucers, ivory chopsticks, and the other for the western
meals with knives, forks and spoons in engraved silver, plates and
glasses in crystal of Bohemia, we lay them out on the table
covering its entire surface. The sunrays of the twilight, which
strike at an angle on this china and silver, bring out their splendor.
The bowls and plates, the silverware, are shimmering in an icy
whiteness, while the glasses of crystal are throwing out sparks.
For a while, we are dazzled. It seems to me that, during my
journey in the desert, a spectacle with such magnificence has thus
ever revived in my memory the souvenir of sumptuousness from
my past. I am staggering with sadness and bitterness, and it
would not take much more for me to collapse on the ground under
the painful chock of my present servitudes compared to my
grandeurs of yesterday. A page has been turned in the history of
my life, and I am shedding burning tears on that half of my
existence and the being that I was and who is now well dead!

I understand that I do not have to knock at the doors of the
Greats: they are often feasting, but on the house, on the occasion
of a visit to Hanoi by a political, economic, cultural personality of
the communist world. Likewise, the Greats, even when their
pockets are overflowing with gold, never commit the impudence of
displaying an undeserved opulence which would feed the rumors
about them and risk to discredit them in the eyes of the Party. I
cannot carry the china, and just limit myself to pack up the
tablecloths and napkins in a bundle which I put on the carrier of
my bicycle. I know where to go.

I enter the hall of the largest hotel of Hanoi reserved for the
visiting and smart foreign clientele. I unpack my bundle and invite
the responsible official of the hotel to come to my home and have
a look at the china and silverware. He pouts and simpers like an
old biddy in front of a popinjay trying to win from the latter a few
favors. He confesses: “This is beautiful merchandise. I do not say
the contrary. But what do you want me to do with it? The clientele
of the brother-countries are poor like Job. They never order an
extra, just stick to the ordinary menu, never drink whiskey, and
when they do not forget the tip, they show themselves to be mean.
It would be unfair to tax them of stinginess, since I have heard that
in the “brother” countries, like in Viet Nam, the civil servants are
reduced to have the strict minimum, and even below that!”
I see that you are at an advanced age. You must have known better times.

My interlocutor glances around him to make sure that no one is listening. Then, he answers me: - The communist cadres teach that our people, under the double weight of the mandarin and colonialist oppression, had a miserable life. I do not know anything in the other localities but, where I used to live, people were not as unhappy as it has been said. There were, of course, rich people and poor people, but still they had enough to eat and, if their clothes had to be mended, they were nevertheless able to have clothing! French colonialism did not appear much in a visible manner. It kept itself in the high spheres and, if it exploited and oppressed, it was done by intermediaries.

- Through the so-called native administration, at the top of it was the class of mandarins.

- But, to be just and truthful, these mandarins, now graduates of the Law Faculty of Hanoi, knew well what was waiting for them if they were caught red-handed. Of course, they rode in automobiles and led an opulent life. But they conceived corruption under an angle of moderation and, if I may say so, of humanity. The penal law which they knew well was a good safety railing. Besides, the Phong Hoa satirical press, the writings of the Tu Luc Van Doan group, by multiplying the jeers about them, put up a social safety railing against their desires for outrageous exploitation. The result being that, in the countryside, although the poor cottages remained, the peasants no longer uttered any protests. None that I am aware of…

- But in town, how was the situation?

- The city dwellers lived comfortably, thanks to the jobs in the administration and in the large commercial and industrial enterprises, or in the small trade. The streets were clean, the roadways as well as the sidewalks. Any violation of the rules of social hygiene was punishable by fines. There were no robbers or bandits, except for a few little pickpockets who might operate at the markets but, in the town, calm and
security prevailed. I am not a professor who analyses and
disserts, I simply note the facts, describe the situation, without
searching for the causes or making commentaries. I owe to
my graying hair to respect the truth, to preserve my honor and
dignity.

- Have you not thought of taking a well deserved rest?

- I have thought of it and made a request for it, but the
authorities have ordered me to remain in my post an train new
recruits. I have been maître d’hôtel for twenty years. On
Saturdays and Sundays, people danced and I served
champagne. For the great diners, our Norwegian-bomb and
ham-pie-in-crust were in great demand by a generous
clientele who were not stingy on the tips. It was the beautiful
life! I was like fish in the water.

- And now?

- Times have changed! All the waiters are from the police or
have acquaintances with it. They spy on people, search their
suitcases, listen to what people say and make reports to their
"responsible parties." I am included in their network of
surveillance. I am exasperated by this. Besides, if only they
carry out well their work here, I would close my eyes about
their marginal activities. But they are ruining everything, the
toilets, faucets, vacuum cleaners, and break the china.
Unfortunate, that is, but what can I do!

- The pleasure of talking to you makes me forget the purpose of
my visit. Let me get to it: can you buy my napkins and
tablecloths?

- We would certainly need it at the restaurant for the banquets
and gala dinners. But I am only the fifth wheel of the coach.
You would have to talk to the political commissar. He is the
one to decide on everything.

This man, worn out under the harness, and who is devoting his
last activities to be useful, does not have any say on the matter.
That is how things go in the communist world. Our first Tet, we
celebrate it in sighs and tears. We have fasted over four meals to be able to decorate the family altar with a bunch of green bananas, incense sticks, a few flowers and a glutinous rice cake. We are happy in our misfortune since the traditional offerings are present on the altar; even if they are not of quality, not of the quality that one would wish for, nothing is lacking! While we are waiting for the incense to burn out, the anguish, which breaks our hearts, fills our eyes with hard repressed tears. Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, what will we become, when we have liquidated all the things we possess? Of course, we can drag on for days and months, but when will we get out of the tunnel? This question is obsessing us night and day, and causing us to lose sleep.

It is now the turn of my library and records collection to take the road of shadow and death! I have made up the list of about one thousand books and some one hundred records which, during so many years, have been my delight. I am naïve to believe that these cultural treasures, unique in Viet Nam, will be greeted with warmth and bring us something to put between our teeth for many years to come. Alas!

I set myself to go to the Service [Department] of the Central Archives and Libraries to which I have offered a copy of each of my works, to begin with my doctorate theses and all the writings which I have published afterwards.

I expect to be well received. The director of the Central Library used to be a librarian, civil servant of the colonialists and had his training on-the-job, as it is said. He did not go through the Ecole des Chartes [School of Charters]. The first authentic charterer was Ngo Dinh Nhu, but it did not turn out well for him; he engaged himself into politics and even the worst possible kind of politics for he was condemned by both the people and the communists! This double condemnation was equivalent to a death sentence. Sooner or later, he was to be crushed by the weight of fatality.

Therefore, my director of the Central Library has made a better choice. He has got himself admitted into the Party and, back in Hanoi, was catapulted to the position of Service [Department] Director where he was a simple employee previously. This small
detail helps understand better his language, when he is going to oppose a formal refusal to my offer for the purchase of my library.

- Comrade, I continue to call you by this name because we, the Communists, hope that you will come out of the errors resulting from the French culture which you pride yourself in and which we loathe. You stand in opposition to communism, you brag about being realistic because you base yourself on facts to formulate your critiques, and you call on justice to reveal the successes against the failures. You pretend to respect this logic which we consider obsolete, deplorable, you remain faithful to your vocation of a clerk who does not want to betray! A capitalist country such as France, that prevails in its liberalism, accepts this attitude. But for us, we condemn it. We condemn it in the name of communism, which we consider to be the sole holder of truth, and which is teaching us that the wisdom of the citizen consists in the respect, obedience to the authorities. These authorities see further and clearer than we do. They incarnate the good, and, if you do not side with them, do know that the bad is awaiting you with its vices and horrors! Between us, I am asking you: did the Party not shower you with its favors? Ten executive committees in the mass organizations, what intellectual can boast himself with such a record? And what do people ask from you? That you close your eyes on the failures -, which we all know like everybody else but on which we throw the mantle of Noah -, and highlight the victories which reminder is more exalting than that of the defeats.

You are required to keep total silence on the defective part of the real, without demanding that you lie to your conscience by inventing imaginary successes. Such an attitude is advantageous to the Party and to yourself. Why not adopt it, as many intellectuals have done and only swear in the name of the Party and collect considerable benefits, for themselves as well as for their families? On the contrary, by persistently remaining faithful to the French culture, in an objective perception and filled with justice, the real, you make yourself guilty of misdemeanors, with their disastrous consequences which you have to bear today!

- Comrade, I thank you for your good advices! If you were a Mermaid, I would not have any sailor to tie me to the mast like Ulysses, who liked to listen to the Mermaids while trying to evade from the fascinating appeal of their beautiful arms! You make me
think rather about the Snake which, in the Garden of Eden, whispered into Eve’s ear pernicious suggestions to which she gave in. Fortunately, I am not a woman and, nowadays, besides the apple there are other tasty fruits from which one can choose. Whatever, I must admit the Crafty that you are enjoys persuasive eloquence! Allow me to respond to your argumentation. About the French culture that you condemn, it has penetrated into my body and flows in my blood. It has shaped up the man that I am, always seeking justice, passionately interested in objectivity and realism, but particularly filled with the faith in man, the love of man, and determined to fight and spare him of the cruelty and arbitrary of despotic power. You ask me to obey the authorities, all right, since I do not wish anything more than order and peace. But the respect of the authorities and of authority itself does not prevent one from opening one’s eyes on their faults and errors! If I remain silent, that will surely help the government of the people, but the government discredits itself and loses the trust of the masses. Therefore, the problem here is to know what would be the best attitude to have in such circumstances: to say nothing and reconcile oneself with the favors of the authorities, come to agree with them and avoid their blows, or take action and give the right to the will of the masses in order to open the eyes of those in power and put an end to the people’s misfortunes which are ruining the people’s trust in their leaders; consequently, get two birds in one shot, reconcile the State with the citizens, so that both can march in step towards the good and happiness of the national community. I accept to obey the authorities, but in keeping my eyes open, my head lucid, and my pen ready! I think this is the only correct attitude of an intellectual who has self-respect, loves his people and is concerned with their good, while wishing no harm to the interests of the Party! Should you also think that this attitude is correct, the merit belongs to the French, the Mediterranean culture that has formed me that way.

- I just restrict myself to note that our two positions do not bear each other out. In any case, I regret, but I cannot buy your library which I do not underestimate its value. Actually, I do not dispose of funds for such acquisitions. Furthermore, I do not see the usefulness of this literature which is of millenniums or centuries old and which ideology, dating from the time of slavery, western
feudalism and capitalism, is of no use for the formation of the communist Vietnamese.

On my way home, I feel taken by the obtuse aspect of a judgment born from political fanaticism which is tearing my heart apart. I am blaming myself for forgetting the word of the Gospel that advises not to give pearls to a pig, *margaritas ante porcos*. It has taken a whole morning for my indignation to dissipate.

