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Agrarian reform in Southern Vietnam from 1975 to the late 1980s:

From small to large scale farming and back again

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A thesis submitted for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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September 2007

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that this thesis is my own original work. It contains no material which has been accepted for a award of a degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'md' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Trung Dinh Dang

Nhất hậu hôn nhi điền thổ

[Children and land were the most precious possession]

Hôn nhân, điền thổ vạn cổ chi thù

[Love and land were ever cause for strife]

(Vietnamese proverbs)

To my wife, *Tran Thi Kieu Nga*
and our newly-born daughter, *Dang Alina Tram*

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September, 2007.

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Abstract

Soon after reunification, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) government in Hanoi launched full scale social, economic and political reforms in southern Vietnam in line with the socialist model of the north. Of these initiatives, agrarian reform was a key component, consisting of post war economic restoration, land redistribution and collective farming. Taken together, the SRV government called this 'socialist transformation of agriculture and agricultural collectivization'. The aim of the reform was to transform existing household-based farming into socialist large scale farming (collective farming), which Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) leaders believed would increase productivity, improve living standards, eliminate exploitation and consolidate the party's power. VCP leaders planned to complete the task by 1980.

The result of the reform varied from region to region. Land reform and collectivization were rapid in the Central Coast but faced major difficulties in the Mekong Delta and other parts of the Southern Region. By 1980 the Central Coast had completed the task of socialist transformation of agriculture while the Mekong Delta failed to achieve the target; collectivization there incorporated only a minority of peasant households and land. With additional effort and struggle, VCP leaders claimed in the mid-1980s that collectivization in the Mekong Delta and elsewhere in Southern Region had been completed.

This dissertation argues that the faster pace of collectivization and other agrarian reforms in the Central Coast relative to the Mekong Delta came from weaker peasant resistance and stronger local cadres' commitment to the socialist transformation of agriculture. Moreover, being heavily affected by wars and living in extremely difficult socio-economic and ecological conditions, the main concern of villagers in the Central Coast was subsistence and survival; their behavior was more likely to be 'safe-first principle' and risk-aversion as moral economist assume. So, villagers there tended to comply with state policies

to avoid any risk and disadvantage that local authorities imposed on non-compliers. Meanwhile, villagers in the Mekong Delta were better-off and lived in favorable socio-economic and ecological conditions and had more economic options. They were closer to being 'political economy' peasants whose main concern was profitability so they tended and were able to resist more strongly and evade collective farming when they saw its disadvantages.

Despite a decade's effort, the socialist transformation of agriculture in southern Vietnam failed badly to achieve its stated goals. As in the north, collective farming in the Central Coast, the Mekong Delta and elsewhere in the south could not produce sufficient food. Faced with severe food shortages and many other problems related to collective farming, the SRV decided in the late 1980s to shift back to household based farming and gradually dismantle the collectives.

By using some features of Joel Migdal's model of strongmen politics, James Scott's notion of everyday forms of resistance and Ben Kerkvliet's concept of everyday politics, this dissertation argues that peasants (ordinary villagers) and local cadres were two sets of key actors derailing post-1975 agrarian reform in southern Vietnam far different from what state leaders expected. In other words, central to the failure of and shift in national policies were widespread peasants and local officials' practices which were often at odds with what VCP leaders expected them to do. For example, peasants tried their best to pursue their own household economic activities, often at the expense of collective farming. Local cadres often took advantage of their positions to benefit themselves rather than the collectives and the state. Despite the authorities' numerous campaigns to correct and crack down on such 'bad behaviors' and even attempts to modify national policies to accommodate local concerns, these problems did not disappear but seemed to increase. The ultimate consequences were inefficiency of collective farming, severe food shortages, and an economic crisis which made

the government accept and eventually endorse new farm arrangements that villagers and local cadres had initiated to deal with their own local problems.

By comparing two localities, Quang Nam province in the Central Coast and An Giang province in the Mekong Delta, the dissertation examines the tensions and interplay between state agencies and peasants over agrarian issues during the period of 1975 to the late 1980s. In particular, it seeks to understand to what extent peasants and local cadres' practices, which were at odds with national leaders' expectations, contributed to the failure of and shift in national policies. Moreover, the dissertation examines similarities and differences in form and magnitude of peasant behaviors and politics in the two these places and the effect of local conditions on the capability of the SRV government to implement its post-1975 agrarian policies.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|------------|---|
| BCHDBHCM | <i>Ban Chấp Hành Đảng Bộ Huyện Chợ Mới</i> [Cho Moi party executive committee] |
| BCHTW | <i>Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương</i> [Central Executive Committee] |
| BCT | <i>Bộ Chính Trị</i> [Politburo] |
| BCTNN | <i>Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp</i> [Committee for Agricultural Transformation] |
| BCTNNMH | <i>Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp Minh Hải</i> [Minh Hai Committee for Agricultural Transformation] |
| BCTNNMN | <i>Ban Cải Tạo Nông Nghiệp Miền Nam</i> [Committee for Southern Agricultural Transformation] |
| BNN & CNTP | <i>Bộ Nông Nghiệp và Công Nghiệp Thực Phẩm</i> [Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and food] |
| BNN | <i>Bộ Nông Nghiệp</i> [Ministry of Agriculture] |
| BQLHTXNNTW | <i>Ban Quản Lý Hợp Tác Xã Nông Nghiệp Trung Ương</i> [Central Agricultural Collective Management Committee] |
| CCTKQN | <i>Chi Cục Thống Kê Quảng Nam</i> [Quang Nam's Department of Statistics] |
| CT | <i>Chỉ Thị</i> [Directive] |
| CTPTNTAG | <i>Chương Trình Phát Triển Nông Thôn An Giang</i> [An Giang program for Rural Development] |
| DBCM | <i>Đảng Bộ Chợ Mới</i> [Cho Moi party cell] |
| DCSVN | <i>Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam</i> [Vietnamese Communist Party] |
| DRV | Democratic Republic of Vietnam |
| HTX | <i>Hợp Tác Xã</i> [Collective] |
| KHXX & NV | <i>Khoa Học Xã Hội và Nhân Văn</i> [Social science and humanities] |
| NLF | National Liberation Front |
| NQ | <i>Nghị Quyết</i> [Resolution] |
| NXB | <i>Nhà Xuất Bản</i> [Publisher] |
| PST | Production Solidarity Team [<i>Tổ Đoàn Kết Sản Xuất</i>] |
| PTWCNC | Production Teams Working According to Norms and Contracts [<i>Tổ Sản Xuất Có Định Mức, Khoán Việc</i>] |
| QD | <i>Quyết Định</i> [Decision] |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| QN-DN | <i>Quảng Nam- Đà Nẵng</i> |
| SNNPTNTQN | <i>Sở Nông Nghiệp Phát Triển Nông Thôn Quảng Nam</i> [Quang Nam Department of Agriculture and Rural Development] |
| SNNPTNNAG | <i>Sở Nông Nghiệp Phát Triển Nông Thôn An Giang</i> [An Giang Department of Agriculture and Rural Development] |
| SRV | Socialist Republic of Vietnam |
| TDKSX | <i>Tổ Đoàn Kết Sản Xuất</i> [Production Solidarity Team] |
| TDSX | <i>Tập Đoàn Sản Xuất</i> [Production Unit] |
| TP. | <i>Thành Phố</i> [City] |
| TU | <i>Tỉnh Ủy</i> [Provincial Party Committee] |
| TUQN | <i>Tỉnh Ủy Quảng Nam</i> [Quang Nam Party Committee] |
| TW | <i>Trung Ương</i> [Central] |
| UB | <i>Ủy Ban</i> [Committee] |
| UBND | <i>Ủy Ban Nhân Dân</i> [Peoples' Committee] |
| UBNDTAG | <i>Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh An Giang</i> [An Giang Peoples' Committee] |
| VC | Vietnamese Communist [<i>Việt Cộng</i>] |
| VCP | Vietnamese Communist Party [<i>Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam</i>] |

List of Key Vietnamese Terms

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nông trường quốc doanh | State farm |
| Tổ hợp công nghiệp | Agro-industrial unit |
| Các hình thức tập dượt của hợp tác xã | Interim forms of collectives |
| Tổ đoàn kết sản xuất | Production solidarity team |
| Tổ đổi công, vản công | Labor exchange team |
| Tập đoàn sản xuất | Production unit |
| Hợp tác xã | Collective |
| Tập đoàn máy | Machinery unit |
| Hợp tác xã bậc thấp | Low-level collective |
| Hợp tác xã bậc cao | High-level collective |
| Điều chỉnh ruộng đất | Land redistribution (readjustment) |
| Hợp tác hóa | Collectivization |
| Công điền công thổ | Communal land |
| Cải tạo nông nghiệp | Agricultural transformation |
| Cách mạng xã hội chủ nghĩa | Socialist revolution |
| Cách mạng ruộng đất | Land revolution |
| Công điểm | Work-points |
| Khoán sản phẩm | The product contract system |
| Sản xuất lớn xã hội chủ nghĩa | Socialist large-scale production |
| Lúa thán nông | High-yielding rice |
| Lúa mùa | Traditional rice |
| Lúa nổi | Floating rice |
| Vùng kinh tế mới | New Economic Zones |

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Notes on names of the provinces and Vietnamese measurements

Names of provinces

From 1975 to now, the names of the provinces of South Vietnam have changed a number of times. In particular, from 1976 to the 1980s, many southern provinces were combined into larger ones. From 1990, the reverse process occurred, and some large provinces were divided. The following tables give the names of the provinces of the Central Coast and the Mekong Delta in the period 1976-1990 and the names used since 2005.

Provinces in the Mekong Delta

| From 1976-1990 | 2005 |
|----------------|------------------|
| | |
| 1. Long An | 1. Long An |
| 2. Tiền Giang | 2. Tiền Giang |
| 3. Đồng Tháp | 3. Đồng Tháp |
| 4. An Giang | 4. An Giang |
| 5. Kiên Giang | 5. Kiên Giang |
| 6. Minh Hải | 6. Cầu Mau |
| | 7. Bạc Liêu |
| 7. Hậu Giang | 8. Sóc Trăng |
| | 9. Hậu Giang |
| | 10. Cần Thơ City |
| 8. Cửu Long | 11. Vĩnh Long |
| | 12. Trà Vinh |
| 9. Bến Tre | 13. Bến Tre |

Provinces in the Central Coast

| From 1976-1990 | 2005 |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Bình Trị Thiên | 1. Quảng Bình |
| | 2. Quảng Trị |
| | 3. Thừa Thiên Huế |
| 2. Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng | 4. Quảng Nam |
| | 5. Đà Nẵng |
| 3. Nghĩa Bình | 6. Quảng Ngãi |
| | 7. Bình Định |
| 4. Phú Khánh | 8. Phú Yên |
| | 9. Khánh Hòa |
| 5. Thuận Hải | 10. Ninh Thuận |
| | 11. Bình Thuận |

Measurements:

Measurements of land areas and paddy yields are different across regions of Vietnam in terms of value or units. Villagers in Quảng Nam use *sào* (equal to 500 square meters), *thước* (one fifteenth of a *sào*), *mẫu* (equal to 10 *sào* or a half hectare) and hectares (equal to 20 *sào*) to measure their land area. They often use *ang* (equal to 4.5 kilograms of paddy) to measure their paddy yield. Meanwhile, more abundant villages in An Giang use *công* (equal to 1000 square meters), *mẫu* (10 *công* or a hectare) and hectares to measure their land area. Villagers often use *gạ* (equal to 20 kilograms) to measure their paddy yield.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

From 1975 to the mid-1980s, Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) leaders of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) struggled to implement 'socialist transformation' in agriculture in the south in line with the socialist north. That agrarian reform consisted of post-war restoration measures, land redistribution and collectivization. The first two were aimed at rehabilitating and restoring the post-war rural economy and preparing for the third one, which was to turn individual farming into large-scale collective farming. Despite the shortcomings of collective farming in the north, VCP leaders still believed that collectivizing the south's agriculture was the only way to eliminate exploitation, increase production, support industrialization and improve living standards. VCP leaders planned for the completion of collectivization in the south by 1980.

The result of these policies varied from region to region. Implementation of post-war restoration measures, land redistribution and collectivization was fast in the Central Coast but slow in the Mekong Delta and elsewhere in the Southern Region (*Nam Bo*). By 1980, the Central Coast had largely completed the task of socialist transformation of agriculture while the Southern region, including the Mekong Delta, failed to achieve their targets. Land redistribution and collectivization there faced major difficulties due to strong peasant resistance and inadequate local cadre commitment. By the end of 1980, collectivization in the Southern Region incorporated only 8 percent of peasant households and 6 percent of land. Despite such difficulties, Vietnam's government persisted and, in the mid-1980s announced the completion of land readjustment and the absorption of a majority of the rural population and cultivated land into collectivization in the Southern Region.

Despite a decade's effort and government claims, the socialist transformation of agriculture fell short of intended goals. Land readjustment in the Mekong Delta did not bring sufficient land or a better life to many intended beneficiaries. Rather, it benefited many local

cadres. Despite efforts to improve and strengthen collective farming, it failed throughout all regions of the south to fulfill the objectives of increased productivity and improved living standards.

Collective farming under the work-points system (1978-1981) faced major difficulties not only in the Mekong Delta but also in the Central Coast. Villagers in the Mekong Delta tried their best to evade collective farming. It was common that they joined but did not actually participate in collective work. Meanwhile, although villagers in the Central Coast seemed to comply with the system, they tried their best to maximize work-points rather than production. In addition, local cadres in both places often acted at odds with what VCP leaders expected them to do. They often took advantage of their positions to embezzle resources and mismanaged collectives. Despite authorities carrying out numerous campaigns to correct and crack down on such 'bad behavior', these problems did not disappear but, in fact, increased.

Faced with the southern peasants' negative responses to agricultural collectivization and a steady fall in food production in the country, in 1981 VCP leaders modified their agrarian policy. They introduced new farming arrangements aimed to motivate villagers and reduce 'bad' local practices. However, these policy amendments only helped to improve collective farming for a few years but failed to sustain its performance. Collective farming under this product contract system still faced major difficulties. Villagers in the Central Coast and the Mekong Delta tried their best to enlarge their household economies by capturing collective resources, land and labor at the expense of the collective economy. Moreover, despite authorities' numerous campaigns to correct and crack down on local cadres' bad behavior, embezzlement and theft of collective inputs and land and mistreatment of peasants grew over time. By the mid-1980s Vietnam faced a serious fall in food production and was on the brink of an economic crisis. In this context, the Sixth National Congress (December 1986) released a 'renovation policy' (*chính sách đổi mới*) that abandoned the centrally

planned economy and adopted a market-based one. The economic policies of *Doi Moi* opened the way to new forms of ownership and management, and the resurgence of the private sector and market.¹ In this context, collective farming faced even more difficulties. Local cadres became more lax about management and took advantage of their positions to make use of market opportunities for personal benefit at the expense of collective farming. Meanwhile, many villagers refused or were not able to pay their debts or fulfill their obligations. Some even returned or abandoned land when they saw that collective farming was unprofitable. In response to the deteriorating performance of collective farming, cadres in many locations in the south tried to experiment with new farm arrangements other than official ones in order to encourage villagers to work on collective land. In late 1988, VCP leaders released resolution No.10 that largely endorsed what local cadres and villagers were doing to deal with their own local problems. The resolution reversed the course of large-scale agriculture by recognizing household farms as the principal economic units and restoring their rights to produce, distribute and market their products. Since then, collective farming has gradually been dismantled.

Studies of agrarian reform in southern Vietnam from 1975 to the late 1980s are few. Most of them are short articles; others are a few books and dissertations in Vietnamese.² Moreover, the existing literature provides scant details and little analysis of VCP leaders' reasons for post-1975 agrarian reform: what type, content and objective did this reform take? How were these agrarian policies carried out at local levels? How did peasants and local cadres respond to these policies? How were the conflicts and tensions handled? Therefore, our understanding of agrarian reform, peasant politics, and state-society relations in rural southern Vietnam from 1975 to the late 1980s remains slight. In addition, the existing

¹ William S. Turley, 'Introduction' in *Reinventing Vietnamese Socialism* (William S. Turley & Mark Selden, eds), Boulder, Westview Press, 1993: p.1.

² Ngo Vinh Long (1988); Christine white (1981); Dao Duy Huan (1988); Quang Truong (1987); Huynh Thi Gam (1998); Lam Quang Huyen (1985) (Please see the bibliography).

literature is largely silent about what concerned southern peasants and how they justified their behavior in relation to post-1975 agrarian reform; what were their intentions; what explains variations in villagers' behavior across regions within southern Vietnam; and who were the key actors contributing to the failure of and the shift in state agrarian policies? Research on Northern Vietnam's agrarian reform, such as that conducted by Adam Fforde and Ben Kerkvliet, has provided some explanations for the rise and demise of agricultural collectivization there.³ But what happened with post-1975 agrarian reform in southern Vietnam is still not understood.

This dissertation has two main objectives. The first is to fill this gap in the existing literature and contribute to a better understanding of agrarian reform in Southern Vietnam during the period from reunification (1975) to the late 1980s. By using comparative case studies at local levels, the dissertation examines the intense interplay between the state and peasants over agrarian issues in two different regions of Southern Vietnam. Moreover, it pays attention to the peasants' perspectives in understanding how agrarian policies were actually carried out and operated at local levels; how peasants and local cadres responded to state policies and the performance of agrarian policies at local levels.

The second objective of my dissertation is to show how the findings about Southern Vietnam's agrarian reform relate to broader questions of agrarian reform, peasant politics and state-society relations in Asia. In particular, it seeks to incorporate Southern Vietnam's agrarian reform into the broader agrarian reform literature, to understand the nature of peasants' behavior and politics, to identify the main actors contributing to the failure of and the changes in national agrarian policies, and to examine how local conditions influenced national policies.

³ See Adam Fforde, *The Agrarian Question in North Vietnam 1974-1979: A Study of Cooperator Resistance to State Policy*, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989; Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005.

Chapter summaries

The rest of this chapter examines the research methodology, the literature of agrarian reform, state-society relations and peasant politics and elaborates my main argument in relation to this literature. The chapter also reviews the pre-1975 agrarian reforms in Vietnam and points out how previous reforms resulted in regional differences in Southern Vietnam. Chapter 2 examines VCP leaders' objectives for the post-1975 agrarian reform. I found that the post-1975 agrarian reform held numerous objectives politically, socially and economically. The primary one was consolidating power and building socialism, but VCP leaders also hoped reforms would solve their post-war economic problems and modernize the south's agriculture. Chapter 3 looks at post-1975 land reform and other preparations for collectivization in Quang Nam-Da Nang (QN-DN) of the Central Coast and An Giang of the Mekong Delta. I found that in QN-DN local authority quickly consolidated its power and successfully carried out preparatory policies such as land restoration, land reform, and building of pilot collective organizations. Meanwhile, authorities in An Giang and many other provinces in the Mekong Delta faced difficulties consolidating power and had problems implementing preparatory policies such as land reform, crop conversion and the building of pilot collectives. Chapter 4 examines the acceleration of collectivization and the performance of collective organizations under the work-points system (1978-1981). I found that collectivization in QN-DN went rapidly there but it faced major difficulties in An Giang. The reason was that collectivization faced weaker peasant resistance in QN-DN than in An Giang. Moreover, local cadres in QN-DN were more loyal to the socialist transformation policy than their counterparts in An Giang. Despite authorities' numerous campaigns to strengthen collective farming in both places it performed poorly due to local peasants and local cadres' practices, which were often at odds with what authorities required them to do. Chapter 5 examines the modifications of VCP's agrarian policies and the adoption of the product

contract system in An Giang and QN-DN. It also examines the second wave of land reform, collectivization and the strengthening of collective farming from 1981 to the late 1980s in An Giang and elsewhere in the Southern Region. Chapter 6 studies everyday local practices and the performance of collective farming under product contracts (1981-the late 1980s) and de-collectivization initiated at local levels. I found that persistent local practices at odds with authorities' expectations significantly contributed to the modification of, the failure of and the shift in national policies. Chapter 7 summarizes my main findings in earlier chapters and links them to issues of agrarian reform, state-society relations and peasant politics.

Methodology

Selecting research sites

The previous agrarian scholarship on South Vietnam focused on the Mekong Delta or the Southern Region, drawing conclusions about the entire south. But South Vietnam consists of four main regions: the Mekong Delta, the Southeast Region, the Central Highlands and the Central Coast. Each possesses different landscapes, geographical features, and socio-economic, historical and cultural backgrounds, so none of those regions can be representative for the whole of the south. By adopting a comparative study of two places in the south, which have some similarities and dissimilarities of background, my dissertation seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the research issues in southern Vietnam.

For my research, I selected the Mekong Delta and the Central Coast. In both regions, food crops, especially rice, have long been the primary farm produce. This sets the two regions apart from the Southeast Region and the Central Highlands, in which industrial crops, rather than food crops, have been prominent (rubber and fruit trees in the former and coffee and rubber in the latter). While the Mekong Delta and the Central Coast have similarities, there are also notable differences. Population density on arable land in the Delta is lower than at the coast. Villager settlements in the Delta follow rivers and channels whereas most

villages in the Central Coast are relatively isolated and surrounded by hedges and rice fields. Pre-1975 agrarian reforms seem to have had a greater impact in the Mekong Delta than in the Central Coast. This led to more commercial food (including rice) and greater diversity in rural communities in the Mekong Delta compared to the Central Coast, which had more subsistence agriculture and relatively homogenous rural communities before 1975.

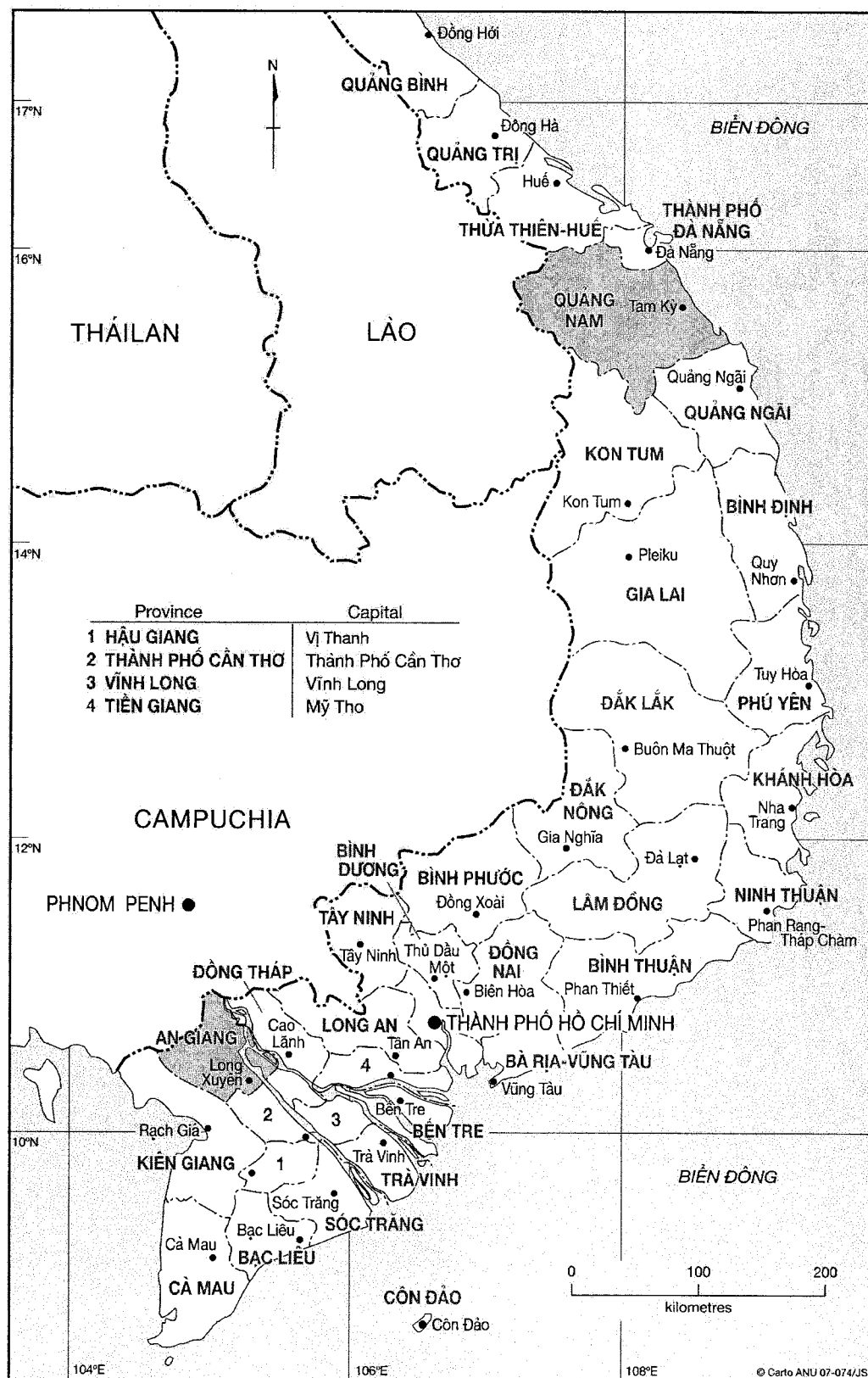
Within the two selected regions, I focused on two provinces, Quang Nam province (previously belonging to Quang Nam-Da Nang) in the Central Coast and An Giang province in the Mekong Delta. In both Quang Nam and An Giang, staple food crops (mainly rice) are the main agricultural produce. However, the two provinces have some differences in terms of socio-economic, geographical, political and historical background. An Giang had considerable commercial agriculture before reunification.⁴ Meanwhile, agriculture in Quang Nam, located in the middle of the Central Coast and the largest rice producing province in the region, had not become very commercial. Another difference is that the war from the 1960s to 1975 caused Quang Nam, like other provinces in the Central Coast, considerably more devastation than An Giang experienced. The relative ease of getting permission to do research in these two provinces also influenced my decision.

Within each province, I focused on one district, Thang Binh in Quang Nam and Cho Moi in An Giang. In both districts, agrarian reform and collectivization campaigns after 1975 were rather intense, perhaps more than in some other parts of the two provinces. In Thang Binh district, I examined two communes (*xã*): Binh Lanh, where provincial and district authorities established a pilot collective on 30 October 1977, and Binh Dinh, which underwent normal collectivization. Most of my interviews were in Binh Lanh's Hien Loc village and Binh Dinh's Thanh Yen village. In Cho Moi, An Giang I focused on Long Dien B

⁴ An Giang is located mainly in Tu Giac Long Xuyen (Long Xuyen quadrangle) and surrounded by Dong Thap Muoi field. These areas are the largest rice growing fields of the Mekong Delta; Ngo Vinh Long, 'Some Aspects of Cooperation in the Mekong Delta', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David Marr and Christine White, eds), Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.169.

commune in which provincial and district authorities built pilot production units (*tập đoàn sản xuất*) in the summer-autumn crop of 1979 (after failing to experiment with collectives in the province). In Long Dien B commune, I interviewed villagers across its eight different hamlets.

