

# The Vietnamese Struggle For Independence

By George Padmore

WHAT makes one more and more sceptical about the efficiency of a world organization such as UN, what is rendering documents such as the Atlantic Charter and the San Francisco Charter more and more void of significance, is the attitude of the Colonial Powers towards the subject peoples. The case of France and Viet Nam is illuminating.

After the Japanese capitulation, Indo-China was occupied, in the north by the Chinese and in the south by the British, in order to dispose of Japanese troops stationed there. This was the effect of a decision secretly taken at Potsdam. The British allowed the French in their area; the Chinese adopted a neutral policy, while being very busy looting in Tonkin and North Annam. The Viet Nam nationalists were able to extend their control all over the territory. By the beginning of 1946 Cochin-China fell back under the authority of the French, who, however, held only the main towns. The nationalists here were driven underground but continued their guerilla activities. In the north, the Chinese withdrew reluctantly and on March 6, 1946, the French signed a preliminary convention with the Nationalist government which recognized Viet Nam as a free state, with its own parliament, army and finance.

Cochin-China, whose population is 85 per cent Annamese speaking, is a rich rice and rubber producing province. Under the March 6 convention it was agreed that it would decide its future status by referendum. An *annexe* to the accord conceded to the French the right to maintain 15,000 troops on Viet Nam territory, which were to be reduced at the rate of 3,000 a year, making evacuation complete within five years. The movement of these troops was to be subject to the approval of Viet Nam headquarters. By virtue of these terms, the French moved into Viet Nam without nationalist opposition. Between April 19

*A review of French imperialism in Asia in its attempt to destroy the Indo-Chinese nationalist movement*

and May 11, 1946, a conference at Dalat discussed Viet Nam's status within the Indo-Chinese Federation and the French Union (new name for the pre-war French Empire), its diplomatic representation abroad, and Cochin-China's future. Three weeks of passionate debate produced very few results. The French and Annamese conceptions were basically divergent. Only provisional agreements were attained with respect to federal currency, customs, and the safeguarding of French cultural and economic interests. A final parley to be held

According to the principles outlined for the new French Union, French colonies are supposed to be integral parts of the French nation. But the French colonials are skeptical, and AFRICANUS, writing in *The New African*, comments as follows:

"There was surprisingly little debate in the first French Constituent Assembly over the organization of the French Union. Everybody agreed with everybody else, and the press was indifferent. There is something peculiarly disturbing when issues can be agreed upon so easily. Ordinarily, the voting would have aroused either hot emotion or endless haggling. Perhaps, however, they were trying to fool the colonials when they adopted principles which they knew would never be put into practice. So far as the native is concerned nothing has changed at all. So the colonials say, 'The principles are OK, but who is going to apply them, and how?'"

in Paris, was to settle outstanding issues.

## Autonomous Republic Proclaimed

On May 1, 1946, French troops arbitrarily occupied the former building of the governor general, but which then housed the Viet Nam finance ministry. A strong protest from the Vietnamese resulted in a joint body to guard the building. At the end of May a delegation of Vietnamese proceeded to France. On June 1, 1946, Admiral d'Argenlieu, French High Commissioner for Indo-China, proclaimed Cochin-China to be an autonomous republic, although the promised referendum had not been held. Seven of the eleven members of the Provisional government, headed by Dr. Nguyen van Thinh, a native millionaire rice grower and notorious Japanese collaborator, enjoyed French citizenship. The other four were French, and the cabinet was entirely responsible to Admiral d'Argenlieu.