The cruel truth, which is making me cry out of rage, is not to expect much from the intellectuals who have been admitted into the Party. However, some of them, sometime, after a number of years, unable to continue with lying to themselves or repress the upsurges of their out of breath conscience, let their intellectuality explode, and bang the door in their expression of contempt for the Party and its rigors. They cut the bridges by taking the opportunity during a mission abroad of not returning home and, in a world of freedom, they are then able to give free reign to the violence of their diatribes. Should they have remained in the country, they would have been condemned for life in prison, from where they would only come out horizontally with their feet first. But the large majority of the intellectuals, misled into the ranks of the Party, have abdicated their dignity and become flatterers whose zeal provokes the smile and contempt of the masses.

The painful lesson that I have learned from my interlocutor is, from now on, to refrain myself from talking about culture with a communized intellectual. But, since it is necessary to get something to eat in the coming months, I am compelled to find a buyer, even at low prices, for my collection of records and my library. It is fortunate that the music-lovers, even belonging to the Party, profess enough taste and broadmindedness to appreciate the music of the great masters of Europe. After a few contacts, I am lucky to liquidate my phonograph and my classical records! But the difficulties remain with regard to the foreign literatures. Of course, Greek and Latin are no longer studied in Viet Nam, the *Bude* collection has no success. And although French has been overthrown by Russian and even by English which is beginning to come back, there are teachers who still read French and are buying a few volumes from me. The *Odyssee* of the translation by V. Berard, and the *Eneide* of the translation by A. Bellessort have
found buyers but the French authors of the Middle Age, the 16th, 17th, 18th centuries, and even the 19th century, do not interest anybody. As for the contemporary authors, I have sold a few novels by Maurois and Mauriac, but the difficult authors like Valery, Gide or Claudel are met by a cold clientele. Since hunger cannot be ignored for long, I have to hang around the streets everyday and meet the second-hand bookshops which sell or rent to a few amateurs books by great authors.

I finally understand that I must not entertain illusions about the fate of the unsold books from my library. I have to resign myself to get rid of them by their weights in the hands of the merchants for waste papers, who will resell them for the making of paper pulp. The books are stacked on the pan of the Roberval balance and weighed. The weight is recorded and I am paid the price for it. My heart is beating wildly each time I put on the luggage-rack of my bicycle the volumes that I have to sell them as junk. No, they are not just paper, they are shreds of my flesh that I am tearing apart. And when the buyer throws them in a corner of his shop, I look elsewhere to refrain from shedding my tears! No father can look at his child being thrown into the fire by the executioner! The torture that I endure is renewed each time, and I have the impression that arrows are piercing through my heart! Often, I ask my wife and daughter to replace me so that I do not have to subject myself to this grief! Once, back in my home, the emotion which has taken me when looking at all these riches scattered in the winds and, especially, in the vat for paper pulp, riches which I have devoted so much patience and love to gather, and which have fed my mind and enhanced my blood, or the weakness caused by hunger and the lack of necessities which makes my legs feel like jelly and tremble, or both of these things together have vanquished my will and forces. About a hundred meters from my house, I fall from my bicycle and cannot get up. I have to sit at the side-walk and, with my eyes seeing things which spin around me, I catch up my breath, during a dozen of minutes, before being able to stand up and on foot drag my bicycle back home.

While I am hanging around in the streets trying to sell something, my wife helps me in my efforts by proposing to the ladies of the nomenclature the underwear and feminine
accessories, well kept in their luxury boxes and covers, and flasks of Chanel, Patou perfumes, in their cardboard packaging wrapped with gilded paper and ribbons of moiré. Unfortunately, she does not obtain any success with clients who have just come out of their native hamlets with many of them still wearing their teeth lacquered in black. They open wide their eyes before these luxury objects which they have never known and heard of before. Their lords and masters married them at the time of the clandestine struggle for a double reason: to comply with the political line which advocated that the city or rural proletariat, oppressed and exploited by feudalism and colonialism, with their unsophisticated customs remaining in their native purity, without being contaminated by the harmfulness of capitalism. Besides, these rural women, whose faithfulness and perseverance were substitutes for beauty, accepted to stay in their isolation for years in the absence of their husbands who were occupied by the revolutionary struggles and only returned home just for the time to shake off the spies on their tails, and to be forgotten for a while before starting again their combat for the triumph of the proletariat.

Now that the triumphing revolutionaries are installed in the highest positions of power, they are bringing their better-halves to Hanoi to make them taste the delights of communist luxury which is in no way different from the capitalist luxury: the same villa guarded by ferocious dogs and vigilant valets, the same gleaming automobile, the same well-styled domesticity. The only difference with the bourgeois aristocracy is that all this luxury is paid by the State, which is valiantly bearing the expenses by eating away the budget set for fundamental expenditures. Another difference is that the noble espouses of the Greats do not hold any positions of responsibility and never appear at the official ceremonies and receptions. It is difficult to understand here the logic which normally demands that there must be equality between the sexes, at least in society. It is also possible that the leaders are aware that their better-halves, unfamiliar with the splendors of life in high society, unable to smile or talk properly, not knowing how to use a fork, would bring them disgrace. They just let their espouses be in the chair at home like sacred relics to be preserved in shrines with purple and golden illuminations.
My wife comes back exhausted by her contacts with the ladies of the communist high nobility. She has gone through great efforts and patience to explain to them the refined pleasures that a woman of high class can get from quality products, coming straight from Paris, the capital of luxury and light. She has managed to reach her aims and bring home enough to feed herself for some months!

But other communist high class ladies, as all true daughters of Eve are attracted by luxury, are frightened. The money they spend for these things is deducted secretly from the common coffers which are always funded by the official contributions. If these women are unscrupulously drawing from the State funds, they make the impossible to avoid causing harm to the prestige of their husbands and jeopardize their promotion. It is easy, since they do not appear in public and dispense the ethereal pleasures of fine lingerie and sensuous perfumes only in their conjugal intimacy.

On my part, I have well tried to give private lessons of French. There is no lack of students: they are aware that the knowledge of a foreign language, besides Russian which is taught at the high schools and faculties, constitutes a good asset in their search for employment. Some are inclined for English. Those with attachment for French come knocking at my door. The most motivated are those who have the ambition to go and serve in Algeria or Madagascar where they will be paid royally. Even when the State is taking its cut of 70% to 90% of their earnings and wages, to pay its debts, what is left for them can easily meet their needs.

But, in order to go to these lands of plenty, one does not only have to grease generously the palms of the civil servants of the labor and foreign affairs departments, but must also pass the examinations to check one's knowledge of French at the embassies of Algeria and Madagascar.

A new horizon opens up for my ambitions. But, at the first course that I am holding at my home, a band of policemen appear at my lodging. Their chief is a stocky guy, short-legged, with low forehead, ferreting eyes, and fluttering nostrils like a bulldog
sniffing a succulent bone. The whole gang invades my living-room, and their chief, without waiting for my invitation, sprawls in an armchair. At the surprise which appears on my face, he answers by a question in pounding each word to emphasize the sense of gravity:

- Do you know what has brought us to your home?

I have learned for many years now that I must not be surprised by anything: the worst absurdities, the worst insanities, the worst turpitudes can be unleashed in a world without faith or law, where any values, how noble they may be, can be thrown to the heap of scrap, except those of Communism and its ill-servants, which cult is practiced and adoration imposed. I am shaking my head in a negative sign. He is settling himself comfortably in the armchair, crosses his short legs in a solemn way, rubs his hands and casts on me his widely opened eyes which are rolling with anger:

- You pretend to be a fool. You know well that you are a rotten intellectual, filled with reactionary ideology. You dare raise your head and demand democracy! What more do you want from that which already exists? Do you not see on the façade of our buildings, on the stationary of our official documents the motto of our State: Liberty – Independence – Happiness? For whom this liberty, this happiness, if it is not for the people? The Party has brought us the glory of a triumphing revolution, an unbelievable victory over colonialism. If we do not believe in the Party, in our president venerated a thousand and thousand times, who else can we believe in?

- I thank you for your lesson which I know by heart. But are you honoring me now by your visit to repeat it one more time?

He does not answer me immediately. By an opulent gesture of a Roman prelate, he raises a little finger. One of his henchmen rushes up, takes out from his bag a small thermos bottle filled with tea, pores out the drink into a small cup and hands it to his master a drinking straw of bamboo, of which no home in the countryside can be lacking. I observe the scene. It is thus exactly the way, in the old days, how the mandarin behaved when he was moving around, everything is there: the escort accompanying him, the
thermos bottle of tea, the drinking straw, and especially the
gesture of the little finger of which the servants know the meaning.
Let us hope that in this ancient way resides a new revolutionary
spirit.

The revolutionary mandarin takes a sip of tea and, right away,
his valet presents him with his pipe filled with tobacco. With a
lighter, the valet lights up a flame from a dried wood twig; his
master brings the pipe near to his mouth, inhales a puff and blows
out the smoke in blue curls. Then, with eyes spinning in
exhilaration, half closed, he puts his neck to rest against the back
of the armchair and, in a slow and solemn voice, he lets the
following sentence drop out from his fleshy lips:

- You have not learned anything. You have committed a fault
of exceptional gravity. But the Party, in its magnanimity, feels
pity for your rashness and good faith. It has not condemned
you to imprisonment, it has contented itself with taking away
the honors it has given you. To thank the Party for its
generosity and goodness, you should have shut yourself away
in solitude, to meditate on your heinous crimes. On the
contrary, you open a course of French, get into relations with
the youth that you can contaminate and lead it away from the
Party. It is for this reason that all private courses are
forbidden.

With majestic bearing and in senatorial steps, he leaves the
house, followed by his pack. The magnanimity of the Party has
denied a lifejacket to the shipwrecked person. Blessed is its
charity of not prolonging exceedingly further the life of a poor
creature who is dragging on his martyrdom, well deserved, in the
communist tide, useless to himself and even more so to those who
are governing him.

The negotiations about my furniture turn out to be long and
hard. The furniture is of importance: armchairs and living-room
sofas, display cabinets for curios and souvenirs, desk, library,
carpets of Hang Kenh, lacquer panels of Coromandel, all in
ancient fashion made of gu wood, large vases in China porcelain
with tripods, incense-burners in solid copper, flower pots in crystal,
masters’ paintings in gilded frames... Le Pho, the painter, has
drawn the models of the sideboards, armchairs and lounge table, the other pieces of furniture reproduce ancient models, but the entire furniture has been executed by master-craftsmen from Ngo Tram. At the time of my splendors, all this cost a fortune but, in the exercise of my career of attorney, I simply needed to open the floodgates for money to flow in. Life is short and subject to vicissitudes. If one can afford a suitable setting to one’s desires, why should one do without the noble and pure enjoyment of beauty and the esthetic? In the past, as long as the future did not make my horizon become hazy with specific dangers, I was happy to live without having to question myself about my tastes and passions. But as soon as I know that sooner or later I have to bid an eternal goodbye to the objects which have given me ineffable and unforgettable delight, I have devoted my free time to enter into a dialogue with each piece of furniture to remind myself of the souvenirs which are linked to it and revealing the moral and spiritual being that I am. I am trying to find myself again, to recognize myself in the things to which I have hanged scraps, shreds of myself and of my past.