Figure 1-1 Southern Vietnam 2005



(Source: Vietnam's Administrative Atlas, Hanoi, NXB Ban Do, 2005: p.8)

Figure 1-2 Quang Nam administrative map 2005

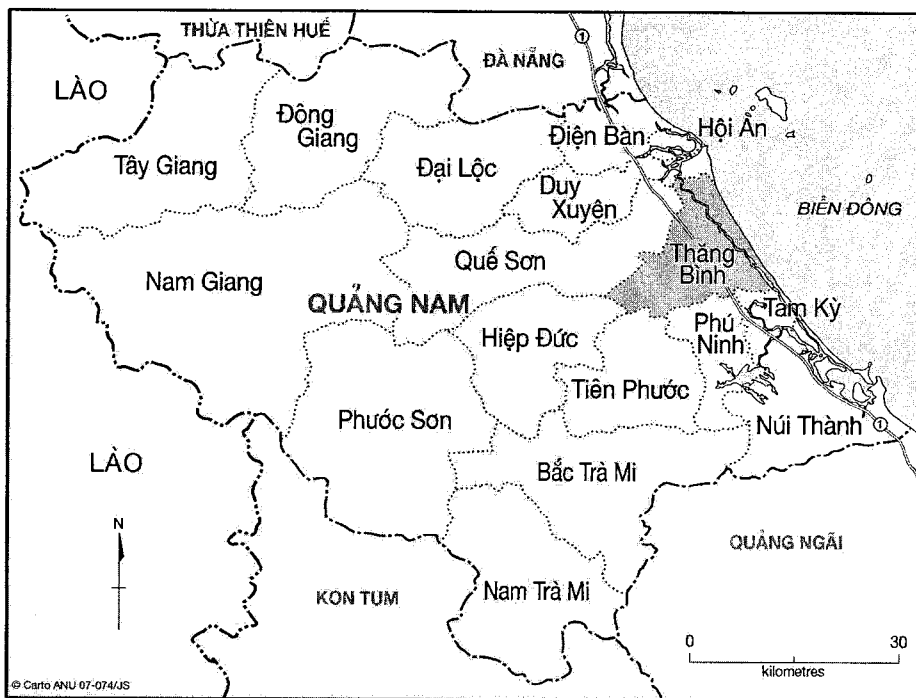
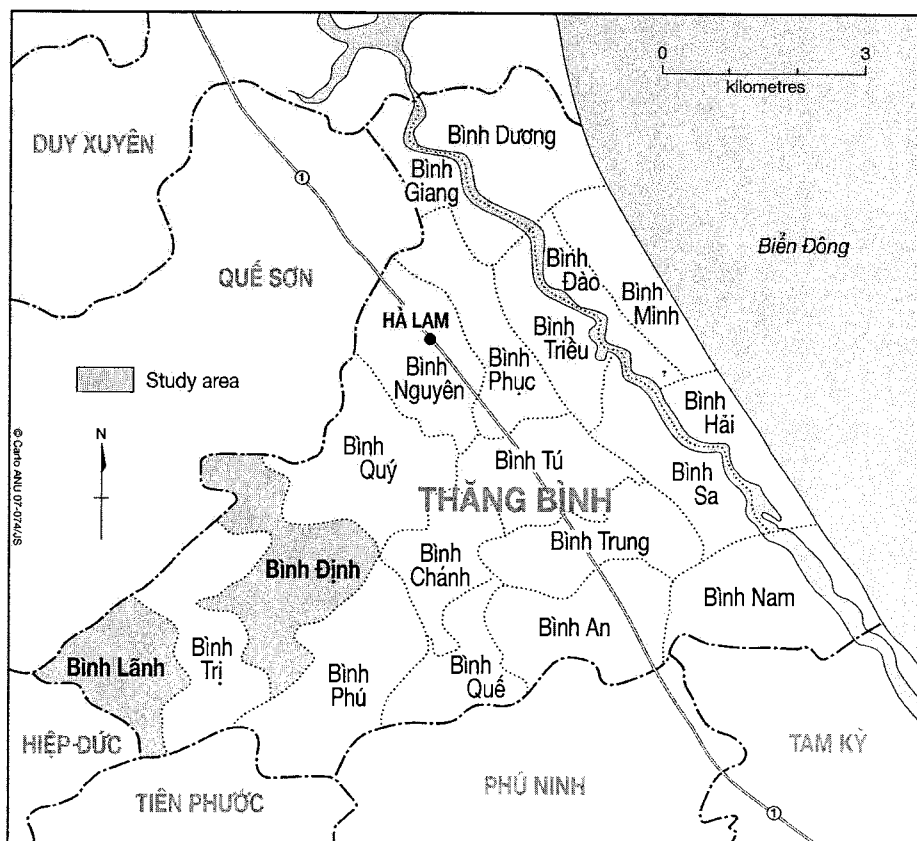


Figure 1-3 Thăng Bình district map 2005



(Source: Vietnam's Administrative Atlas, Hanoi, NXB Ban Do, 2005: p.48)

Figure 1-4 An Giang administrative map 2005

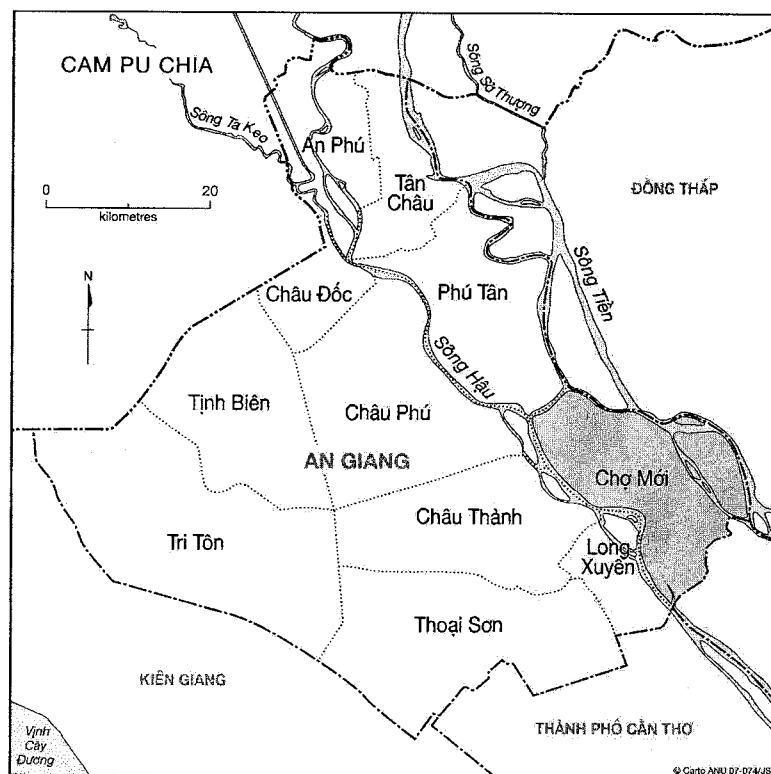
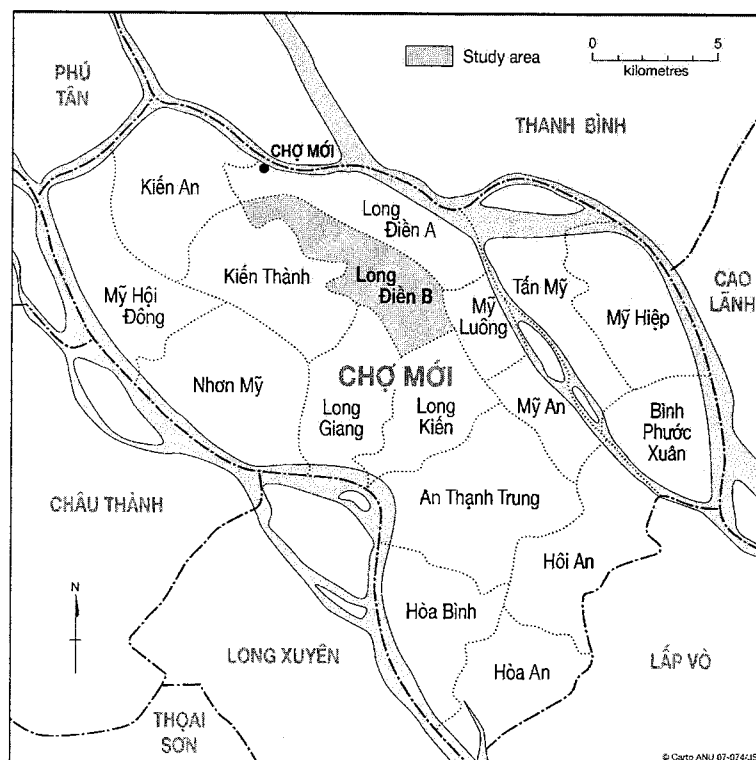


Figure 1-5 Cho Moi district map 2005



(Source: Vietnam's Administrative Atlas, Hanoi, NXB Ban Do, 2005: p.73.)

Collecting information

Research in Vietnam requires getting permission from authorities. Because I grew up in Binh Dinh, Thang Binh, Quang Nam, I was 'free' to do research at the village level and found it easy to collect data at commune, district and provincial levels. In An Giang, I had to show my introduction papers to officials and get their permission. However, because I was Vietnamese and had contacts there, I got considerable support from officials and villagers during my fieldwork there. In order to accumulate sufficient information, I carried out two rounds of fieldwork: the first one in September-November 2004 and the last from in May 2005 to January 2006. During my fieldwork, I did interviews and collected written materials such as local newspapers, official local histories, public and unpublished documents, books, dissertations and other secondary source material.

Interviews

One main source of data gathering is through interviews. I spent most of my fieldwork time interviewing ordinary villagers and current and former officials at different levels who had experienced socialist transformation of agriculture and collective farming from 1975 to the late 1980s. Most of these people were more than fifty years old. The interviews were open-ended, not structured questionnaires. I asked people about their experiences, observations and their assessments of post-1975 agrarian issues related to my broad research questions. Specific questions to each informant varied depending on the person's background and involvement, their comments and the information they provided, and what I had learned during the course of my research. When I found it convenient, I asked permission to tape-record interviews.

In Ho Chi Minh City, I was able to interview two officials who had previously been staff members of Ban Cai Tao Nong Nghiep Mien Nam (BCTNNMN) (the Central Committee for Socialist Transformation of Agriculture in the south). In An Giang, I was able

to interview three former staff members of Ban Cai Tao Nong Nghiep An Giang (BCTNNAG) (provincial Committee for Agricultural transformation). In Cho Moi, I interviewed three Cho Moi district officials and more than fifteen commune, hamlet and production unit cadres who were directly engaged in carrying out agrarian policies from 1975 to the late 1980s. In Quang Nam, I was able to interview three provincial officials, one local journalist, two district officials and more than 15 commune, collective and brigade cadres.

For ordinary villagers, I was able to stay in selected villages for a total of 4 months in each province, so I had many opportunities to chat with and interview individuals and groups. In particular, I was able to interview more than a hundred male and female villagers in each province. The interviews were carried out mostly in their homes, varying in length from 20 minutes to two hours. Some individuals were interviewed more than once. In my first round of fieldwork, I took notes to record my interviews. However, in the final round of fieldwork, thanks to the rapport established, I was able to tape-record more than 60 interviews in each province. For the safety of informants, I generally use pseudonyms when referring to them.

Written materials: Newspapers, official documents and other secondary sources

In Ho Chi Minh City, I was able to access and photocopy some relevant books, dissertations, national newspapers such as *Nhan Dan* newspaper (the Peoples newspaper), *Dai Doan Ket* (Great unity newspaper) and *Sai Gon Giai Phong* newspapers (Saigon liberation newspaper) in Khoa Hoc Tong Hop library (General sciences library) and Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi library (social sciences library). When interviewing staff members of BCTNNMN, they gave me some valuable BCTNNMN reports.

In An Giang and Quang Nam, I acquired relevant materials, published and unpublished, from numerous government agencies at different levels, such as people's committees, departments of agriculture and rural development, department of statistics, and libraries. These documents include reports, surveys, statistics, historical records and studies

done by commune, district, provincial and national agencies. Importantly, I was able to access and copy local newspapers, magazines and reports ranging from 1974 to the early 1990s in Thu Vien Tong Hop (general) library in Da Nang city for Quang Nam –Da Nang province and from 1978 to the early 1990s in the An Giang library, Long Xuyen city of An Giang province (Unfortunately, An Giang newspapers before 1979 were unavailable). I found local newspapers a valuable source of information if reading them carefully. The papers covered a wide range of information on national and provincial policies, their implementation and results, and daily struggles at village levels across different places in each province. It was common that articles revealed or criticized policy shortcomings and activities that had occurred a few years earlier. The newspapers often carried debates over agrarian issues. Local newspapers also frequently published readers' letters or petitions regarding their land, property and other agrarian issues or their complaints about corrupt practices of local cadres.

Theories of agrarian reforms, state-society relations and peasant politics

Agrarian reform: Types and objectives

Agrarian reform has had a long history and has taken a variety of forms and characteristics in different historical, social and political contexts. In the post-colonial era, after World War II, agrarian reform became prominent in the development agendas of both socialist and non-socialist countries. Some agrarian reforms resulted from social upheaval and vice versa. Some fundamentally transformed existing economic, social, and political power and structures. Other reforms took place without any fundamental change in social and power structures.⁵

According to Elias Tuma, 'agrarian reform consists of land tenure reform - or any improvement of land tenure system or title to the land and land operation reform, which deal

⁵ Rehman Sobhan, *Agrarian Reform and Social Transformation: Preconditions for Development*, London, Zed Books, 1993: p.7.

with the pattern of cultivation, the terms of holdings, and scale of operation'.⁶ By examining twenty-six centuries of agrarian reform, Elias Tuma divides them into two ideal types. The first one, which he calls the 'class I approach' agrarian reform, is consistent with capitalist types of economy. This type advocates reform within the system of private property and small family operations and it allows inequality in wealth and income. When expropriation of land and property is necessary, compensation is paid for land surrendered.⁷ The rights of land and its alienability are protected by the state and often guaranteed by a provision in the constitution.⁸ For Tuma, the second type of reform is the 'class II approach', which is more consistent with socialism. Such reform seeks to eliminate private tenure and promote public tenure, collective holdings and operation because private ownership is considered a source of class exploitation. No compensation should be paid for expropriated property because accumulated property is considered the result of past exploitation.⁹ According to Christodoulou, in 'pure' socialist economies, the abolition of private property is an integral part of the entire economic system. Land is nationalized or virtually publicly controlled. Agricultural production, exchange and distribution operate through state and collective farms.¹⁰ Few agrarian reforms are entirely one or the other, but most tend toward one approach or the other.

Post-1975 SRV government pursued a kind of class II agrarian reform. The socialist transformation of agriculture in Southern Vietnam was aimed at replacing private ownership of land and other means of production with collective ownership. Like what occurred in northern Vietnam and China in the 1950s, although with far less violence, post-1975 land

⁶ Elias Tuma, *Twenty-Six Centuries of Agrarian Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965: p.221.

⁷ Ibid, p.223.

⁸ Demetrios Christodoulou, *The Unpromised Land: Agrarian Reform and Conflict Worldwide*, London, Zed Books, 1990: p.16.

⁹ Elias Tuma, *Twenty-Six Centuries of Agrarian Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965: p.226-7.

¹⁰ Demetrios Christodoulou, *The Unpromised Land: Agrarian Reform and Conflict Worldwide*, London, Zed Books, 1990: p.67.

reform in southern Vietnam was a stepping stone toward collectivization. The end goal of the process was collective farming and collective ownership.¹¹

According to Elias Tuma, reformers' objectives or reasons for agrarian reform can be distinguished as economic, social and political. Economic objectives concern productivity, production and allocation. Social objectives concern equality, distribution of income and wealth and peasant status. Political objectives deal with political stability, the legitimacy of the political system and national security.¹² He argues further,

Though the objectives of the reform are varied, the primary ones are usually political regardless of who initiate it. The reformers use reform to win the support of specific groups, to create or restore political stability, to legitimize their own political positions ... The timing and extent of the reform are determined more by political pressure than by the genuine economic and social needs of the rural population.¹³

Likewise, Redman Sobhan says that revolutionary governments often use agrarian reform to destroy landed elites and transform existing societies and economies into those in line with a socialist or modern developmentalist states.¹⁴ In her study of collectivization in Eastern Europe, Joan Sokolovsky argued that consolidation of state power (state formation) was the highest priority in pursuing collectivization in these countries.¹⁵ According to James Scott, collectivization in the Soviet Union was aimed at fulfilling twin goals of appropriation and political control. The headlong drive for collectivization came from a desire to seize enough grain to push rapid industrialization. Another purpose was to destroy the independent social and economic units of the peasantry which were hostile to state control.¹⁶

¹¹ Edwin E. Moise, *Land Reform in China and Vietnam*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1983: p.13.

¹² Elias Tuma, *Twenty-Six Centuries of Agrarian Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965: p.180.

¹³ Ibid: p.233.

¹⁴ Rehman Sobhan, *Agrarian Reform and Social Transformation: Preconditions for Development*, London, Zed Books, 1993: p.1.

¹⁵ Joan Sokolovsky, *Peasants and Power: State Autonomy and the Collectivization of Agriculture in Eastern Europe*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1990: p.167.

¹⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998: p.203, 218-9.

In a study of the political economy of collective farms, Peter Nolan listed a number of reasons for socialist governments to carry out collectivization. These include: (1) the political and ideological threat posed by an economically independent peasantry; (2) collectives raising the rate of rural savings and investment; (3) the state achieving a high rate of marketing of farm production and siphoning off rural savings to finance non-farming investment through collectives; (4) collectives serving as vehicles for the rapid diffusion of new techniques; (5) collectives enabling villages to avoid class polarization; (6) collectives enabling the 'basic needs' of poor villagers to be met; and (7) collectives realizing economies of scale and overcoming problems of 'lumpy' investment.¹⁷

VCP leaders also held several economic, social and political objectives for the post-1975 agrarian reform. These included exploiting the potential of southern agriculture by adopting socialist large scale production, bringing advanced techniques and science into agriculture, backing socialist industrialization and ensuring food security, eliminating exploitation, rural backwardness and poverty, and consolidating power in rural areas. Like other socialist governments who have as the primary objective consolidating power, VCP leaders also emphasized the economic objectives of the reform. Despite facing difficulties strengthening collective farming in the north, VCP leaders still believed that collectivization enabled facilitation of productivity and food production which brought about self-sufficiency in food, improvements in peasant living conditions, and surplus extraction for industrialization.

To ensure the success of collectivization, VCP leaders paid great attention to the preparatory stages such as redistributing land, training cadres, familiarizing peasants with interim forms of collectives and building the capacity of local authorities. In a similar way to that which occurred in the north, they called for the simultaneous execution of 'three

¹⁷ Peter Nolan, *The Political Economy of Collective Farms: An Analysis of China's Post-Mao Rural Reforms*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988: p.32-39.

revolutions': revolution in production relations to create collective farms; revolution in science and technology to modernize collective farming; and revolution in thought and culture to eliminate any resistance. However, peasants' attitudes, thoughts, norms and culture could not be easily engineered. After 1975, the rural south became a site of struggle, conflict and compromise between state agencies and peasants over agrarian issues.

State-society relations: two approaches to study social change

Political leaders of many developmental states believe that their state has the capacity to shape economies and societies: move their economy from agriculture to industry and their society from backward to modern. State agencies play an active and aggressive role in transforming the periphery in determined ways. However, in examining state-society relations, Joel Migdal, James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet show that states in many developing countries are unable or fail to implement policies and achieve intended goals. There are two approaches to understand this that pertain to my analysis of agrarian reform in southern Vietnam: strongmen politics and everyday politics.

The state in society approach: 'strongmen politics'

Joel Migdal considers the state one of the organizations among the mélange of social organizations within society rather than the dichotomous structure that state-centric theory has used.¹⁸ In contrast to the traditional belief that states have an overwhelming capability to bring about social change in societies at their will, he argues, 'the states are often severely constrained by domestic environments from achieving an independent reordering of society'.¹⁹ Migdal argues that the nature of societies or social structures fundamentally determines the capabilities of the state. Indeed, the ability of the state to implement economic

¹⁸ Social organizations refer to formal and informal ones, including families, clans, multinational corporations, domestic enterprises, tribes, and patron-client dyads.

¹⁹ Joel Migdal, *State in Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001: p.56.

and social policies and mobilize the public relies significantly on the socio-economic structures of society. Where social organizations are weak and undeveloped, the state can gain the upper hand in the struggle over social control. However, in societies where there are numerous social organizations that effectively exercise social control, the capabilities of the state are significantly limited. The strength of these social organizations influences not only the priorities of state leaders but also the ability of states to implement policies.²⁰

According to Migdal, in fragmented or web-like societies, resistance against the state's predominance comes from leaders of informal and formal social organizations such as chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants and clan leaders, who he calls 'strongmen'. These strongmen often dominate social organizations and use a variety of sanctions, rewards and symbols to guide people's behavior. With the capability of denying their members' livelihoods: jobs, land, credit or protection as well as creating 'strategies of survival' for their clients, the strongmen have the ability to mobilize people to compete with the state over social control.²¹

Migdal says the struggles over social control between states and social organizations have been the 'real politics' of third-world societies at the local level. The interaction of state-society makes the impact of state policies on societies quite different from that expected by state leaders or indeed scholars looking at the scope of public policies and politics at top levels. He identifies three main actors - strongmen, local leaders, and local implementers whose triangular relationship and interaction determines the actual results of state policies.

At local levels, state policies often encounter the resistance of strongmen whose rule or social control are threatened by state policies. However, thanks to the effective social control they exercise and their capability to mobilize people around them, the strongmen have considerable bargaining power with the state. This often leads to an accommodation between

²⁰ Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988: p.64.

²¹ Ibid: p.257; Joel Migdal, *State in Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001: p.48.

strongmen and state leaders in implementing state policies, deciding how to allocate state resources and which rules to apply.²² Thus, at a local level, strongmen play an important role in affecting the actual results of policies.

Implementers are in charge of carrying out state policies and allocating resources so they also have bargaining power at local levels. Therefore, where supervision is weak or absent, 'they can use their leverage for personal gain with little regard for the overall purpose of any given policy'.²³ Local leaders are representative of state agencies at a regional and local level, who face constraints and opportunities like those of local implementers. Where supervision from above is lax, they also use leverage for personal gain at the expense of the state's interests.

In examining state-society relations in Maoist China, Vivienne Shue argues that despite considerable real power being lodged in the hands of top leaders, much real power also lay in the hands of local officials who had responsibility for policy implementation and for reporting local conditions to supervisors. Local officials found numerous ways to protect the interests of their own people; they frequently threw in their lot with local people and departmental associates at the expense of national interest. These practices undermined state capacity in implementing national policies.²⁴

Everyday forms of resistance and the everyday politics approach

Other actors who may affect the performance of national policies but seem to be ignored in Joel Migdal's model are 'ordinary people' or 'powerless people'. These actors might have significant political roles in authoritarian states seeking to radically transform societies according to predetermined plans.

²² Joel Migdal, *State in Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001: p.65.

²³ Ibid: p.90.

²⁴ Vivienne Shue, 'State Power and Social Organization in China', in *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World* (Joel Migdal et al, eds), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.3-88, 1994: p.70-1.

James Scott examines the tensions between the state and various ordinary individuals and provides an explanation for the failure of many high-modernist programs throughout the world. He argues that high-modernist states share a common goal of enhancing legibility including standardization, simplification and codification of complex, illegible and local social practices that they record and monitor. According to Scott, a combination of four key elements makes possible harmful social-engineering programs. First, the legibility of a society provides the capacity for a large scale social engineering. Second, a high modernist ideology inspires a desire for societal transformation. Third, authoritarian states provide determination and full weight of coercive power to pursue that desire. Finally, the prostrate civil society that resulted from war, revolution or economic collapse provides the leveled social ground to carry out that social engineering program.²⁵ Collectivization of Soviet agriculture and the villagization program in Tanzania are among a wide range of social engineering programs that Scott examines.

For Scott, the main actors causing the failure of social engineering are ordinary individuals whose actions and responses determine the performance of the state programs. Scott says, 'the most important factor in social engineering: its efficiency depends on the response and cooperation of real human subjects'.²⁶ For example, villagization in Tanzania failed badly because it encountered strong resistance from peasants, 'including flight, unofficial production, and trade, smuggling, and foot dragging'.²⁷

In socialist states, according to Scott, while state leaders envisaged a collectivization of agriculture, the peasantry preferred to keep their smallholdings. The leaders wanted to exercise total social control with a centralized political structure while the peasantry tried to preserve their local autonomy. The leaders tried to appropriate grain to support

²⁵ James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998: p.4-5.

²⁶ Ibid: p.225.

²⁷ Ibid: p.247.

industrialization, peasants tried to deny appropriation for their own survival. For example, during collectivization, the Soviet state tried to take from peasants their economic independence, autonomy, land and grain to support rapid industrialization. The peasants responded with all forms of foot-dragging and resistance which thwarted Soviet agriculture.²⁸

For Scott, individual peasant acts in socialist states such as foot-dragging and evasion in response to unpopular forms of collective agriculture may make 'an utter shambles of the policies' dreamed up by the national leaders.²⁹

The state may respond in a variety ways. Policies may be recast in line with more realistic expectations. They may be retained but reinforced with positive incentives aimed at encouraging voluntary compliance. And, of course, the state may simply choose to employ more coercion. Whatever the response, we must not miss the fact that the action of peasantry has thus changed or narrowed the policy options available.³⁰

According to Scott, everyday forms of peasant resistance refer to 'constant struggle between peasants and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents and interests from them'.³¹

Being a diverse class of low classness, geographically distributed, often lacking the discipline and leadership that would encourage opposition of a more organized sort, the peasantry is best suited to extended guerrilla-style campaigns of attrition which require little or no co-ordination.³²

The goal of peasant resistance is to thwart material extraction from states or dominant classes and minimize the disadvantage of the system, to survive rather than directly overthrow or transform it. Indeed, peasant resistance involves strategies of survival under difficult conditions, which deny or mitigate the claims from states or dominant classes.

²⁸ Ibid: p.217.

²⁹ James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet, eds, *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in Southeast Asia*, London, Frank Cass & Co., 1986: p.7-8.

³⁰ Ibid: p.8.

³¹ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985: p.29.

³² James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet, eds, *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in Southeast Asia*, London, Frank Cass & Co., 1986: p.7.

Ben Kerkvliet develops further the insights of everyday resistance and considers it as part of everyday politics. According to him, everyday politics includes

quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that indirectly and for most part privately endorse, modify, or resist prevailing procedures, rules, regulations, or order. Everyday politics involves little or no organization. It features the activities of individuals and small groups as they make a living, raise their families, wrestle with daily problems, and deal with other like themselves who are relatively powerless and with powerful superiors and others.³³

In examining the impact of everyday politics on collective farming in Northern Vietnam, Kerkvliet concludes that everyday politics (practices) of villagers which were often at odds with what collective farming required significantly contributed to the demise of collective farming and modifications of and shift in Vietnam's national policies.³⁴

In conclusion, by synthesizing Joel Migdal, James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet's models, this dissertation argues that peasants (ordinary villagers) and local cadres were two sets of key actors during post-1975 agrarian reforms in southern Vietnam. Their behavior taken together helps to explain the course of policy implementation and the eventual derailing of collectivized farming.

Peasants, peasant economy and peasant politics

Although the state-society relations approach help explain why state policies fail, it provides little theoretical insights into why peasants in QN-DN of the Central Coast and An Giang of the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam behaved and reacted quite differently to the same post-1975 agrarian reform policies of the state. Helping me to address this question is the literature on peasant economies and politics.

³³ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.22.

³⁴ Ibid: p.234.

According to Marcus Kurtz, there are numerous definitions or conceptualizations of peasants across different disciplines. He identifies five concepts of peasants in the Marxist, anthropological, Weberian, moral economy and political economy perspectives. He also identifies four principal dimensions those scholars use in different combinations to define peasants: rural cultivators (producers), control or ownership of land, social subordination, and cultural distinctiveness. Furthermore, Kurtz argues that these conceptual differences in turn profoundly affect the construction of theoretical arguments and interpretation related to peasant behaviors, politics and revolution.³⁵

Francesca Bray defines peasants 'as rural producers with a degree of independent control over their resources, who produce for their own consumption and sometimes also for sale, relying principally if not exclusively upon household labor'.³⁶ Bray argues that economies of scale often found in large Western farms are not true in the wet-rice economies in Asia where land is scarce and labor is plentiful. Unlike Western farms whose technological innovation tends to substitute machinery for scarce labor, wet-rice farms of Asia tend to substitute 'skilled labor' for scarce land. In such a context, small family farms or peasant farms in wet rice economies are more suitable and efficient than other kinds of farms.³⁷

According to Yujiro Hayami, family farms operate on trust and cooperation between each member. Unlike large-scale farms or collective farms, each member works in a voluntary and self-motivated way without much supervision. So, they can avoid 'the prisoner's dilemma situation' found in many other economic organizations. Moreover, family farms can utilize the low opportunity-cost labor of young and old family members. All these factors make peasant farms more resilient, viable and efficient than most other kinds of

³⁵ Marcus J. Kurtz, 'Understanding peasant revolution: From concept to theory and case', *Journal of Theory and Society*, 29 (2000): p.93-104.

³⁶ Francesca Bray, *The Rice Economies: Technology and Development in Asian Societies*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986: p.12.

³⁷ Ibid: p.114, 136.

farms.³⁸ In developing a theory of peasant economies, A.V. Chayanov attributes the self-exploitation feature of peasant households to their resilience and the advantages of peasant economies relative to other types of farms.³⁹

In short, in a wet rice economy like Vietnam, the peasant economy seems to be more resilient, viable and efficient than any large-scale modes of farming. Thus, any attempt to replace individual farms with collective farms is likely to face considerable obstacles, among them, peasant resistance. The following section examines the literature of peasant politics to probe further the nature of peasant behavior and politics.

Peasant politics

Over past decades there has been a well-known debate on nature of peasant behavior and peasant politics (especially revolution) between moral economy and political economy. Moral economist James C. Scott places the 'subsistence ethic' at the center of his analysis of peasant politics to explain the rebellions in Southeast Asia during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Scott focuses on poor peasants with very low incomes, little land, large families and few outside opportunities. Because they live close to a subsistence margin and constantly fear food shortages, these peasants seek to avoid the loss of their subsistence needs rather than to make risky investments or innovations.⁴⁰ He terms this behavior as 'risk-aversion' or the 'safety-first principle'. Moreover, he says that many of these peasants live in communities in which traditional arrangements aiding survival are being undermined. Examples of such arrangements are reciprocity, forced generosity, communal land and work sharing. They provide social insurance and help to protect community members from falling below

³⁸ Yujiro Hayami, *Development Economics: From the Poverty to the Wealth of Nations*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001: p.292.

³⁹ A.V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (edited by Teodor Shanin), Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986: p.87-89.

⁴⁰ James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976: p.4, 25.

minimum subsistence.⁴¹ Scott argues that many policies of states and the penetration of market relations have weakened these social arrangements, thus threatening peasants' subsistence and provoking their resentment and resistance.⁴²

Political economists such as Samuel Popkin argue that most peasants live in stratified and internally competitive, rather than corporate communities (villages) and that peasants are rational and self-interested actors. Peasants pursue their own benefits and make their decisions based on a cost-benefit calculation rather than being guided by social and cultural norms. Popkin argues that cultural patterns such as reciprocity and forced generosity do not work well enough to ensure a peasant's minimum subsistence. As a result, peasants favor private investment in future welfare – through children and savings – rather than relying on village institutions for their future welfare or security.⁴³ For the political economists, the safety-first principle is only meaningful for poor peasants when a small loss is disastrous to them. 'Peasants are often willing to gamble on innovations when their position is secure against the loss and a success could measurably improve their position'.⁴⁴

Popkin argues that because peasants are self-interested and rational actors, it is difficult for them to participate in collective action. Peasants only participate in collective action when they expect the benefit to outweigh the cost. What hinders peasants from coordinating any collective action are 'free-rider' problems.⁴⁵ So, for Popkin, the free-rider problem is the barrier to the mobilization of peasants and the peasant revolution. When such barriers are overcome or removed by skilled leadership or organization, peasant collective actions or peasant revolutions are likely.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid: p.2, 3.

⁴² Ibid: p.6.

⁴³ Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979: p.22.

⁴⁴ Ibid: p.21.

⁴⁵ The free-rider problem refers to phenomena that non-participants can access to collective benefits.