The second Franco-Vietnamese conference opened at Fontainebleau on July 9, 1946. France was represented by a business man, some colonial civil servants, naval and military experts, and three deputies from the major parties—Communist, MRP, and Socialist. All the Vietnamese delegates were members of the Republic's cabinet. The instability of France's internal politics and the lack of responsibility of the French delegation, increased the difficulties of the negotiations. The cleavage between the viewpoints of the two parties proved unbridgeable. The last blow to success was given by a fresh maneuver of Admiral d'Argenlieu on August 1, 1946. Representatives of Cochin-China, Cambodia, Laos and South Annam were summoned to Dalat to work out the status of the Indo-Chinese Federation, one of the main tasks of the Fontainebleau meeting. The Vietnamese envoys voted for the suspension of their conversations with the French until the equivocal

situation was ended. The deadlock would have continued indefinitely had President Ho Chi Minh not concluded a *modus vivendi* with French Colonial Minister Moutet on September 13. Only minor problems, such as a custom union, federal currency, safeguarding of French interests and cessation of hostilities between guerillas and the French in Indo-China were arranged. The agreement was due to come into force on October 31, 1946. Mixed commissions were to be appointed to settle technical details of implementing the agreements. A cease-fire order was given and carried out at once by the nationalists, and a period of calm followed, in which hopes of an improvement in French-Vietnamese relations rose high. However, Dr. Thinh committed suicide on November 9, leaving a letter in which he said that he "was tired of playing the farce staged by the French."

On November 19, French authorities in Indo-China created a customs house in Haiphong to control Vietnamese foreign trade, without the establishment of the mixed commissions which had been agreed upon. The Vietnamese protested and, fighting between them and the French broke out. A liaison body, despite elaborate efforts, did not succeed in bringing about a truce. Fresh clashes occurred in Lang-Son, a Tonkin strategic point. On December 3, the French acting high commissioner in Tonkin, General Molière, sent an ultimatum requiring Viet Nam to evacuate Haiphong completely and to hand over the police of this port to the French troops. On December 9, 1946, French reinforcements landed at Tourane (Annam), and a week later the French took over the finance and communications ministries in Hanoi. President Ho Chi Minh cabled President Léon Blum proposals for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and received no response. New incidents occurred at Hué, capital of Annam, at Nam Dinh and Haiduong (Tonkin). Viet Nam's president renewed his peace offers, but M. Saintery, high commissioner for Tonkin refused to meet the Viet Nam foreign under secretary. The tense situation deteriorated daily, and on December 19, 1946, general fighting started in Hanoi and slowly spread down to the south.

M. Léon Blum then sent M. Moutet and General Leclerc to investigate the situation. Meantime, 8,000 reinforcement troops were embarked for Indo-China. M. Moutet arrived at Saïgon and met with Dr. de Van Hoach, Dr. Thinh's successor at the head of the Cochinese government and for-

mer commissioner of the occupying Japanese police. President Ho Chi Minh indefatigably broadcast peace messages to M. Léon Blum and M. Moutet, urging resumption of negotiations on the basis of the September 13 *modus vivendi*.

### Viet Nam Held Responsible

In a speech delivered at Saïgon, M. Moutet laid the responsibility of the conflict at the door of Viet Nam. A resolution of the League of the Rights of Man, the Cultural and Marxist Group, the Indo-Chinese Socialist section, and other organizations, requested M. Moutet to recall Admiral d'Argenlieu, to bring an end to the hostilities, and to appoint a mixed commission with a view to creating a favorable atmosphere for the renewal of negotiations. An invitation was broadcast to M. Moutet by Ho Chi Minh for an interview.

Before M. Moutet and General Leclerc left for Hanoi, Admiral d'Argenlieu flew to the Tonkin capital. French representatives in Nankin were reported to have approached the Kuomintang-backed Vietnamese conservatives, who had taken refuge in China, with a view to forming a moderate government with whom the French were prepared to open conversations. In Hanoi, Admiral d'Argenlieu declared that he held the Viet Nam government responsible for the present crisis. French troops there dug out, on January 2, 1947, M. Nguyen Manh Ha, leader of the Catholic Youth Movement, and put him under their protection. Rumors circulated that he might be the moderate representative of the Viet Nam people with whom there was some chance of an understanding. On January 3, 1947, M. Moutet arrived in Hanoi, where he was reported to have been shot at by the Vietnamese guerillas. He denied that he had received any invitation from President Ho Chi Minh, and confirmed Admiral d'Argenlieu's opinion as to the responsibility of the Viet Nam government for the present state of affairs. "A military decision was necessary," he added, "before any talks could be resumed."