Why did I not buy for my use the furniture of western design, more comfortable, with purer lines, simpler tones, more harmonious arrangement that would suit better my Cartesian mind, agree with my love for logic and clarity? Why then such an unexpected but excited and prolonged burning for the past, that of the people and tradition?

I suddenly remember that in 1936, during my final return to the country, I have engaged myself in the study of the Chinese language, participated in the drawing up of Vietnamese grammar by Tran Trong Kim and Bui Ky, and collaborated in the drafting of the dictionary by Khai Tri Tien Duc. To what motivation did I obey in maintaining myself in that attitude, I who have never ceased to exalt the beneficial effects of the French culture which has formed me. I can answer that question only by saying: “I come back to the past and traditions of my people not at the price of a struggle and persevering efforts, but by letting myself slip down a natural slope, with facility and ease. People, even endowed with extended scientific knowledge, who are opposing the French culture that I have received at School and the Vietnamese culture in which I have lived during my entire existence, prove that they do

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not have a healthy and correct perception of what culture is. A culture worthy of its name never distinguishes itself by its exclusivity, never aspires to a monopoly, never confines itself inside an enclosure of detention. On the contrary, culture is an upper space swept by all the winds, accessible to all the good wills without any discrimination of whatever kind, it is a source of clear springs capable of quenching all the thirsts. Each people have their own national culture, but all the cultures merge into The Culture, the ultimate and unique aim of which is to form man in his generality, his quintessence, his major and irreducible virtues, in what he specifically possesses as human, and to raise him to the highest level of his humanity. Since all the national cultures merge into The Culture, as the rivers into the sea, how is it possible to conceive oppositions, contradictions and antagonism between the cultures and The Culture?

What type of divorce can separate animus from anima, what discord can take place between the French culture which has formed my mind and the Vietnamese culture which has shaped my soul?

Having put my mind at rest, at peace with myself, I look movingly at each piece of furniture. Each one of them is part of my past and soul, and all of them represent a half of my being and existence. Tomorrow, after tomorrow, they will leave me, one by one, to unknown destinations, and then a day will come when the strength of my memory is only able to give me a tarnished, vanishing image, like these landscapes seen from the window of a train carriage, thrusting at full speed, into the beginning of the night. Never before have I appreciated more the piercing melancholy of the verse: “To leave, it is to die a little…”

The first client who appears is a communist cadre in his green kaki uniform with the straight-up collar and wearing sandals made out of discarded tires salvaged from the trash cans, an outfit which gives his political affiliation away. He does not have the look of a needy but his eyes, lost in surprise, go from one piece of furniture to another, wondering how an intellectual can order such furniture and spend his days in it. I can read his thoughts which are jostling in his head. He is surely saying to himself that I must be a “reactionary” of high caliber to be able to live in such luxury:
indeed, he believes that, in all societies, as in Viet Nam, the intellectuals are pushed back into the ranks of the poverty-stricken, crushed by the contempt of the leaders, and if one of them departs from this rule, he is nothing but a reactionary dishonestly enriched. Watching his stares and gestures, I notice that, if he is not going to be incorrect with me, he is not giving me the respect that is required. Obviously, he is carrying out orders from his masters. But for what purpose? It is him who asks the first question: “Why are you selling your furniture?”

- As you must know, all the people of the intellectual circles in Hanoi do it. I have committed, it seems, errors because of which I have been excluded from the Bar Association and from teaching. Without resources, in need of feeding myself and my family, I am selling what I have owned for many years. This furniture is the last possession that I still have.

- You have said: “it seems”. Therefore, you do not recognize to be guilty and have a grudge against the Party. Should one despair of seeing you return to the path of reason?

- My dear friend, I do not know if you are aware that any judgment bears the weight of subjectivity from the person who has formulated it. In the chock of subjectivities, who can claim to be right? In a democracy which is worthy of its name, it is the law by the greater number that decides. In other regimes, it is the law of force that holds power. A judgment prompted by force and relying on force does not have the conclusive value of truth. It is invalidated by history, and this even in the lifetime of those who have pronounced it, when, after time and circumstances have passed by, these persons are brought out of their obtuse dreams and beat their breasts. But you have not come here for a discussion with me, and I am not either in the mood to do it. So, please let me know the purpose of your visit.

- I am mandated to come and see how you are doing, and find out how much you are asking for your furniture.

- Really, the Party has its eyes on everything and does not let anything escape its sight. But I think the police reports must
have provided it with sufficient information on my modest person. No, I am not on the article of death, not yet anyway, but may be for soon. Anyway, I thank the Party for the generosity and magnanimity it has demonstrated by not condemning me to the guillotine or execution stake. That may as well be better for me. I thank the Party for the solicitude with which it is seeking news from me. The furniture which I am putting up for sale now is the only remaining possession I have, and it is my last recourse for salvation. I hope to obtain what is needed to ensure the subsistence of my family at least for the next dozen years or so.

- A dozen years? But what price are you asking for?

- Before answering you, I would like to know if, actually, the leaders wish to buy my furniture and to what use do they want to make of it.

- Oh, I do not have a precise idea about the destination of your furniture. But I think that our diplomatic relations are growing, it is easy to find a place in a reception hall or lounge for your furniture.

I have found then the word for the enigma. In fact, the purchase of the furniture is only a pretext to justify the unexpected presence of a henchman at the home of a condemned, a dead man with a deferment. I think that in the high sphere it is considered that I am "irredeemable" and, as the common saying goes, why raise a wasp in the sleeve of your jacket? There are people who do not wish to kill me because they do not want to stir up emotion in the intellectual and popular circles. But there are people who hope for my death to spare the Party troubles which may be caused by my pen or voice. Therefore, knowing what to expect from the intentions of the Party about me, I easily find the answer to be given to their proxy:

- I would like to ask you to thank, in my name, the authorities that are delegating you to come and see me. I would appreciate if you could inform them that I am grateful to them until my death for what they have done for me. Holding my fate in their hands, instead of condemning me to death for my
“crime,” for justice and humanity, they prefer to condemn me to life! To a dying life, but to life still! If now, my furniture is acceptable to them, they can take it, as they have taken my heritage composed of three buildings which I have offered to the people. If they do not wish to present the face of grabbers, they can grant me the compensation they want. I would have thus offered to the Party everything I possess, as if I were a good communist!

I am not mistaken. I have never seen again that good-for-nothing person, or anyone else from that bunch. The only idea that the Party comes to buy, at a low price the furniture of value from a person it has condemned to live in hunger, appears to me so funny that I could not, at the time, refrain myself from roaring with laughter. One can blame the Party for its errors but not for such cynicism, no, no!

Sometime afterwards, a distinguished person appears at my home, in suit and tie, something which, at the time, indicates a Vietnamese from overseas. Why? Because only a foreigner or a Vietnamese diplomat just passing through Hanoi can elude the communist uniform. But, when a Vietnamese diplomat has ended his mission abroad and becomes again an employee of the ministry of external relations, he has to be reconverted back to the religion of the straight-up collar and sandals, so that only the overseas Vietnamese wear the European suits.

My Vietnamese visitor introduces himself as a businessman who has the intention to set up a luxury hotel in Hanoi for the foreign tourists. Just looking at him, one already knows what country he comes from and what social circle he belongs to. Rather tall in height for a Vietnamese, he displays a light complexion which belongs to people who reside in a temperate zone where the sun shines on people without darkening their skins, his face is hairless, dominated by a broad and high forehead crowned by a flock of hair well combed and perfumed with a discreet fragrance. Behind golden-rimmed spectacles, his eyes are focused at his interlocutor as an effort to penetrate the thoughts of the latter. He talks in a composed tone, pronouncing his words and syllables distinctly to avoid making any slip of the tongue which would reveal his secret intentions but also to give
more seriousness to his language and expressions. But his smile is friendly, welcoming, aspires to sympathy and seems to make possible a sincere and understanding dialogue. He introduces himself:

- I left the country thirty years ago and have settled down in the United States where I have set up an agency for imports and maritime transportation with my small fleet of merchant shipping. At home, I do not miss any Vietnamese or English broadcast about Viet Nam. I am corresponding with all the Vietnamese in France, Canada, England, Australia, Germany and naturally in the United States. I am not a communist, but I try to comprehend that ideology and never hesitate to support its efforts, as long as they are motivated by a concern for patriotism and not because of doctrine. We, the Vietnamese living overseas, are not afraid of words: whether it is communism or socialism, or any other kind of "ism," as soon as it concerns itself with the welfare of the people and the search for ways to lessen their poverty and suffering, we bring our contribution, particularly, for humanitarian aide, for example, in cases of famine or floods. We are teaching our children the mother tongue of our native country, we educate them about its customs and traditions and we are happy to see that the generation of our off-spring have shown that they are worthy of the attention given to them and hold high the honor of bearing the Vietnamese name and homeland.

- We are informed of all the things you have done for the country and our people. Especially, for the population in areas of periodic disasters who do not hesitate to declare that the rice, which is saving them from famine, does not come out of charity by the Government but by popular patriotism in the country and even more so from overseas!

- We are happy about this. The tradition of dum boc, the mutual aid coming from people of the same mother, is not recent but has existed since the time of Au Co. We have only one regret on this matter: it is, may we so say it, a misunderstanding which exists between the Government and us. During decades, it has called us by all kinds of names, it has heaped on us the most despicable insults, considered us traitors to the
fatherland. We can admit that politics is obsessing reason. But from there to be antagonistic to the considerable mass of the overseas Vietnamese, so rich in men of talent, of science, in technicians and managers in all the branches of the economy, and particularly men possessing great financial power which can bring useful assistance to the recovery of the country, it is an insanity, an unforgivable folly. If the friends of Viet Nam are deploring it, its enemies are congratulating themselves, for Viet Nam is depriving itself of the cooperation of its own children and, thus, accelerate the ruin of communism.

- It is fitting here to remind oneself of the ancient saying according to which Jupiter is blinding those he wants to doom. But, now, the government is pampering the overseas Vietnamese, exalting their patriotism!

- Many of us are bursting out laughing! Money does change the face of things and the heart of people! One should be grateful for the dollars which are making the miracle of metamorphosis, bleaching the dark fiends of Satan and turning them into angels of paradise! But I have to note a fact which appears significant to me. Some of us have undertaken a persevering struggle for the defense of human rights in Viet Nam. The malediction that the communists have casted on them only shows nothing but the ferocious hatred that the communists have for human rights: they take the side of the bad cause and that of the small number of dictators. They stubbornly refuse to see the obvious truth embodied in the fact that the defense of the human rights does not mean treason to the fatherland and people. Those who are mixing up one for the other are setting themselves as outcasts from humanity. They are to be pitied rather than feared! The time for punishment will come sooner or later!

