

Vietnam: The Revolutionary Movement in Indo-China

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Economically, Indo-China is ruled by the Bank of Indo-China, which in the year 1924 possessed a capital of 64,400,000 francs, and the transactions of which during the 'same year amounted to 4,5 milliards. It has in its hands the "Credit Industriel et Commercial", the French Coal Company of Tonkin (which exports 1,400,000 tons of coal in the year) and the Railway Company of Yunam.



Funeral of Phan Chau Trinh in 1926.

The total trade of the colony amounts to more than 4 milliard francs. The sale of opium and alcohol bring in more than one milliard, of which sum the administration costs 200 millions. The rest is pocketed by the monopolists. In this manner French Imperialism earns 415 millions a year just for poisoning the natives. The budget of the colony totals 1,327,000,000 francs. Exports of rice figure at 15,000,000 centners, exports of rubber at 80,000 centners.

The wealth of Indo-China accrues to the exclusive advantage of the French. A miner earns 32 centimes a day, a female worker 28 centimes and a juvenile 16 centimes. Furthermore, they are not paid regularly and, even so, not always in money. The coal company erects shops at which the workers are obliged to buy their requirements at prices about 10% higher than those ruling on the market. Wages are often paid in kind, and the worker gets his money in many cases a fortnight or even a month later.



A very tired French Colonial.

By these methods the company prevents the workers from deserting. Of the 15,907 miners counted in 1916, not one reached the age of sixty. And out of this consideration workers' pensions for the natives have been refused as being superfluous.

The life of the peasant is no better. The soil is lean, the methods of working it belong to the Middle Ages, and the crop is consequently slight. While in Europe a hectare yields 4,67 kilogrammes of grain, the same measure of ground produces only 1,21 kilogrammes in Indo-China. The Government levies upon the peasants a revenue tax of 10% in gold. Furthermore, the peasant must pay so much for irrigation, manure, seed, hire of draught cattle, labourers, etc., that he works with a deficit of 3,75 Dollar per "Mau" (ground measure). How is it possible for the peasant to live and pay his taxes? The answer is very simple: It does not matter. The principal thing is: He pays and lives.

An Annamitic proverb says: "If a man works, he dies of hunger; if he does not work, then hunger kills him." Through thousands of years of tradition and through force of circumstances they are tied to the land. They would gladly escape from the ungrateful land if they could; but where can they go to? The majority of them eat nothing but potatoes and vegetables the whole year round. Only on great holidays do they eat the precious rice.



It is not only under taxation that the natives groan, though this has increased by 550% in the course of ten years following is taken from a native paper "Khaihoa du Tonkin": "People are often arrested illegally. They are kept in prison for months... the soldiers compel them to pay this and that and also brutalise them... One was so seriously maltreated that he had to be taken to hospital. When a very poor man has the misfortune to be arrested, there is nothing for him to do but sell his wife and child in order to pay the fine, even though his conviction be unjust." But there are even more serious cases. The Governor of Cambodsha built a summer palace for 57 millions, which the natives had to raise, and on the road which he had laid from his residence to the palace, 1900 natives met their deaths.

In November of last year the natives handed to the newly arrived Governor, the "Socialist" Varenne, the "Claims of the Annamites". They related to rights in connection with the freedom of the Press, freedom of speech, meetings and coalition, etc. Varenne promised everything and gave nothing, just as his predecessors had done. At the same time, the French police in Shanghai arrested the old Nationalist, Phan-Boi-Chow, who had been living abroad for twenty years. He was brought to Tonkin for trial. Although the matter was kept quiet, the rumour of the arrest spread about and, after the arrival of Varenne in Indo-China, the students held demonstrations which were directed particularly against the colonial rule. This was the first time that anything of the kind had occurred in Indo-China. Varenne was obliged to release the old Nationalist and content himself with having him watched secretly. Since that time the students' movement has continued and since March of this year it has become much more animated.

In connection with the return of the Nationalist Bui Queng Chieu from France, where he had been carrying on propaganda against the corruption in the colonial administration, there was another demonstration in which thousands took part. The French Fascists organised a counter-

demonstration, and soldiery, police and gendarmerie were mobilised. Despite all the provocations, the Fascists did not succeed in causing any bloodshed, much as they wished to do so. About this time another Nationalist, Fan Chau-Trink, an old political prisoner, died, and 30,000 Annamites of Indo-China accompanied his corpse to the grave. Throughout the country national mourning celebrations were held. Collections were made and 100,000 dollars were raised within a few days. All the students went into mourning.



The French were startled by this national movement and took measures against it. They forbade the students to wear mourning and to make collections. They prohibited the mourning celebrations. The students answered with a strike, which was carried out in all the big towns. Even the little school girls joined in. A slight incident illustrated the national spirit of the students: In a school in Saigon somebody wrote on the blackboard: "Ablf." This means "A bas les Français". ("Down with the French"). The French teachers demanded that the students should clean it off. All the students refused to do so. The "Socialist" Varenne gave instructions that severe measures should be taken against the students. There were arrests and expulsions, and in Saigon alone more than 500 students were removed from the schools.

In Tonkin there is a secret organisation known as "FucViet" (Liberation of Annam). It recently published its programme. The following is an extract from it:

"France keeps. Annam under. It has oppressed our people for years...our population of 25 million must form a solid block in order to end the tyranny...which is already perishing. All the nations are answering to the signal of the Russian revolution. India and are awakening and will recover their freedom. Is it possible that the people of Annam will sleep for centuries? If the ordinary methods will not suffice to liberate us, then we must have recourse to extreme violence in order... to capture our place. People of Annam, awake!"

In Cochinchina there is a group known as the "Constitutional Party" and consisting of intellectuals who have been brought up according to French ideas. It is thoroughly moderate and preaches "co-operation of the French and Annamites upon the basis of equality". In reality they have no organisations. But as it often attacks the French administration — in all loyalty, of course — it enjoys a certain amount of influence with the natives.

Another group is called "Young Ansam". This is more advanced and very active. Its official organ — managed by a young Annamite — often publishes articles taken from "L'Humanité". It published the Communist Manifesto in the form of feuilletons. The French administration naturally tried to destroy the organisation. In March the "Young Annamite" arranged a meeting of protest against the exiling of Tonkinese; more than 3000 people attended it and a sharp resolution was adopted. Among other things it demanded freedom for the native press, abolition of corporal punishment, freedom of education, freedom of movement etc. In the proclamation of the demonstration the phrase occurred: "...we swear to work for the liberation of the Annamite people". On account of this phrase which was copied in the "Tribune of Young Annam", two writers of the proclamation, the organisers of the meeting and the director as well as the manager of the paper were sentenced to two years imprisonment. The judgement gave rise to a renewal of the strike in the schools.

The political situation in the colony is best of all illustrated by a plaint in one of the French journals

of Tonkin: "This agitation is transforming our country, which has previously been so quiet, into a seat of commotion and disorder."

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P.S.

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