In an interview with the Press on January 6, 1947, M. Nguyen Manh Ha stated that he was supporting the Viet Nam government and desired that France would come to an agreement with this government. M. Moutet returned to France without meeting with Ho Chi Minh. On January 16, strict wartime censorship was reestablished on press despatches from Indo-China. At a press conference in Paris, a French Foreign Ministry spokesman

urged the Colonial Powers to adopt a common policy with France in relation to the subject peoples of South East Asia if they did not want to see a Communist outpost established in Viet Nam, the noxious influence of which would extend to Burma, Malaya and Indonesia.

### Disorders Spread

Disorder now spread to Cochinese. The French installed provisional government there admitted that their confidence was shaken by the ever-growing nationalist authority. Though President Ho Chi Minh's message of congratulation and peace to the newly elected French President, M. Vincent Auriol, was reported in the press, the French authorities issued a categorical denial of it. On January 27, 1947, Admiral d'Argenlieu gave confirmation to the policy outlined by the French Foreign Office ten days earlier, in order to stem the tide of Communism in South East Asia.

Recently the replacement of Admiral d'Argenlieu as high commissioner for Indo-China was announced unofficially, and immediately denied by the French radio. On February 5, Cochinese was officially proclaimed a free state member of the Indo-Chinese Federation and the French Union. Pending the election of a National Assembly, the provisional government and a French appointed council will be in charge of legislation.

This measure coincided with an increase and extension of guerilla fighting throughout the south.

In the light of the events which have been carefully described here, to facilitate a thorough understanding of the problem, some facts emerge clearly. First, the preliminary convention of March 6, 1946, together with the *annexe* of April 3, enabled the French to occupy the nationalist controlled area without loss or effort. The subsequent successive encroachments were neither surprising nor unpredictable. The reluctance of the French, illustrated in the dilatory way in which they called the first Dalat conference and the Fontainebleau meeting, and the small interest they took in these conversations were evident signs of wilful procrastination. The French expected that their playing for time would contribute to the economic collapse of the country, already strained by two occupations. The French military authorities were led to launch the offensive in the belief that the time had come to give Viet Nam the last blow. Their attempts to form a moderate government, similar to the

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Mestizos, Mulattoes, Zambaigos (Indian-Negro), and the Negro slaves.

But toward the end of the Viceroyalty, classifications came to be based more and more upon skin color, and wherever difficulties arose there might be ancillary references to such anatomical differences as form and color of hair, shape of the nose, color of the eyes, and caste of the face, since caste classification was necessary to determine legal and social position. Space does not permit extended examination of this color-caste nomenclature; but despite the astounding variety of terms, of which some twenty-five are listed by our author, it was often difficult for the colonial administration to place an individual in his proper ethnic niche. In passing, the author points out that the "classification of the learned," with such terms as *Tente en el aire* (held in the air), *Torna atrás* (a backward step), etc., was never actually used, since it had the "defect of being both unintelligible and impracticable." However, by the middle of the seventeenth century the Mexican population had jellied into six broad ethnic groups: European, African, Indian, Euromestizo, Afromestizo, and Indomestizo.

Factors which had facilitated this miscibility were the scarcity of white women, which led to the widespread concubinage of white men with Indian and Negro women; the policy of importing two Negro males for every one female (in 1793, for example, Negro females made up only 35.3 percent of the total Negro population in contrast with the 64.7 percent for the males); and the discouraging of marriage, though perfectly legal, between Negro men and Negro women, which had resulted in the widespread concubinage of Negro men and Indian women. The offsprings of these *Negro-India* unions, *Zambaigos*, were born free, since they took the status of their mother, and usually incorporated into the Indian group. It is interesting to note that the African group, that is the more or less pure Negroes, which had made up on 0.6 percent of the population in 1570, had increased by 1646 to 2 percent; but had declined by 1810 to only 0.1 percent; whereas the Afromestizos, who had made up only .07 percent of the total in 1570, had increased by 1646 to 6.8 percent; and by 1810, to 10.1 percent.