But, what has provoked my astonishment is the infantilism with which the communists are afflicted. With regard to all the conquests over capitalism that one has appropriated, the market economy, the law of supply and demand, the theory of prices, the liberal economy baptized and called the economy of five components, profitability etc... one just sticks on them the socialist
label and the trick is done: one can get on one’s high horse to shout out the cock-and-doodle-doo of socialism. One has started with democracy for quite sometime now, but, since one has been speaking ill of capitalism, one has to adorn democracy with the epithet “socialist”! And, now, the logomania is going full swing: slogans are launched, with cries of renovation, but nothing has changed: corruption and embezzlement are spreading more and more their areas of infection, but no pontiff has been sent to the courts, or been condemned by an infamous sentence, worse still, escape to foreign countries can be arranged for high caliber culprits, or eyes are closed for their emigration, out of fear that the judiciary investigations, arraignment, or court hearing, would compromise too much the big shots and provoke the very understandable indignation of the people. Meanwhile, the suckers of the people’s blood can put aside in safe places the funds they have stolen and, after a token stay of pure form in a kind of prison where they can lead a life of a rich sultan, be pardoned, recover their freedom and enjoy in tranquility and honorability the products of their crimes. The explanation for such an attitude is easy to find: the communists do not consider the crimes of penal law committed by their political comrades belonging to the Party should be subjected to the rule of law and repressed with severity. In fact, if the Party has to suffer from a decline in prestige and disgrace which is taking away from it the trust of the people, it does not qualify the guilty individuals of political enemies. Since my arrival in Viet Nam, I have been given news by many of my friends which, although revolting, are true. The enemies, who are charged by the leaders’ hatred and condemned to mysterious deaths, are political enemies who have deviated from the “line” of the Party and, especially, are threatening to displace them from their positions of command, at the supreme level, the present holders of such functions. In fact, it is the sordid struggle for power which is camouflaged under the red peplum of politics! But what is astounding, unimaginable is that, inside as well as outside the Party, there are people of high intellectual notoriety and with unanimously respected virtues who are taking part in this game, accept the justifications of the Party, raise their fists and march in the ranks of the Party, yelling the ordered slogans. Here, admiration must be given to the communist education which has succeeded in convincing people, apparently with healthy minds, not to believe what they see with their eyes and hear with their
ears but, on the contrary, to proclaim the credo of the Party, add faith to all that the Party decides and decrees as the sole holder of truth and prophet of the Marxist-Leninist Gospel. Such fanaticism, which turns the multitude into robots, transforms human beings into automates acting on outside command, is upsetting the minds that think!

- I only see the remedy in the intellectual culture, which develops rationality, maintains the spirit of critique, forms judgment, preaches realism and objectivity, advocates clarity and precision in the perception and comprehension of phenomenon, logic in reasoning and the greatest skepticism about all the Don Quixote who are riding their high horses and throw out their bragging, who do not gain any conviction, and only manifest naivety, ignorance, imbecility! It is the French culture which I recognize everyday its advantages, which helps me preserve, maintain, develop what is human in me, in the midst of a world fraught with conformism and servility.

- The sense of critique and the skepticism are less developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries where I live, but the realism and pragmatism are holding us back on the slope of errors and prejudices, and the conformism breaks itself on the rock of the interest. So, what I see in Viet Nam is plunging me into astonishment. During my pilgrimages in various regions of the country and particularly in the North, I have not been able to understand the resignation of the rural masses that are swallowing their poverty and suffering without uttering any protest, without searching for either the causes or remedies. When I left the country, more than thirty years ago, the people were active, dynamic, and the gibes that they sprayed the leaders with demonstrated the good health of the heads and common sense. The people’s dynamism fed its anger in the face of poverty and injustice. Where did the fire burn out, that which lifted up the masses in the August Revolution? Why have the people become so lifeless, and immobile in apathy, why do they accept to shed tears in a passive and may be desperate resignation? Do they no longer have any trust in the resources of their minds and the strength of their hands, they who have written splendid pages of History?
I cannot find anything more appalling than the spectacle of sixty million people going adrift, like human wrecks. They have been deceived, fooled, betrayed, because it is incomprehensible that people can only lament about their poverty while the natural resources are plentiful and waiting to be exploited. My business relations have taken me to Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Korea. Thirty years ago, were the people of these countries able of claiming to be superior to the Vietnamese people? Have they not begun from poverty, known the same social, economic and moral conditions, lived through the same kinds of antagonism? And, yet, they are now benefiting from a better standard of living, enjoying a minimum of comfort in their dwellings, more freedom in their lives, with more smiling optimism on their faces. Why is it that such a minimum of well-being, which gives to existence its value and meaning, is denied to the Vietnamese people who have nothing to yield to their neighbors on so many points? It is important for each person in Viet Nam to ask the question and find the solution which, nevertheless, must be at hand.

- I pay homage to the relevance of your observations and the quality of your judgment. I can see well that you have been inspired by a sincere and warm love for the people to whom you belong. But I do not share your optimism when you feel that the solution to our ills is at hand. In my opinion, the essential problem is that of the education of the masses. Education teaches values for which faith and respect must be imposed. The man will become what the School wants him to be. The Spartan education, which produces soldiers, subjects its youth to the black grinder, and military exercise. But education can function and give its best effects only if the social practice is assisting its efforts. The values infused into the youth have meaning and efficiency only if, in the whole country, everywhere, people are exalting and honoring these values. At the time of feudalism, people were taught and imposed the respect of Chinese writing and the masters who propagated it. An illiterate peasant, if he happened to see on the ground a piece of paper with writings inscribed on it, he would pick it up and throw it into the fire. The masters, in the social hierarchy, were placed even higher than the fathers. If it was that way, it was because the father was considered to give life but the master formed man. To form man, that was
The supreme and sole purpose of education. So, man worthy of the name must display the virtues that, only by themselves, elevated and exalted the humanity of man. The School instilled in it the principle, morality applied it in the family and social sphere. The monarchical State, therefore, promoted the scholars, particularly those who had succeeded to the triennial competitive examinations to accede to the highest positions at the Court. The names of the laureates were engraved on the steles of stone, and every village took pride for having given birth to mandarins, among whom there were some who did most good for their fellow countrymen and were raised to the rank of genies emeritus and honored in the pagodas. The literatures, both oral and written, advocated a model to be followed with the case of mandarins having integrity and loyalty to their kings and people and castigated without mercy the bad mandarins who had climbed up the ladder of honors uniquely by their servility and lowness. In such a society, immorality could not get in and find a place. The popular masses did not have the need to demand punishment of the prevaricators and embezzlers; immorality did not cover the whole society, the entire country, with its black tide!

The radical, fundamental difference which distinguishes the society of yesterday and the one of today is that its purpose has changed. Yesterday, man and virtue were honored. Today, communism and its political internationalism are being praised to the skies. When the political values have dislodged the intellectual and moral values, it is a whole revolution, but the members of the Party are unaware of it. They ceaselessly cry out: “Renovation” but the slogans cannot replace action; the decadence of man and morality follows or goes with the ruin of the economy, aggravates the suffering and poverty of the people.

- I have immediately noticed this as soon as I disembarked from the plane at Tan Son Nhut. The intellectuals are cycling the pedicabs, while the politicians are riding in automobiles, the intellectuals are washing motorcycles by the roadsides, repairing bicycles or sell vegetables at the markets, while the leaders are taking it easy in their sumptuous villas and expanding their waistlines by honoring the banquets with their
presence. The intellectuals are pulling the devil by its tail, while the politicians, not satisfied with emerging themselves in luxury, they themselves and their families as well, gather gold and foreign currencies which they confine in Swiss banks. In the meantime, the coffers of the State [Services] do not have cash liquidity, employees are laid-off, and the remaining ones, who are maintained in their functions, are permitted to engage in commerce, even on the ground floor of the administrative buildings, and receive important commissions when they are able to conclude profitable contracts for the Department [Service] which is employing them. The door is open to State black-market, tax frauds and theft of considerable sums of money, thanks to the illegal surcharge for the commissions. In no country, can such a situation be imagined: the State indirectly favors delinquency!

- The crucial, capital, urgent problem is to reform man, the engine of all activities in society, for education to give itself the supreme objective: the man of culture and virtue. Of course, the conception of man's culture and virtue must adapt itself to the progress of modernity: it cannot remain and stagnate at the Confucian stage. It would be ridiculous at the age of the atom, electronics and conquest of space that the culture of man could neglect the knowledge of science. But the scientific culture is teaching man only a wide and deep perception of the physical world. If it equips man with a logical method of thinking, on the double basis of induction and deduction, it is of no assistance in the exploration of the moral world, in the comprehension of the movements of the soul, in the explaining of the sentiments of the heart, their genesis, evolution and extinction. Here, literature reveals its competence. The culture of the modern man edifies and unfolds itself on both the scientific and literary planes. Likewise, the virtue of the modern man merges itself with the requirements of the new society. People no longer fight by throwing deathblows to one another, combatants are no longer required of bravery, sacrifice, valiant generosity, on the battlefields, no one defies death anymore for one's God or beloved belle! No, the modern man situates himself by his clear and just outlook, his foresight of what will happen tomorrow, his precise judgment about his adversary and the
juncture of events, his endurance which enables him to bear the temporary setbacks in order to reach a future success. He acquires these virtues in the course of his experience from life, through his struggles but also in literature. But his most decisive virtues may well be integrity, honesty, justice, the sense of dignity and honor, humanity and tolerance.

- I approve you entirely. But the man of culture and virtue constitutes an ideal which is difficult and long to be achieved. The major difficulty comes from the virulent resistance that the State is opposing to the replacement of its ideal of man. Although it is intelligent and open enough to understand that its ideal of man in the international and communist proletariat has already been condemned and destined to join the wax museum Grevin for History of the Medieval Knight, it is clinging, may be not so much because of a parent’s self-pride but for the sake of selfish interests of the Party that wishes to survive. To reach this goal, it launches the slogan of renovation. But, in the entire country, wherever I go people just talk about corruption of the civil servants, with almost all of them being members of the Party. Only such dignitaries can occupy the highest positions and carry out the high mission of filling more easily their pockets. The people demand their punishment, the Party proclaims the principle of it, but until now only the little fries have been brought to justice and whose isolated and individual delinquency does not compromise the big shots. It is an error of not punishing or deferring too long the punishment of the high caliber culprits. The Party is discrediting itself by refraining from punishing them as well as by doing it. It is discrediting itself even more by stopping at half-measures, procrastinations, reshaping of the economy, and it is provoking the astonishment of everybody by sticking the “socialist” label on measures and solutions which have always belonged to capitalism. If, really, they are socialist, then why wait for the economic debacle to put them in execution? If they are not invented by socialism, it is dishonest to appropriate the property of others, especially after having dragged capitalism into the gutter for so many decades? In fact, the ambiguity can be explained: cornered into defeat, but unable to admit it because of having to lose face, it prefers to become the laughing stock of the public! It is
an error. Here, as anywhere else, frankness rules. There is nothing to gain by cheating the people with loaded dices. Not only one admits one’s helplessness, but one also sullies one’s honor. Is it a shame to recognize an error if the lesson which has been learned is bringing favorable conditions for a victorious return game, the next time?

- May I ask what are your intentions?

