

Never Forget the Lessons of Vietnam

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This April marked the tenth anniversary of a great event in human history—the utter defeat of U.S. imperialism at the hands of the peoples of Indochina. Much has been written about this momentous anniversary, especially in the press of the United States for whom the Vietnam war, and especially its outcome, remain a giant nightmare.

Few who were politically conscious at the time can forget the last exhilarating moments of that conflict when the U.S. ambassador mounted the helicopter, clutching the bloody American flag that had flown over the embassy, while thousands of reactionaries—collaborators with the U.S. army of aggression, torturers, drug dealers and brothel owners—scurried in panic as the revolutionary army closed in on all sides. Nothing can ever erase the victory that was won by the masses of people on the battlefields of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, against the most heavily armed military force ever to swagger on the planet earth.

A few facts are worth recalling. At the height of the war *500,000 U.S. soldiers* were arrayed against the people of Vietnam. Over *one million* people were killed in Vietnam alone. More bombs were dropped by the U.S. on North Vietnam than had been used by *both sides during all of World War 2*. The napalm, the concentration camps, the whole villages massacred. Yet despite all this U.S. imperialism was decisively defeated.

All over the world attention was focused on the people's war. Revolutionaries everywhere, including the revolutionary communist forces of the time, came to the defense of the Vietnamese people's just struggle. The flames of Vietnam proved contagious as revolutionary struggle sparked off in first one, then another corner of the world.

The fact that Vietnam incarnated the hopes of revolutionaries made the disappointment all the more bitter. Even before the victory was complete the fruits of victory were

rotting and eventually they were stolen from the people. The Soviet Union was to replace the U.S. as the real master of Indochina—complete with its own neo-colonial war, this time waged by the Vietnamese army against the people of Cambodia.

The problem was that the leadership of that struggle, the Vietnam Workers Party, was not led by a strong Marxist-Leninist line. When Mao Tsetung led the great ideological struggle between Marxism-Leninism and modern revisionism, a polemic that began drawing in all the world's revolutionaries with the publication in 1963 of the famous polemics of the Communist Party of China against Khrushchevite revisionism, the Vietnamese Party sought out an illusory, centrist path. It called the great struggle "divisive," and for the sake of an unprincipled "unity" between Marxists and revisionists called upon the Marxist-Leninists to abandon the struggle against modern revisionism. Pragmatism and nationalism were substituted for pro-



U.S. and lackeys flock to leave Vietnam at end of war.

letarian internationalism. Later, the lessons of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution then raging in China under the leadership of Mao Tsetung were never really understood and upheld by the VWP. Having refused to draw a clear line between Marxism and revisionism, the Vietnamese party also refused to recognise that, as Mao said, “the rise to power of revisionism means the rise to power of the bourgeoisie.” Imperialist predators were prettified as “socialists.” This line had extremely bad consequences not only for the struggle in Indochina but in the international communist movement as a whole.

The results of this is that once military victory over the U.S. imperialists was achieved the leadership of the VWP was neither able nor inclined to mobilise the masses of people to begin to build a new Vietnam based on self-reliance, let alone begin the long march toward a genuine communist world free of class division.

Thus Vietnam, besides being an outstanding example and proof of the ability to wage revolutionary war against imperialism, is also a tragic example of the kind referred to in the *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement*, which says “the revolutionary masses in these countries have waged heroic struggles, including wars of national liberation, which have not led to the establishment of political power by the proletariat and its allies but where the fruits of the victories have been picked by new exploiters usually in league with one or another imperialist power(s).”

Today the world situation is even more complex than it was at the beginning of the Vietnam War. As the *Declaration* puts it: “The current intensification of world contradictions while bringing forth further possibilities for these movements (in the oppressed countries) also places new obstacles and new tasks before them.” If the refusal to recognise the character of the Soviet Union had

the tragic consequences in Vietnam with which we are all familiar, with regard to those forces in today’s world who have rediscovered socialism in the USSR or who believe that Soviet aid is justified—even necessary—in the face of a U.S. imperialist “main enemy,” one can only repeat the words of Karl Marx: first time tragedy, second time farce.

Today the situation really is more and more favourable for the launching of revolutionary warfare in many countries in the world.

The twin lessons—the possibility of waging revolutionary warfare against imperialism and the necessity that the revolution be led by a genuine party upholding Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought—are extremely important in the light of the conditions today in the world, ten years after the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam. □