The tendency of the Mestizos was to identify themselves with the whites, and of the mulattoes and zambaigos, wherever possible, with the Indomestizo group. No one wanted to be "maculado por sangre vil," that is "stained by servile or Negro blood." Toward the end of the period of Spanish domination, Sr. Beltrán says there was a tendency for "individuals born of Negroes and Indians to be catalogued as Spanish Americans," as with, to take a notable example, the famous hero of the Mexican independence, José Maria Morelos y Pavón.

Stated in simple terms, the socio-historical process was as follows: the Europeans absorbed the Indians (or the Europeans began to dissolve in the Indian caldron), and then this class, the mestizos, now darker in hue, began to absorb the next darker element beneath it, and so on, until today there are practically no Negroes in Mexico and only a few Negroid villages on the order of Valerio Trujano; a decided Negro caste to the fea-



Religious News Service

**READS PROCLAMATION THAT MADE HIM FREE MAN**—The Rev. J. B. Jones, Negro minister of Nashville, Tennessee, who was born into slavery 88 years ago, reads the Emancipation Proclamation that set him free. He is shown with his wife as they visited the Freedom Train on its stop in Nashville.

tures of many Mexican Indians; and the author's observation that the "Negroes made not only a biological contribution, but as bearers of culture they also introduced cultural artifacts, the survivals of which are still evident in Mexico."

Although *Negro Inhabitants of Mexico* is intended primarily for the ethnologist and the anthropologist it can, because of the clarity of its style and the cogent handling of its materials, be profitably read by any intelligent layman. This essay, says the author, should be considered not as definitive but as the first historical approach to the study of the Negro in Mexico. His conclusions, he states, are provisional and he hopes that they will either be affirmed or corrected by subsequent investigations.

J. W. I.

## Let's Go!

The battle for civil rights is going forward. The tide is running our way. NAACP branches, youth councils and college chapters should be active as never before. In this election year hold meetings, keep in touch with your Congressmen and Senators, fight for your goals, and raise money to keep your NAACP in there pitching.

## India's Bapu

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Pakistan will have a bright future. The whole of Asia will heave a sigh of relief. It may even affect the strained relations between the USA and USSR, because a progressive and well knit India can certainly become the bridge between the East and the West.

If this happens Gandhi in death will have performed the greatest service to mankind.

Bapu is dead—but he can never die.

## Vietnamese Struggle

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Cochin-China cabinet, were foiled by the determination of the people, despite the despondent economic situation, to stand up to the French attack. Now that their tricks have all failed, the French reactionaries are trying to frighten the other Colonial Powers with territories in South East Asia with the bogey of Communism, which is

growing, they say, in strength and volume.

While the French left-wing parties are rendering no assistance to the Vietnamese, volunteers from India, Burma, Malaya, Ceylon and Java are organizing International Brigades to go and fight side by side with the Vietnamese. In Calcutta, British-controlled police opened fire on Indian university students who were observing "Viet-Nam Day" in sympathy with the Indo-Chinese nationalists. In London, colonials are subscribing money to fit out an ambulance and to provide medical aid to the gallant Asiatic fighters for freedom.

## "New" Wilberforce

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and one for women.

One of the very few bureaus of educational research in American colleges, white or Negro, is located at the College of Education and Industrial Arts. Another agency for guidance and personnel service, the Wilberforce Bureau of Educational Research, performs the following functions: (1) Educational and institutional research; (2) educational services; (3) clinical counselling; (4) publications and information; (5) testing; and (6) collection of bibliography and materials. Perhaps the most significant work of the bureau has been the development of an "all-school testing program." According to present plans, a psychological clinic will be set up in the near future to follow through the implications of test data now being accumulated in the Bureau of Educational Research. Already, reading and speech clinics have been organized as a result of this testing program.