- I come here to see again the country, but I have friends who are waiting to know my opinion before investing in Viet Nam. Well, what I have seen does not encourage me to undertake anything. I must say to you, the Vietnamese market is interesting, the natural resources are plentiful and unexploited, labor is abundant, but communications and transports are defective, the customs officers are fussy, the policemen are bothersome. The legislation, in spite of the recent reforms, is not yet satisfactory and, especially, the government which has tried hard to put on itself some paint, under a crude makeup, still shows the red color of its complexion. It persists in defending its political monopoly, ignores democracy, does not recognize human rights, despises and ill-treats the intellectuals. A French journalist, who lauded the glory of the Vietnamese people at the time of Dien Bien Phu has recently returned to Viet Nam, has written: now, hypocrisy and lies have been added to ignorance and incompetence. Conclusion: it is necessary to wait.

- Wait! You wait and so do we. All, we wait for better days for Viet Nam!

- The wait may be long, at least I can feel that. Here, I have gone through the alternatives of hope and despair. I am in hope when I think of the Vietnamese potentials in natural wealth and men. But I am in despair when I witness the dreadful poverties that the people have to endure still, particularly in the countryside. Of course, there are now more brick houses than before but, alas, not everybody can live in ease, there are even regions in Central Viet Nam which continue to suffer of shortages and often of famine. This is intolerable! I hope when I hear the Party and the people shout
"renovation," and all the more so when the Party is consulting
the people about the reforms to be done. But I despair to see
that only the orthodox opinions are acclaimed while the
heterodox ones are doomed to the hegemonies while waiting
for harsh sanctions to come. I hope when I see the Party
organizes its internal consultations, but I despair when I see
on television members of the Party, with a unanimity too
touching to be natural, proclaim their faith in the Party, as the
Party is asserting its faith in Marxism-Leninism. I am asking
myself if, between these two faiths, there is faith in the people
and improvement of their fate. And, particularly, I feel my
mind going off the rails when I hear the Party advocates a
market economy which can only make sense in liberalism. I
hope when I hear the leaders proclaim that democracy rules,
that human rights are respected, and I despair to learn that
thousands of intellectuals, for having praised democracy and
expressed freely their opinions, are meditating behind bars in
order to find out whether they or the leaders are right. I hope
when I see that the peoples of Eastern Europe have swept
away the communists and their leaders, but I despair when
Viet Nam seems to be the last bastion of communism and
closes its eyes and ears to what is happening in the world. I
hope when I read in the press the names of the Vietnamese
laureates who have triumphed at the international university
competitions. But I despair to see in Viet Nam the intellectuals
being relegated as outcasts from society and forced to engage
in the hardest manual works, the least honorable, to avoid
death by starvation, while the Party members installed in their
posts of direction take it easy in their magnificent automobiles
and send their children to “study” abroad and eventually return
home to replace them in their high functions. I only name the
few facts which have impressed me and I challenge anyone to
prove me the contrary. What must be done to remedy this
lamentable situation?

- The facts that you have enumerated are not invention on your
part. We, in the country, suffer from them but never make any
allusion to them because even the mere act of crying out that
Midas has donkey ears is charged of crime. There are only
the opportunists in thirst of honors and profits who can talk at
any street corner and say that Messalina is the most virtuous
woman in the world. The leaders profess, as the popular saying goes, that one should not show one's bare back for people to see. Yet, I am not pushing to the extremism and want to overthrow communists. A mind that thinks is horrified by "novelties" which can provoke social disturbances of high gravity, with possible damages to the interests of properties as well as persons. I am doing the same thing that the old woman did when she went to pray each day for the good health of the tyrant of Syracuse because she was afraid that his successor would be much more cruel than him. Therefore, I put my trust in a regenerated Party. On the other hand, it does not matter whose hand can bring about the welfare and happiness of the people, which should be the major concern of not only governments but also the entire people. Personally, I am horrified by politics and even more so by politicians all hidden behind their masks of hypocrisy and lies, rotten by culpability and vanity. How could it be otherwise since they are men, that is to say, beings with whom the good has to struggle against the evil and seldom triumphs? I put all of them in the same bag.

- Can you make an exception for those communists who were receiving, yesterday still, praises sung by millions of people in the world?

- The communists have killed half of my life, condemned my entire family to endure the throes of hunger by depriving me of my means of livelihood in teaching and law practice. But the poor guys are simply suffering from infantilism and psittacism: the have bullied the intellectuals with the Stalinist and Maoist example. I forgive them: they know not what they are doing! But what I cannot let them off with is for depriving me of the happiness to form during decades many generations of intellectuals as I did prior to their conquest of power, that is to say, an entire youth endowed with a high level of knowledge in the French language and literature, men equipped with French wisdom and a culture of quality which would have enabled them to govern their vessel through the reefs of existence. I have not been able to transmit to them the flame which has illuminated my mind and lighted my steps in the human community.
- How did this wisdom and culture inspire your attitude with regard to politics and especially in the face of the communists?

- I open Montaigne. It is my breviary, my resources for the last sacrament. There are so many good lessons that the communists can learn, if only they had some culture, from the Essais. By way of the "sane examples of the Elders" and of Montaigne, they could have learned that one should not lodge anything in one's head "by just authority and on credit," that anyone "following another does not follow anything." Translated into clear language, this means that one must not kneel before anybody, neither Marx nor Lenin, neither Stalin nor Mao. They must neither shut themselves up nor lock themselves in a closed world, but open themselves to the "commerce of men," "rub and sharpen our minds against that of another person," enter into this vast world, "scrutinize where we should look for to find out the good angle," and "thus, with the pieces borrowed from others," one must transform them and mix them up in order to "turn them into one's own work, namely, one's judgment." "The gain of our study is to become better and wiser." There, in brief, is what the communists should have learned in order to form themselves before governing others!

And now, in face of the communists, what attitude must one adopt in order to preserve the integrity and authenticity of one's own being? Let us listen to our master: "me, I fold back my life inside, I plant it, and I entertain it." The order "belong to yourself" can only be carried out at the "back-shop." "This corner alone must be shielded from the conjugal and filial and civil community." From that observatory where we are observing ourselves, we can "be the spectators of other people's lives," to judge and adjust" our own lives... "The only fear has been to rely on my own self and necessity." Since we are living through difficult times, and witnessing "at that notable spectacle of our own death," let us be aware that "in that confusion where we have been in the past thirty years, any man can see himself every hour on the verge of the entire collapse of his fortune." Therefore, the only dignified attitude, - even if we were compelled to take a public position,
must be the one of “misunderstanding neither the laudable qualities of our adversaries nor the reproachable ones of those who have followed us.” In short, let us keep our vigilance and clear perception, avoid partisanship and prejudices which affect the position we hold in a social and particularly political community. The utmost wisdom is to follow our author: “I am not engaging myself so deeply and so entirely: when my will gives me to a party, it is not by a violent obligation which is infecting my comprehension.” It is for avoiding to infect their comprehension that quite a number of intellectuals have declined the offer to be admitted into the Party.

- Well, I understand you perfectly. But, in the present situation, what are your reflections? How to get out of the impasse in which we are held, against our will?

- The extreme right wants to pursue communism to its most hidden nooks. The extreme left wants to defend communism come hell or high water, even if it means having to carry out some reforms and make some concessions. I think that the solution must have more nuances. What is the golden rule which forbids us to forget and dominates the frenzied combat between the adversaries in presence? If man is the point of departure and that of arrival for any education and culture, the people must be the point of departure and the point of arrival for all politics. Let us be realists! Are we not making fun of any ideology which is simply giving a pretext to the logomania. What are the people demanding? Not much and yet a lot. Not much because they wish for a reasonable material life: a decent dwelling, decent food, clean clothes. In the intellectual and artistic life, they only ask for the possibility to acquire instruction and culture, to be entertained in a healthy manner. In the political life, they dream of being consulted about the major problems which concern their present and future interests and to be able to express, in all sincerity, their thoughts and reflections. In the social life, they demand education and the practice of morality, the purity and cleanliness of the customs and standards of behavior on the part of the individuals and, all the more so, of the rulers. They consider that all the doctrinal quarrels and the like are purely grammatical ones, as says Montaigne. They are not
concerned with knowing whether a measure taken is capitalist or socialist. The essential thing is that it contributes to the welfare of the population: the rest is simply rattling and nonsense!

Currently, the communist party is governing the country. It has known its grandeurs and servitudes. It cannot deny that the people are not exercising any right to have a look into the secrets of its functioning: it is a separate world, beyond the earthy world. The political monopoly, which it is defending with significant furor, has forged its cohesion and consolidated its bloc, but has pushed the Party into committing unforgivable crimes which disastrous gravity it has recognized. Now, it wants to become incrusted, it has well organized the network of its forces and to dislodge it from its positions would require bloodshed. It has proclaimed its willingness to reform itself by fundamental and essential renovations. Let us give it a delay of grace, a reprieve. If, thanks to dynamic efforts, costly sacrifices, it is regenerating itself, has decided to carry out in good faith and sincerity the principle that it has up to now only professed: **by the people, for the people**, why do we not give it the opportunity of the last chance? If we proscribe it as a political party, we are playing the political game, we are showing it the same fanaticism for which we are blaming it. Our indulgence will make it think, and it will try to be more deserving of the people’s trust by giving satisfaction to their rights and interests, and to respect the will of the people.”

We do not have to bargain about the price of my furniture. It is well beyond all my expectations since what is paid is the double of the amount that I intended to ask my buyer.

5.

THE DRAMA OF EXCOMMUNICATION, ISOLATION, AND SOLITUDE

From the most ancient times, man used to live in community. All the needs, which require the possibility to be met, exceed the
forces and capabilities of a human being or family and are fulfilled by way of aid, assistance, and cooperation from the community, especially in the fields of defense, staple cultivations, habitat, clothing, education. This multi-faceted activity provides for the maintaining of the individual’s material life, is concerned with the development of the being’s physical body, and protects the integrity and continuity of the existence.

But, beyond the limits of the physical being and material existence, spreads the boundless and infinite world of sentiments and the heart. The community neither wants nor can interfere in this. This backroom-shop constitutes a laboratory where the inner decisions take place and dictate to the individual the actions which have bearing on his or her personality and express his or her will. There is interference between the two worlds, the exterior by creating the conditions which compel the being to respond, and the interior by the interplay of these reactions, making him or her to intervene with the exterior world. The mechanism of this double movement guarantees the balance of the individual, the exchanges between the two worlds situate and maintain the being in a complex network of actions and reactions which give him or her the impression of life.

Yet, communism puts a check to the contacts and exchanges between the two exterior and interior worlds, severs the relations from each other, and the engine no longer functions with full efficiency but does it only in slow-motion, and considerably reduces the rotation of the wheels and chains. In the extreme case when the individual is entirely excluded from the exterior world, he or she loses the use of the senses and then of the head which can no longer think, and of the soul which is sinking into a growing numbness. The individual can become insane; anyway, his or her ancestors do not have to wait long to meet him or her again. In the jails, the prisoner who has committed an offense is punished by isolation in an individual cell. It is thus the hardest punishment which can be inflicted to a being. Above this, there is only the death sentence.