⁴⁶ Edwin Moise, 'The Moral Economy Dispute', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.14 (1982), pp.72-77.

In comparing the empirical domains of the moral economy and the political economy, Edwin Moise argues they are focusing on two different phenomena. Popkin is concerned about peasant mobilization and the politics of peasant revolution. Meanwhile, Scott is concerned with what and how peasants think, feel and do in a spontaneous sense. He focuses on the politics of unorganized and spontaneous peasant action and revolution.⁴⁷ Similarly, Kurtz argues that the difference in peasant behavior between moral economy and political economy results from difference in conceptualization and empirical cases of peasantry. For the moral economy, peasants live in closed, tightly knit and corporate villages; they by and large live only a hair's breadth away from threats to their very physical survival. For political economy, peasants live in open, stratified and internally competitive ones. Scott's analysis of Vietnam concerns rebellions in pre-capitalist society where traditional institutions were weakened by the process of transition to market capitalism. Popkin's analysis was of a later period in which capitalist relations had been fully established and community structure was weak.⁴⁸

My assessment is that moral economy and political economy are not necessarily contradictory but can be complementary. The difference between Scott and Popkin came from different empirical realities of peasants they studied. Both say that peasants are rational and concerned with protecting and advancing their own interests. The difference in behavior the two analysts see is due to differences in the contingencies bearing on people's efforts to make rational choices. The closer to the edge of survival, the stronger individuals seek risk-sharing and risk-aversion arrangements. Conversely, the more prosperous the society the less need individuals have of risk-sharing strategies and the more likely they develop loose-knit communities. In southern Vietnam case, peasants' socio-economic conditions in Quang Nam, in Vietnam's Central Coast were noticeably different in the mid-1970s than in the Mekong

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Marcus J. Kurtz, 'Understanding peasant revolution: From concept to theory and case', *Journal of Theory and Society*, 29 (2000): p.105, 119.

Delta's An Giang province. Broadly speaking, conditions for peasants in Quang Nam were harsher and more precarious; villagers' main concerns were subsistence and survival. Thus, in these given circumstances, their behavior was more likely to be 'safe-first principle' and risk-aversion as moral economist assume. Meanwhile, Mekong Delta peasants in An Giang were better-off, lived in more favorable social and ecological conditions and had more economic options. They were closer to 'political economy' peasants whose main concern was profitability. These differences of behavior help to explain the contrary reactions of villagers to early stages of post-1975 agrarian reforms, including collectivized farming.

Vietnam's land tenure and pre-1975 agrarian reforms

Before analyzing post-1975 agrarian reform, a little history about previous Vietnamese land reforms, especially in the south, is in order.

Vietnam has long been primarily an agrarian country. Land has always been an essential source of livelihood, security and social status for the peasantry. Land is not only an important means of production but also of wealth, which has historically provided the strongest base for social and political power.⁴⁹ In other words, land is the major concern not only for peasants themselves but also for political leaders competing for power and people's allegiance and support. Like many other agrarian countries, agrarian reforms were intermittently carried out through Vietnam's history, aimed either at stabilizing existing power structures or consolidating new ones. The following sections reviews land tenure and agrarian reforms before the reunification (1975).

Pre-colonial period

⁴⁹ Demetrios Christodoulou, *The Unpromised Land: Agrarian Reform and Conflict Worldwide*, London, Zed Books, 1990: p.22.

In pre-colonial periods, the land tenure system in Vietnam consisted of three intertwined and competing forms of land ownership: state, village and individual ownership.⁵⁰ In theory all land belonged to the state. 'There is no land under the vault of heaven that does not belong to the king (*phổ thiên chi hạ, mạc phi vương thổ*)'.⁵¹ However, in practice land within the boundaries of each village generally belonged to its inhabitants, either collectively or individually. A large portion of village land was communal land, inalienable by law and distributed among its male inhabitants periodically. Those who were outsiders or not born in the village were excluded from a share of communal land.⁵² Village communal land played an important role in ensuring a basic livelihood for its inhabitants. The court used communal land as means of penetrating and controlling rural society. Private land ownership had been long recognized as part of Vietnam's land tenure. It is evident from historical documents that as early as the tenth century, the court had officially endorsed private ownership of land and the right to sell and buy it conditional on cultivation and payment of taxes.⁵³ All land uncultivated in the country belonged to the state.⁵⁴

At various points of Vietnamese history, when private land increased to a point at which it posed a potential threat to the throne, the court often resorted to 'land reforms' to redistribute or put limit on private land holdings in order to reduce social unrest and prevent centrifugal power concentration. For example, in response to a sharp concentration in private land holdings, in 1397 the Ho Quy Ly dynasty put a strict limit on private holdings.⁵⁵ In addition, a change in power often led to a change in land tenure used by a new dynasty to

⁵⁰ Vu Huy Phuc, *Tim Hieu Che Do Ruong Dat Viet Nam Nua Dau The Ky XIX* [Vietnam's land tenure system in the early 19th century], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1979: p.11.

⁵¹ David Marr, 'A Brief History of Local Government in Vietnam' in *Beyond Hanoi: Local Government in Vietnam* (Ben Kerkvliet and David Marr, eds), Singapore, NIAS Press, 2004: p.32.

⁵² Ibid: p.63; Christine White, *Agrarian Reform and National Liberation in the Vietnamese Revolution 1920-1957* (PhD Dissertation), Cornell University, 1981: p.28.

⁵³ Vu Huy Phuc, *Tim Hieu Che Do Ruong Dat Viet Nam Nua Dau The Ky XIX* [Vietnam's land tenure system in the early 19th century], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1979: p.236-7.

⁵⁴ Nancy Wiegiersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988: p.51.

⁵⁵ Vu Huy Phuc, *Tim Hieu Che Do Ruong Dat Viet Nam Nua Dau The Ky XIX* [Vietnam's land tenure system in the early 19th century], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1979: p.36.

consolidate its rule and destroy the socio-economic bases of its opponents. Nancy Wiegersma writes that the dynamic of change in land tenure in traditional Vietnam was a circular process.

There were periods of strong control of central government over land tenure and water control alternating with periods of failure of the central government in upkeep of dikes and dams and failure to provide protection against usurpation of communal land in the villages. A dynasty would gain power and change the distribution of wealth in the villages through land reform which usually consisted of nothing more or less than the distribution of land expropriated from supporters of the previous dynasty, among the poor peasants.⁵⁶

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, Vietnamese territory gradually expanded southward and reached to the vast plains of the Mekong Delta. In order to encourage land reclamation southward, the state allowed peasants to reclaim and own as much land as they wanted. This led to a land tenure system in the Southern Region different from the rest of Vietnam. Private land became dominant while communal land seemed to be insignificant.⁵⁷ However, from 1836 to 1860, shortly before the French colony, the Nguyen dynasty tried to consolidate communal land in the Southern Region. For example, in 1836 the emperor Minh Mang sent a commission to the Southern Region to establish the land register (*địa bộ*) and consolidate the communal land system. As a result, according to researcher Nguyen Dinh Dau, by the time of the French invasion, communal land in the Southern Region accounted for about 22 percent of land.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, for the whole of Vietnam, communal land made up more or less 50 percent of land.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Nancy Wiegersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988: p.19.

⁵⁷ Nguyen Dinh Dau, *Che Do Cong Dien Cong Tho Trong Lich Su Khan Hoang Lap Ap o Nam Ky Luc Tinh* [Land tenure system in the Southern Region of Vietnam], TP. Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tre, 1992: p. 61, 82; Vu Huy Phuc, *Tim Hieu Che Do Ruong Dat Viet Nam Nua Dau The Ky XIX* [Vietnam's land tenure system in the early 19th century], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1979: p.215-6.

⁵⁸ Nguyen Dinh Dau disputed Yves Herry's smaller estimate of the area of communal land in the Southern Region before the French invasion (Nguyen Dinh Dau, *Che Do Cong Dien Cong Tho Trong Lich Su Khan Hoang Lap Ap o Nam Ky Luc Tinh* [Land tenure system in the Southern Region of Vietnam], TP. Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tre, 1992: p.167).

⁵⁹ Vu Huy Phuc, *Tim Hieu Che Do Ruong Dat Viet Nam Nua Dau The Ky XIX* [Vietnam's land tenure system in the early 19th century], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1979: p.227.

The colonial period (1859-1954)

The French colonial policies brought a major upheaval in Vietnam's land tenure system. French policies favored large landowners at the expense of traditional small landowners by granting large tracts of land, whether free, at fixed prices, or at auction to French colons and Vietnamese collaborators. Much of the granted land belonged to peasants who fled their villages as a result of the French invasion. On their return, they often tenanted land that was previously theirs.⁶⁰

The French tactically kept the social structure of the traditional village and used the village council of notables (*hội đồng kỳ mục*) as a liaison between them and villagers. Apart from traditional tasks, the notables were now responsible for monitoring any anti-French political activities within the village and collecting taxes. These rural elites often took advantage of their positions to use communal land as their own. For example, in the late nineteenth century, during the turmoil of invasion and struggle, notables in many villages took advantage of the situation to make communal land their own. Therefore, during the colonial period, there was a sharp increase in private claims to communal land.⁶¹ In other words, communal lands that previously provided subsistence security to the rural poor in times of dearth had increasingly fallen into the hands of local notables and mandarins.

In general, over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French colonial policies heavily exacerbated the tenure problem in Vietnam. The French increased landholdings, power and influence in the small group of village notables and administrators and weakened traditional institutions. In the 1930s, communal land was only 25 percent of the land in Annam, 20 percent in Tonkin and only 3 percent in Cochinchina.⁶² Those with holdings of less than 5 hectares accounted for 94.8 percent of the total households but

⁶⁰ Christine White, *Agrarian Reform and National Liberation in The Vietnamese Revolution 1920-1957* (PhD Dissertation), Cornell University, 1981: p.31-2.

⁶¹ Ibid: p.38.

⁶² Christine White, *Agrarian Reform and National Liberation in The Vietnamese Revolution 1920-1957* (PhD Dissertation), Cornell University, 1981: p.40

occupied only 28.5 percent of cultivated land. Meanwhile, those with holdings of more than 50 hectares made up 3 percent of landowners and occupied 31.5 percent of the land. In general, the landlords and French colons occupied about 70 percent of cultivated land but more than half of rural population was landless.⁶³ Especially, in the Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*), the level of land concentration was severely acute. The region had 6,300 out of 6,530 the country's big landlords with holdings of more than 50 hectares. These landlords made up 2.5 percent of total landowners but occupied 45 percent of cultivated land. Three-quarters of Southern peasants were landless.⁶⁴ In the western part of the Mekong Delta, according to Pierre Brocheux, the French conquest added other features to its 'plural' society. The new structure was particularly beneficial to middle-sized and large landowners, moneylenders, wholesalers and transporters. The desire for enrichment and material accumulation and participation in commercial and industrial ventures were no longer belittled. However, at the same time the peasantry became proletarianized.⁶⁵

A severe land tenure problem, an unequal pattern of landholding distribution and heavy French taxes made peasants dissatisfied with French policy. Thus, the agrarian reform advocated by the Viet Minh became more attractive to peasants and won considerable support in many rural areas, which significantly contributed to the fall of French colonial rule.⁶⁶

⁶³ Tran Phuong, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Việt Nam* [Land revolution in Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1968: p.11-2; According to statistics from the Land Reform Committee, before 1945 landlords (3.2 percent of the population) occupied about 24.5 percent and each member of landlord families possessed on average more than 1 hectare. Tran Phuong says that *có nông* (the landless) were those who had no or insignificant land accounted for 20.6 percent of the rural population but possessed 1.2 percent of cultivated land. In general, the landless and land-poor (*bần nông*) accounted for 56 percent of the population but occupied about 13 percent of land (Tran Phuong, 1968: 12-35).

⁶⁴ Ibid: p.12-3.

⁶⁵ Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1960-1960*, Madison, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1995: p.91-3.

⁶⁶ During the time of the Resistance (1945-1954), the Vietminh advocated the 'land to the tiller' policy that recommended confiscating land of absentee landlords and French settlers and redistributing it among poor peasants in the south (Tran Phuong, 1968: p.120).

During the war of resistance (1945-1954), in an effort to win the support of the rural poor, the Vietminh (led by Ho Chi Minh) advocated mass-regarding agrarian reform. In areas under the Vietminh control, lands held by the French settlers, “traitors” and fleeing landlords were confiscated and distributed to the poorer peasants. Colonial government tax collections had largely ceased in such areas.⁶⁷ In the south, by the time of the Geneva Conference in 1954, the Vietminh controlled 60-90 percent of rural areas and reportedly confiscated about 750,000 hectares which they distributed among poor peasants. In the Southern Region, most big landlords fled to the cities and the Vietminh took 564,547 of these landlords and French colons’ land to grant to 527,163 poor peasants. In inter-zone 5 of the Central Coast, the Vietminh redistributed about 1,421 hectares to 17,202 poor peasants.⁶⁸

In competition with Vietminh’s agrarian reform, in 1953 the French-installed Bao Dai government announced a land reform (*cải cách điền địa*) which advocated rent reduction, security of tenure and modest restrictions on maximum size holdings. In particular, the government called for confiscating more-than-two-year-abandoned land to distribute to the landless and land-poor; and tenant rights were guaranteed at least 5 years through land rental contracts. The tenant was given first priority to buy (*tiền mãi*) and re-extend the rental contract of the land he was cultivating. Land rent was fixed at 15 percent of land crop value and all other extra fees were abolished. Land retention of landlords (*suất lưu trứ*) was allowed from 12 to 36 hectares in Tonkin, 15 to 45 in Annam and 30 to 100 in Cochinchina.⁶⁹ However, this land reform was not successful because the Bao Dai government made no serious effort at implementation.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore, The Johns University Press, 1987: p.120.

⁶⁸ Ibid: p.120; Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in south Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.25.

⁶⁹ Tran Phuong, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Việt Nam* [Land revolution in Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1968: p.247-8

⁷⁰ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore. The Johns University Press, 1987: p.120.

Post-colonialism (1954-1975)

After the collapse of French colonialism in 1954, Vietnam's political economy went in two very different directions based on the different regimes in the two halves of the country. In the north, after coming to power, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) pursued a 'class II approach' of agrarian reform, Elias Tuma's term, which was consistent with socialist models. The reform included 'radical land reform' and 'agricultural collectivization'. The land reform was carried out between 1953 and 1956, confiscating and redistributing about 810,000 hectares of land and other wealth more or less equally to more than 2 million peasant households.⁷¹ The goal of land reform was not only to take land and other wealth of landlords, rich peasants and other rural elite to redistribute among poor peasants but to cut off the psychological and organizational bases of their power and to destroy their prestige and influence over peasants.⁷² During the land reform campaign, thousands of people classified landlords or traitors were imprisoned or killed. The Party Central Committee later publicly acknowledged the mistakes and excesses of the land reform and carried out rectification.⁷³ Despite mistakes, the reform fulfilled its objectives of removing the economic-social bases of the traditional village elite and fundamentally changing the existing land tenure system making conditions favorable for the next stage of collectivization.

Land reform was considered necessary intermediate step towards collectivization. From 1955 to 1958, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) began to organize peasants into labor exchange groups and establish a few experimental cooperatives. From late 1958 to 1960, the DRV accelerated collectivization and brought 86 percent of farming families into

⁷¹ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.35.

⁷² Edwin Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*, Chapel Hill, The University North Carolina Press, 1983: p.4.

⁷³ Nancy Wiegersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988: p.139; Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.38.

low-level collectives with an average size of 59 households and 34 hectares. Later low-level collectives were upgraded into high-level collectives with 120-150 households each.⁷⁴

According to Quang Truong, the DRV's main objectives for collectivization in the north included building socialism, solving food problems, supporting industrialization and preparing for agricultural modernization. Collectivization was part of the 'three revolutions' that the Party wished to carry out in the northern countryside. The first was the revolution in production relations with the aim of creating a system of socialist ownership and large-scale agriculture production. The second was scientific and technical revolution using irrigation, mechanization, chemical fertilizers and better seeds to modernize socialist agriculture. The final one was ideological and cultural revolution trying to transform the peasants into socialist men.⁷⁵ In the view of the DRV leaders, agricultural collectives would enable the state to mobilize surpluses from the agricultural sector to finance the industrialization of the country. Moreover, party leaders believed that the integration of peasants into collectives with specialized working patterns would not only result in increased production but also enable peasants to better cope with the natural disasters that regularly occurred in northern Vietnam.⁷⁶ However, collective farming in the north fell short of VCP leaders' expectations. Rural living conditions across the north declined. According to Ben Kerkvliet, the average real income for rural people in 1966-1975 was 78 percent of what it had been in 1959.⁷⁷

In the south, when coming to power, Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of the Republic of Vietnam, also pursued land reform and considered it a top national policy. In contrast to the socialist north, Diem's government pursued agrarian policies in line with a capitalist model.

⁷⁴ Ben Kerkvliet, 'Accelerating Cooperatives in Rural Vietnam, 1955-1961', in *Vietnamese Villages in Transition* (Bernhard Dahm and Vincent J.H. Houben, eds), Passau University, 1999: pp.53-88.

⁷⁵ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.51-5.

⁷⁶ Martin Grossheim, 'The Impact of Reforms on the Agricultural Sector in Vietnam: The Land Issue', in *Vietnamese Villages in Transition* (Bernhard Dahm and Vincent J.H. Houben, eds), Passau University, 1999: p.92.

⁷⁷ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.152.

So, in the effort to stabilize the rural south and consolidate power, the government carried out a 'class I approach' agrarian reform that advocated reform within a system of private property and allowed inequality. In contrast to 'radical land reform' in the North, Ngo Dinh Diem's government advocated land reform that mixed tenurial reform and redistributive reforms.⁷⁸ Ngo Dinh Diem's ordinance No.2 (8 January 1955) stipulated a rent limit of 15-25 percent of the crop and promoted security of tenant rights by introducing five year land rental contracts. His ordinance No.7 (5 February 1955) extended landholding security for new owners of abandoned land and communal land in order to encourage utilization of the land and cultivation. Rent limitation did not apply to communal land.⁷⁹ Later, Ngo Dinh Diem's government released ordinance No.57 (22 October 1956) advocating a partial land redistribution by putting maximum holdings of 100 hectares plus with 15 hectares of ancestral (patrimonial) land (*ruộng hương hỏa*). Any holding in excess of the retention limit was subject to land expropriation (*trúất hữu*). Expropriated land could be purchased directly by tenants or purchased by the state for resale to tenants. Cultivating tenants were given first option to buy the expropriated land. The maximum holding a tenant could buy was 5 hectares. He could pay this in installments and with no interest within 6 years. He did not have the right to sell, mortgage or lend the acquired land within a period of 10 years after the purchase.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ According to Byres, apart from collectivization, there had been two basic types of land reform over the past decades: tenurial reform and redistributive reform. The former dealt with terms of operational holdings and eliminated the particular tenancy form while tenancy remains and there is no change in landholdings. The latter sought to redistribute land from those with large holdings to the land poor and landless (Terence Byres, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing and Interrogating the GKI case for Redistributive Land Reform', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 4 (Jan-April 2004): p.3.

⁷⁹ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in south Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.34-5; Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.141-2.

⁸⁰ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.141-2; Tran Phuong, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Việt Nam* [Land revolution in Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1968: p.252-3.

The first two Ngo Dinh Diem ordinances touched only on land tenancy issues. According Tran Phuong, their main aim was to nullify the Vietminh's previous land reform by returning to previous landlords the land that the revolutionary movement had redistributed to peasants. In this regard, the reform had achieved its goal. By July 1960, 812,473 rental contracts had been signed, fulfilling 80 percent of the target and involving 1,469,200 hectares (out of two millions of tenanted land) or half of Southern Vietnam cultivated land.⁸¹ Landlords often did not abide the rent limit. Rent payments were generally greater than the legal maximum. Jeffrey Race's study in Long An province showed that landlords and tenants often privately agreed on a higher rent than was stipulated by law. Peasants seemed unhappy with the policy because under the contracts, tenants had to pay taxes to both the government and the Vietcong. Moreover, the Communists had previously confiscated and redistributed much land that had been free to them.⁸²

Ngo Dinh Diem government's attempt to carry out modest land redistribution was unsuccessful. According to Tran Phuong, under the law, 2,035 Vietnamese landlords (including 12 in the Central Coast) with holdings of more than 100 hectares and 200 French landlords were supposed to be affected. In other words, 650,000 hectares of landlords were supposed to be expropriated.⁸³ According to Prosterman and Riedinger, however, by the end of 1967 only 275,000 hectares had been redistributed to 130,000 families. 'This represented less than one eighth of South Vietnam's cultivated land, with benefits going to barely one-tenth of those who had been wholly or substantially dependent on farming land as tenants'.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Tran Phuong, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Viet Nam* [Land revolution in Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1968: p.262.

⁸² Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An*, Berkeley, University California Press, 1972: p.17; Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore. The Johns University Press, 1987.

⁸³ Tran Phuong, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Viet Nam* [Land revolution in Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1968: p.265-72.

⁸⁴ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore. The Johns University Press, 1987: p.126.

Opposition to and evasion of landlords who had considerable socio-economic and political power were main factors contributing to the failure of Ngo Dinh Diem's land reform. This failure is similar to that which occurred in South Asia where counter-measures from the landed class and a lack of political will from the government also stymied any land reform attempts.⁸⁵ The tenancy reform in countries where the power of landlords remained virtually intact often proved ineffective.⁸⁶ These 'strongmen' still dominated rural areas and used a variety of sanctions, rewards and symbols to guide tenants' behaviors.⁸⁷ Therefore, they had the ability to hinder the implementation of the government's land reforms.

In conclusion, it is hard to say whether Ngo Dinh Diem's land reform benefited tenants and reduced the power of landlords and the inequality of land distribution in southern Vietnam. Significantly though, it reversed the land redistribution that the Vietminh had previously achieved through land reform. Although Diem's government claimed land reform as one of its top national policies, the reform seemed not to solve the land tenure problems and rural discontent that contributed to the emergence and the operation of the National Liberation Front (NLF). In peasants' minds, the reform was largely parallel with restoration of lapsed landlord rights via rental contracts.⁸⁸

Following the fall of Diem's government (November 1963), and growing insecurity and political instability, governments in the south made no further efforts towards land reform until the accession of Nguyen Van Thieu's government. From 1967-1969, The Thieu government continued land redistribution. By 1969, a further 174,000 hectares of land had been distributed to 100,000 families.⁸⁹ In the Mekong Delta, by early 1970, 298,347 out of

⁸⁵ Ronald Herring, *Land to the Tillers: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983: p.18.

⁸⁶ El Ghonemy, *The political economy of rural poverty: the case for land reform*, London and New York, Routledge, 1990: p.187.

⁸⁷ Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988: p.257.

⁸⁸ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore, The Johns University Press, 1987: p.127.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*: p.134.

1,074,000 hectares which was supposed to be expropriated under ordinance 57 had been transferred. Only 123,000 out of 1.5 million peasant families benefited from this redistribution.⁹⁰ Backed by the US, on 26 March 1970 Thieu's government launched new land reform programs, called 'the Land to the Tiller', in the hope of gaining peasants' support against the growing National Liberation Front (NLF), which was fighting the Saigon government. The content of the reforms consisted of three main points: (1) Retention of land by landlords was limited to no more than 15 hectares in the Southern Region and 5 hectares in the Central Coast on the condition that they had to cultivate the land. For their excess land, landlords received compensation equal to 2.5 times the annual crop. Twenty percent of the compensation was paid immediately and the rest was paid in eight-year bonds that earned interest of 10 percent per year. (2) Farming families were granted land with title, free of charge up to a limit of 3 hectares in the Southern Region and 1 hectare in the Central Coast. Existing tenants had first priority on plots to be distributed. New owners were required to cultivate directly and not sell the land within 15 years. (3) Tenancy was abolished. The law also recognized the ownership rights of farmers on squatted land and land distributed by the NLF.⁹¹

Nguyen Van Thieu's land reform was more extensive than Diem's. It involved 'radically' redistributing land, with compensation for landlords and without charge for tenants.⁹² Thieu's land reform was similar to previous land redistribution programs carried out in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.⁹³

⁹⁰ David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in The Mekong Delta 1930-1975* (vol.1), Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2003: p.445.

⁹¹ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore. The Johns University Press, 1987: p.135-6; Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.145-6; Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Mien Nam Viet Nam* [Land revolution in south Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.51.

⁹² Thieu's land reform mixed what Ronald Herring called with 'ceiling re-distributive model' and 'land to the tiller'. The former seeks to deal with the inequality of holdings by placing a ceiling on agricultural holdings and appropriating excess land to the landless and land-poor. The latter seeks to eliminate tenancy and make

According to Prosterman and Riedinger, in contrast to Diem's reform the procedure and process of Thieu's program moved fast and operated well. By early 1974, a total of nearly one million land titles had been distributed, covering more than a million hectares of land. In other words,

44 percent of total farm area, 75 percent of tenanted farm area, and approximately 75 percent of wholly or partly tenant families had been affected ... the Land-to-the-Tiller distribution was very close to universal in its application to currently cultivated lands in those areas to which South Vietnamese administration extended.⁹⁴

The NLF opposed the program with propaganda but did not physically interfere with the titling process. However, in the NLF strongholds, the process of titling could not be organized.⁹⁵ According to Nancy Wiegiersma, the Land-to-the-Tiller program was more successful in areas with the NLF influence than in areas with Saigon government influence. The reason was that the Land-to-the-Tiller essentially legitimized what the NLF had done in the countryside. Meanwhile in areas with Saigon government influence, the landlords were still strong. So, they often found ways to evade the reform. For example, 'in An Giang and Chau Doc provinces, where Saigon government held strong control because of an alliance with the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect, the land reform ran into great difficulties'.⁹⁶ Soon after the war, according to a study, landless and land-poor in areas within Saigon government's strong control and religious regions were higher than in other areas.⁹⁷

Besides the Saigon government's land reforms, the NLF carried out reform in areas under their control, called 'liberated areas' (*vùng giải phóng*). According to Lam Quang Huyen, in 1959-1960 and 1965-1966, areas under the NLF control gradually expanded,

cultivators the owners of the land they till (Ronald Herring, *Land to the Tiller: Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983: p.8-9).

⁹³ Nancy Wiegiersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988: p.191.

⁹⁴ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore, The Johns University Press, 1987: p.139.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Nancy Wiegiersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988: p.192.

⁹⁷ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất Ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in south Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.177.

reaching up to 7 million people in rural areas. The Communist Party Central Committee for the South (*Trung Ương Cục Miền Nam*) advocated rent reduction, tenure security and partial redistribution for abandoned and communal land rather than radical land redistribution as carried out in the North.⁹⁸ In an attempt to maximize the support of the rural population, the NLF only praised land reform as a means of achieving social equality and never mentioned collectivization.⁹⁹ According to Nancy Wiegiersma, along with land reform, the NLF had programmes for accelerating production in liberated areas such as forming mutual assistance groups, mobilizing people to do irrigation and drainage canals, and expanding education and other social services.¹⁰⁰ Broadly speaking, NLF reforms contributed to the rise of the middle peasants. By 1969, middle peasants consisted of about 51 to 87 percent of the rural population in NLF controlled areas.¹⁰¹

In general, both Nguyen Van Thieu's the Land-to-the-Tiller and the NLF's land reform had turned a large number of southern tenants into small landowners. Apart from land reform, the Saigon government had implemented other agrarian measures designed to boost rural development. For example, in 1973, the government spent a great amount of money (2.2 billion VND) to construct water control sites. Thieu's government also increased the importation of fertilizers, pesticides and farm equipment to sell to farmers. A system of rural banks was set up and ready to provide loans to farmers. The use of new high-yield-rice strains was introduced contributing to an increase in rice production and productivity in the south.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid: p.175.

⁹⁹ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.177.

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Wiegiersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988: p.207.

¹⁰¹ David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in The Mekong Delta 1930-1975* (vol.1), Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2003: p.451.

¹⁰² Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.146.

According to Prosterman and Riedinger, although Thieu's agrarian reform came too late to save the Saigon regime, its economic and political impact was significant. Economically, the reform boosted agricultural production, ended landlord domination, and provided favorable conditions for the emergence of commercial agriculture. Rice productivity in South Vietnam increased from 1.92 tons per hectare in the period 1966-68 to an average of 2.34 tons from 1973-75. Farming diversification was twice greater than previously in the high-implementation villages. Farmers or ex-tenants started to feel 'the beginnings of a better life' and 'an end to the fear of the landlord'. 'The confirmatory titling process, beyond the declared end to ex-landlord rights to evict or collect rents, was vital to the long-term economic and political impact of the reform.' Politically, since land reform, the number of men recruited by the NLF fell drastically.¹⁰³

Saigon's agrarian reforms had a greater effect on the Mekong Delta than on the Central Coast. In the Mekong Delta, by 1975, 70 percent of the rural population were middle peasants who owned 80 percent of the cultivated land, 60 percent of the total farm equipment and 90 percent of the draft animals.¹⁰⁴ Thanks to previous agrarian reforms and less tumultuous conditions, most peasants in the Mekong Delta engaged in commodity production and used modern inputs in their production. Meanwhile, in the Central Coast, the war had caused a large proportion of the rural people to live in enclosed camps and much of their land had been abandoned. Many peasants returned home without capital, draft animals and farm tools. Thus, soon after reunification, the agricultural sector in the Mekong Delta, had reached a higher level of economic development than that of the Central Coast. The social structure and rural economy in the Mekong Delta were more diverse than those in the Central Coast.

¹⁰³ Roy L. Prosterman and Jeffrey M. Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore. The Johns University Press, 1987: p.140.

¹⁰⁴ Ngo Vinh Long, 'Some Aspects of Cooperation in the Mekong Delta', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David Marr and Christine White, eds), Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.169.