The important departments in the new Division of Arts and Sciences are: (1) speech and dramatics and (2) social administration. Designed to provide training for the developing fields of speech and dramatics, interested students now can receive the B.S. degree in speech and dramatics in the College of Educational and Industrial Arts. "The Wilberforce Players," which, for seventeen years has been an extra-curricular drama group, has been reconstituted as the "Player's Guild" to serve as a laboratory organization for students majoring in speech and dramatics. Another phase of the new speech and dramatics program involves a plan to produce radio broadcasts in conjunction with a proposed radio station, to be operated by the Division of Industries.

Directed by a Negro, with the first

Ph.D. in social research and statistics awarded by the Ohio State University and formerly of the Atlanta University School of Social Work, the Department of Social Administration "maintains undergraduate curricula, which provide an excellent educational background for further study in graduate schools of social work and greatly enhance the capabilities and opportunities of the students who are unable to continue with graduate training and who desire employment in social work after graduation. . . . This junior professional training gives the graduate a thorough orientation to the field of social work and a resultant degree of competence, not available in the untrained worker since, each year, approximately ten thousand persons find employment in the social welfare agencies and institutions of this country."

Supplanting the old Department of Commerce is the new Division of Business, headed by a certified public accountant. This division is offering four curricula leading to the B.S. degree in accounting; business administration; business education; and secretarial science. The fields of specialization in business administration are marketing and merchandising; real estate; and finance and insurance. The courses offered in accounting include tax accounting; cost accounting; auditing; and governmental accounting and budgeting; for the announced purpose of "preparing students for employment with private business and governmental agencies as accountants, auditors, and in related capacities, or for professional careers as independent certified public accountants."

As a practical experiment in human economics almost an entire building (Jenkins Hall) is being converted into a cooperative book store and grill. When renovations are completed, the bookstore and grill will be operated by a student-faculty committee in collaboration with the Division of Business. Periodical dividends, declared from this enterprise, will be divided between the student loan-fund and each participating student.

### Building Program

Greeted by an overflow of prospective students, the College of Education and Industrial Arts was compelled to limit its freshman class in order to readmit approximately 70 per cent of the student body that had been enrolled in Wilberforce University during the school year previous to the split. Even then the intended freshman quota of 150 was exceeded by almost 100 students, giving a total college enrollment of 1010 students as compared

with a total of 1489 (765 in the College of Education and 707 in the College of Liberal Arts) for the 1946-47 school year at Wilberforce University.

Fortunately, though, the one-million-dollar-building program of the state of Ohio for the College of Education is just getting under way and, thus, it has been possible to provide necessary accommodations for the unexpectedly large student population at the "New Wilberforce." Structures planned in this building program include a university library building, a men's dormitory, a teachers' apartment, a home economics practice house, a university stadium, a student health building, a natatorium, and an administration building, along with construction of additional administrative offices in Bundy Hall and renovations in Galloway Hall, which has become mainly the arts and sciences building.

In order to meet the immediate need for a library building, the College of Education converted a newly-erected student recreation building into a temporary library building. This will be used until the new building is erected. In the meantime, the foundation has already been laid for a new men's dormitory and ground soon will be broken for a science building and a natatorium. Construction, also, has begun on an elementary education building.

### Interracial Relations

No longer hampered by the concept that Wilberforce University is a "Negro" College, as listed in the U. S. Department of Education *Directory of Institutions for Higher Education*, perhaps because of the impetus given by the African Methodist Episcopal church in its widespread advertisement of a "Negro school under Negro leadership," the College of Education and Industrial Arts has lost no time in expanding the interracial program begun by Wilberforce University. Only, this time, the basis is "a first rate college in Ohio" rather than a college for Negroes seeking better race relationships." Those who scan the newspapers, no doubt, have read of the overwhelming victory for the State College football team over Bergen Junior College (white) at the Polo Grounds in New York. In the realm of music, a combined Wilberforce-Antioch [see February *Crisis*, page 40] choir sang "The Messiah" during the Christmas season, both on the Antioch and Wilberforce campuses. Similar instances could be recited of interracial ventures in the classroom, student organizations, and among professional groups.