In my personal case, there has not been any verdict of punishment pronounced against me, no prison, no cell. But, in the communist citadel, there are nameless forms of punishment,
informal ones, which are equivalent to a death sentence, in the long run. Such is the case of excommunication that political fanaticism has picked up from the medieval arsenal of criminology; excommunication is the most decisive weapon of religious fanaticism. It is forbidden for any faithful to provide residence, food or clothing to an excommunicated who has been deprived of shelter, subsistence and apparel, and is no longer able to lead his or her life to a normal end. The excommunication that I am subjected to only closes the doors of the University and the Court of Justice. The ten executive Committees of the mass organizations have never pronounced any exclusion against me but simply stop inviting me to their meetings. This attitude of the communists is meaningful: they are adepts of half-measures, strokes of the knife in the back, poisons in the cup of tea and, it is said, craftily simulated accidents. The crime bears no signature. In the eyes of the law, one pleads the lack of evidence, but all the more so, in society, one avoids scandals, upheavals in political public opinion, one exonerates oneself from any responsibility and retains one’s honorability in the civil and political society. The Machiavellianism is conscious but camouflaged with art.

As far as I am concerned, I am not thrown in prison, or put in handcuffs. I am not arraigned to face any political or criminal court. I am not taken away from my home or family. But the entire human and social community knows; in order to avoid troubles, all contacts with me, whatever they may be, must be severed. My house is sheltering a pestiferous person, it is not wise to come near it. In the street, when people see me, even from far away, they take a detour to avoid me and, if a person is thrust by heroism or lack of consideration, knocks at my door, as soon as coming out of my house, he or she is politely invited to go to the police station, tortured by questions about his or her identity, family, social class, but particularly concerning his or her relations with the criminal that I have become. Much obliged, the person is informed that he or she is put on the blacklist and from then on his or her activities will be under watch. It is not necessary to have good eyesight to see that all the crossroads leading to my house are guarded by one or two acolytes who can change their identities but not their function of argus or cerberes, which is to arrest people who by ignorance and ill-fate come to ring at my door. It is such a comedy, both funny and tragic, each time I have
to go out for an errand, I am ostentatiously tailed. The friends who, by chance, notice me from afar, at once turn back and vanish like shadows in the night. If for health reasons I happen to take a small stroll in the neighboring streets, whenever I pass near the policemen put on my tail, I never fail to give them a big salute with my hat which displeases them greatly. They and I know well the kind of game we have to play … They must be aware that I have full knowledge of the orders they have received from their masters, and that my cunning will never allow their vigilance to catch me with my guard down. Of course, all my mail is open and most of the time, does not reach me. All the particulars are inscribed in my file with regard to persons who send me letters and, of course, investigations have been carried out about them. All the big dogs sent to bite me, cannot stick their fangs in me since they fail to find my naked flesh! After long, very long years of watch, their masters have come to admit their helplessness and must act in consequence.

At the start of the cycle of my misfortunes and in the course of my adversities, it has been my great amazement to see a political personality of high caliber coming to my home, comrade Ha Huy Giap; I do not know whether it is at his own will or at the request of someone that he pays me a visit. He has expressed concern for my health and asked a few harmless questions about my activities. I have heard previously about him in rather good terms, but I did not have any opportunity of meeting him. Our conversation does not reach the depths of intimacy, but I think I can guess the friendly motives which have guided him. One must be a member of the Central Committee, a significant personality of the Party, to take a chance in making a visit to an excommunicated. Whatever it is and whatever the nature of the sentiments that have inspired him, his visit has produced the effect of a sunray into the darkness of my solitude.

In spite of the radiant and shining visit by Ha Huy Giap, which was just a flash of lightning in my night, I am suffering from the cold of the isolation to which I am condemned. I have not been separated from my family but the tears overflowing the eyes of my wife and daughter, which they carefully conceal as not to aggravate my sadness, I know, continue to drip down in my absence. On my part, I avoid looking at them in the eyes so that I
do not have to detect the furrows marked on their cheeks by wakefulness and hardship. Whenever a power puts into the balance the weight of its authority, declares that in its own perspective an unredeemable crime has been committed, the fear it spreads in society is such that no one dares open his or her door or heart to the “criminal!” The latter is, therefore, cast into forced isolation which he or she has to endure its painful torments. No roof accepts to shelter his or her sleep, no clothing can protect him or her from the ice-cold harshness of the night and winter, no food to warm up his or her belly and give strength for his or her feet to move, no friendly ear to listen to his or her lamentations, and no sympathetic voice to offer the charity of a wail.

They have looked at me and I at them, and we have not recognized one another. Yes, the excommunicated is alone everywhere, even in his own country!

Yet, it is an isolation in the midst of strangers, although they are from your race, and how painful this may be, it is nothing compared to the one from which you can feel the anguish within your own family, the persons who are dearest to you, by the side of the companion of your life and the flesh of your own flesh! This isolation has a rare quality, sprung up from the very love which has created the sacred ties between them and you. They suffer to see you suffer. They have conceived in their minds that it is their duty as well as by their affection to lessen your pains by hiding their own. The motivation is in itself commendable, it is noble, and deserves respect and honor but, unfortunately, the father or mother, whose misfortunes they wish to lessen, partly or the least possible, suffer twice more for not being able to share among the three of them the same sighs and tastes of bitterness. The distressing, dramatic game in which the three of us are playing consists of making the other, the two other, believe that each of us is vigorously bearing the assaults of adversity and is maintaining his or her serenity and inner balance which expresses peace of the soul. But what is killing us is the fact we know that we are fooling ourselves by wanting to fool the other, or the two other. No one is a dupe but, from both sides, one pretends to be comforted, even knowing that more tears will come in the solitude of the night.
Therefore, I am in pain for knowing that my wife and daughter suffer because of me, and are damaging their health by the sleepless nights which are dragging on and on, repeating themselves everyday. This thought tortures me day and night, lacerates my heart, causes restlessness in bed, compels me to get up and take a few steps in my room before being able to lie down again! In our house, the three inhabitants do not close their eyes and, with the help of hunger, walk unsteadily and, if they happen to be overcome by an unexpected sleepiness, it is due to exhaustion which has consumed their energies and strength. It is a miracle that we survive from so many trials, a single of them can easily take away our lives.

If each crisis can make me ache to death, each lull, depending on its duration, can wear me out even more. The suffering tears me apart, crushes me, rips me, pierces my heart with its sharp needles, and pulls out shreds from my soul with its pointed teeth. It is a real force, one of character and positive, if I may so say it, which I can measure the intensity, dynamism, power, evolution and revolutions, pauses and renewals. On the contrary, the new feelings of anguish which are torturing me belong to a category with a totally different nature and so far unknown to me. In contrast to the pain which I qualify as positive and breaking my spirit as well as ripping my heart, the suffering by which I feel the negative effects dilutes the will, weakens my nerves, slackens the springs of my energy, deforms entirely my physical and moral being, turns me into a rag good to be thrown to a trash can. This suffering, like a rising tide, spreads in me, floods me with languor and inertia, and only leaves in me a fragment of consciousness by which I perceive the weight of emptiness. Formerly, I led a boiling existence, giving lectures at the University, pleading cases at the Court of Justice, and composing my literary essays. I used to have the feeling of overflowing with vitality, of burning with the fever to act and express myself. Now, I doze off into languidness, collapse into passivity, have the impression of drifting away on a boundless sea without any horizon, and melting into the vastness of a motionless fluid. Time, which seemed to me the most precious treasure before, although unfolding too rapidly to my liking and despair, is now an empty frame devoid of its content, leaving a colorless space which conveys nothingness, injures the eyesight and annihilates the spirit. I tighten my mind to fill this
absence of audio-visual sensations. I stare at each leaf on a tree in the street, at each passer-by strolling along, at each car moving on the road, I am like a blind man who has just regained the eyesight, is examining the realities of the world and starry-eyed as well as delighted by its novelty. But all my quests prove to be fruitless and their conceit throws me into an intolerable despair. All this time, which I try to spend in frivolities, continues to confuse me, to harass me with its vacuity.

The idea of roaming about in town comes to my mind, of fixing my attention on all the living beings, all the houses and all the animated spectacles which make up so many sequences for a documentary film on the life of the capital city. No tourist has pushed his or her curiosity as far as I have. But all these occupations, the uselessness of which I know better than anyone else, do not allow me to fill my timeframe. All these soulless things do not meet the unsatisfied desires of my thirsting soul in its broken surges. I compare myself to the traveler crossing the desert, bending under the weight of gold on his shoulders and asking nothing else but to exchange that gold for a cup of water.

I drift to the Ba Dinh Club where, in my former spare-times, I used to play tennis. Time for the end of the office hours has not yet come and the courts are deserted. Sitting at a bench, it is quite a surprise for me to see something rolling against my feet which, at first, I believe it to be a ball of wool. It is a tiny young cat, born just a few days ago and, according to the usual practice, its mother must have made the firm decision to abandon it so that the little kitten can discover the world by itself. I took the animal in my hand, caressed it and was filled with compassion and tenderness for it. The kitten and I are two wrecks in life, suffering from the same hunger, victims of the same isolation, and afflicted by the same fate. After making a tour of the neighboring houses and failing to find out the owner of the kitten, I thank the chance, or Providence?, which has given me a companion of misfortune and distress, from which a silent conversation is going to fill my time and offer me a sentimental communion that I have not dared to ask from my wife or daughter so as not to bore further into their sufferings. Between them and me, silence is more eloquent than words and does not squeeze out more tears from their eyes. It
would also be the same between the kitten and me: the language of the eyes would be enough for our sentimental exchanges.

Back at home, I share with the kitten my tasteless rice! At my great satisfaction, it is happy with just that and gains weight rapidly. While I go on with my meditation at the edge of my window, it remains on my lap and, at night, it sets itself by my side. Therefore, I am able to take my first steps and come out of the endless tunnel of my isolation, and give myself a reason to live by filling up the void of my existence. I cannot take myself for walks in the streets because my watchdogs always follow me from a distance. I cannot register myself for training sessions at the Ba Dinh Club because the rackets, balls and canvas shoes are insanely expensive and beyond my reach. But what is most heartbreaking for me is to see my old companions of sports avoiding me and running away from me! These flights are all the more like strokes of the knife slashing my heart, and it is impossible for me to play the role of the outcast or leper. I understand the attitude of my comrades for tennis who all are high ranking public servants, members of the Party, of course, and are much concerned before anything else about their administrative and political future. Consequently, they would be horrified to shake hands with a plague-stricken person and have a tennis set with him! They are just men, the poor souls, and it is not possible for me to expect from them less indignity, cowardice and degradation.