These regional disparities contributed to differences in peasants' behavior and the results of post-1975 agrarian policies.

Chapter 2 VIETNAM'S COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERS' REASONS AND OBJECTIVES FOR POST- 1975 AGRARIAN REFORM

Introduction

After the military victory of April 1975, the south was under the control of Hanoi's government in general and the Communist party leaders in particular. Quickly, the party leaders decided to remake the south in line with the socialist north. They called for a 'socialist revolution' or 'socialist transformation and building' in the south, a key component of which was the socialist transformation of agriculture.

This chapter examines the main reasons why the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) decided to carry this out in the south. It also explores the development model that VCP's leaders pursued and its rationale. In particular, it examines the original objectives, content and steps of socialist agricultural transformation.

Reunification and socialist revolution in the south

Reunification and taking socialism to the south

At the 24th plenum of the Third Party Congress in September 1975, Hanoi's leaders began planning how to bring the south into line with the north politically, socially and economically and to make the whole nation socialist.¹ At this meeting, the party released a resolution which outlined the 'on-going tasks of Vietnam's revolution in the new age'; one important task was to 'accomplish national reunification and take the whole nation fast, vigorously and firmly to

¹ The Third Central Committee was the Central Committee formally chosen at the time of the Third Party Congress in 1960.

socialism'.² At the reunification negotiating conference in November 1975, Truong Chinh stressed,

Reunification of the country will be very beneficial economically because the economy of the two regions can be complementary. We can use the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of each region. The aggregated strength of our country will create favorable conditions for the economies of the two regions and reorganize the productive forces and labor of the country.³

On 25 April 1976 the official political reunification of the country came about through a national election to establish a unified National Assembly.⁴ At the first session of this newly unified National Assembly in June 1976, Le Duan, the Secretary General of the party, clarified the on-going tasks of economic reunification for both regions of Vietnam: 'the north must continue speeding up the task of building socialism and improving socialist production relations; the south must proceed simultaneously on the task of socialist transformation and the task of socialist building'.⁵

At the fourth National Party Congress in December 1976, Le Duan elaborated the tasks of socialist transformation in the south.

In the south, transforming the production relations has just started and it will be a heavy and complicated job. [It is necessary] to eliminate completely feudal ownership of land and the remnants of feudal exploitation and to nationalize trading and industrial bases of the comprador capitalists, traitors and fled capitalists. [It is necessary] to carry out the socialist transformation of private capitalism, agriculture, small handicraft industries, small industries and trading. The content of socialist transforming of these elements is to make use of, to limit and above all to transform private capitalism into joint private-public enterprises (*công tư hợp doanh*); [it is important] to collectivize agriculture together with building the district and bringing agriculture to socialist large-scale production. [It is also important] to transform small trading by gradually converting small

² DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24' [Resolution of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.369. (I used the electronic versions of Vietnamese Communist Party's documents (*Van Kien Dang Toan Tap*) downloaded from VCP website: www.vcp.org.vn on 13 February 2006).

³ Truong Chinh was the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly of the DRV at that time. He was the leading representative of the north at the reunification negotiating conference; *Sai Gon Giai Phong newspaper*, 17 November 1975: p.6.

⁴ Pham Van Chien, *Lich Su Kinh Te Viet Nam* [History of The Vietnamese economy], Hanoi, NXB Dai Hoc Quoc Gia, 2003: p.152.

⁵ DCSVN, 'Toan dan doan ket xay dung to quoc Viet Nam thong nhat, xa hoi chu nghia' [Calling for solidarity, reunification and socialism], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.140.

traders into producers, and combine a revolution in production relations with revolution in technology and science and in thoughts and culture revolutions, as well as reorganizing national production and circulation. [It is essential] to take the south to large-scale socialist production so that the economy of both regions [north and south] will be unified.⁶

The aim, according to party leaders, was to transform non-socialist elements into socialist ones, replace private ownership of the main means of production with public ownership (collective and state), and eliminate perceived 'old' and 'backward' institutions so as to build 'new and advanced' ones. Socialist building meant establishing new production relations [socialist production relations], new productive forces, new super-infrastructure and new culture.⁷

Politically, the party leaders' orthodox communist ideology drove the socialist revolution, which was, in essence, a class war that would be 'difficult, complicated and prolonged between the workers and capitalists, between socialism and capitalism'. This war of 'who will triumph over whom' (*ai thắng ai*), the party said, was between the capitalist and socialist model of development.⁸ The aim was to weaken or eliminate perceived opposition classes such as comprador capitalists, landlords, rich peasants and upper middle peasants so that the party could control society, build up and strengthen its new socialist state and facilitate so-called 'collective mastery' (*quyền làm chủ tập thể*) of laboring people.⁹

Economically, the socialist transformation sought to destroy the economic bases of opposition classes to make it easy to build up a new socialist economy. Vo Van Kiet, the

⁶ Le Duan, 'Nhiệm vụ cải tạo quan hệ sản xuất Miền Nam', [On-going task for socialist transformation in the south] in *Dai Doan Ket newspaper*, 17 September 1977: 14.

⁷ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ IV của Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam' [Resolution of the national meeting for the fourth party congress] (20 December 1976), in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004, p.898-965; DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24 của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam, số 247-NQ/TW (29 September 1975)' [Resolution of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.368-406.

⁸ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của đại hội Đảng lần thứ IV của Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam (20 December 1976)' [Resolution of fourth national congress], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*: p.916; DCSVN, 'Báo cáo của Bộ chính trị tại hội nghị Trung ương Đảng lần thứ 24' [Politburo's report at 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975, 2004*: p.383.

⁹ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết đại hội Đảng toàn quốc lần thứ IV của Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam (20 December 1976)' [Resolution of fourth national congress], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*: p.915; Le Duan, 'Báo cáo chính trị tại đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ V của Đảng' [Political report at national meeting] in *Cách Mạng Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa ở Việt Nam*, Hanoi, NXB Sự Thật, 1984: p.35.

secretary of Ho Chi Minh City at that time, stressed that 'the socialist transformation has become the top priority task because the capitalist economy together with its ally, the individual economy, is the obstacle to building socialism'.¹⁰ A concern of the party leaders was not only to transform existing production relations but also for the new economy to perform well. Le Duan stressed, 'socialist transformation is not only to eliminate exploitation [class] and the causes of exploitation but more importantly to build an economy that meets the material and cultural needs of the people'.¹¹ The party leaders also believed that under socialist production relations and socialist ownership, Vietnam would be able to transform its 'backward' economy with small-scale production into an advanced economy with socialist large-scale production.¹² (See more in the next sections.) Only socialism, the party leaders claimed, could modernize Vietnam and end poverty and class exploitation.¹³

The VCP's leaders thought the south would play an important role in ensuring the success of nationwide socialist revolution and industrialization because of its economic potential, especially in agriculture. Pham Hung, an ex-revolutionary southerner, stressed in his report at the first session of the unified National Assembly:

The south together with the whole country becoming socialist is a historical must (*tất yếu lịch sử*)... Compared to the north, the south has more advantage in agriculture, forestry and fishery. It bestows plentiful resources in forests and sea (*rừng vàng biển bạc*), fertile land and a variety of natural resources.¹⁴

¹⁰ Vo Van Kiet, 'Cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa nhiệm vụ hàng đầu của Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh' [Socialist transformation is the top priority of Ho Chi Minh city], in *Dai Doan Ket newspaper*, 9 July 1977: p.16.

¹¹ Le Duan, *Cải Tạo Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa ở Miền Nam* [Socialist transformation in the south], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1980: p.66-67.

¹² DCSVN, 'Nghị Quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24 của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng cộng sản Việt Nam' [Resolution of 24th plenum of Party Executive Committee], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.383.

¹³ Le Duan, 'Toàn dân đoàn kết xây dựng quốc gia Việt Nam thống nhất, xã hội chủ nghĩa' [Solidarity for building a socialist unified country], in *Van Kien Dang, Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.160.

¹⁴ Pham Hung, 'Miền Nam có trách nhiệm lớn đối với sự nghiệp cách mạng xã hội chủ nghĩa chung cả nước' [The south has a big responsibility for country's socialist revolution], in *Sai Gon Giai Phong newspaper*, 1 July 1976; Pham Hung was a former Politburo member and deputy prime minister in the north who was sent to the south in the late 1960s. He was also a leader of representatives of the south who attended a joint Political Reunification Negotiating Conference (*Hội nghị hiệp thương thống nhất đất nước*) in Saigon city in November 1975 (Vo Nhan Tri, 1990: 59).

Moreover, the south inherited the nearly intact infrastructure and economic bases of Saigon's government. Therefore, the south would play a key role in ensuring the food needs of the people and providing the raw materials for industry and goods for export.¹⁵

Pham Hung also believed that the south would succeed in building socialism thanks to the following favorable conditions. First, Vietnam was now a peaceful, unified and independent country. Second, its party leaders had great experience in leading previous wars and building socialism in the north. Third, the south had the advantages of labor, land, natural resources and infrastructure which guaranteed a fast capital accumulation necessary for fast socialist industrialization. Finally, the north and socialist countries elsewhere were ready and willing to help and support the south. Therefore, 'it is not necessary for the south to go step by step from rehabilitation to transformation and to development stage [socialist stage]'; the south could bypass some of these stages and go straight to socialism.¹⁶

Building a socialist state-centered planned economy in southern Vietnam

The resolution of the Fourth Party Congress in December 1976 laid out the economic guidelines for Vietnam, which stressed:

stepping up socialist industrialization, building up socialist technical and material bases, bringing Vietnam's economy of small-scale production to a socialist large-scale production one and giving priority to develop heavy industry rationally on the basis of developing agriculture and light industry ... to make Vietnam become a socialist country of modern agro-industrial economy, advanced technology, science and culture, strong defense, civilization and happiness.¹⁷

¹⁵ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết đại hội lần thứ 24' [Resolution of 24th plenum], *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1976*: 359; Pham Hung, 'Mien Nam co trach nhiem lon doi voi su nghiep cach mang xa hoi chu nghia chung ca nuoc' [The south has a big responsibility for country's socialist revolution], in *Sai Gon Giai Phong newspaper*, 1 July 1976.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết đại hội đại biểu lần thứ IV của Đảng cộng sản Việt Nam' [Resolution of fourth national representative meeting], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.916.

This statement was also repeated in the next National Party Congress in March 1982.¹⁸ There were three main reasons for these guidelines:

First, driven by Marxist-Leninist ideology, the party leaders stressed that the main task of 'proletariat dictatorship state' was to construct a socialist economy in which public ownership of the means of production was considered as an economic foundation of socialism and socialist industrialization was considered a tool to modernize the whole economy.¹⁹

Second, at a low starting-point of development and driven by a high economic ambition, the party leaders believed that Vietnam could modernize and build an independent economy like other socialist countries by adopting a socialist planned and inward-looking economic model. The VCP's leaders reasoned that through the socialist tools of 'planning' and 'proletariat dictatorship state', Vietnam could successfully build up a socialist large-scale production and 'rational' agro-industrial structured economy whose two giant legs (agriculture and heavy industry) would help move the economy forward in balanced way. Agriculture was considered a base or a source of capital to finance industrial development (especially heavy industry) through means of surplus extraction. Agriculture was also considered a large market for industrial goods. On the other hand, the industry could modernize agriculture by providing with up-to-date farming machines and tools and agricultural inputs.²⁰

¹⁸ Le Duan, 'Bao cao chinh tri tai dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu V cua Dang' [Political report at fourth national representative meeting], in *Cach Mang Xa Hoi Chu Nghia o Viet Nam*, Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.36.

¹⁹ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.7.

²⁰ In a planned economy, the plan would replace the role of markets in directing production and distribution and synchronizing agriculture and industry; the socialist trading system would replace networks of existing markets all over regions of the country. The party argued that our industry could only develop on the basis that agriculture could not only provide inputs, labour but also produce used for export in exchange for modern machines and equipment. In return, the industry served agriculture by producing agricultural inputs, farm equipment, and machines in order to mechanize (*co gioi hoa*) agriculture in land preparation, growing, harvesting, transforming, serving and processing (see DCSVN, 'Phuong huong nhiem vu va muc tieu chu yeu cua ke hoach 5 nam: 1976-1980 (16 December 1976)' [Socio-economic plan of five year 1976-1980], in *Van*

Finally, the party revealed that despite having been highly dependent on foreign countries, the south had reached a certain level of capitalist development.²¹ Moreover, the south had a high potential for agricultural development and light industry. Therefore, the party leaders believed that under the socialist planned economy, Vietnam could use the potential of the south's agriculture and light industry and, together with the north, satisfy not only the country's food and foodstuff needs and produce exports but also establish heavy industries.²² In other words, party leaders strongly believed that economic complementarities between the enormous agricultural and light industrial potential of the south and mineral resources and heavy industry capacity of the north would promote rapid economic growth and fast socialist industrialization in the whole country.²³

Post-1975 agrarian reform or socialist transformation and building of agriculture in the south

According to Christine White, 'post-war economic problems and the reunification of Vietnam after so many years of war had constituted an unfavorable context for an open, innovative, and creative approach to experimentation with alternative routes to socialism'.²⁴ In order to build socialism in the rural south, like what existed in the north, the post-1975 government

Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37: p.608-697; Hong Long, 'Quan he cong nong nghiep trong chan duong hien nay o nuoc ta' [Industrial-agricultural relations in the present stage of Vietnam], in *Ve quan he cong-nong nghiep trong chan duong hien nay*, Hanoi, NXB Vien Mac Le-Nin Thong Tin Ly Luan, 1983: p.25.

²¹ DCSVN, 'Bao cao cua Bo chinh tri tai hoi nghi lan thu 24 Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang' [Politburo's report at 24th plenum of Party Executive Committee], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.382, 383.

²² Regarding agriculture, the south's agriculture was assessed as having much larger cultivated area than that of the north; millions of hectares of land were fertile and relatively plain; the weather was favorable to cultivation. For industry, light and food industry (including small industry and handicrafts) has been able to produce almost necessary goods. The party leaders revealed that because of relations with developed capitalist countries, in general, the goods are quite high in quality; some met the international standards but had low cost for export. Besides, the south's infrastructure such as: 'ports, roads, airports, stores and housing had been well developed' (Ibid.).

²³ Beresford, 'Issues in economic unification overcoming the legacy of separation', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David G. Marr and Christine P. White, eds), Ithaca, NY, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.97.

²⁴ Christine White, 'Alternative Approaches to the Socialist Transformation of agriculture in Post-war Vietnam', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David Marr & Christine White, eds), Ithaca, NY, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.134-135.

called for large-scale socialist production in agriculture. This had two main components: land redistribution and collectivization.

Post-1975 land reform in the south

Objectives of the post-1975 land reform

According to Elias Tuma, land reform is often closely associated with revolution and regime change. A new regime tends to redistribute land both to win the support of the peasantry and to weaken its opponents.²⁵ In Vietnam's case, post-1975 land reform in the south meant more because it embraced not only those political objectives but also economic and social objectives.

Politically, land reform in the south was aimed at eliminating the social bases of perceived opponents such as landlords, rural capitalists and rich peasants who would pose obstacle for building socialism in rural areas. In addition, it was aimed at fulfilling the promise of 'land to the tillers' that the party used to attract peasants' support during the war. The party called this 'completing the remaining task of land revolution in the south' (*hoàn thành nhiệm vụ cách mạng ruộng đất ở Miền Nam*).²⁶ In order to fulfill this objective, the party issued resolution No.247-NQ/TW (29 September 1975), resolution No.254-NQ/TW (15 July 1976) and directive No.235-CT/TW (20 September 1976), and other rules and regulations. These called for 'eliminating the vestiges of colonist and feudal exploitation on land', 'nationalizing farms and the land of foreign capitalists', 'expropriating farms, the lands of comprador capitalists, and treachery landlords and abroad-fled landlords' and persuading

²⁵ Elias Tuma, *Twenty-six Centuries of Agrarian Reforms*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965, p.233

²⁶ The slogan the party used at the time of the Democrat National Revolution was 'national independence and land to the tillers' (see DCSVN, 'Đề cương kết luận của đồng chí Lê Duẩn tại hội nghị lần II (4 July 1977)' [Le Duẩn's final statements at second meeting] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*: Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: 254; Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Mien Nam* [Revolution on land in the south], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.174.

normal landlords to offer their land.²⁷ In addition, the surplus land of small rural capitalists and rich peasants (*phú nông*) and the tenanted land were subject to confiscation and land readjustment.²⁸ The party argued,

Eliminating exploitation and carrying out land readjustment is in fact the first class struggle against rural capitalists, separating the boundary between the working class and the exploitation class and initiating the class warfare between two roads [of development: capitalism and socialism] in the countryside.²⁹

Economic and social aims of land reform were to restore and increase food production and facilitate solidarity among peasants. The party's instruction No.235 (dated 20 July 1976) stated,

Resolving the land problem in the south is aimed at not only eliminating the vestiges of feudal and colonist exploitation and making the landless and the land-short have means of production to make a living but also facilitating peasant solidarity and production ... [Therefore,] in areas where the land problem is basically resolved, [we] can just carry out land readjustment in some necessary cases, not undo and do it again. In areas with vestiges of feudal and colonist exploitation, [we] will attempt to address that fast, definitely by 1976. Note that when sharing land to peasants, [we] must avoid dividing land into small parcels that are unfavorable for production.³⁰

In addition, like other socialist countries, the purpose of land reform in the south was preparation for collectivization.

²⁷ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24' [Resolution of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.368-406; DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của bộ chính trị số 254-NQ/TW (15 July 1976) về những công tác trước mắt ở Miền Nam' [Politburo's resolution No.254 on going tasks for the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004, p.200-225; DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị 235-CT/TW: về việc thực hiện nghị quyết của bộ chính trị về vấn đề ruộng đất ở Miền Nam (20 September 1976)' [Directive No.235 on the implementation of Politburo's land resolution in the south]: p.2 (provided by a former staff of the Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south).

²⁸ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị số 254-NQ/TW về những công tác trước mắt ở Miền Nam' [Politburo's resolution No.254 on going tasks for the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.200.

²⁹ Hong Giao, *Dua Nong Nghiep Mot Buoc Len San Xuat Lon Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Taking agriculture one step towards socialist large-scale production], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.56.

³⁰ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị 235-CT/TW: Về việc thực hiện nghị quyết của bộ chính trị về vấn đề ruộng đất ở Miền Nam, (20 September 1976)' [Directive No.235 on the implementation of Politburo's land resolution for the south]: p.2.

The land reform approach

Land reform in the south was a 'class II' variety, using Elias Tuma's typology, which often took place in socialist countries. This reform was aimed at eliminating private tenure and promoting public tenure.³¹ However, instead of using considerable violence, as in the north in 1953-57 (and as occurred in China in the 1950s), Vietnam's government took a more moderate approach in the south.³²

One reason why party leaders took a moderate approach was that 'the landlord class has already been largely eliminated ... the majority of land now belonged to peasants'.³³ By 1975-1976, thanks to previous land reforms during the 1950s - early 1970s, most peasant households who previously had little or no land, had fields to farm. Most farming households were middle peasants (*trung nông*).³⁴ According to the government's survey (July 1978), in the Mekong Delta rich peasants and rural capitalists accounted for only 3.1 percent of total rural households and occupied only 11.17 percent of cultivated areas; per capita land for these households was about 11,855 square meters (about more than one hectare).³⁵ So, although party leaders knew that land and machinery were not distributed equally, especially in the Mekong Delta, the tenancy problem in the south had already been largely eliminated and certainly was not as serious as it had been in the north during the 1950s.³⁶ A government report said that the tenancy was a problem in only a few rural areas which had previously

³¹ Tuma, Elias, *Twenty-Six Centuries of Agrarian Reform*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965: p.223, 227.

³² Peter Nolan, 'Collectivization in China: Some comparisons with the USSR', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 3, January 1976: p.203; the content and the emphasis of post-1975 land reform varied over time. From 1975 to 1978 the authorities emphasized eliminating exploitation rather than land redistribution. However, when collectivization in the Mekong Delta failed to achieve its expected goal, the party attributed the failure to the incompleteness of land reform. So land redistribution (*dieu chinh ruong dat*) was given prominence in the early 1980s which touched not only upper-middle peasants but also middle peasants.

³³ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24' [Resolution of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.382.

³⁴ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat* [Revolution on land], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.189.

³⁵ BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông thôn Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the Southern Region], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1984: p.4.

³⁶ Le Duan, *Cai Tao Xa Hoi Chu Nghia o Mien Nam* [Socialist transformation in the south], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1979: p.74.

been under the prolonged control of Saigon's government; the tenanted land accounted for only about one percent of total agricultural land, and the land rent was about 20 *gia* of paddy per hectare'.³⁷

Second, the party wanted land reform to resolve post-war economic problems. Given that after reunification both China and the U.S. cut their food aid to Vietnam, the party had to make food security and self-sufficiency a top priority. A radical land reform program could cause a great fall in food production. So, besides fulfilling the political objectives of expropriating and confiscating the land of perceived opponents, the party tried to minimize the negative economic effect of the reform by advocating a 'soft' approach. This meant 'negotiating with each other', 'helping and unifying each other', 'being affectionate and rational' (*có tình có lý*) and 'mainly allowing cultivators to continually farm on parts of their current land' (*giữ nguyên canh là chính*).³⁸ Party leaders argued that this approach could avoid disrupting agricultural production, strengthen peasants' solidarity and make collectivization easier.³⁹

Finally, the party had learned a costly lesson from radical land reform in the north and did not want to repeat it in the south.⁴⁰ Party leaders realized that unlike the big-landlord-land tenure system in Vietnam in 1940s, small landowners formed the basis of the land tenure system in the south; several social groups comprised the rural population: rural capitalists, rich peasants, upper-middle peasants, middle peasants, land-short and landless and other non-

³⁷ BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông thôn Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the Southern Region], TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 1984: p.3. *Gia* is often used to measure paddy weights in the Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*). It is equal to 20 kilograms; 20 *gia* is equal to 400 kilograms.

³⁸ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết Bộ chính trị, số 254-NQ/TW (15 July 1976) về những công tác trước mắt ở Miền Nam' [Politburo's resolution No.254], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.214-216.

³⁹ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 235-CT/TW (20 September 1976) Về việc thực hiện nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị về vấn đề ruộng đất ở Miền Nam' [Secretariat's directive No.235 on the implementation of Politburo's land resolution in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.279-280.

⁴⁰ I hardly found any evidence of this in official documents. In interviews, however, many local cadres, including former cadres of the Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south said these things to me (Fieldwork in Vietnam May-December 2005).

farming people. Party leaders classified rural capitalists, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants as 'exploiting' class and considered wage labor as a capitalist form of exploitation. However, in many cases, the 'perceived exploited' considered wage labor as a voluntary exchange between them and their employers rather than a form of exploitation. Therefore, the concept of exploitation became vague and did not make much sense to the perceived exploited compared to previous grievance tenants in the north in 1950s. New authorities realized that without existence of severe grievances, they were not able to mobilize the perceived exploited and local cadres to carry out a radical land reform as they did in the north in 1950s.

Socialist transformation of agriculture for collectivization

According to party leaders, the rural south had to undergo: 'revolution in production relations, in technology and science, and in thought and culture', as the north did earlier.⁴¹ The party's revolution in production relations in Vietnam is largely parallel to what Tuma calls land tenure reform and its revolution in science and technology is comparable to Tuma's land operation reform.⁴² 'Revolution in thought and culture' is a feature of Vietnam's agrarian reform in the north (the 1950s-1960s) as well as in the south (post-1975) that does not conform to Tuma's definition of agrarian reform.

Because the post-1975 agrarian reform was a key component of the socialist revolution, it is difficult to separate agrarian reform from other economic and social reforms. In order to understand the rationale, justifications or original objectives of post-1975 socialist transformation of agriculture in the south, it is necessary to examine them in the whole context of the socialist revolution.

⁴¹ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao Va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.232.

⁴² Elias Tuma, *Twenty-six Centuries of Agrarian Reforms*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965: p.221.

According to party accounts (such as the second plenum resolution of the fourth Communist Party Congress, the Politburo's instructions No.15-CT/TW [4 Aug 1977] and the Secretariat's Instruction No.43-CT/TW [14 April 1978]), the objectives of socialist transformation of agriculture included 'taking agriculture into socialist large-scale production'; 'eliminating exploitation, causes of the exploitation, backwardness and poverty'; 'facilitating the collective mastery of the laboring people and developing agricultural production'; 'building up technical bases and bringing advanced science and techniques into production to increase productivity'; 'improving step by step living standards of the peasants and constructing a new way of life in rural areas'; 'contributing to the reorganization of productive forces at national level'; and 'contributing to meeting the essential requirements of food and food stuff, of industrial inputs and of export and making agriculture become favorable base for socialist industrialization'. The following sections will pinpoint in detail each of these objectives and justifications.⁴³

From small to large-scale and from spontaneous to planned production: exploiting the potential of the agriculture

The resolution of the Fourth National Party Congress pointed out the role of Vietnam's agriculture in a new stage: (1) producing sufficient foodstuffs for the consumption needs of the whole society and food store; (2) supplying raw materials for industrialization; and (3) producing for export.⁴⁴ Driven by a high ambition, the party leaders believed that Vietnam's agriculture could fulfill these requirements by developing an 'entire agriculture' (*nông nghiệp*

⁴³ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ hai của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng (khóa IV) số 03-NQ/TW (19 August 1977)' [Second plenum's resolution No.03], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.298; DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 15-CT/TW về việc làm thí điểm cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp ở Miền Nam (4 August 1977)' [Secretariat's directive No.15 on experimenting with socialist agricultural transformation in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, pp.741-747; DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Bộ chính trị, số 43-CT/TW: về việc nam vùng và đẩy mạnh công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp ở Miền Nam (14 April 1978)' [Politburo's directive No.43 on intensifying agricultural transformation in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 39, 1978*, pp.183-191.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

toàn diện) and a socialist large-scale production of agriculture.⁴⁵ The party believed that collectivization and collective ownership made it easy to zone and plan production at regional and national levels. It was also easy to construct large concentrated and specialized agricultural production areas. Under the large-scale production, it was possible for agriculture to adopt new and modern techniques and science to push up intensive farming (*thâm canh*), increase the number of crops per year (*tăng vụ*), expand cultivated areas (*mở rộng diện tích*), expand irrigation (*thuỷ lợi hoá*), increase mechanization (*cơ giới hoá*) and adopt new seeds (*giống mới*).⁴⁶ The combination of all these factors could make Vietnam's agriculture modern and productive which guaranteed producing sufficient food for whole society and surplus for industrialization.

According to party leaders, the south would play an important role in fulfilling these new tasks of agriculture because it possessed an abundance of fertile land, farm equipment and skilled labor, especially in the Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*).⁴⁷ The south, according to one study, had about 3.2 million hectares of cultivated land compared to 2 million hectares in the north. Moreover, the south had the potential to extend to 10 million hectares of agricultural land compared to 4 million hectares in the north. Of this, the Mekong Delta was able to extend 1,032,000 additional hectares of agricultural land, the Southeastern Region, 779,000, the Central Highlands, 1,366,000 and the Zone V of the Central Coast, 652,000.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ 'Entire agriculture' was perceived as agriculture that had a rational combination of cultivating, husbandry, fishing and forestry, a mixture of irrigating, mechanizing and using chemicals, and an amalgamation of development in lowland, highland and mountainous areas (Le Duan, 'Toàn dân đoàn kết xây dựng quốc gia Việt Nam thống nhất xã hội chủ nghĩa' [Solidarity for building a socialist and unified Vietnam], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1977*, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.190).

⁴⁶ DCSVN, 'Nghị Quyết của đại hội Đảng toàn quốc lần thứ IV' [Resolution of Fourth Party Congress], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.930-932.

⁴⁷ A vice-chairman of the central department of agricultural transformation, Phan Van Dang, said rhetorically that the Southern Region was the granary of granaries, the milk source of milk sources in the country (see Phan Van Dang, 'Tập đoàn đi lên hợp tác xã nông nghiệp' [Experiment with agricultural collectives], in *Con Đường Lam An Tập Thể Của Nông Dân* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB TP.Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.110).

⁴⁸ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Những Vấn Đề Công Tác Cải Tạo Và Xây Dựng Nông Nghiệp ở Các Tỉnh Phía Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nông Nghiệp, 1980: p.182.

Moreover, party leaders said that the south had not yet utilized fully its agricultural potential. A large proportion of the land still had only one crop a year. Given that agricultural land in the south was more fertile compared to that of the north, party leaders believed that it could produce much more.⁴⁹

The agricultural labor force of the south was, said one study, diverse and highly qualified because the south's peasants had experience of modern farming and know-how about agricultural machines, new seeds and fertilizers.⁵⁰ The south also possessed most farm equipment in the whole country. For example, it had more than 8,000 tractors with more than 30 Horse Power (HP) engines, more than 16,000 small and medium tractors (and some other big machines which the north did not have). Besides that, machinery-repairing services had been quite developed in many locations of the south.⁵¹

Despite valuing highly the south's agricultural potential, party leaders strongly criticized 'individual farming', 'fragmented land holding', 'unequal development' and the influence of capitalism.⁵² They argued, 'the fragmentation of agricultural production results from small production, individualized farming aimed at fulfilling subsistence and narrow demands of local markets'.⁵³ Individual farming was 'spontaneous, unplanned' (*tự phát, tùy tiện*), and 'fragmented' (*manh mún*). It had 'a low level of specialization and cooperation',

⁴⁹ Ibid: p.166-167; in accessing the agricultural potential of the south, To Huu, a vice-chairman of the Central Committee for agricultural transformation also recognized that favourable natural conditions in the south, especially the Southern Region had great potential for the adoption of intensive farming, increasing the number of crops per year, and extending agricultural areas (see To Huu, 'Phat dong phong trao quan chung' [Calling for masses' campaign], in *Khan Truong va Tich Cuc Day Manh Phong Trao Hop Tac Hoa Nong Nghiep o Mien Nam* [Be urgent and positive to intensify collectivization in the south] (Vo Chi Cong at al, eds), Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1979: p.39.)