My cat, growing up fast and well taken care of by my attention, has reconciled me with life by reviving in me the taste for intellectual activity which used to fill me in the past with pure states of joy. How am I going to re-start the engine of my intellectuality? I carry out a review of what I have done since 1932, date of the presentation of my theses for the State Doctorate of Literature and the Doctorate of Law. In the choice of my subjects for study, I have given an equal share between East and West, between France and Viet Nam. My main thesis in literature was on Musset, my thesis in law was concerned with the individual in the ancient annamite city (Code of the Le kings,) and with regard to my complementary thesis in literature, it was aimed at making known to the French public a French author who had written about Viet Nam of the late 19th century: Jules Boissiere. It is the same consideration for balance between the two worlds which has
inspired me about the four books published in French by the year 1940. The first one, *Sourires et Larmes d'une Jeunesse* [Smiles and Tears of a Youth], presented the psychology and the intellectual, social activity of Vietnamese youth trained in France and to whom was given the construction of the East of tomorrow. It was this construction of the East which inspired me two other books, one devoted to French values: *Pierres de France* [Stones of France] and the other to Mediterranean values (Spain, Italy, Greece): *Apprentissage de la Méditerranée* [Apprenticeship of the Mediterranean]. The fourth work was a theater play with the setting for the conflict, on a sentimental plane, between the Traveler, who personified the West in his needs for mobility and change, and the young girl, who represented the feeling in her faithfulness and steadfastness: *Le Voyage et le Sentiment* [The Journey and the Sentiment].

From 1940 to 1945, disturbances of exceptional gravity took place in the world and in Viet Nam: henceforth, France no longer directed its activities on the Vietnamese territory where the Communist revolution had triumphed since 1945, and governed the people. From 1945 to 1956, together with my family, I had gone underground with the anti-colonialist Resistance movement. Back in Hanoi, I picked up again my teaching course of French literature at the University and reopened my lawyer's practice there. Thanks to the Party, and having asked for nothing, I was seated on ten executive Committees of the mass organizations. From 1958 on, I was condemned to be relieved of all my functions for having defended democracy; I have related these incidents at the beginning of this volume.

Such have been my intellectual and literary activities since 1932 to this day. To what creations am I going to harness myself to? This is of capital importance. The essential problem to which I have directed my entire intellectual life is that of the meeting between West and East, in opposition to the thesis of Rudyard Kipling who denies such possibility. I give myself the task of aiding the mutual comprehension of these two worlds, on the basis of which their meeting can take place. Each world has its own scale of values which sometimes clash with one another. The meeting, on the basis of comprehension, goes along with a reciprocal aid between the two worlds in order to complete and
shape themselves for the better good of humanity. It is in this
direction that I will engage my thinking to complete the work of my
life.

But the East, and particularly Viet Nam, is running into a
number of difficulties in the search for solutions to some problems
which are both important and urgent. For example, there is the
problem of forming the new man. In Viet Nam, the educational
reforms have followed one another without producing any
satisfaction. It may be necessary to carry out a reshaping of the
political conceptions, but the Vietnamese communist Party looks
with a very bad eye at those who advocate such a way of
resolving the problem of education. Therefore, it would be
necessary to make the ruling authorities meditate on the French
pedagogic ideas which, over two centuries from Erasmus to
Rousseau, have succeeded in forming the man, and more
precisely the modern intellectual man, for without him the techno-
scientific revolution cannot be achieved. My first research works
will address this point.

Another major problem of concern for the Vietnamese
intelligentsia is to find out how to solve the problem about the
relationship between politics and literature. Many Vietnamese
writers and artists cannot accept that politics rules over literary
creativity. The Party has declared that politics has the duty of
governing literature and the finality of literature is to serve politics
in its general line and special policies. All the men of letters, who
comply with this principle and commit their talents to it, receive
honors and privileges for themselves and their families. But the
remaining majority balks at following such an orientation. The
problem is, therefore, as important as that of educating men.
Consequently, it is necessary that I put forth my thoughts on this
matter. Without wanting to convert the recalcitrant to the thesis of
the Party, I feel it may be useful to show the literary men how the
problem was resolved in the Greek Antiquity and Latin Antiquity.

Ancient Greece offers us the model of Eschyle (Aiskhylos,) one
of the masters of Greek tragedy whose work enjoys the admiration
and respect of both the State and people. It does not matter
whether politics adapts itself to literature or vice-versa. The
essential in Eschyle’s work is that it gives out the fragrance of
politics and celebrates the glory of the people having triumphed over foreign aggression. The Vietnamese reader finds in it the echo of his or her people’s own glory.

Likewise, this is found in the work of Virgil (Vergilius.) The policy of Augustus is to stimulate agricultural production; it belongs to the poet to sing the beauties of the countryside and poetry of agriculture. Augustus proposes further a policy of concord and union to cement the foundations of the Empire after having given birth to it. Viet Nam would find itself again in the dithyrambic praise of agricultural life as well as in the policy of the fatherland’s national Front.

Now, the masterpiece of Eschyle: the trilogy of Oresteia should also interest Viet Nam since it evokes the passing from private vengeance to the legal punishment of the State and, on the other hand, the passing from the enslaving oligarchy to the enslaving democracy. Democracy begins its ascension and receives the aid of Peace, the Erynnies, goddesses of vengeance, having turned themselves into the Eumenides, divinities of gentleness and kindness.

To free myself from the horrors of the void, the penetration of which into my being immobilizes me in languor and gloom, both my day and night cogitations have led me to elaborate a working program which can last for twenty years, according to my estimates.

Therefore, within the framework of my meditations on the meeting of the two worlds, in the pursuit of my intention of supplying the construction site with the western building materials, I insist on the contributions by the Greek and Latin Antiquity. Such contributions can be immense, and I have to choose those which concern directly the problems of current Vietnamese affairs and, precisely, those which are facing the intellectuals and men of letters. And as it has turned out, during the long years spent with the underground movement, it was proposed to us to study Marxism, and this was the opportunity or never for me to put into practice whatever I had been able to draw from Marxism which helped me comprehend better the evolution of societies and the happening of historical events. So, as the Vietnamese public and
their rulers are the first ones to be interested by my research works, I will write in Vietnamese and not in French.

My efforts have resulted in four books which are: 1. – *Doctrines pédagogiques de l’Europe, du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (d’Erasme a Rousseau) [Pedagogic doctrines of Europe, from XVIth to XVIIIth Century (from Erasmus to Rousseau)]. 2. – *Eschyle et la tragédie grecque* [Eschyle and the Greek tragedy]. 3. - The Vietnamese translation of *Oresteia* by Eschyle with a study as introduction. 4. – *Virgil et l’épopée latine* [Virgil and the Latin epic]. Each of these books is of about 500 typewritten pages.

I have sent a copy of each of these books to the Commissions of the Central Committee of the communist Party (the Commission for Education and the Commission for Letters and Arts;) I have received congratulations and obtained the Imprimatur (authorization for publication.) Unfortunately, the State Publishing Houses, to which I have trusted with my manuscripts, have answered me by saying that they do not have the funding for the printing. I yield. That is communism!

I have established a working plan for a rather long period of time, without much concern about whether or not I will be able to complete it before my death. Twenty years will bring me to the 75th year of my existence. Will I live that long to reach my goals? Whatever! The essential thing for me is to break the embrace of the void, to emerge from the depressing boredom in which I am gluing myself, and to exhaust my time by plunging into the waters of salvation resulting from a useful and delightful activity. My Calvary has ended and I must surely display a better appearance since my wife and daughter no longer shed tears when looking at me. To their tenderness is added that of my cat which is growing up in a visible manner, purring on my knees while I work, and rubbing its head against my legs whenever I stand up. The poor thing! It is lacking of all the stuff which fill the kind of luxury cats that the Greats have in abundance: chunks of meat, laps of milk or chicken soup. I murmur into my cat’s ear that it was born under a bad star since it has landed in the house of an excommunicated who is himself scrimping on his rice, under the pretext of keeping the “waistline” as a young beauty would do in dreaming of new conquests. I force my cat to take care of its looks, to maintain its
feline elegance, whenever it exhibits its hollow flanks on the mat which is put on the floor and serving as table for our meals. The poet is right when declaiming: “Oh work, the sacred law of the word!” It is work which has saved me: in it, I feel like being in my element, like a fish in water. I am born again in the joy of life, and this joy will not leave me for one minute during the days that are left for me to breathe the air of the sky and time!

The successive sales of our belongings have provided us with some resources, the modicum of which equals the frugality of our meals. The bowls of rice that the three of us swallow, for lunch as well as dinner, now reach twelve bowls per day, and the share of vegetables has also increased. It is a real feast for us when we allow ourselves a banana on Sundays! Our isolation has remained the same: no member of our larger family dares knock at our door and no friend passes by our window. They all make a detour to avoid having to use the street where we are dwelling. I no longer get out of my house, or leave my working desk, so as to spare my acquaintances a meeting with me that they fear more than the fires of hell.

However, by ways unknown to me, my friends, from far and near, do not forget me. Often, when getting up in the morning and opening my front door, I find an envelope filled with banknotes under the door leaf. We weep of emotions and despair for not ever being able to express our gratitude to our benefactors whose names we do not know! Often, with the fall of the night, between dogs and wolves, it happens that I take short walks in the street. My argus-tails follow me at a distance, but it is difficult for them to recognize the faces of people who cycle by me quickly and slip into my hand an envelope or a tiny package. Not seen, not known! The whole operation takes place in the flash of light: the policemen just see dust in their eyes!

All these acts of generosity from which I benefit make me ponder. I notice the helplessness of the authorities to stop the circulation of news. They have decreed my civil death and forbidden all my communications with the outside. In the country, the fear of punishment, whether direct or indirect, seizes the naïve persons or the audacious ones who dare contact a plague-stricken of my kind, and abolishes all feelings of goodwill. Therefore, as I
am cut off from both the outside world and inside the country, it seems that my natural death would sooner or later have to follow my civil death. But this hope is futile. The most secret news leak out in society, they propagate themselves at an unimaginable speed, thanks to the modern communication medias and the curiosity of people who are burning to know what is scheming behind the scene in the government offices.

I note a second helplessness on the part of the authorities: perhaps, they do not wish my death which would dirty their hands, and they must avoid with care not having to bear the responsibility for it before the people; for sure, they would they would not welcome my disappearance with a bad eye. They have tried everything to eliminate a member of that confounded breed of intellectuals: by denying them the means of subsistence. My family and I are not starved to death by hunger: we have suffered cruelly and lost many kilograms of our flesh, our faces bear the stigmas of the hollow bellies and empty stomachs, but we hold on! Returns from the successive sales of our belongings have helped us drag on through the languishing days during many years but we do not give to those who detest us the satisfaction of being told about our passing away. And, when our resources run dry, the generosity of our friends from the outside and inside the country have thrown us the lifebuoys which enable us to keep our heads above water instead of sinking down to the depths of nothingness. Many friends from Viet Nam, and from France as well, have thought that after forty years of silence I must have been crossed out from the list of the living. But I have answered them: "I am not a crazy weed that one can tramp on, or flatten to the ground, for that grass will stand up again and smile at the light as soon as it receives a drop from the dew, rain, or tear. Our source for livelihood, which began to dry up, has been fed again by the fierce torrent of generosity from our friends and acquaintances in the country and in the world. They are nameless, shapeless and without any concert among themselves, they have invented ingenious ways of fooling all the world authorities in spite of all the obtuse cruelty and sharp vigilance. These friends and acquaintances have formed an informal but dynamic front, one of compassion and charity, to extend a helping hand to the victims of persecutions by blood-thirsty despots. Their surges are motivated by pure altruism, and their unselfishness ignores all calculations of
egoism. The objective that they wish to reach has two prongs but represents the double faces of the same problem: on one side, the sense of the human and intellectual fraternity, on the other side, the horror of tyranny and barbarism. The struggle in the defense of the intellectual is the assault against the blind and inhuman autocracy since the latter torments the former! An intellectual, kept in the integrity of his person and the lucidity of his spirit, is an armed soldier against the autocrat who manifests himself by the repetition of his vain promises and impotence which calls on the police force to retain his throne.