⁵⁰ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.168; Nguyen Tran Trong also gave the example of the labor skills of southern peasants that in the Dong Vinh cooperative, Phu Vinh commune, Huong Phu district, Binh Tri Thien province, of 1,500 labourers 22 people were excellent machine repairers, 50 were competent machine operators. In the Mekong Delta the situation was much better.

⁵¹ Ibid: p.168.

⁵² Ibid: p.202.

⁵³ Hong Giao, *Dua Nong Nghiep Len Mot Buoc Lon Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Taking agriculture one step towards socialist large-scale production], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.23.

and was 'technically backward'.⁵⁴ Moreover, the individual farming system, party leaders believed, had 'backward' production relations that hindered adoption of modern techniques and better use of land.⁵⁵

In general, according to the party, the south had high agricultural potential that had not been fully exploited. So, the task was to transform the old agriculture into a new agriculture of 'planned, concentrated and large-scale production', 'specialization' (*chuyên môn hoá*), 'cooperativization' (*hợp tác hoá*), 'inter-linkages' (*liên hiệp hoá*), and collectivization.⁵⁶

By relying on the political collective mastery of laboring people, said the party's top leader Le Duan in 1976, Vietnam could 'set up immediately the collective ownership of economy: [through] development of state farms and collectivization without having great industry'.⁵⁷ Party leaders assumed that the state-farms were more economically efficient than collective farms and collective farms were much more efficient than individual farms.⁵⁸

With high expectations of utilizing the south's agricultural potential, party leaders set ambitious targets for agriculture for the five-year plan of 1976-1980. They planned that within five years, Vietnam would complete the basic transformation of agriculture toward the socialist large-scale production. By 1980 Vietnam's agriculture was to reach 21 million tons of paddy-equivalent foodstuffs, 16.5 million pigs, 9,800,000 hectares of industrial crops and fruits, to reclaim one million hectares of land and to rehabilitate 500,000 hectares of land, to

⁵⁴ Tran Van Doan, *Nhu The Nao La Nong Nghiep Mot Buoc Len San Xuat Lon Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [What is one step of agriculture towards socialist large-scale production], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1986: p.5.

⁵⁵ Vo Van Kiet, *Thuc Hien Dong Bo Ba Cuoc Cach Mang o Nong Thon* [Simultaneous execution of three revolutions in rural areas], NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1985: p.47,128; Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.9

⁵⁶ Ibid: p.9; To Huu, 'Phat dong phong trao quan chung' [Calling for the masses' campaign], in *Khan Truong va Tich Cuc Day Manh Phong Trao Hop Tac Hoa o Mien Nam* (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds) [Be urgent and positive to intensify collectivization in the south], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1979: p.42.

⁵⁷ DCSVN, 'Phat bieu cua dong chi Le Duan tai hoi nghi lan thu 25 cua Trung uong' [Le Duan's speech at 25th plenum], in *Van Kien Dai Hoi Dang: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.342.

⁵⁸ DCSVN, 'Bao cao chinh tri cua Ban chap hanh Trung uong tai hoi nghi lan thu 24' [Political report of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.373.

bring 1.8 million people to New Economic Zone, and to prepare 50 percent of cultivated land by machines.⁵⁹ (Many of these targets had not been fulfilled until the party decided to return to small production (household farming) in late 1980s-see chapters 4, 6).

Eliminating exploitation, causes of exploitation, poverty and backwardness

In the view of the party leaders, land redistribution would provisionally eliminate exploitation in farming but would not eliminate the causes of exploitation. As was the case in the north, the party believed, ‘without collectivization a few successful farming households would end up owning much of land, thus undermining the ideal of social and economic equality’.⁶⁰ A party scientist even argued, ‘eliminating the feudal land tenure system and implementing the slogan “land to the tillers” were in fact beneficial to the development of capitalism in rural areas’.⁶¹ Rural households would soon become unequal. Replacing private ownership with collective ownership would guarantee the elimination of exploitation and its causes as well as eliminate poverty and backwardness.⁶² At the second plenum of the Fourth Party Congress (from 6 to 16 December 1977), in assessing the achievements and the shortcomings of the past 20-year-collectivization in the north, Le Duan minimized the failure of the north’s ability to increase productivity and the living-standards of peasants. Instead, he tended to praise the achievements. Collectivization in the north, he said, had eliminated the cause of class conflicts in the rural areas, facilitated solidarity among different rural groups (such as religious people and non-religious people, Kinh people and ethnic minorities) and protected the livelihood of people, especially the old, infants, the invalid and war-martyr families (*gia*

⁵⁹ DCSVN, ‘Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ hai của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng (khoá IV), số 03-NQ/TW (19 August 1977)’ [Resolution of second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p. 306-7.

⁶⁰ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.10.

⁶¹ Nguyen Huy, *May Van De Ly Luan Va Thuc Tien Cua Cach Mang Quan He San Trong Nong Nghiep Nuoc Ta* [Theories and practices of revolution in the production relations of our country’s agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.121.

⁶² DCSVN, ‘Nghị quyết lần thứ II: Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng (khoá IV) ra nghị quyết’ [Resolution of second plenum], in *Dai Doan Ket newspaper*, 3 September 1977: p.11.

đình thương binh liệt sĩ). Second, it had improved irrigation, facilitated new farming techniques, and increased the number of crops per year. All these factors led to 'an increase in productivity and food production in the north despite still facing stressful food shortage in the time of calamity'. Third, it changed the face of rural society; thanks to it, cultural, education, healthcare and material conditions in rural areas had improved gradually. Finally, it played an essential role in contributing to defeating the American invasion to save the country. Therefore, collectivization in the south could have similar achievements.⁶³

Backing socialist industrialization and ensuring food security

In some socialist countries, such as Russia and China, leaders considered agriculture a source of financial surpluses for carrying out industrialization. Chinese leaders 'shared with Stalin the essential instrument vision of collectivization as the key to state-centered accumulation and the primacy of heavy industrial growth'.⁶⁴ Post-1975 agrarian reform in Vietnam was also aimed at supporting industrialization as well as ensuring food for the whole society. The party set the dual objective of five-year planning (1976-1980): 'urgently constructing socialist technical and material base and improving cultural and material living standards of the people'.⁶⁵

During the war both the north and the south had relied heavily on foreign aid including food.⁶⁶ After reunification, aid was gradually cut off or significantly reduced. Said one party document, 'during the war, we achieved food balance thanks to imported food. After the war, imported food no longer exists'.⁶⁷ So ensuring food for the whole society

⁶³ DCSVN, 'Đề cương kết luận của đồng chí Lê Duẩn tại hội nghị lần thứ II' [Le Duẩn's final statements at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*: p.254-5

⁶⁴ Mark Selden, 'Pathways from collectivization', in *Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center*, 4 (1994): p.425.

⁶⁵ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của đại hội đại biểu lần thứ IV' [Resolution of fourth national representative meeting], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.917.

⁶⁶ Võ Nhân Trí, *Vietnam's Economic Policy since 1975*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990: p.58.

⁶⁷ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 02-CT/TW: Về những việc trước mắt để giải quyết nạn đói lương thực (21 tháng 1 năm 1977) [Secretariat's directive No.02 on the ongoing tasks to deal with food shortages]' in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, 2005: p.2.

became a top concern of the party. With collectivization, party leaders believed, Vietnam could deal with food shortage. Moreover, collectivization would create conditions in which 'every laborer has a job, every field is properly used and every industry can develop'.⁶⁸

'Facilitating the collective mastery of laboring people': controlling the rural society and consolidating power

In many developing countries, states try to exercise the ultimate control of the society within its bounds. Such states want to penetrate and control society and direct resources in predetermined way.⁶⁹ Post-1975 Vietnam's state leaders also had great ambitions to remake the south. Their primary concern was to control the south politically, economically and socially in order to consolidate its power and reorganize production according to the socialist principles. Party leaders often called for 'holding firmly proletariat dictatorship' in order to control and manage all aspects of society and the economy, controlling and monitoring people's political, economic and cultural and social activities.⁷⁰ Socialist transformation included eliminating political, social and economic bases of any perceived opposition classes. Vo Van Kiet pointed out, 'through economic transformation the state consolidates and strengthens the proletariat dictatorship and collective mastery of laboring people, roots out completely counter-revolutionary forces, completes the economic unification of the country and facilitates the entire strength of socialist state'.⁷¹

One of the objectives of socialist transformation of agriculture was to bind peasants with the party-state in order to isolate perceived opposition groups and gain social control of

⁶⁸ Hong Giao, *Dua Nong Nghiep Mot Buoc Lon Len San Xuat Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Taking agriculture one step towards socialist large-scale production], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.26-7.

⁶⁹ Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988: p.81.

⁷⁰ DCSVN, 'Bao cao tong ket cong tac xay dung Dang va sua doi dieu le Dang (17 December 1976)' [Report on building party organization and changing party regulations], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.749, 789; DCSVN, 'Bao cao chinh tri cua Ban chap hanh Truong uong Dang tai dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu IV, do dong chi Le Duan trinh bay' [Political report of Party Executive Committee at fourth national representative meeting] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.501.

⁷¹ Vo Van Kiet, *Thuc Hien Dong Bo Ba Cuoc Cach Mang o Nong Thon Ho Chinh Minh* [Simultaneous execution of three revolutions in rural areas], NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh 1985: p.40.

the countryside. Moreover, the party leaders believed that controlling peasants and their produce would help to control non-food producing groups and their goods in the cities. Le Duan argued, 'if the state controls staple food, it can control industrial goods ... controlling staple food means controlling everyone's essential goods which enables control of the products of large industries, small industries and handicraft producers'.⁷² Therefore, controlling the countryside and food production had become important to the party in the post-reunification period. At the Fourth Party Congress in December 1976, Premier Pham Van Dong stressed, 'in agriculture, be quick to cut off the relationship between the capitalists and the peasants, organize immediately the relationship between the state and the peasants, using this relationship to help peasants develop production and request them to sell food to the state'.⁷³

Party leaders attached great importance to controlling rural areas in times of war as well as post-war times. In war time, within a competitive environment and an attempt to win the war the party had to adopt policies favoring peasants' interests, which Brantly Womack called 'mass-regarding in policy'.⁷⁴ In other words, the main concern of the party during war time was to secure the support of the peasants. Post-reunification changed the context in terms of not only power relations between the party and the peasants (the party-mass relations of 'fish and water' in the past were replaced by ruler-subordinate ones) but also the main concern of the party. Although the party still paid attention to peasants' interest, party ideology favors other matters too, such as controlling land, labor, production and grains to strengthen socialist building projects.

⁷² Le Duan, *Cai Tao Xa Hoi Chu Nghia o Mien Nam* [Socialist transformation in the south] Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1980: p.14.

⁷³ DCSVN, 'Phuong huong nhiem vu va muc tieu chu yeu cua ke hoach 5 nam 1976-1980: Bao cao cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang tai dai hoi dai bieu lan thu IV do dong chi Pham Van Dong trinh bay (16 December 1976)' [Socio-economic plan of five years 1976-1980] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*: Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.655.

⁷⁴ Brantly Womack, 'The Party and the People: Revolutionary and post-revolutionary politics in China and Vietnam', in *World Politics*, Vol.39, No.4, July 1987: p.480.

Another objective of the socialist transformation of agriculture was to select and purify local cadres in order to consolidate the power of the party-state in the rural south. During the war many, southern party cells had been destroyed. Others, especially in the 'religious areas' of the Mekong Delta, hardly functioned, considered 'thin' (*cơ sở đảng mỏng*) or 'blank' '*cơ sở đảng trắng*'.⁷⁵ Thus, a party Secretariat's instruction in September 1976 called for 'consolidating party's bases and recruiting new members in the south'.⁷⁶ Policy implementation itself was part of that effort. The 'campaign to implement concrete tasks of revolution at local levels', said one 1976 pronouncement, 'will build and consolidate political organizations, test cadres and purify the bad elements' within state and party organizations'.⁷⁷

The content and steps of the socialist transformation of agriculture

The overall aim of the 'three revolutions' in the rural south referred earlier was to create 'a regime of the socialist collective ownership, socialist large-scale production, and a new culture with new people'.⁷⁸ The following sections describe these three revolutions and the steps toward socialist agricultural production.

'Revolution in production relations': land tenure and production organization reforms

Party leaders proceeded to create socialist large-scale agricultural production into stages

Stage 1:

Post-war rehabilitation and land reform:

⁷⁵ Nguyen Thanh Tho, 'Ra suc tien hanh hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Implementing collectivization], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.28.

⁷⁶ DCSVN, 'Chi thi cua Ban bi thu, so 273-CT/TW: Ve viec cung co to chuc co so Dang va ket nap Dang vien moi o Mien Nam (24 September 1976)' [Secretariat's directive No.273 on consolidating party organization in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*: Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.285.

⁷⁷ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị, số 254-NQ/TW : Về những công tác trước mắt ở Miền Nam (15 July 1976)' [Politburo's resolution No.254 on on-going tasks in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.223-4.

⁷⁸ DCSVN, 'Báo cáo chỉ thị của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng tại đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ IV do đồng chí Lê Duẩn trình bày (14 December 1976)' [Political report of fourth national representative meeting], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004, pp.454-608.

In the south at the war's end, according to party's documents, 560,000 hectares of agricultural land had been abandoned; 4 million of peasants were put in urban camps, which increased urban population from 3 million in 1967 to 7 million in 1975; and 3 million people were unemployed, roughly 30 percent of the labor force⁷⁹ So, restoring agricultural production and dealing with unemployment were major concerns for the new rulers.

Post-war rehabilitation quickly merged with building socialism. Soon after reunification, along with restoring abandoned land, reclaiming new land, relocating people in cities to rural areas and reviving agricultural production was land reform.⁸⁰

In contrast to the land reforms of Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu's governments in the 1950s and early 1970s, which were consistent with capitalist development and promoted private ownership, the post-1975 land reform in the south was part of the process toward creating collective farming. Beneficiaries had the right to use but not own the land. Distributed land was inalienable. 'The state', said one party resolution 'does not provide a certificate of land ownership to the beneficiaries'.⁸¹ The party instructed that government officials

have to make all people understand that the task and privilege of laboring people was continually to make revolution and take small-scale production to socialist large-scale production. People must understand that sharing land was to ensure all families would have the means of making a living, not hold any long lasting meaning.⁸²

⁷⁹ According to Quang Truong (1987), the number of unemployed was one and a half million people, accounting for 20 percent of the labor force, which consisted of war-refugees, ex-government soldiers and officials (Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural development in Vietnam: A north/South study [1955-19885]*, Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.160).

⁸⁰ In particular, party leaders urged the restoration of all abandoned land in the south and the reclaiming of three million hectares of new land in the Central Highlands and the Mekong Delta in the south and in Nghe An in the north. In dealing with unemployment in the south, the party leaders planned to move about 1.5 to 2 million labourers from urban areas to old rural areas where land was abundant, and to New Economic Zones (*Vung kinh moi*) where land had just been reclaimed to build state-farms (see DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết lần thứ 24 của Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Đảng khoa III' [Resolution of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*: p.309).

⁸¹ DCSVN, 'Quyết định, số 188/CP của hội đồng chính phủ về chính sách xóa bỏ tàn tích chiếm hữu ruộng đất và các hình thức bóc lột thực dân, phong kiến ở Miền Nam Việt Nam (25 September 1976) [Ministerial Council's decision No.188 on eliminating vestiges of exploitation in the south]: p.7.

⁸² DCSVN, Chi Thi, số 235-CT/TW: Về việc thực hiện nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị về vấn đề ruộng đất ở Miền Nam (20 September 1976)' [Directive No.235 on implementation of Politburo's land resolution in the south]: p.2.

The party leaders expected land reform to be completed in a few years, but it dragged on until the mid-1980s. Subsequent chapters will explain why.

Rural market reform: Forming socialist trading and credit collectives

Party leaders assumed that peasants in the south, especially in and around the Mekong Delta were exploited by capitalists who hired them, loaned them money, and sold them goods and bought their produce. 'The rural capitalists', said one study, 'make up a very small proportion of population but possess the majority of farm machines, equipment and processing and transporting services'.⁸³ Land reform was not sufficient to 'liberate' peasants from such exploitation. Rural market reform had to be carried out as well to eliminate private trading and cut market relations between private traders and peasants.

Along with eliminating private traders, authorities planned to establish networks of socialist trading collectives and credit collectives in rural areas. These networks would also ensure the state control over agricultural trade and foodstuff, and state monopoly of delivering agricultural inputs to rural areas.⁸⁴

Setting up state-farms

To party authorities, state-farms (*nông trường quốc doanh*) would be the largest production organization in socialist agriculture. The state-farm, a so-called agro-industrial unit (*tổ hợp công nông nghiệp*), would be large enough to run like an industrial factory, relying on mechanization, being specialized and using intensive farming techniques.⁸⁵ The state farms, according to party leaders, would produce a large amount of food to meet the consumption needs of non-agricultural people and provide raw materials for manufacturing industries and

⁸³ Hong Giao, *Dua Nong Nghiep Len Mot Buoc Len San Xuat Lon Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Taking agriculture one step towards socialist large-scale production], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.57.

⁸⁴ The rural collective had responsibility to supply industrial goods to peasants and buy products from them (See DCSVN, 'Bao cao cua Bo chinh tri tai dai hoi lan thu III' [Political report of Fourth Party Congress]', in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.578)

⁸⁵ DCSVN, 'Bao Cao cua Bo chinh tri tai hoi nghi lan thu 24 Ban chap hanh Trung uong' [Politburo's report at 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.385.

for export. State farms were also expected to set good examples for agricultural collectives in the use of scientific methods of management and farming.⁸⁶

Party leaders argued that the south had many favorable conditions for large-scale, specialized and well-equipped state-farms.⁸⁷ They expected state farms to occupy about one third of the cultivated area and become dominant in production, circulation and distribution.⁸⁸

Interim forms of collectives (các hình thức tập dượt của hợp tác xã)

Party leaders argued that collectivization required a prolonged political campaign and class struggle between capitalism and socialism.⁸⁹ To ensure its success, the party called for a 'step-by-step' approach. Politburo instruction No.43-CT/TW urged cadres to 'be positive, work steadily, do not hesitate but don't be hasty, do not be careless ... go from low to high, from simple to complicated forms [of collective farming], suitable for each region and within the principles of voluntariness, mutual benefit, and democratic management'.⁹⁰

The process of collectivization had to go from 'simple interim forms of collective organization' (production solidarity team (*tổ đoàn kết sản xuất*) or labor exchange team (*tổ đổi công vắn công*)) to middle form of collective (production units (*tập đoàn sản xuất*)) and to the full collectives (*hợp tác xã*). This process is quite similar to that of northern collectivization which went from 'mutual aid teams' (*tổ đổi công*) to low-level collectives (*hợp tác xã bậc thấp*), and then high-level collectives (*hợp tác xã bậc cao*).⁹¹

⁸⁶ DCSVN, 'Báo cáo của Bộ chính trị tại hội nghị lần thứ hai Ban chấp hành Trung ương IV' [Politburo's report of second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004, p.223-224.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid: p.223; DCSVN, 'Báo cáo chính trị tại hội nghị lần thứ 24' [Political report at 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.368-406.

⁸⁹ Phạm Văn Kiệt, 'Nông dân đang sôi nổi đi lên làm an tập thể' [Peasants are eager for collective farming], in *Con Đường Lam An Tập Thể Của Nông Dân* [Collective farming for peasants], NXB TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 1978: p.20.

⁹⁰ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Bộ chính trị, số 43-CT/TW (14 April 1978) về việc nam vùng và đẩy mạnh công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp Miền Nam' [Politburo's directive No.43 on intensifying agricultural transformation], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1978*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.188; Nguyễn Huy, *Máy Van De Ly Luan Va Thuc Tien Cua Cach Mang Quan He San Trong Nong Nghiep Nuoc Ta* [Theories and practices of the production relation-revolution for our country's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.61.

⁹¹ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.56.

The production solidarity units and labor exchange teams were 'transitional forms' from individual to collective farming.⁹² In the view of party leaders, interim forms of collectives would help to cut peasants' relations with rural capitalists and vice-versa so that the party-state could establish a direct market relationship with peasants via 'two-way contracts' (*hợp đồng hai chiều*).⁹³ The interim forms of collectives would train cadres and familiarize peasants with collective farming. Through these organizations, the party-state could direct peasants to create irrigation systems, adopt intensive farming methods, increase the number of crops per year, implement land rehabilitation, readjust land allocations and so on.⁹⁴

Party leaders expected to bring peasants into interim collective organizations by 1978.⁹⁵ By 1980, however, the plan had not been fulfilled, especially in the Mekong Delta and the Southeastern Region.⁹⁶ The formation of interim collectives in the south took until the mid-1980s (as subsequent chapters explain).

Stage 2

⁹² Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.259; Nguyen Huy, *May Van De Ly Luan Va Thuc Tien Cua Cach Mang Quan He San Trong Nong Nghiep Nuoc Ta* [Theories and practices of the production relation-revolution for our country's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.95-6; another interim form was the farming-machine team (*to hop may nong nghiep*) established in the Mekong Delta and Southeastern region. Each team had five to seven peasants who possessed farm machines. Depending on the classification of the machines (large, medium or small) these teams were organized under the direct leadership of either the agricultural department of the district or commune or hamlet production department (*Ban san xuat ap xa*) respectively. These organizations were supposed to be 'interim' or 'transitional' (*qua do*) steps to establishing collective machine units (*tap doan may*) under the control of the district's authorities or specialized machine teams (*doi chuyen may*) under the control of collectives or production units.

⁹³ 'Two way contract' was the contract the state made with peasants (through interim forms of collectives) which stipulated peasants exchange food with state agricultural inputs, industrial and other necessary goods according to fixed prices. (See DCSVN, 'Chi thi cua Ban bi thu, so 02-CT/TW: Ve viec truoc mat de giai quyét van de luong thuc (21 January 1977)' [Secretariat's directive No.02 on the ongoing tasks to deal with food shortages], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.4).

⁹⁴ DCSVN, 'Nghì quyết đại hội lần thứ hai của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khóa IV, so 03-NQ/TW (19 August 1977) [Resolution of second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.297.

⁹⁵ Phan Van Dang, 'Tap duot di len hop tac xa nong nghiep' [The experiment with agricultural collectives], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB TP.Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.101.

⁹⁶ DCSVN, 'Chi thi cua Bo chinh tri, so 93-CT/TW (30 June 1980): Ve viec thuc hien tich cuc vung chac cong tac cai tao xa hoi chu nghia doi voi nong nghiep o mien Nam' [Politburo's directive No.93 on implementing positively and firmly agricultural transformation in the south] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 41, 1980*: Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2005: p.204.

Forming pilot collectives

Before expanding collectives extensively in the south, the party wanted to establish pilot collectives. The party instructed pilot collectives to be built ‘positively’ (*tích cực*), ‘firmly’ (*vững chắc*), ‘urgently but carefully’ (*khẩn trương nhưng thận trọng*) in order to achieve a good result. Each province in the south was supposed to select one district to build a pilot collective in the winter-spring season of 1977-1978. The chosen district had to meet the following criteria: (1) be a good representative of the whole province in terms of production conditions; (2) have well-developed economic plan; (3) have a stable political situation; and (4) have the majority of middle peasants already organized into interim collective organizations.⁹⁷

One reason for pilot collectives was to see how collective organizations would work in the south and what forms best fit each region. Party leaders recognized, for example, that socialist transformation of agriculture in the south, especially in Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*) would be extremely complicated because of the high levels of agricultural commercialization and diverse social and economic conditions.⁹⁸

Second, party leaders wanted to achieve a ‘good’ performance at the outset. Successful pilot organizations would then attract peasants into collective organizations. As the vice-chairman of the central committee for agricultural transformation in the south stated, ‘building pilot collectives meant making an ideal model to follow, making people see the

⁹⁷ DCSVN, ‘Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 15-CT/TW: Về việc làm thí điểm cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp Miền Nam (4 Aug 1977)’ [Secretariat’s directive No.15 on establishing pilot collectives in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*: p.746; DCSVN, ‘Chỉ thị Ban bí thư số 28-CT/TW (26 December 1977)’ [Secretariat’s directive No.28], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.704-5.

⁹⁸ DCSVN, ‘Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 15-CT/TW về việc làm thí điểm cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp Miền Nam (4 Aug 1977)’ [Secretariat’s directive No.15 on establishing pilot collectives in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.709.

superiority of collectives compared to production solidarity teams and production units and thus be determined to go forward to the new style of production'.⁹⁹

Finally, pilot collectives would help train new cadres and party members, who would learn things through doing.¹⁰⁰ Pilot collectives would help the party to test and 'fine tune' the collective model and improve local leaders' capacity before creating collectivization throughout the south.

Building key districts (huyện trọng điểm) and the capacity of local authorities

After reunification, the administrative system of the south had been divided up into four levels of government: central, provincial or municipal, district and communal, in hierarchical order.¹⁰¹ Of these, the district was considered the most important local government level to administer policies, manage economy and cultural affairs, and maintain security. The district government was to be in charge of planning and managing all aspects of the economy (*quản lý toàn diện về kinh tế*), lead the three revolutions, establish and monitor collectives in the countryside.¹⁰²

Northern Vietnam had experimented with agro-industrial districts in the early 1970s. Soon after reunification, the party expanded this model in the south with the aim of turning 500 districts of the whole country into 'socialist fortresses' (*pháo đài xã hội chủ nghĩa*).¹⁰³ At the Fourth Party Congress in late 1976, Le Duan stressed,

⁹⁹ Phan Van Dang, 'Tap duot di len hop tac xa nong nghiep' [The experiment with agricultural collectives], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB TP.Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.95.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid: p.101.

¹⁰¹ DCSVN, 'Bao cao cua Bo chinh tri tai hoi nghi lan thu 24' [Politbur's report at 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.404.

¹⁰² Ibid: 27-45; the district was also the last place to set up a committee for agricultural transformation (*Ban cai tao nong nghiep huyen*) under the provincial and central committee for agricultural transformation (*Ban Cai Tao Nong Nghiep tinh* and *Ban Cai Tao Nong Nghiep Trung Uong*), which were responsible for directing the implementation of agricultural transformation in the south.

¹⁰³ Le Duan was excited with the model of building agro-industrial districts first tried in Quynh Luu district, Nghe Tinh Province. According to him, Quynh Luu district succeeded not only in controlling the economy (*Lam chu kinh te*) such as reallocating productive forces at district level but also in controlling culture and society (*lam chu van hoa va xa hoi*) such as mobilizing people to build up schools and hospitals. (Le Duan, 'Phat bieu cua dong chi Le Duan tai hoi nghi 25 cua Ban chap hanh Trung uong' [Le Duan's speech at 25th plenum] (DCSVN, *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.343-9).

The district plays an important role in taking agriculture to a socialist large-scale production one. The district is a place to reorganize production, re-allocate labor and coordinate industry with agriculture, production with circulation, the state-economic sector with the collective economic sector, workers with peasants and the state with the people. The district is a location to carry out three revolutions in the countryside ... to ensure the material and cultural life of the people. The district's authorities determine all relations between the state and the peasants in terms of production, circulation and distribution.¹⁰⁴

Party leaders assumed that within the district, various socialist economic units across different industries such as agricultural collectives, trading collectives, state-farms and industrial enterprises would cooperate and be linked together.¹⁰⁵

Despite attaching great importance to the district level, party leaders also paid considerable attention to strengthening local authorities at communal and hamlet levels in the Southern Region. In the north, party leaders reasoned, commune authorities were not required to manage economic affairs because collectivization had been completed and communes were small. In the south, however, individual farming was still popular, so commune authorities had to be strengthened to assist district authorities in directing and managing agriculture.¹⁰⁶ The fourth plenum's resolution (of Fourth Party Congress) in July 1978 instructed, 'in the next few years, the communal authority together with the district authorities [in the south] will have responsibility for managing all affairs of the commune'.¹⁰⁷

The Secretariat's directive No.28-CT/TW (26 December 1977) requested local authorities in the south to set up commune production boards (*ban sản xuất xã*) and hamlet production boards (*ban sản xuất ấp*) to 'direct and guide and coordinate activities of local

¹⁰⁴ DCSVN, 'Bao cáo chính trị của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng tại đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ IV (14 Dec 1976)' [Political report of fourth national representative meeting], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*: Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.552.

¹⁰⁵ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Bộ chính trị, số 33-CT/TW: Về xây dựng huyện và tăng cường cấp huyện (24 January 1978)' [Politburo's directive No.33 on building district capacity], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 39, 1978*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.27-29.

¹⁰⁶ DCSVN, 'Báo cáo của Bộ chính trị tại hội nghị lần thứ II Ban chấp hành Trung ương khóa IV' [Politburo's report at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*: p.222.

¹⁰⁷ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ IV của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng (Khóa IV), số 10-NQ/TW: Về việc tổ chức, cải tiến chế độ làm việc, đáp ứng yêu cầu của tình hình và nhiệm vụ mới (27 July 1978)' [Resolution of the Fourth Party Congress on improving work conditions], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 39, 1978*: Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.323.

cooperative organizations'.¹⁰⁸ Later, the Politburo's directive No.43-CT/TW (14 April 1978) called for establishing so-called Go Cong-style hamlet production boards, especially in the Mekong Delta, in order to take peasants into production solidarity units and other interim forms of collectives.¹⁰⁹ The main duty of the hamlet production board was to monitor land, farm equipment, direct the production, especially increase the number of crops per year, deliver agricultural inputs to peasants and mobilize peasants to do 'food obligation' (*nghĩa vụ lương thực*) to the state.¹¹⁰

To VCP leaders, building the capacity of the district, communal and hamlet authorities and establishing farm-service enterprises within the districts were essential preparation for collectivization.¹¹¹ Like the process of collectivization, the party leaders called for building the district's capacity step by step, first in 'key districts' (*xây dựng điểm*) and later in the rest (*mở rộng diện*).¹¹² After the local authorities were strengthened, collectivization would be launched extensively until completed

Recruiting and training local cadres

Building new institutions in the south required a large number of cadres. Except for some southern returnees, most people and new local cadres in the south were not familiar with

¹⁰⁸ DCSVN, 'Chi thi của Ban bí thư, số 28-CT/TW (26 December 1977)' [Secretariat's directive No.28], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38-1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.703.