By the end of twenty years of efforts, I have completed the working program to which I have subjected myself. Thanks to the company of Montaigne, Rousseau, Eschyle, Virgil, I have come out of my isolation and solitude, I have blossomed to the light of creation and to the sun of an inner freedom. From 1958 to now, during nearly forty years of my existence, I have lived through the worse trials which could be given to an intellectual, to a person to endure. Yet, those years have been the most magnificent ones I have come to know. I have blossomed, I am joyful for having triumphed from the adversities that people have set up to block the path of my life, for having directed my activity in the sense of my likings and preferences, and for having offered my humble capabilities to the service of my people. My will has overcome the malevolence and perversities of those who have vowed for my undoing. But I forgive them by repeating a well-known saying: "They know not what they are doing." One forgets Cinna but remembers Augustus and his clemency.

In 1989, at the age of eighty four, French and Vietnamese friends invited me for a trip to France. It was after the 6th Congress of the Vietnamese communist Party which, for the first time, proclaimed the wavering liberalism, and that was the opportunity for me to apply for a passport to go to France. I did not expect approval to my request considering the heavy weight of my political file. To my great stupefaction, with a delay of two months, I was granted the passport and exit visa from Viet Nam. Unfortunately, the French government took many long months before delivering me an entry visa. Decidedly, it’s the world upside down!

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I disembark at Orly Airport one October afternoon. French and Vietnamese friends give me moving reception. After sixty years, I rediscover the homeland of my intelligence and, at the same time, the fine and thoughtful hospitality of the golden hearts. My health, shattered by forty years of material privations and mental distress, collapses. For the first time in my life, at the age of eighty four, I check in at a French hospital where I receive devoted care. Ten days later, I resume contact with my friends and continue with my activities. I was the object of a televised interview by Channel TF1. I gave two conferences, one in Clermont, Herault province, near Montpellier, where I went o look for some documentary materials on J. Boissiere who was the subject of my complementary thesis for the State Doctorate in Letters, and the other at the Sorbonne of Paris VII [University]. I paid a visit to the President [Batonnier] of the Paris Bar Association.

The major event, unexpected, unpredictable and unforeseen, which has seized and overwhelmed me, has been the popular uprisings in the countries of Eastern Europe. Each day, during long hours, I try to follow the unfolding of this movement on television and in the press, to understand what these popular masses want to say when they are yelling their hatred for communism and have dethroned the leaders and despots of all kinds who, by their obtuse minds, meaningless personalities, lack of capabilities for the governing of a country, have followed the steps of Stalin and worn out their trousers to theirs knees for having knelt down before Marx and Lenin! To think of it seriously, those who observe and study communism, more in its practical applications than in its doctrinal teaching, realize that it is difficult for its leaders to maintain their positions in the administration of a country and the governing of its people since these leaders happen to violate brazenly with impunity the laws of economic science and trample with rage the permanent needs, the deep-rooted beliefs of man. At such a rate, how long will they be able to keep on standing with such a basic lack of balance? But no one could have guessed that its breakdown would happen so rapidly. Journalists have come to find out about my opinion concerning events which may take place in Viet Nam. They ask me the question: "In your opinion, when will the Vietnamese regime collapse?" I answer them: "I do not resort to astrology and do not
read the cards. *Patience, patience in the azure! Each atom of silence is the chance for a ripe fruit!"

Having spent a life during eighty years in my country, I begin to know the Vietnamese people. Since forty years of my existence are under the communist hegemony, I have come to understand those who practice its doctrine. Therefore, I feel that a revolution through violence, in order to get rid of these leaders, would be inopportune, ineffective and undesirable, because it would generate unimaginable upheavals, irrepressible unrests, and civil war that the people will have to shed tears of blood!

The rational and logical criterion requires that talent goes in pair with virtue. Thus, if the intellectuals are overflowing with talents, their virtues do not yet inspire trust. They sin by their opportunism, selfishness, and conceit. The successful industrialists and merchants possess fortune and experience in the sector of business and the economy but they are suffering at times of political short-sightedness and often lacking of moderation and wisdom. Patriotism and righteousness are the most respected virtues but talent must spring from the intellectual and scientific culture. Which political party could include in its ranks men who associate patriotism and righteousness with the intellectual and scientific culture? Likewise with regard to pluralism which sheds so much ink and saliva, and against which the Vietnamese communist Party rants and raves with incoherent tenacity, how would it be proclaimed and recognized, and is there in sight any party, in the near future, capable of obtaining the popular votes in order to assume the government of the country.

Another reason catches our attention. Whether or not one likes communism, one must admit that the communist leaders have suffered martyrdom because of their patriotism. The generations of their off springs and successors in the Party cannot claim the same prestige. Nevertheless, there are among them people of integrity, if not of talent, who deserve a salute of the hat and find themselves mingled with a multitude of others who may not be devoid of talents or virtues but are essentially clinging to the Party since they have to organize and safeguard their personal interests. These communists are fiercely determined to sell dearly their lives for the defense of the Party. Even more so in the popular masses,
there are hundreds of thousands of people – in the Army, factories, and rural classes – who have benefited from the ideological education during many years but, however, lack in culture, judgment and critical mind; these people, therefore, adhere to fanaticism, believe hard in the truths taught by the Party and are prepared to offer their blood and, if necessary their lives, for the defense of Ho Chi Minh’s Party against all the adversaries and enemies who would like to overthrow and annihilate it! On the one side, there is the Army and, on the other, millions of exalted fanatic persons, they are the two fortresses which would eliminate the liberators of Viet Nam. The latter better stop entertaining illusions or playing Don Quixote!

The mysteries of democracy consist in its functioning, in the analysis of the natural rights and liberties of man and, consequently, they require a minimum of knowledge about public law and international legislation. The conditions of democracy are in relations with the economy of the country, the prosperity of which, even at a reduced level, is necessary for its achievement, for the enjoyment of the liberties and human rights. What communism has done for the propaganda of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the same must be done for the propagation of democracy. To put democracy into practice, there is the need to learn the principles and organize the institutions which enable it to function. In its essence, in its complete meaning and full effect, democracy consists of two indissoluble and inter-related functions: that of government by the people and that of government for the people. It would be shameful to play on words and pretend that the government for the people is enough. It is an imposture. If it is not the people who act and exercise control, no one can do that instead. Under the pretence that one is acting for the people, one is perpetrating all kinds of infamies and taking measures which undermine more or less seriously the interests of the people.

The people have the right to ask the Party a few questions: in face of the high tide of democracy and liberalism, why do you persist in denying reality and clinging desperately to a credo which has become irremediably obsolete? Between your doctrine and the interests of the people and fatherland, which side are you on? The flowers which you have imported and put in the vase have faded. Until when will you persist in worshipping a mummy that

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cannot be resuscitated? And, even more so, do tell the people the true reasons for your hatred for pluralism! The attitude of the fanatics is shameful, with the majority of them having received your education and instructions, with the rest of them being the sheep of Panurge who, without any culture, have no understanding at all about the realities of the world and are impervious to its innovations and transformations. Were you sincere with yourself, you should know that. Now, you are compelled to admit your lamentable failures in society and politics where the monopoly of power leads to a hypertrophy of power which opens the way to the explosion of moral decay and penal criminality among the possessors of authority and force. Furthermore, you must admit that you have suffered a lamentable Waterloo defeat. It is due to your ignorance and psittacism which have led you to follow the example of the big brothers, and you display contempt for science and reality, in short, for the scientific laws. The result does not have to wait long to come: the debacle, which precipitates the economy-at-will to go into ruin, with millions of manual and intellectual workers being condemned to unemployment and horrible destitution while the economy, which is seeking a take-off can hardly lift itself above ground in insignificant sectors of minor industrial, agricultural, or handicraft production, is only capable of doing some hedgehops! Indeed, with regard to society, politics, and the economy, the collapse is total; is there anything left unharmed in this State the foundations of which have given way and the decay no longer possible to be concealed? The hollow sounds of proclamations and promises offend people who are glued in an endless misfortune and asking themselves why the Party does not apply to itself what it teaches the delinquents: “Offense confessed is offense half forgiven?” How will the Vietnamese communists resolve the antagonism between the interests of their party and those of the fatherland and people? The decision that you take on this conflict serves as basis for the judgment that people and History will pass on you and your Party.

There is the opinion which recognizes that you have made some first steps on the road of “renovation”. Therefore, you have started to make confession of your errors. But you, as well as the people themselves, can you be content with half-measures which merely have some therapeutic effect in a few sectors where they are decreed, while the illness is affecting the entire body of the
State and its structures? You please yourself with the pride of having made sacrifices even at the expense of your lives, sacrifices which you have paid homage to your Party. Would your heroism now shun from the sacrifice of your Party on the altar of the fatherland and people? Viet Nam and the history of Viet Nam are awaiting for your answer.

Hanoi, May 13th, 1991

Professor and Mrs NGUYỄN MẠNH TUỔNG

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Biographical notes

NGUYEN MANH TUONG, Vietnamese writer and attorney-at-law, former President (Batonnier) of the Hanoi Bar Association, was born in 1909, at the age of 22, obtained in the same year a Doctorate-in-Letters and a Doctorate-in-Law at the University of Montpellier, France. From 1946, he joined the underground resistance movement with the government of Ho Chi Minh. After Dien Bien Phu, he returned to Hanoi in 1955 with a dozen honorific titles from the government of the Resistance, the representative of which he served at several international conferences. The famous critique about the enormous errors made by the communist authorities during the Agrarian Reform (it was said to have caused hundreds of thousands of victims) which he made at the meeting of the Fatherland Front in Hanoi on October 30, 1956, earned him the disgrace. Since then, his life was poverty and illnesses.

An Excommunicated [Un Excommunié in French] is one of his autobiographical accounts covering the period between 1955 and 1991 in Hanoi. The manuscript reached Paris in the fall of 1991, with his desire to see it published. He then had some hesitation but finally made his decision in the following terms in a letter dated March 16, 1992 from Hanoi:

“… I have wished for the delay of the publishing of my works because the recent circumstances have put me on the alert. But you have made me cross the Rubicon and I think you are right: the risk is great but it must be taken. I am expecting the worse and hope that it will not happen. But, if they push the barbarism so far as to inflict on me the same treatment given to other intellectuals who are accused of speaking ill of the regime, I firmly await the trials of which I know well the hardship. I am determined, should it come, to begin a hunger strike to death. At the age of 84, I have known the best and the worse of life, and do not have any regret to depart from this life during which I have done my duty as an intellectual in the eyes of the people and history!…”