¹⁰⁹ DCSVN, 'Chi thi của Bộ chính trị, số 43-CT/TW (14 April 1978)' [Politburo's directive No.43], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 39, 1978*: Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.186; Because the size of the communes was too large, some areas such as Go Cong district of Tien Giang had set up hamlet production boards, even before the Directive No.28, which did a good job of directing and coordinating the activities of production solidarity units and machine teams. After that, the party urged other districts in the Southern Region to adopt Go Cong-styled hamlet production boards (see Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.262).

¹¹⁰ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.262

¹¹¹ Farm-serving enterprises included tractor stations (*tram may keo*), machine repairing station (*tram sua chua*), seedling and veterinary firms (*trai goiing va thu y*), food processing factories, trading stations and so on. These structures were considered essential for the activities of agricultural collectives. (see Le Thanh Nghi, *Thong Nhât Quan Ly va Cai Tien Quan Ly Kinh Te Trong Ca Nuoc, Xay Dung He Thong Quan Ly Kinh Te Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Cua Nuoc Ta*, Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1977: p.31).

¹¹² DCSVN, 'Chi thi của Ban bí thư, số 15-CT/TW (4 Aug 1977): Ve viec lam thi diem cai tao xa hoi chu nghia doi voi nong nghiep o Mien Nam' [Secretariat's directive No.15 on establishing pilot collectives in the south], in *Van kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*: Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.744.

collective organization and the socialist planning system. A series of party policies called for recruiting and training cadres for the south. Party leaders reasoned,

Agricultural collectivization is to transform the nature of production organization and the way of life in the countryside. Because the production is organized according to socialist large-scale production, the requirements of economic and technical management are now completely different to those of small individual economy. The difference lies not only in the scale of production but also in the mode of production. Therefore, cadres (including political, managerial and technical cadres) are determining factors.¹¹³

Party leaders proposed measures for increasing the number of cadres in the south: (1) move some staff at central and provincial levels to district, commune and collective levels; (2) train some soldiers for a short time to supplement local cadres; (3) select some 'good' cadres in the north to supplement the south; and (4) open schools to train local cadres for districts and collectives.¹¹⁴

As mentioned in the previous section, party leaders used mass campaigns to select loyal cadres for their organizations in the rural south. They believed that through the campaigns of agricultural transformation and collectivization, local party cells (*đảng bộ cơ sở*) would be able to identify who were the 'good' and 'bad' cadres. The former included those who had 'thoughts of the worker class' and were 'committed to large-scale production' (*quyết tâm theo con đường sản xuất lớn*).¹¹⁵ The latter were those who still bore the 'thoughts of peasants' (*tư tưởng nông dân*), 'thoughts of self-satisfaction and longing for individual farming' (*luyến tiếc làm ăn riêng lẻ*).¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Những Vấn Đề Về Công Tác Cải Tạo Và Xây Dựng Nông Nghiệp ở Các Tỉnh Phía Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nông Nghiệp, 1980: p.277.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid; a former district cadre in Cho Moi asserted that he learnt a lesson about cadres during the campaign of collectivization: good cadres were those who 'took care of the people but did not follow the ideas of the masses' (*lo cho dân nhưng không chạy theo quần chúng*) (Interview, Cho Moi, An Giang, 17 June 2005).

¹¹⁶ DCSVN, 'Đề cương kết luận của đồng chí Lê Duẩn tại hội nghị lần thứ II (4 July 1977)' [Le Duan's final statements at second plenum], in *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.289.

With the experience of 20 years of collectivization in the north the party learned: 'no good, politically qualified and potent cadres, no good result for building collectives'.¹¹⁷ However, despite many campaigns for improving and training local cadres, local cadres' weakness and corruption was one of the main factors negatively affecting the performance of national policies, which will be discussed in next chapters.

Stage 3

Accelerating and completing collectivization:

Production solidarity teams (*tổ đoàn kết sản xuất*) and production units (*tập đoàn sản xuất*) were 'transitional forms of collectives'. The former was a transitional or intermediary organization between individual farming and collective farming; the latter was a transitional organization of a high-level collective (*hợp tác xã bậc cao*). So the production units were small-scale and 'socialist-incomplete' collectives. They were not full of socialist characteristics because their distribution was not entirely based on labor contribution but included payment for land (*trả hoa lợi ruộng đất*) despite some of the peasant's means of production such as land and labor being collectivized. Also the production unit was small, ranging from 30 to 50 hectares of land and from 50 to 100 households.¹¹⁸

Therefore, the final stage of agrarian reform was to 'basically complete agricultural collectivization in the south' by converting production units into high-level collectives. This meant that the plan was, after a few preparatory years, to bring most peasant households and their land into the collectives. The result would be socialist large-scale agricultural production either in the form of state-farms or the collectives dominating agricultural

¹¹⁷ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.277.

¹¹⁸ Hong Giao, *Dua Nong Nghiep Mot Buoc Len San Xuat Lon Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Taking agriculture one step towards socialist large-scale production], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.68; Hong Giao, 'Buoc di va hinh thuc hop tac hoa nong nghiep', in *Buoc Di Va Hinh Thuc Hop Tac Hoa Nong Nghiep* (Tran Xuan Bach et al, eds), NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1984: p.49; Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.255-64.

production, circulation and distribution. Individual farming would be eliminated or be insignificant.

The resolution of the Fourth Party Congress in 1976 set 1980 as the target date for completing agricultural transformation in the south.¹¹⁹ (After failing to meet that target, party leaders at the Fifth Party Congress in March 1982 extended it to 1985. Moreover, the party leaders decided to regard a production unit as the final form of collectivization in the Southern Region rather than the high-level collectives)¹²⁰

'Revolution in science and technology': cultivation reform

While the revolution in production relations was to take agriculture to socialist large-scale production organizations (collectives, state farms), the revolution in science and technology would bring science and modern technology into agriculture. This was also considered essential to make collective farming superior to individual farming. So, together with carrying out collectivization in the south, party leaders stressed, 'the need to combine collectivization with extending irrigation (*thủy lợi hoá*) and mechanization (*cơ giới hoá*) and using modern and advanced science and techniques for cultivation and animal husbandry'.¹²¹

The revolution in science and technology included extending irrigation, mechanization, electrification (*điện khí hoá*) and using chemical inputs (*hoá học hoá*) in agriculture. Moreover, it focused on intensifying and specializing farming (*thâm canh, chuyên canh*), increasing the numbers of crops per year (*tăng vụ*) as well as reclaiming and

¹¹⁹ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết đại hội đại biểu toàn lan thu IV (20 Dec 1976)' [Resolution of fourth national representative meeting], *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.917; Phan Van Dang, 'Tập duot di len hop tac xa nong nghiep' [The experiment with agricultural collectives], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* [collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB TP.Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.101.

¹²⁰ Le Duan, 'Báo cáo chính trị tại đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lan thu V của Đảng' [Political report at fifth national representative meeting], in *Cach Mang Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Viet Nam*, Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.40.

¹²¹ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 15-CT/TW: Về việc làm thí điểm cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp Miền Nam (4 Aug 1977)' [Secretariat's directive No.15 on establishing pilot collectives in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.742.

expanding more the cultivated area (*mở rộng diện tích*) in the south. All of these factors were aimed to increase land and labor productivity.¹²²

Irrigation

Using irrigation has a long tradition in Vietnam's agricultural history. In ranking the importance of factors in agriculture, the Vietnamese people concluded in a famous proverb: 'First water, second fertilizer, third caring, fourth seeds' (*nhất nước nhì phân tam cần tứ giống*). The party recognized that 'experiences from many generations of our people prove irrigation at anytime and anywhere is always the first measure for increasing cultivated areas, intensifying farming, increasing the number of crops per year and rehabilitating the land'.¹²³ Party leaders considered extending irrigation a top measure in developing agriculture because it would help to increase the number of crops per year.¹²⁴ Going beyond Vietnam's tradition, which highly respects natural harmony, party leaders proclaimed the need to 'conquer nature' (*chinh phục thiên nhiên*) so as to extend irrigation.¹²⁵ Thus soon after reunification, the party launched continuous campaigns for irrigation (*làm thủy lợi*) in all regions of the south.

In assessing the irrigation systems of the south, the party concluded they were too few, too small and often belonged to individual owners. War had also destroyed some. According to Nguyen Tran Trong, only 450,000 out of 2,999,577 hectares of the south's

¹²² DCSVN, 'De cương kết luận của đồng chí Tổng bí thư Lê Duẩn tại hội nghị lần thứ II (4 July 1977)' [Le Duẩn's final statements at second plenum], in *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.265.

¹²³ DCSVN, 'Phương hướng nhiệm vụ và mục tiêu chủ yếu của kế hoạch 5 năm 1976-1980 (16 December 1976)' [Socio-economic plan for five years 1976-1980], in *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.616-618.

¹²⁴ DCSVN, 'De cương kết luận của đồng chí Tổng bí thư Lê Duẩn tại hội nghị lần thứ hai (4 July 1977)' [Le Duẩn's final statements at second plenum], in *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.274.

¹²⁵ Statements such as 'to conquer nature' (*chinh phục thiên nhiên*) or 'replace the sky to make rain' (*thay trời làm mưa*) were often used in official documents during this period (see Nguyen Duong Dang, *Kinh Tế Nông Nghiệp Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa* [Economics of Socialist Agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nông Nghiệp, 1983: p.40).

cultivated land, or 15 percent, was irrigated in 1972.¹²⁶ Party leaders planned to double the degree of irrigation by 1980.¹²⁷

For the Mekong Delta, the party's irrigation program emphasized better canal systems to clean alum and retard the flood. With these objectives in mind, the party's second plenum (Fourth Party Congress) in 1977 urged local authorities in the Mekong authorities to dredge existing channels and make new ones, and to build new irrigation systems for cleaning fields of the alum (*rửa phèn*) and retarding flooding and the spread of saltwater (*chống lũ, chống mặn*).¹²⁸ With these and other measures, party leaders hoped that the delta could meet the food requirements for the whole country.

On the other hand, the party thought the Central Coast had difficult conditions for agricultural production. In mid-1970s, although the natural area of the region was more than 4,4 million hectares, agricultural land amounted to only 460,000 hectares, 10.4 percent. The soil in the region was also poor and vulnerable to erosion. There was little irrigation; many farmers relied heavily on rain.¹²⁹ In 1977, at second plenum of the Fourth Party Congress, party leaders called for repairing existing irrigation systems and establishing more lakes and water-pumping stations. By 1980, the Central Coast was to have 180,000-200,000 hectares of double-rice cropped fields and 650,000 additional hectares of agricultural land.¹³⁰

Mechanization

¹²⁶ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.314.

¹²⁷ DCSVN, 'Phuong huong nhiem vu va muc tieu chu yeu cua ke hoach 5 nam 1976-1980' [Socio-economic plan for five years 1976-1980], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.626

¹²⁸ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của hội nghị lần thứ hai của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khoa IV, số 03-NQ/TW (19 August 1977)' [Resolution of second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.315.

¹²⁹ The Central Coast consisted of 4 provinces: Quang Nam-Da Nang, Nghia Binh, Phu Khanh and Thuan Hai (Nguyen Duong Dan, 1983: p.105).

¹³⁰ DCSVN, 'Báo cáo chính trị tại hội nghị lần thứ hai Ban chấp hành Trung ương khoa IV' [Political report at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.180.

For party leaders, mechanization meant substituting machinery for animal and men power so as to increase productivity and efficiency.¹³¹ Authorities also believed mechanization would help to attract peasants, especially 'middle' ones, to collective farming because many farming households in the Southern Region were already using some machinery.¹³² One party scientist argued, 'without ... combining collectivization with mechanization, attracting peasants into collectives will be difficult' because collective farming without mechanization was not able to demonstrate its superiority over individual farming.¹³³

Party leaders also believed that mechanization would help to increase the number of crops per year and the area of cultivated land.¹³⁴ In assessing labor productivity in Vietnam's agriculture in the mid-1970s Le Duan observed critically that the labor productivity in Vietnam's agriculture was still very low because each agricultural laborer farmed less than one hectare and was able to feed only two or three people at very low living-standard. Comparatively, each agricultural laborer of the United State and Russia was able to handle 50 and 20 hectares and feed 50 and 20 people respectively. With the use of mechanization, party leaders believed that by 1980 each agricultural laborer of Vietnam could tend two hectares of land in the south and one hectare in the north.¹³⁵

In order to use existing agricultural machinery in the south, party leaders urged each district to organize privately-owned machines into machinery teams (*tổ hợp máy*), machinery units (*tập đoàn máy*), specialized machinery team (*đội máy chuyên doanh*) and collective machinery teams (*đội máy tập thể*). Each district was also supposed to build state-machinery

¹³¹ Nguyen Duong Dang, *Kinh Te Nong Nghiep Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Economics of Socialist Agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1983: p.42; Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.328.

¹³² DCSVN, 'Bao cao chinh tri tai hoi nghi lan thu hai Ban chap hanh Trung uong khoa IV' [Political report at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.232.

¹³³ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.246.

¹³⁴ DCSVN, 'De cuong ket luan cua dong chi Le Duan tai hoi nghi lan thu hai', in *Van Kien Dang Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.275.

¹³⁵ DCSVN, 'De cuong ket luan cua dong chi Le Duan tai hoi nghi lan thu hai' [Le Duan's final statement at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.273.

stations (*trạm máy quốc doanh*) equipped with 'large' machines (*máy lớn*) supplied by the state or bought from individuals.¹³⁶ At the second plenum of Fourth Party Congress, party leaders planned to import 18,700 large tractors, 30,000 small ones and other machinery in order to increase the mechanization rate in land preparation to 50 percent for the whole country and 74 percent for the Mekong Delta.¹³⁷

Chemical inputs and new seeds

Party leaders paid great attention to 'chemical use' and encouraged the importation and production of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.¹³⁸

Before reunification, southern peasants, especially in the Mekong Delta, had used chemical fertilizers. The importation of chemical fertilizer in the south had increased dramatically since 1960 and reached 372,183 tons in 1973. The average amount of chemical fertilizer per hectare of agricultural land reached about 120 kilograms. The greater use of fertilizers was associated with the increased adoption of new rice seeds (*lúa thần nông*) in the south, which were planted in 41,000 hectares in 1968 (accounting for 1.4 percent of rice land) and in 890,400 hectares in 1973 (31 percent). However, new seed adoption in the south was low compared to a rate of 60 percent in the north at the same time. Party leaders used this to indicate the superiority of socialist agriculture.¹³⁹ Apart from the low rate of new rice seed adoption, party leaders criticized southern farming for using too little fertilizer, especially compared to the north.¹⁴⁰

Party leaders thought that the south should use 'rational combination of using chemical fertilizers and manure'. Apart from encouraging the use of lime, apatite, phosphate

¹³⁶ Nguyen Huy, *May Van De Ly Luan Va Thuc Tien Cua Cach Mang Quan He San Trong Nong Nghiep Nuoc Ta* [Theories and practices of the production relation-revolution for our country's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.96.

¹³⁷ DCSVN, 'Bao cao chinh tri tai hoi nghi lan thu hai Ban chap hanh Trung uong khoa IV' [Political report at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.210.

¹³⁸ Nguyen Tran Trong, *Nhung Van De Cong Tac Cai Tao va Xay Dung Nong Nghiep o Cac Tinh Phia Nam* [Ongoing tasks for transforming and building the south's agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1980: p.341-2

¹³⁹ Ibid: p.347.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid: p.342.

and other chemical fertilizers, party leaders urged rural southerners to ‘make green manure’ (*làm phân xanh*) and ‘dung manure’ (*phân chuồng*). They stressed,

[We] have to increase sources of fertilizer. All the regions have to boost raising livestock as well as develop robustly green mature (*phân xanh*), make use of waste and other materials ... Families, collectives and state-farms were all encouraged to do this.¹⁴¹

It is likely that extending irrigation, mechanization, using chemical inputs and new rice seeds were also tools to adhere peasants to the state’s organizations and the plan. The Politburo’s report at the second plenum of Fourth Party Congress clearly mentioned that through the state’s investment in reclaiming new land, implementing irrigation, and supplying machinery, fertilizers and petrol, the state could gradually take peasants into collective organizations from low to high levels and dictate peasants to produce according to the state’s plan, pay tax and sell produce to the state.¹⁴²

‘Revolution in thought and culture’: ‘no socialist new man, no socialism’

Taking the south into socialism, carrying out socialist industrialization, or building socialist large-scale production of agriculture were decisions by the top party leaders. In order to get their policies executed, party leaders needed people’s participation, conformity and endorsement. The party realized that southerners had long engaged in capitalist production, had ‘private ownership minds’ (*đầu óc tư hữu*) and had ‘tended toward capitalism’ (*có khuynh hướng tư bản chủ nghĩa*). Leaders also thought that harmful legacies of two decades of US neo-colonialism posed great obstacles for the construction of socialism in the south.¹⁴³ For example, colonialism and bourgeois thoughts (*tư tưởng tư sản*) in the south was heavy and that ‘anti-revolutionaries’ groups (*bọn phản cách mạng*) were still active.

¹⁴¹ DCSVN, ‘Bao cáo của Bộ chính trị tại hội nghị lần thứ hai’ [Political report at second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tập 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.178.

¹⁴² Ibid: p.233.

¹⁴³ Philip Taylor, *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam’s South*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001: p.31.

Thus, carrying the socialist revolution to determine ‘who will triumph over whom’, transform private into public ownership, and replace individual with socialist large-scale production would encounter strong resistance.

To tackle this situation, party leaders set out to transform people’s thoughts and culture to fit their policies. They called this effort a ‘revolution in thought and culture’. A prevalent guiding slogan was a statement by president Ho Chi Minh - ‘the first and essential condition for constructing socialism was to have socialist people’ (*muốn xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội, trước hết cần có những con người xã hội chủ nghĩa*).¹⁴⁴ Socialist people were supposed to have the following characteristics: (1) correct thoughts, right affection, adequate knowledge and the ability to undertake collective mastery over society, the natural world and oneself (*làm chủ xã hội, thiên nhiên và bản thân*); (2) high spirit of volunteerism and a determination so as to overcome every difficulty in order to complete assigned tasks; (3) honest, disciplined, skillful and productive, love working and detest living on others (*ăn bám*), and respect and protect public property; and (4) ‘love socialism soundly as well as have the pure spirit of the proletariat international (*quốc tế vô sản*)’.¹⁴⁵

To produce these kinds of socialist new men, party leaders called for multiple measures involving education, administration, political and cultural activities, coercion, and economic incentives.¹⁴⁶ Socialist people were created not only in the Communist Party but in ‘every mass, economic, cultural and social organization, in every industry and at every level of administration, in every town and village and family’.¹⁴⁷ The central and local newspapers, socialist literature and arts were also required to serve the construction of socialist new men

¹⁴⁴ Ho Chi Minh’s statement on socialist new men was cited in Le Duan’s report at the first meeting of the unified National Assembly (25 June 1976) (DCSVN, ‘Báo cáo chính trị tại kỳ họp thứ nhất quốc hội chung cả nước, do đồng chí Lê Duẩn trình bày’ [Political report at the first meeting of the unified National Assembly], in *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.151).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ DCSVN, ‘Báo cáo chính của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng tại đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ IV, do đồng chí Lê Duẩn trình bày (14 December 1976)’ [Political report of fourth national representative meeting], in *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.500-1.

by ‘praising good people, good merits’ (*ca ngợi người tốt việc tốt*) and strictly criticizing ‘the negative phenomena’ (*hiện tượng tiêu cực*) in the society and ‘the legacy of feudalism and colonialism’.¹⁴⁸

Party leaders requested cadres to be models for the masses. As mentioned in the previous section, party leaders considered local-level cadres the most important agents for the success of socialist transformation. Apart from the general characteristics of socialist new men, cadres were supposed to be ‘frugal’ (*cần kiệm*), be ‘moral’ (*liêm chính*), ‘live simple, clean and sound lives’, ‘fight against privilege, embezzlement, collusion and trespassing on the state property’ and ‘repel the influence of bourgeois’s life-style’.¹⁴⁹

Apart from the behavior of local cadres, party leaders also realized that peasants’ attitudes, motivations and acts would significantly affect the results of socialist transformation in general and the performance of collective farming in particular. The results would be excellent if people ‘absolutely trusted’ party policies. Therefore, soon after reunification, the party tried to attract peasants in the south into ‘peasant associations’ (*nông hội*) in order to educate them to ‘enhance a patriotic spirit’ (*nâng cao tinh thần yêu nước*), ‘love socialism’ (*yêu chủ nghĩa xã hội*), maintain ‘solidarity among peasants’ and ‘restore and develop production according to the state’s policies and plan’.¹⁵⁰

The resolution of second plenum of Fourth Party Congress pointed out that thought and cultural transformation in rural areas meant educating and instilling peasants with ‘socialist thought’, to understand the party-state’s policies, to have a ‘consciousness of building socialism’ (*có ý thức xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội*), and to ‘perform well obligations to

¹⁴⁸ DCSVN, ‘Nghị quyết của đại hội Đảng toàn quốc lần thứ IV’ [Resolution of Fourth Party Congress], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.935.

¹⁴⁹ DCSVN, ‘Báo cáo tổng kết công tác xây dựng Đảng và điều lệ Đảng (17 December 1976)’ [Report of building party organization and changing party regulations], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.743, 849.

¹⁵⁰ DCSVN, ‘Báo cáo chính trị của Ban chấp hành Trung ương đại tại đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ IV’ [Political report at fourth national representative meeting], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 37, 1976*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.564.

the state' (*thực hiện tốt nghĩa vụ với nhà nước*). Also, thought and cultural transformation focused on fighting 'thoughts of exploitation' (*tư tưởng bóc lột*) and correcting the 'negative thoughts of small producers' (*tư tưởng tiêu cực của người sản xuất nhỏ*).¹⁵¹

As with collectivization, party leaders called for transforming thoughts and culture in a step by step fashion, firmly, from a few to a large number, from party organizations to people's council (*hội đồng nhân dân*), from cadres to revolutionary families to ordinary ... Be patient with those who are considered stick-in-the mud (*chậm tiến*), educate them individually.¹⁵²

Cracking down on 'bad elements' was also an important tool for carrying out the 'thought and culture revolution'.¹⁵³

Conclusion

Soon after reunification, the government in Hanoi decided to carry out a socialist revolution in the south in order to reunify the country politically, socially and economically. VCP leaders considered socialist agrarian reform a key component of the socialist revolution.

Driven by Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and high expectations of their capacity and the south's economic potential, VCP leaders believed that they could succeed in building a centrally planned economy, socialist industrialization, and large-scale production which they had not accomplished and even failed to implement in the north. In the agricultural sector, this vision included two main components: land reform and collectivization.

Redistribution was considered an important initial step of socialist agrarian reform. Unlike the Saigon government's previous land reform, VCP leaders pursued a 'class II' land reform and considered land redistribution a temporary measure toward collectivization. They also advocated a reform approach that was more moderate and much less violent than what happened in the north in the 1950s.

¹⁵¹ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ II của Ban chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khóa IV' [Resolution of second plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 38, 1977*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.290.

¹⁵² Phan Van Dang, 'Tap duot di len hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Experiment with agricultural collectives], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB TP.Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.30-1.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Socialist large-scale production was the end goal of socialist transformation. Collectivization would enable the state to control rural areas, extract resources to support socialist industrialization and advance agriculture. Party leaders also believed that peasants' living conditions and productivity would greatly improve. Although VCP leaders' objectives for the agrarian reform were numerous, like other socialist governments, their primary ones always were to consolidate power and build socialism in the countryside.

To ensure the success of collectivization, VCP leaders paid great attention to preparatory steps: redistributing land, bringing peasants into interim collective organizations, training cadres and building the capability of the local authorities. They called for the simultaneous execution of three revolutions in production relations, in science and technology and in culture.

The revolution in production relations was aimed at creating collective organizations; the revolution in science and technology was to improve the performance of these organizations. The revolution in thought and culture would make peasants and local cadres conform to state policies and eliminate opposition. Through these revolutions, VCP leaders believed they could enhance that the peasant's participation in, conformity with and acceptance of their policies.

Chapter 3 POST-WAR RESTORATION AND THE PREPARATIONS FOR COLLECTIVIZATION 1975-1978

Introduction

This chapter examines the implementation of agricultural transformation policies in the first few years after the war ended and prior to intense collectivization of farming. In particular, the chapter focuses on how these policies were implemented at local levels in parts of the Central Coast province of Quang Nam- Da Nang (QN-DN) and the Mekong Delta province of An Giang and how local officials and peasants reacted to these policies. By comparing two places in different regions, the chapter reveals differences and similarities in policy implementation. It also shows how local conditions affected the implementation and performance of national policies.

Post-war restoration policies

Vietnam is the most bombed country in world history. After three decades of war (1945-1975), Vietnam inherited a devastated economy, society and ecology. Rural destruction in the southern half of Vietnam was especially severe; 9,000 out of 15,000 villages were heavily affected by war. Millions of hectares of agricultural land were bombed repeatedly and by 1975, 560,000 hectares of cultivated land were left untended.¹ One and a half million buffaloes and oxen were killed.²

The south faced another post-war problem: massive unemployment in urban areas. During the conflict a large number of rural refugees were moved or fled to cities and towns where they often worked in military-related sectors of the economy. At war's end, a majority

¹ DCSVN, 'Bao cao cua Bo chinh tri tai hoi nghi lan thu 24' [Politburo' report at 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.318.

² Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural development in Vietnam: A north/South study [1955-19885]*, Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.155.

of these war-refugees, Saigon government's discharged soldiers and civil officials became unemployed. According to communist party reports, the total urban population in 1975 was 7 million, of which about 3 million (30 percent) were unemployed.³

After the war, government and communist party authorities in the south emphasized economic restoration and the consolidation of political power. Inherent in these policies, however, were political and economic plans to prepare for collectivization. In other words, after the war the VCP focused simultaneously on establishing its new authority, restoring production, implementing land reform and solving other post-war problems.⁴ The following sections discuss how these policies were implemented in the Central Coast and the Mekong Delta.

Post-war restoration and preparations for collectivization in the Central Coast

Rebuilding the war-torn economy with 'two empty hands'

The Central Coast was the worst affected region in the south in terms of lives lost and social, economic and ecological destruction. One area in that region is Quang Nam –Da Nang (QN-DN) province (now consisting of two separate provinces (Quang Nam and Da Nang)). According to Quang Nam's Department of Statistics, more than two-thirds of the province's agricultural land was abandoned and uncultivated in 1975. Hundreds of thousands of people had been killed and injured. Unexploded mines littered the countryside. More than three quarters of all villages were destroyed, forcing peasants to flee and live together in a few refugee areas, bringing economic activity to a standstill. Therefore, after the war, the province 'faced a severe food shortage and acute unemployment.'⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ See DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 24 (29 September 1975)' [Resolution of 24th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 36, 1975*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004.

⁵ CTKQN, *Quang Nam 30 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien* [Quang Nam's socio-economic development over the past 30 years] Tam Ky, Cuc Thong Ke Quang Nam, 2005: p.22.

According to QN-DN newspaper reports, during the war urban areas of the province had thousands of refugees, many from neighboring provinces. As a result, for many years, a large proportion of arable land was uncultivated. After the war, these peasant refugees went home with 'only two empty hands and no ploughs, hoes, buffaloes and oxen, seeds, fertilizers or irrigation.'⁶ An QN-DN newspaper article (December 1975) summarized the situation in verses: 'fields in rural areas lack draft animals; gardens were abandoned, houses were empty, and the people were prostrate and hungry' (*đồng quê vắng bóng trâu cày, vườn hoang nhà vắng dân gầy xác xơ*).⁷

Despite heavy destruction, the revolutionary movement's authorities in QN-DN rapidly consolidated their power in all parts of the province. By September 1976, according to the former provincial chairman of QN-DN, 'a complete system of revolutionary authority was quickly built from province to district, commune, ward, sub-commune and sub-ward. The revolutionary authorities swiftly controlled and managed all urban areas and large rural areas.'⁸

At least three factors helped the new authorities in QN-DN consolidate their power. First, a large part of QN-DN and Central Coast rural areas were under the influence of the Vietminh during the war with France (1945-1954), then the NLF during the war against U.S.-backed Saigon government (1954-1975). Despite 'liberated areas' (*vùng giải phóng*) being reduced significantly in the late 1960s, the NLF controlled many remote and mountainous rural areas economically, politically and socially. Economically, the NLF carried out campaigns such as 'be determined to win on the agricultural production front' (*quyết thắng*

⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Neu cao tinh than tu luc tu cuong trong san xuat va xay dung que huong' [Be self-reliant in ensuring food production and building the country], 29 September 1976.

⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dong que vang bong trau, vuon hoang nha vang dan gay xác xơ' [Fields in rural areas lack draft animals; gardens were abandoned, houses were empty, and the people were prostrate and hungry], 15 December 1975.

⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoan thanh thang loi ve vang hoan thanh thang loi nhiem vu xay dung dat nuoc, xay dung che do moi, con nguoi moi xa hoi chu nghĩa' [Completing the task of building the country, the new regime and new socialist men], 8 September, 1976.

trên mặt trận nông nghiệp'), and 'do the best to increase production and be thrifty (*lời kêu gọi gia tăng sản xuất và thực hành tiết kiệm*)'.⁹ This history helped the authorities to control and deal with post-war society.

Second, the NFL in QN-DN had recruited a large number of revolutionaries who operated locally or were sent to the north for training. Despite the surrender or killing of many revolutionaries from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, their numbers were still considerable. Quang Nam's records show that during the war the Binh Lanh commune suffered severe destruction. At the war's climax, many NLF revolutionaries were killed and many families had to flee. However, at least 25 revolutionary soldiers and 20 other revolution-supporting-families still operated and lived in the Binh Lanh commune.¹⁰ Likewise, Thang Phuoc commune of Thang Binh district was reportedly 'wiped clean' (*bị xóa trắng*) of its revolutionary base because people fled or were forced to live together in a few areas controlled by Saigon's government. Despite near-annihilation, the number of surviving revolutionaries in the commune (*bám trụ*) still holding on was enough to fill key positions in the post-war communal and sub-communal authorities (*chính quyền thôn*) and even labor exchange teams (*tổ đổi công*).¹¹ QN-DN and other areas in the Central Coast did not face a huge problem to fill government and party positions thanks to the large number of local revolutionaries who survived and others who returned there from northern Vietnam.

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

⁹ *Quang Da newspaper* (pre-1975 *QN-DN newspaper*), 'Quyết thắng trên mặt trận nông nghiệp' [Be determined to win on the agricultural front], 30 April 1974; *Quang Da newspaper*, 'Lời kêu gọi ra sức tăng gia sản xuất, thực hành tiết kiệm' [Do the best to increase food production and be thrifty], 30 April 1974.

¹⁰ TUQN, *Quang Nam Anh Hùng, Thời Đại Hồ Chí Minh, Kỷ Yếu 6/2003* [Quang Nam is hero in the age of Ho Chi Minh], Tam Kỳ, Tỉnh Ủy Quang Nam, 2003: p.319-21.

¹¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Toàn xã Thang Phuoc làm ăn trong các tổ đổi công thương xuyên' [The whole population of Thang Phuoc commune is organized into regular labour exchange teams], 23 May 1977.

Along with consolidating their power bases, the new authorities in QN-DN focused on solving the problems of refugees, unemployment and production. After the war the province sent 400,000 refugees back to their home nearby provinces (Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue). QN-DN also sent 700,000 refugees in urban areas back to their rural homes. In dealing with unemployment, the new authorities decided to move a large proportion of unemployed people in urban areas either to the new economic zones in the Central Highlands or to rural areas.¹²

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

Land restoration and land readjustment

Land restoration

Soon after reunification, the new authorities in QN-DN launched a campaign of 'attacking weeds in fields' (*chiến dịch tấn công đồng cỏ*) and 'removing unexploded land mines' (*tháo gỡ bom mìn*). The QN-DN newspaper in March 1976 reported that authorities had mobilized thousands of youths from urban areas to work in rural areas. In addition, they mobilized thousands of engineers (*công binh*) and former local guerrillas to remove the mines littered in the fields. As a result, within a year the province had restored more than 26,000 hectares of land, accounting for about a half of the abandoned land and one third of the provincial

¹² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhân dân tỉnh ta chang nhưng danh giac gioi ma con giao nghi luc va tai nang sang tao trong xay dung lai que huong giao dep' [Our province's people fought enemy and are building the country well] 29 March 1976.

agricultural land.¹³ Within two years the province reportedly restored to productive use of 50,000 hectares of previously abandoned land.¹⁴

Because the authorities were able to mobilize rural and urban people, land restoration made good progress in many areas. An example is Dien Ban district. It had 114 sub-communes (villages), 93 of which were 'destroyed totally' during the war. Many people faced hunger and weeds had taken over their land. The district's new authorities mobilized 'everyone to turn 4,600 hectares of abandoned land into cultivated land.' Guerrillas and local militia removed 20,794 land mines, during which 19 people were killed and 34 were injured.¹⁵

Another example comes from the Thang Binh district, in which 14 of 20 communes had been 'totally destroyed' during the war and most agricultural land had been abandoned. Hence, after the war, food shortages were severe. District authorities soon mobilized people to 'attack the weeds in the fields', 'remove and undo unexploded mines, 'restore abandoned land' and 'improve irrigation'.¹⁶ Land restoration in Thang Binh district was completed a few months after the war.

Villagers in Hien Loc village of Binh Lanh commune in Thang Binh district recalled that after the war, people returned home with 'two empty hands' (*với hai bàn tay trắng*). During the war many labor-aged men had died, so many families returning to their villages faced 'a situation of "a son lost his father and a wife lost her husband"' (*cảnh con mất cha, vợ mất chồng*). Moreover, many families lacked the tools necessary for making a living, and wild weeds a meter high had taken over their fields. Bombs and rockets had destroyed some of their land. There were still land mines in some rice fields. A widow with three children remembered,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hội nghị to đổi công toàn tỉnh thành công tốt đẹp' [The conference on labour exchange teams achieved good results], 25 June 1977.

¹⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien Ban ca huyen la mot cong truong' [Dien ban district is station], 11 August 1976.

¹⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang Binh tu thuy loi di len' [Thang Binh advanced by irrigation], 30 November 1977.

After the war, I took my three children home with two empty hands, no rice, no buffaloes (*không lúa gạo, không trâu bò*). It was so miserable! (*cực khổ lắm*). This village was full of wild weeds and trees. We had to restore the land (*vở ruộng trời*), by exchanging labor with others (*làm vắn công với người khác*). At that time we were afraid of mines exploding in the fields but we still tried to do [land restoration].

I was not afraid of death but worried that if I died, who would take care of the children? My sister in law died of a mine exploding when she was hoeing an abandoned field at that time.¹⁷

A blind man in the village shared the story of his accident,

I got injured due to M 79 rocket exploding when I was hoeing a grass bush in the field. It was 20 days after reunification and 10 days after we started restoring the land. We reclaimed land for each other. When we reached the land of my sister, I had this accident.¹⁸

Villagers in Hien Loc village of Binh Lanh commune recalled that the land tenure system had totally changed because land had been abandoned for many years. Previous landlords had fled. Large areas now seemed to have a kind of common land ownership. People restored any plot they liked as if it were their own. Some restored as much land as their families could manage. Those who came home first could select land close to their houses. Those who came later had to cultivate land further away.¹⁹

Besides people restoring some part of the land, the new authorities mobilized villagers to rehabilitate remaining abandoned land. The new Thang Binh district authorities mobilized villagers from less war-torn communes to help residents in heavily damaged communes. A former Binh Lanh commune official recalled that people in Binh Nguyen, Binh Tu, Binh Trung communes who lived in or near the district center came to help the commune restore fields. After land restoration, the commune authority, through the local farmer's associations

¹⁷ Interview, Binh Lanh, Quang Nam, October -December, 2005.

¹⁸ Interview, Binh Lanh, Quang Nam, 19 October 2005.

¹⁹ Mr. Do in Hien Loc village recalled that he returned home from Da Nang city later than other people so he was forced to cultivate on land far from home, which other people disliked (interview, Binh Lanh, 14 October 2005).

(*ban nông hội thôn*), reallocated land among households according to the number of people in their immediate families (*theo nhân khẩu*).²⁰

The situation in Thanh Yen village in Binh Dinh commune (Thang Binh district) was similar. After the war, residents returned to their old war-devastated village. Wild weeds and bomb craters riddled their land. In a similar way as described in the previous paragraph, local authorities (through local farmer associations) mobilized people to restore abandoned land in neighboring villages and other communes as well as their own. The commune authorities also mobilized youth associations and ex-soldiers of Saigon's regime to restore 'difficult' fields littered with land mines. All restored unclaimed land was handled by commune authorities and local farmers' associations to reallocate to the land-poor and landless households according to their needs.²¹

Land readjustment

After land restoration in QN-DN came land readjustment, which did not face strong resistance from a landed class, as was the case in the Mekong Delta (see next sections). At a conference on 'summing up the implementation of land policy and land to the tillers in QN-DN' held on 30 July 1976, authorities announced that the province had 'successfully completed land redistribution to peasants'. So,

one year after starting to implement a new land policy, the fields in our province actually returned to peasants (*ruộng đất về tay nông dân*). Basically there is no more exploited class or landlords. Feudal exploitation has permanently been eliminated.²²

²⁰ Interview, Binh Lanh, 14 October 2005.

²¹ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh commune, October-December 2005.

²² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoan thanh thang loi cong viec chia cap ruong dat cho nong dan' [Having completed land redistribution among peasants], 7 August 1976.

The province had redistributed 19,547 hectares of arable land to 47,000 landless people. About 1,710 hectares had come from 'land donations' (*hiển điền*) and land expropriations of landlord and 'lackeys of the imperialists' (*tay sai của Đế quốc*).²³

According to party researcher Lam Quang Huyen, 'by May 1976, the former zone V (*khu V cũ*) [of the Central Coast] had solved land distribution problem.' Huyen reported that according to the data from 61 communes and 7 wards of 9 districts in the Central Coast, the local authorities had appropriated 18, 027 hectares, accounting for 31 percent of total arable land. This land was then allocated equitably to 34,875 land-poor and landless peasant households (containing 192,107 people).²⁴ The composition of appropriated land is displayed in table 1:

Table 3-1 The composition of appropriated land of 61 communes and 7 wards in the Central Coast

| Type of land | Area (hectare) | Proportion (%) |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Communal land (<i>công điền công thổ</i>) | 4,515 | 25,05% |
| Landlord and rural capitalist's land | 4,330 | 24,02% |
| Rich peasant's land | 1,717 | 9,52% |
| Religious land | 1,541 | 8,55% |
| Others | 5,924 | 32,86% |
| total | 18,027 | 100,00% |

(Source: Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in the south], 1985: p.180)

In heavily war damaged areas and in areas where local authorities played a major role in restoring abandoned land, land redistribution was more extensive than in areas less affected by the war. For example, in Binh Lanh commune, the authorities redistributed equitably a large proportion of restored land to landless and land-poor households. Similarly, after reunification Duy Phuoc commune of Duy Xuyen district had 'redistributed equally all

²³ Ibid; at that time the total agricultural land of the province was about 90,000 hectares.

²⁴ Lam Quang Huyen also mentioned that Binh Tri Thien province had retrieved 12,737 hectare of land and granted it to 40,609 peasant households (Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in the south], Ha Noi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.180).

land regardless of private or public land to peasants, each person receiving one *sào* and three *thước* [equal to 600 meter square].²⁵ Meanwhile, in Hoa Tien commune of Hoa Vang district where abandoned land and land restoration was more modest, local authorities only 'granted communal land' to peasants. They did not touch private land, hence inequitable land distribution remained.²⁶ Likewise, in Thanh Yen village of Binh Dinh commune local authorities only granted communal land (*công điền*) and unclaimed land to landless and land-poor households. Land redistribution gradually happened, however, as families with more land lent some to their relatives and neighbors.²⁷

The Central Coast in general and QN-DN in particular had 'eliminated exploitation on land' and completed 'land redistribution' before the release of the official resolution prescribing it (for example, the party's resolution No.254 NQ/TW, 15 July 1976). It was not only government policy that drove land redistribution; five other factors were significant.

First, as mentioned above, after the war many landlords did not return home and those who returned did not reclaim all their land. A large proportion of abandoned land, including fields that had previously belonged to landlords as well as communal land, was classified as 'unclaimed land' (*đất không có chủ*). Hence, it was not difficult for the authorities to redistribute that land to needy households. Besides, because authorities had carried out land restoration, villagers thought land redistribution could be done as well. The new authorities lent villagers rice, hoes, ploughs and other production tools to restore fields, so they considered restored land 'state's land' (*đất của nhà nước*) that could be reallocated among local households.²⁸

²⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xa Duy Phuoc truoac buoc ngoac lich su' [Duy Phuoc before its historical turning-point], 24 September 1977; one *sào* is equal to 500 square metres and one *thước* is equal to one fifteenth of *sào*.

²⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoa Tien: 1,057 ho tu nguyen dua 379 ha ruong dat vao lam an tap the' [Hoa Tien has 1057 households voluntarily putting 379 hectares into collective farming], 4 October 1977.

²⁷ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh commune, October-December 2005.

²⁸ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh commune, 20 October 2005.

Second, the war had disrupted village life and peasants became refugees in enclosed areas (*khu đồn*). The distance from their land weakened QN-DN peasants' sense of ownership unlike families in many parts of the Mekong Delta who had stayed on their land during the war. A former landlord's son in Binh Lanh commune explained why he did not care much about land ownership after the war: 'after reunification people who had a lot of land did not care or fight over land ownership because they had abandoned their land for years. People disputed what was actually in their own hands such as buffaloes, gold and silver'.²⁹

Third, land redistribution fitted well with local practices. After the war most peasants in QN-DN were struggling to earn a living. To cope with their difficulties, they developed tightly knit corporate communities in which labor exchange and mutual aids among them were common. For example, after reunification, people in two sub-communes, Giao Dong and Giao Tay of Dai Loc district 'voluntarily and spontaneously shared land with each other.' Those who had more land 'shared 3 to 5 *sào* to those who did not.' In return, the landless worked some days for land-givers.³⁰ In Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villages peasants with more land spontaneously gave out large tracks of land to their relatives without authorities telling them to do so. Some villagers who were not able to restore and cultivate all their land because of the lack of labour, farm equipment, and capital decided to cultivate some good plots and let relatives and neighbors use the rest. For example, an only son of a formerly land-rich family in Thanh Yen village said that after the war he did not care much about his family's land because he could not cultivate all 8 hectares of it. He selected a few good plots and allowed his relatives and neighbors to farm the rest.³¹

Four, land-rich peasants knew that under the new authorities they could not have tenants farm for them. They also knew that any resistance to the new authorities' land policy

²⁹ Interview, Binh Lanh, 24 October 2004.

³⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Ngày mai rung mía bat ngan' [Sugar cane crop will be extensive in the future], 20 November 1975; one *sào* is equal to 500 square metres.

³¹ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 5 October 2004.

could be labeled 'reactionary' (*phản động*) or 'opposing revolutionary authorities' (*chống phá chính quyền cách mạng*). Hence, they decided to allow 'authorities to do whatever they wanted' (*ai muốn làm gì thì làm*).³² A QN-DN newspaper article of September 1975 reported that in response to the land redistribution policy,

95 percent of the landlords in Hoa Nhon and Hoa Hung communes of Hoa Vang district [close to Da Nang city] had voluntarily submitted their previous land certificates and application forms to donate a large part of their land to the commune's people committee (*Ủy ban nhân dân xã*) and farmer's association (*Ban nông hội xã*). They only asked to retain what they themselves could farm and within the allowed amount per capita.³³

Finally, after enduring a tumultuous war, most people wished for a peaceful life. Reunification might have brought fear to some people in the cities but most peasants who had fled to urban areas were very pleased. A lady who previously came from a middle-peasant family in Hien Loc village recalled,

After liberation we came home with great joy. We did not care much about land. We were happy to cultivate a few plots we'd just restored. It was better to suffer from hunger than being threatened by death in war.³⁴

Therefore, ending the war satisfied peasants and increased the legitimacy of the new Central Coast authorities.

Ensuring food subsistence and other preparations for collectivization

During the war, according to the Quang Nam Department of Statistics, QN-DN's economy had depended heavily on imported commodities, food and foreign aid. The province produced only about 95,000-100,000 tons of food, falling short of its annual consumption of around 450,000-500,000 tons.³⁵ After the war, the province faced serious food shortages. The lead article of QN-DN newspaper on 16 February 1976 canvassed the provincial leaders' main concern: 'The food problem has now become our top concern ... After liberation we had

³² Interviews, Binh Lan and Binh Dinh communes, 3-29 October 2004.

³³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Đất này về với chúng ta' [This land comes back to us], 1 September 1975.

³⁴ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lan, 15 October 2005.

³⁵ CCTKQN, *Quang Nam 30 Năm Xây Dựng và Phát Triển* [Quang Nam's socio-economic development over the past 30 years], Tam Ky, Chi Cuc Thong Ke Quang Nam, 2005: p.22.

to rely on a large amount of food subsidized from the centre. In order to solve the food problem, the only way was to facilitate food production'. The provincial leaders then urged 'party members, cadres, and people to facilitate food production and economize to the maximum (*thực hành tiết kiệm tối đa*).'³⁶ With only 90,000 hectares of agricultural land, accounting for less than 10 percent of natural areas, and a population of 1.5 million in 1976, QN-DN province had a low level of agricultural land per capita. In addition, most agricultural land was sandy and poor and had inadequate irrigation.³⁷

The lead article of QN-DN newspaper in July 1976 called for 'raising the spirit of self-sufficiency in production and building our country' (*nêu cao tinh thần tự lực trong sản xuất và xây dựng quê hương*) and 'increasing food production in order to supply food stuff for the whole province in a short period of time'.³⁸ Responding to the draft political report of Fourth Party congress, in late 1976 the QN-DN newspapers launched a column called 'the people's forum' (*diễn đàn nhân dân*) to discuss whether or not QN-DN province could resolve its own food problem (*tỉnh ta có khả năng tự giải quyết lương thực hay không?*). Several subsequent articles in this column came from state offices at provincial, district and commune levels. Most articles agreed that the province could feed itself. Methods to do so included 'irrigation' (*thuỷ lợi*), 'intensive farming', (*thâm canh*) 'adopting new seeds' (*áp dụng giống mới*), 'developing subsidiary crops' (*phát triển cây màu*), 'increasing the number of crops per year' (*tăng vụ*), 'expanding agricultural land' (*mở rộng diện tích*) and 'transforming and designing fields' (*cải tạo đồng ruộng*).³⁹ Provincial leaders eventually

³⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Day manh san xuat va thuc hanh tiet kiem giai quyet van de lương thực cấp bách trước mắt' [Increase production and be thrifty to immediately deal with urgent food shortage], 16 February 1976.

³⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Phan dau mo rong nhanh dien tich canh tac' [Extending cultivated area], 26 June 1976.

³⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nêu cao tinh thần tự lực tu công trong sản xuất và xây dựng quê hương' [Be self-reliant in ensuring production and building the country], 29 September, 1976.

³⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tỉnh ta có khả năng tự giải quyết lương thực hay không?' [Is our province able to solve our own food problem?], 22 November 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhìn lại diện tích đất đai để thấy rõ khả năng tự giải quyết lương thực' [Agricultural area and potential food production], 26 November 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nước và sản xuất lương thực ở tỉnh ta' [Irrigation and food production in our province], 18 December 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vì sao tỉnh ta đất đai van de giải quyết lương thực' [Why do we pay great attention to solving the food problem?], 22 December 1976.

asserted that the province could ensure its own food and set a target to produce 500,000 tons of staple food in 1980. To achieve this, the plan called for expanding 50,000 hectares of agricultural land to a total of 140,000 hectares, extending irrigated areas from 21,000 hectares in 1976 to 60,000 in 1980, moving 160,000 people from low lands to build new economic zones in mountainous areas, increasing subsidiary crops to 30 percent of total food production, and expanding the area of new spring-summer rice crops to 15,000 hectares.⁴⁰

These measures were not totally new; some had been implemented in many parts of the province immediately after the war.⁴¹ The QN-DN provincial leaders considered irrigation a first measure (*biện pháp hàng đầu*). According to a QN-DN newspaper account, after the province's irrigation conference in November 1975, authorities launched a widespread campaign for increased irrigation which mobilized people to dig ponds, build dams and canals and use manual water pumps in order to water fields.⁴² Within the first three months of 1976, QN-DN province had mobilized 111,850 days of labor to repair 363 dams and 132 canals totalling 131,905 meters long. Besides this accomplishment, the province started five 'big irrigation projects'.⁴³

For example, Thang Binh district had 23,000 hectares of agricultural land, a large part of which was classified as 'sandy, acidic, saline and infertile' (*đất cát, chua, mặn và bạc*

⁴⁰ Ho Nghinh, the Communist party secretary for QN-DN province, 'Quang Nam-Da Nang vuot bac phat trien san xuat nong nghiep' [Quang Nam-Da Nang has made a great progress in agriculture], in *Nhan Dan newspaper*, 8 March 1977; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị ban chấp hành đảng bộ tỉnh khoa 11' [Resolution of 11th provincial party executive committee], 12 March 1977.

⁴¹ See *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tăng vụ sản xuất xuân hè' [New spring-summer crop], 9 Feb 1976; 'Hoa Mau Dat Quang' [Secondary crops], 16 February 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Day mạnh công tác thủy lợi nhỏ để phục vụ sản xuất vụ xuân hè và hè thu' [Extending irrigation for the spring-summer and summer-autumn crops], 8 March 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Làm thế nào để đạt đỉnh cao năng suất vụ hè thu' [How to make the summer-autumn reach the highest productivity], 26 May 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Phân đầu mô rộng nhanh diện tích canh tác' [Extending cultivated area], 24 June 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nêu cao tinh thần tự lực tự cường trong sản xuất và xây dựng quê hương' [Be self-reliant in ensuring production and building the country], 29 September 1976; 'Làm thế nào để sản xuất nhiều lương thực thực phẩm: nhưng biện pháp thủy lợi để thực hiện mục tiêu nông nghiệp tỉnh' [Irrigation measures to achieve agricultural targets], 14 September 1977.

⁴² *QN-DN Newspaper*, 'Day mạnh công tác thủy lợi nhỏ để phục vụ sản xuất xuân hè và hè thu' [Extending irrigation for the spring-summer and summer-autumn crops], 8 March 1976; Binh Duong commune of Thang Binh district was considered as an exemplary case because it had dug 2,200 ponds (*giếng*) to water the crops. On average, each laborer had dug one pond.

⁴³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Toàn tỉnh soi noi ra quan làm thủy lợi' [People in the province are all extending irrigation], 12 May 1976.

màu) as well as poorly irrigated. Therefore, irrigation was considered a first priority to develop agriculture.⁴⁴ Apart from mobilizing peasants to repair damaged canals and build small irrigation systems, district authorities also focused on building larger irrigation systems and such dams as Truong Giang and Cao Ngan.⁴⁵

Truong Giang dam was built by blocking Truong Giang river, 500 meters wide, to irrigate 2,000 hectares of land in the eastern part of the district. The project required a huge amount of labor working simultaneously. Authorities adopted the 'military method' (*quân sự hoá*) of mobilizing workers to complete 110,000 labor-days (*ngày công*). Within 2 months of 'working day and night' (*làm cả ngày lẫn đêm*) and 'working like real fighting' (*làm như chiến đấu thật sự*), the district had completed the dam in time.⁴⁶

Cao Ngan dam, located in Binh Lanh commune, was built to irrigate 300 hectares in the western part of the district. Despite the dam being much smaller than Truong Giang, it required six times as much labor to build than Truong Giang. Besides using the military method mentioned above, authorities adopted northern collectivization management strategies such as the three contracts system (*3 khoán*): contracts of quantity (*khối lượng*), work assignments (*công việc*) and timing (*thời gian*) for each commune. Authorities also adopted five management (*5 quản*) categories from the north: the management of planning (*kế hoạch*), materials (*nguyên liệu*), tools (*dụng cụ*), technology (*kỹ thuật*) and livelihood (*đời sống*).⁴⁷

Villagers in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen villages recalled that soon after reunification, each family had contributed months to build Cao Ngan dam in Binh Lanh commune and Phuoc Ha dam in Binh Phu commune. Later, authorities mobilized youth in the villages to build another great irrigation dam, Phu Ninh (*Đại công trình thủy lợi Phú Ninh*), located in

⁴⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang binh tu thuy loi di len' [Thang Binh advanced by irrigation], 30 November 1977.

⁴⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang Binh day manh phong trao lam thuy loi, quyet ganh vu lua he thu thang loi' [Thang Binh intensifies extending irrigation for the summer-autumn crops], 12 May 1976.

⁴⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang Binh tu thuy loi di len' [Thang Binh advanced by irrigation], 30 November 1977.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Tam Ky district. One lady in Hien Loc village said that she had to contribute three months labor (*3 tháng lao động*) for Cao Ngan dam and many days for the other dams. When working this, she had to carry her own food.⁴⁸ Some peasants in Hien Loc commented that previous governments in the French and American time attempted to build these dams but were not able to pay for labour and for the use of private land. Under revolutionary authorities, however, land belonged to everyone (*của chung*) so it was easier to build dams, roads and things which required vast tracts of land.⁴⁹

Building dams took over a large amount of peasants' land, but I found no evidence of strong resistance. Some peasants did express dissatisfaction with the policy. An article in QN-DN newspaper (29 September 1976) told how the party cell of Hoa Nhon commune of Hoa Vang district overcame peasants' 'backward thoughts and superstitions' when it decided to open a canal through hills and villages to divert water from the river to rice fields. Many peasants refused to participate in the project. Some elderly people were afraid that the dam would 'disturb the integrity of their village land' (*đứt con đất của làng*) and upset 'the spirits of the land' (*Thổ địa quở phạt*). Some worried about the loss of their land and their family's tombs. Other residents doubted the success of the project. In order to overcome these objections, the party cell organized meetings to 'fight and criticize feudal thoughts such as selfishness and superstitions'. The article also commented that disputes over thought were 'actually aimed at dealing with "who triumphs over whom" - socialism versus capitalism and large-scale production versus small production'.⁵⁰

Besides more irrigation, local authorities wanted new rice seeds used and more crops per year. In order to solve the food shortage in the interval between the winter-spring and the

⁴⁸ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 15 October 2005.

⁴⁹ An old man in Hien Loc village referred to Phu Ninh dam as Ba Ky dam (the three periods dam) because the dam was initiated by the French, continued by Saigon's government and completed by the existing government (interview, Hien Loc, 17 October 2005).

⁵⁰ QN-DN newspaper, 'Hoa Nhon qua mot nam tien cong nghe nan lac hau' [Hoa Nhon after one year of attacking poverty and backwardness], 29 September 1976.

summer-autumn crops (*chống đối giáp hạt*), the province launched a campaign to adopt a new spring-summer rice crop (*vụ xuân hè*).⁵¹ Such a crop was totally new to many peasants in QN-DN who previously had cultivated at most only two rice crops per year. However, adopting the spring-summer rice crop seemed to go well and achieve good results initially. The lead article of QN-DN newspaper titled 'Spring-summer crop wins a victory' argued that 'the victory of the spring-summer crop has shown the great potential for adopting intensive farming, increasing the number of crops per year and extending arable land to deal with the food problem.'⁵² Some years later, much of irrigated areas of QN-DN province had a third rice crops cultivated each year too.

Adopting new seeds, authorities said, was an essential measure to increase food production. Provincial leaders encouraged peasants to adopt new rice seeds in the winter-spring crop 1975-1976. Excited by the 'good results', provincial leaders released a resolution in May 1976 calling for the new rice seeds to be used 90-100 percent of cultivated areas.⁵³ At a February 1977 meeting, the chairman of QN-DN reported that the province had indeed increased the new seed rate from 50-60 percent of total rice area in the winter-spring 1975-1976 to 80-90 percent in the winter-spring 1976-1977.

Adopting new rice seeds was familiar to peasants who were under the influence of the Saigon government's rural development program. For example, QN-DN peasants in Dien Quang commune of Dai Loc district, Dien Minh and Dien Phuong of Dien Ban district and Hoa Nam and Hoa Xuan communes of Hoa Vang district had used chemical fertilizers, new rice seeds and farm machinery even before 1975.⁵⁴ However, the majority of peasants in the

⁵¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tang vụ sản xuất xuân hè' [New spring-summer crops], 9 February 1976.

⁵² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vụ sản xuất xuân hè thắng lợi' [The spring-summer crops have a good result], 7 August 1976.

⁵³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vụ lúa đông xuân 1975-1976 đạt kết quả tốt' [The winter-spring rice crops of 1975-1976 have a good result], 8 May 1976; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Ban thường vụ tỉnh ủy ra chỉ thị phát động chiến dịch sản xuất hè-thu, quyết giành vụ hè thu-thu thắng lợi lớn' [Provincial standing committee issued directive calling for intensifying spring-summer crop production to gain a big victory], 12 May 1976.

⁵⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhưng mùa lúa đầu tiên' [The first rice crops], 19 April 1976.

province still grew traditional rice and had rarely used chemical fertilizers or *phân bắc* (human manure: literally northern manure).

When authorities urged increased use of new rice seeds and *phân bắc*, they met resistance. A QN-DN newspaper article in September 1976 told how the party cell in Hoa Nhon commune triumphed over the peasants' evasion of new rice seeds. Despite the commune's party cell releasing a resolution asking peasants to adopt new rice seeds (No.73/2), many peasants in Phu Hoa sub-commune evaded and refused to follow orders because they feared crop failure. Some had eaten or hidden the new rice seeds that the communal authorities delivered to them and 'secretly' replaced them with old rice seeds. Some only pretended to follow the instructions of seed preparation or deliberately made mistakes. Instead of soaking seeds in a mixture of 3 parts of boiling water and 2 parts of cold water, they poured boiling water first and cold water later, thus killing the seeds. Then they attributed the failure to the quality of the seeds and returned to using their old seeds. However, the communal authorities knew about the deliberate sabotage of the cultivation of new seeds and organized meetings to correct these 'bad behaviors' and asked peasants to prepare new seedlings. The struggle between the peasants and the authorities continued. Finally commune authorities got the upper-hand by using commune youth association members to prepare seedling, the local women's association members to deliver and transplant seedlings for peasants.⁵⁵

As an additional step toward increasing rice production, authorities in QN-DN called for the removal of tombs from agricultural land.⁵⁶ Although the policy touched a sensitive aspect of peasants' culture, who respected the immovability of ancestral tombs, it encountered only modest resistance. For example, people in Dien Ban district 'spent 100,000

⁵⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Kien quyet danh chien thang cho cai moi' [Be resolute to succeed in struggling for new things], 29 September 1976.

⁵⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Uy ban nhan dan ra chi thi ve cong tac quy hoach mo ma va nha cua cua dan' [The provincial Peoples' committee issued directive to reallocate tombs and houses], 28 August 1976.

working days to remove 90,000 scattered tombs, extending 80 additional hectares of agricultural land'.⁵⁷ Despite dissatisfaction with the policy, few Dien Ban peasants openly objected. Many, though, criticized it behind the authorities' backs. Similarly in Duy An commune, Duy Xuyen district peasants mockingly said, 'even the dead aren't allowed to rest!' (*người chết cũng không được nằm yên*). However, authorities were finally able to 'convince' these peasants to accept the policy.⁵⁸

According to a QN-DN newspaper, post-war economic restoration policies achieved a 'good result.' From mid-1975 to the end of 1977, the province had expanded its cultivated areas (*diện tích gieo trồng*) from 96,000 to 183,337 hectares, equal to the figure in 1965. The staple food production also increased from 149,062 in 1975 to 300,000 tons by the end of 1977, promising the province would be able to overcome food shortage and produce 500,000 tons targeted by 1980.⁵⁹

Building interim forms of collectives and preparing for collectivization

While carrying out post-war economic restoration policies, authorities also created labor exchange teams (*tổ đổi công vắn công*). This did not face any opposition in QN-DN because it fit well with reciprocity and mutual assistance still popular among villagers. Besides, before 1975, especially during the Vietnam period, revolutionary authorities in many areas of QN-DN had already organized peasants into exchange teams and even some collectives.⁶⁰

Soon after the war, Dien Ban district, for example, formed 598 labor exchange teams to help with land restoration.⁶¹ Likewise, peasants in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen villages, Thang Binh district recalled that in order to undertake land restoration, sub-commune

⁵⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien Ban ca huyen la mot cong truong' [Dien Ban district is now like a construction site], 11 August 1976.

⁵⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Duy An lap khu nghia dia moi' [Duy An has established new graveyards], 5 April 1976.

⁵⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Giong duong cay thang loi' [Be victorious in agriculture], 26 April 1978.

⁶⁰ *Quang Da newspaper*, 'Nganh nong nghiep tinh Quang Da tinh cuc cham lo vu mua thang 8' [Agricultural sector in Quang Da is positive about caring for August crops], 20 June 1975.

⁶¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien Ban ca huyen la mot cong truong' [Dien Ban district is now like a construction site], 11 August 1976.

farmers' associations organized them into labor exchange teams, each with 15-20 nearby households.⁶² Most of these labor exchange teams operated in an 'irregular' and 'seasonal' way (*tổ đổi công không thường xuyên, thời vụ*) and for specific tasks such as preparing fields and harvesting. They were dismantled when the specific task was completed.

Local authorities 'successfully' organized peasants into 'regular labor exchange teams' (*tổ đổi công thường xuyên*) in some parts of QN-DN. For example, Song Binh sub-commune (Dai Quang commune, Dai Loc district) formed 'regular labor exchange teams' for land restoration, production and irrigation. One hundred and sixty households in the sub-commune were organized into such teams, each with 12-14 households and 1-2 buffaloes. Members in these organizations exchanged labor among themselves in their everyday production activities. Men were often in charge of hoeing and plowing; women did lighter work such as transplanting and harvesting. Those who did not have draft animals could use the team's buffaloes.⁶³ Another example is Thang Phuoc commune of Thang Binh district whose rural communities had been 'totally destroyed' by American and Saigon's forces during the war. Living conditions in the commune were poor; their land had been abandoned for 10 years; women and the elderly made up the workforce. To cope with such difficulties, local authorities quickly organized peasant households into 39 'regular labor exchange teams'.⁶⁴

QN-DN authorities wanted regular labor exchange teams to develop more quickly. The pace was slow, similar to what had happened in the northern Vietnam towards the end of 1958 when only 22 percent of the labor exchange teams were regular.⁶⁵ In June 1977 QN-DN provincial leaders at a 'conference of labor exchange teams' (*hội nghị tổ đổi công*) praised

⁶² Interview, Thang Yen and Hien Loc village, October-December 2005.

⁶³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'To doi cong vong cong o Song Binh' [Labour exchange teams in Song Binh], 8 May 1975.

⁶⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Toan xa Thang Phuoc lam an trong cac to doi cong thuong xuyen' [The whole population of Thang Phuoc is organized into regular labour exchange teams], 23 May 1977.

⁶⁵ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2005: p. 57.

the widespread movement (*phong trào*) to build labor exchange teams and their role in 'training peasants to work collectively' and solving their post-war problems. But leaders also criticized these organizations for 'developing unevenly and unsoundly', operating in simple, unfair and irrational methods (*chưa công bằng, hợp lý*). The teams 'had not stimulated a positive attitude among peasants' (*chưa phát huy tính tích cực của nông dân*). Provincial leaders then called for upgrading simple labor-exchange teams into higher-level organizations called 'production teams working according to norms and contracts (PTWCNC)' (*tổ sản xuất có định mức, khoán việc*).⁶⁶

According to the guidelines, the PTWCNC was still based on individual ownership of land and other means of production but management was similar to a collective organization. For example, officials kept track of labour exchanges through work-points, norms and contracts, and they distributed state agricultural inputs to teams.⁶⁷

Establishing PTWCNCs was a 'first step of collectivization'. The aim of these organizations was to 'facilitate peasant's solidarity', 'improve collective work', 'establish state and peasant relations', 'make peasants familiar with collective work' and 'select and train cadres' for ongoing collectivization.⁶⁸ However, unlike a simple labor exchange team, building a PTWCNC required training cadres and peasants. For example, when building PTWCNCs in Dien Ban district, officials had trained 134 cadres by 12 August 1977 and over 400 were being trained. Each commune sent about 30 to 40 people to training school.⁶⁹ By October 1977, QN-DN had trained nearly 9,000 cadres; some districts had completed the

⁶⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hội nghị to đổi công toàn tỉnh thành công tốt đẹp' [The conference on labour exchange achieved a good result], 25 June 1977.

⁶⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Một vài đề cập chú ý khi hướng dẫn và xây dựng tổ sản xuất có định mức khoán việc' [Some tips about establishing PTWCNCs], 22 October 1977.

⁶⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Ban hướng dẫn nội dung xây dựng tổ đổi công có định mức, khoán việc' [Guidelines to establish PTWCNCs], 29 June 1977.

⁶⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien Ban mở lớp tập huấn về tổ sản xuất có định mức, khoán việc' [Dien Ban opens class to train cadres for PTWCNCs], 24 September 1977.

training of all cadres and were preparing to establish PTWCNCs before the winter-spring crop of 1977-1978.⁷⁰

Building PTWCNCs faced difficulties. For example, Dai Loc district selected Duc Phu sub-commune in Dai Hiep commune to build pilot PTWCNCs. To ensure success, the sub-commune had to organize policy studying meetings (*học tập chính sách*) for cadres and peasants, wipe out 'distorted statements of bad people' (*luận điệu xuyên tạc của kẻ xấu*), and prevent people from selling draft buffaloes and farm tools'. Despite authorities mobilizing 97 percent of households into 33 PTWCNCs, in operational terms, many teams 'were confused about management (*lúng túng về quản lý*) and cadres were unsure how to make norms and contracts, calculate and determine workdays among households'.⁷¹ Similarly, An Binh sub-commune (in Tien Ky commune, Tien Phuoc district) faced difficulties managing its PTWCNCs. Peasants were 'confused' about how to work according to norms and contracts. Some complained that the procedures 'coerced, mortified and restricted' people and 'did not raise their enthusiasm'. A peasant complained, 'without norms and contracts, I can work with all my heart. Now under the norms and contracts, I do enough to just achieve satisfactory result according to the contract!'⁷²

By the end of 1977 when collectivization began, QN-DN had built 4,524 simple interim collective organizations in which nearly 80 percent of peasant households were members. Of these, 2,625 were PTWCNCs, although 42 percent of them were below

⁷⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xây dựng các tổ chức sản xuất có định mức khoán việc' [Establishing PTWCNCs], 22 October 1977.

⁷¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dai Loc xây dựng các tổ chức sản xuất có định mức khoán việc' [Dai Loc is establishing PTWCNCs], 26 Oct 1977; in June 1977, the provincial authorities released a directive 'forbidding merchants from purchasing and slaughtering draft animals' (*QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nghiem cam thương nhân mua trâu bò để giết thịt' [Prohibiting private merchants from purchasing and slaughtering livestock], 24 September 1977).

⁷² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Binh An xây dựng tổ chức sản xuất có định mức khoán việc' [Binh An is establishing PTWCNCs], 24 April 1978.

standard.⁷³ Among the places in QN-DN without any PTWCNCs were Hien Loc village (Binh Lanh commune) and Thanh Yen village (Binh Dinh commune).⁷⁴

Generally speaking, by late 1977, authorities in QN-DN, particularly in Thang Binh district, were able to accomplish most of the measures they had intended prior to going on to collectivized farming. The story is different in the Mekong Delta's An Giang province.

Post-war restoration and the preparations for collectivization in the Mekong Delta

Building the foundation for new authorities and collectives farming

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

According to the documents about Cho Moi district's party committee, new district authorities after the war faced many difficulties in controlling society and consolidating their power.⁷⁵ According to a former official of Long Dien B commune, after 30 April 1975, Bao An soldiers (of Hoa Hao religion) and Saigon's soldiers and officers gathered in Cho Moi district and fought against the revolutionary force for a week.⁷⁶ Assessing the difficulties of Cho Moi district in the first few years after reunification, a former party secretary there reported, 'eighty percent of the population was religious; most of them were the Hoa Hao. Twenty thousand Saigon's soldiers gathered here ... forty percent of the population were

⁷³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tinh uy mo hoi nghi ban ve cai tao xa hoi chu nghia doi voi nong nghiep' [Provincial Party Committee held a conference about socialist agricultural transformation], 22 February 1978; 'Mot so viec can lam de dua su nghiep cai tao xa hoi chu nghia doi voi nong nghiep len thanh cao trao' [Some necessary steps to intensify socialist agricultural transformation], 25 February 1978.

⁷⁴ Interview, Hien Loc and Thanh Yen villages, August-November 2005.

⁷⁵ DBCM, 'Tren mat tran bao ve an ninh to quoc' [On the front of national security], in *Cho Moi 25 Nam Xay Dung va Phat Trien* [Cho Moi's socio-economic development over the past 25 years], Dang Bo Cho Moi, 2000: p.44.

⁷⁶ Interview, Cho Moi, 16 June 2005.

landless and land-poor'.⁷⁷ The authorities considered the large number of Saigon and Bao An ex-soldiers in Cho Moi a political threat to them.

Another difficulty authorities faced was a lack of local party cadres to fill new positions. This was the situation in Cho Moi district and other Mekong Delta locations.⁷⁸ During the war, the local networks of southern cadres had been destroyed and many revolutionaries killed, especially through the American and GVN Phoenix program.⁷⁹ After the war, party organizations in An Giang were weak. Seventeen communes had no party cells. Most survived ex-revolutionaries came from remote districts such as Tinh Bien, Tri Ton and Phu Chau.⁸⁰ Villagers in Cho Moi called their area a 'white area' (*vùng trắng*) which meant no communist party cells operated there until reunification. By mid-1975, Cho Moi district had only 58 communist party cadres, insufficient for establishing new local authority. Therefore, 40 party cadres were sent from nearby Sa Dec province.⁸¹ In assessing the situation of the party organization in Cho Moi district in the first few years after reunification, the secretary of An Giang commented, 'the party bases (*cơ sở đảng*) were small and thin (*mỏng*). Mass organizations and communal and hamlet authorities were inadequate and weak'.⁸²

In the first few years after reunification, many communes of Cho Moi district had no party cells or only weak ones. For example, Long Dien B commune had a new party cell with only three members in 1977; one was the secretary of the cell, one was the commune's

⁷⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Qua hoi nghi cong bao hoan thanh co ban hop tac hoa nong nghiep o huyen Cho Moi' [Conference on the completion of collectivization in Cho Moi], 15 April 1985.

⁷⁸ Pham Van Kiet, 'Nong dan dang soi noi di len lam an tap the' [Peasants are eager to undertake collective farming], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* (Vo Chi Cong et al., eds) [Collective farming for peasants] NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.28.

⁷⁹ Beresford, 'Issues in economic unification overcoming the legacy of separation', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David G. Marr and Christine P. White, eds), Ithaca, NY, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.107; Natalie Hicks, *Organizational Adventures in District Government* (PhD thesis), Australian National University, 2005: p.120.

⁸⁰ Uy Ban Nhan Dan Tinh An Giang, *Dia Chi An Giang* [An Giang's monograph], Long Xuyen, 2003: p.349.

⁸¹ BCHDBHCM, *Lich Su Dang Bo Huyen Cho Moi 1927-1995* [The history of Cho Moi party cell: 1927-1995], Cho Moi, 1995: p.169.

⁸² *An Giang newspaper*, 'Huyen Cho Moi hoan thanh hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Cho Moi district has completed collectivization], 4 April 1985.

chairman (*chủ tịch xã*) and the other was the chief policeman of the commune (*trưởng công an xã*), who had just become a party member. At hamlet level, new authorities selected some trusted local people to work as chiefs (*trưởng ấp*) and members of hamlet managerial boards and peasant associations.

A majority of local cadres in Long Dien B commune were not ex-revolutionaries. They were selected thanks mostly to the revolutionary merit of their parents, brothers, or even distant relatives. Long Dien B residents remembered after reunification new local cadres often calling themselves 'ex-undercover revolutionaries' (*cán bộ nằm vùng*) or 'having the merits of having hid VC cadres' (*có công nuôi cán bộ*). In many cases, the new cadres were exaggerating. An old man, a former chief of the Saigon government's local militia group (*dân quân tự vệ*) of a hamlet in Long Dien B, commented that the local post-1975 chief had been a member of his staff. After reunification, the man was made hamlet chief thanks to the revolutionary merit of his brother-in-law who lived in Dong Thap. The man often claimed that he had previously been an undercover revolutionary, but many people did not believe him.⁸³ Some local people added that due to lack of revolutionary merit, many of these cadres tended to work to gain political merit (*lập công*). Some commented that while these cadres tried to comply with the official policies, they also pursued their own interests.

While establishing a new government, leaders in the Mekong Delta also began to build foundations for collectivization. In the Central Coast the first stage was to create 'labor exchange team' (*tổ đổi công, vắn công*). In the Mekong Delta, however, the first step was to create 'production solidarity teams' (*tổ đoàn kết sản xuất*). The different names reflect social and economic differences between two regions. In the Mekong Delta, labor exchange among peasants had not been as common in past decades as in the Central Coast. Instead, land-rich

⁸³ Interview, Long Dien B, Cho Moi, 29 June 2005.

peasants had often hired the land-poor and landless to work for them. The term 'solidarity' reflected the Communist party government's desire to join these two classes of villagers.

According to official guidelines, each production solidarity team (PST) should farm 30-50 hectares. In so doing, authorities expected cadres and peasants would learn to exchange labour (*vấn đổi công*) and work together collectively. In practice, many PSTs did not operate in these ways. Villagers in Long Dien B said that the PSTs in Cho Moi district often had 200 to 300 hectares, virtually the size of a hamlet. Moreover, many PSTs did not exchange labor. A former PST leader said peasants refused to farm that way. Peasants wanted to hire labor as they did previously, rather than exchanging it, because the latter method was unknown and inferior.⁸⁴ Therefore, although PSTs existed, people farmed no differently than before, as individual, not as teams. One local cadre described this as 'each person cultivated on his own land and paid his own fees' (*đất ai nấy làm phí ai nấy trả*). The PSTs played only an intermediary role between the state and peasants. They were in charge of delivering agricultural inputs and other necessary goods from the state to peasants and collected taxes from peasants for the state.⁸⁵

In 1976 Cho Moi district established 105 PSTs in 101 hamlets. But their quality was low. Cho Moi's party cell reported,

In 1977, the district party committee realized that ... in reality peasants in these organizations still farmed individually. In other words, these organizations were in fact just fuel-delivering teams (*tổ xăng dầu*). Therefore, the district's party committee decided to establish a committee for agricultural transformation (*ban cải tạo nông nghiệp huyện*) and immediately selected several cadres to go to the provincial capital for training.⁸⁶

By 1978 An Giang province had established about 300 production solidarity teams, 528 by 1979 and 1,528 by 1980. Most of these organizations, according to assessment

⁸⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 25 June 2005

⁸⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 15 June 2005.

⁸⁶ An Giang newspaper, 'Qua hội nghị công báo hoàn thành cơ bản hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp huyện Cho Moi' [Report from a conference announcing the completion of collectivization in Cho Moi], 15 April 1985.

reports, were 'inadequate in quality and scale' (*không đúng tính chất và qui mô*).⁸⁷ Hoping to improve their quality, the vice-chief of An Giang's Committee for agricultural transformation in June 1981 ordered the teams be made smaller.⁸⁸ However, the situation did not much improve much because local leaders were preoccupied with land redistribution and other issues.

First land reforms

Compared to other regions of the south, the Mekong Delta (especially the western part, *Miền Tây*, where An Giang is) was among the least affected by the war. Thanks to a relatively peaceful life, natural resources and previous agrarian reforms, food production in many places of the region had exceeded consumption needs; previous reforms had almost eliminated big landlords; and the rural population had diverse occupations including growing commodity-crops, working as laborers, engaging in petty trade and doing other non-farming work. This made the social structure and economic activities of the Mekong Delta more diverse compared to the Central Coast and other regions of the south.

Another unusual feature of the region was that peasants' farming and production activities went beyond their villages. Many peasants had land in their own hamlet as well as in distant communes, districts and even provinces. In Cho Moi district (An Giang), far more than half the peasants had fields elsewhere. Most of their 'outside' land was located in Long Xuyen quadrangular (*Tứ Giác Long Xuyên*) and the Plain of Reeds (*Đồng Tháp Mười*), which local peasants called 'big fields' (*đồng lớn*). A former district official mentioned that the area of agricultural land that Cho Moi's peasants had outside the district exceeded that of the

⁸⁷ STTVHAN, *Thong Tin Pho Thong* [General information], Long Xuyen, NXB So Thong Tin Van Hoa An Giang, 1978 (9): p.9; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phong trao hop tac hoa tiep tuc di vao chieu huong on dinh va phat trien theo phuong cham tich cuc va vung chac, phong van dong chi To Sy Hong, pho truong ban cai tao nong nghiep' [Collectivization is going well, interview of To Sy Hong, a vice-chairman of Agricultural Transformation Committee], 7 June 1981: p.2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

district's agricultural land. Most peasants who had land in 'big fields' possessed more than 100 *công* of land (10 hectares of land); despite growing one 'floating rice' crop (*lúa nổi*) a year, these peasants carried home annually thousands *gia* of paddy.⁸⁹ Many peasants in Long Dien B recalled that before 1975, they enjoyed self-sufficiency and a higher standard of living. Even agricultural laborers who did not have land had an 'enough' life (*sống thoải mái*) working for land-rich, fishing and non-farming occupations.⁹⁰

Authorities in the new Communist Party government viewed the rural south as polarized into two social classes: exploited and exploiter. According to party documents, land in areas that had been controlled by Saigon (*vùng địch*) was more unequally distributed in 'liberated' areas (*vùng giải phóng*). For example, in the Hoa Hao religious areas of An Giang province, 41 percent of peasants were considered landless and land-poor. In Vinh Thach commune, Thot Not district of nearby Hau Giang province, where the Nguyen Van Thieu government had piloted 'land to the tillers' before 1975, 26 percent of peasants were still landless. Meanwhile, in 'liberated' and 'semi-liberated' areas such as Tan Hoi commune, Cai Lay district of Tien Giang province, only 3.3 percent of peasants were landless; in Ninh Quoi of Hau Giang province, 1.7 percent of peasants were landless.⁹¹ Therefore, post-1975 land readjustment became a major concern of national and local government.

Prohibiting non-resident cultivators (cắt xâm canh)

To deal with the areas of peasants' cultivation beyond their own residences, Hanoi officials issued directive No.235-CT/TW in September 1976:

For land of non-commune residents (*đối với ruộng đất xã này xâm canh xã khác*), if it belongs to laboring peasants [such as poor and middle peasants], let them continue to cultivate it; if the land has been classified as land under confiscating

⁸⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 3 August 2005; A *công* is equal to one tenth of hectare. A *gia* is equal to 20 kilograms.

⁹⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August-October 2005.

⁹¹ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách mạng ruộng đất ở miền nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in the south], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.177-178.

[such as land of rich peasants and landlords], then grant it first to current cultivators of the land who have farmed the land for a long time and now do not have enough land.⁹²

The Politburo's directive No.57 (15 November 1978) clarified that land confiscation would apply to the land of non-resident rich peasants, rural capitalists and upper-middle peasants. For land of non-resident laboring people, local authorities should either mobilize landowners to where their land was or give them other land in exchange.⁹³ In the light of these policies, the authorities in An Giang and elsewhere in the Mekong Delta implemented a policy of 'prohibiting land occupying' or 'prohibiting non-resident cultivators' (*cắt xâm canh*) which meant many peasants in the region including middle peasants lost much of their land.⁹⁴

Villagers in Long Dien B commune, Cho Moi district, recalled that after the war, the first controversial policy they faced was this one prohibiting non-resident cultivators. The policy encouraged 'cultivation close to the residential area' (*liền canh liền cư*) and discouraged peasants from cultivating in other communes and districts.⁹⁵ According to some former local officials in Cho Moi district this made it easier for local authorities to control rural society, food production and food procurement. They argued that if people were allowed to move freely, the local authorities would not be able to mobilize people into collective organizations. Moreover, these policies were a first step toward land redistribution and collectivization. Prohibiting non-resident cultivators helped authorities to appropriate the land of non-resident land-rich households and give it to land-poor and landless households in

⁹² DCSVN, 'Chi thi của Ban bí thư số.235-CT/TW: Về việc thực hiện nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị về vấn đề ruộng đất ở Miền Nam (20 September 1976)' [Directive No.235 on the implementation of the Politburo's land resolution in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap*, Tap 37, 1976, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.280-1.

⁹³ DCSVN, 'Chi Thi 57-CT/TW về việc xóa bỏ các hình thức bóc lột của phú nông, tư sản nông thôn và tàn dư bóc lột phong kiến; thúc đẩy phát huy quyền làm chủ tập thể của ông dân lao động; đẩy mạnh công tác cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp ở các tỉnh miền Nam' [Directive No.57 on eliminating exploitations in the south], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap*: Tap 38, 1977, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.474.

⁹⁴ Huynh Thi Gam, *Nhung Bien Doi Kinh Te Xa Hoi o Nong Thon Dong Bang Song Cuu Long 1975-1995* (PhD thesis) [Socio-economic changes in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1995], Ho Chi Minh, Đại học Khoa Học Xã Hội và Nhân Văn, 1998: p.88.

⁹⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, August-October 2005.

each commune.⁹⁶ In addition, the policy also helped to identify land for state farms (*nông trường*), district farms (*nông trang*) and other state organizations.

Under the 'non-resident cultivator prohibition' policy, many peasants in Cho Moi claimed to have lost land in Tu Giac Long Xuyen and Dong Thap Muoi to either newly-established state farms, collectives or production units. Many expressed their dissatisfaction. Some peasants resisted silently and softly by abandoning land and refusing any land in exchange.

Mr. Ph., a farmer in Long Dien B commune, Cho Moi district, recalled that he had owned 7 hectares of land in another district, Chau Thanh, also in An Giang since 1952. After 1975, he continued to till the land for two seasons [two years] until a state farm was established and expelled him. When losing the land, he felt very sad but could not do anything. He returned home to borrow 5 *công* (0.5 hectares) of land from his relatives to make a living.⁹⁷ Mr. H in the same hamlet as Mr. Ph. had possessed 20 hectares of land in Thoai Son district of An Giang since 1954; he said that a state farm appropriated his land and offered him another land in exchange. But he felt very upset and refused the offered land. Eventually, he decided to abandon the land and returned home to 'raise ducks and chickens and worked on a few *công* of land around the house'.⁹⁸ Mr. Ch. in Long Dien B recalled that he reclaimed more than 10 hectares of land in Vinh Hanh commune (Chau Thanh district, An Giang province) in the mid-1950s. A few seasons after 1975, when local authorities implemented the non-resident cultivators prohibition, he quit farming, despite Vinh Hanh commune saying that he could keep some fields on the condition that he transfer his household registration. He gave two reasons for abandoning his land. First, even if he transferred his household registration to the Vinh Hanh commune, he could not keep all the land. Second, even if he accepted farming on part of his land, he could not transport produce

⁹⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 20-29 June 2005.

⁹⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 3 August 2005.

⁹⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 4 August 2005.

to his home in Cho Moi, because transferring staple food between two communes was not allowed.⁹⁹

In general, many peasants reacted softly, privately and often submissively. Most of them claimed they feared the new authorities because they did not yet know the laws properly and even if they tried their best, powerful authorities would control the situation.

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

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

He cried for hours before the chairman. But the chairman remained silent, doing nothing to help him. Finally, knowing that it was not possible to change the situation, Mr Ba G decided to abandon land and made a mockery goodbye to the official, 'you often said that you liberated us from the yoke of slavery, but now you put us with another yoke, the yoke of no land with which to make a living!'¹⁰⁰

A lady in Long Dien B who lost 13 hectares of land in another An Giang district, shared her story:

After reunification, the authorities planned to establish a state farm on the peasant land. We complained to the commune authorities. In response to our objection, the commune secretary organized a meeting with us. She, the commune secretary, suggested exchanging our land. I got angry and said, "whose land? Peasants' land or your land? If it is your land, we will take it but other people's land we refuse". I turned back and said to the crowd: "those who do not want to exchange land, raise your hands". They all raised their hands ... a man from the crowd stood up and said, "I come from Communist areas but I haven't seen anyone like you. Now

⁹⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

we do not have any land to till.” The commune secretary could not do anything but withdrew in silence.

Some tractor drivers who were on her side said, “Who ever dares till the land will get shot to death and then buried by plowing!” I got so angry, but at that time, I was pregnant. If I had not been with child, I would have laid on the land to see whether they dared shoot me.

Then, our small group, about twenties people, went to the district authorities to complain. They said they would consider our petition and would resolve it gradually.

We again went to meet the provincial authorities. They urged us to go home and promised to deal with it later. But nothing had been resolved until Mr. Nguyen Van Linh ascended to power. As a result, I had to go around and worked as a wage-earner for 7-8 years.¹⁰¹

‘The prohibition’ was controversial not only to peasants in Long Dien B but also to many peasants in the Mekong Delta. They argued that peasants in the Mekong Delta had enjoyed ‘freedom’ in where they resided, in selecting their occupations and seeking new economic opportunities. Many peasants in Long Dien B commune recalled others became sick and died due to depression after losing their land. A former cadre of a production unit in Long Dien B commented,

Southern people valued their land highly: “first are children, second is land” (*nhất hậu hôn nhì điền thổ*). Because many suffered a lot to accumulate the land during the wars, when losing their land, they were so sad that a few of them suffered metal sickness, even died of metal depression.¹⁰²

A man in Long Dien B who lost 10 hectares of land considered the prohibition an ‘odd’ policy (*chính sách kỳ cục*) imposed from the north.

The terms “land occupying” or “non-resident cultivators” (*xâm canh*) were heavy and foreign to us. It must be that the northern cadres created it to make it easy to take our land. Land occupying meant occupying the land of others (*xâm lấn*) but we suffered in reclaiming our land rather than occupying the land of others.¹⁰³

At first the prohibition was applied to non-resident cultivators of each province and district. Later when production units and collectives were established, the practice was extended to non-resident cultivators of each commune, hamlet and even production units.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 10 August 2005; Nguyen Van Linh had been the general secretary for VCP since 1987 until 1992. Local people often divided the period of 1975-1990 into two phases: Le Duan’s phase (*trào Le Duan*) and Nguyen Van Linh’s phase (*trào Nguyen Van Linh*).

¹⁰² Interview, Long Dien B, Long Dien B, 20 September 2004.

¹⁰³ Interview, Long Dien B, 4 August 2005.

Many peasants in Long Dien B claimed that they were affected by the prohibition at commune and hamlet level. Mr. N.G. in Tra Thon sub-commune, Long Dien B said he had lost 3 hectares of land in a nearby commune, Long Dien A. In 1979 when a production unit was established on his land, he was not allowed to till the land anymore because he was not a commune resident.¹⁰⁴ Mr. H.H. in Long Dien B also recalled losing two hectares of land in Long Dien A, a nearby commune; a commune official worked on his land. He said,

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

But finally he failed to convince the officials. Later he was granted a few *công* of readjusted land when he joined a production unit in Long Dien B. Asked whether he received the readjusted land, he said, 'it was stupid not to take the land. They took my land and I took some other's land back'.¹⁰⁵

A report of the Communist Party's Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in 1984 recognized shortcomings and variation from one area to another in the implementation of the prohibition policy. Some local authorities implemented the policy correctly by encouraging peasants who had land in two different areas (*hai nơi*) to choose only one.

But in general, many local authorities were often confused in resolving the problem. Some considered non-resident's land an invasion land (*coi xâm canh là xâm lấn*). They implemented the policy wrongly (*nhiều tiêu cực*); non-resident peasants were often coerced into abandoning the land, even though they did not have land in their residential area.¹⁰⁶

In summary, the non-resident cultivator prohibition was a first step towards post-1975 land reform and collectivization. In controlling the free flow of the rural population and the areas for their farming and economic activities, the policy significantly upset existing land

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 4 August 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 9 August 2005.

¹⁰⁶ BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông thôn Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the Southern Region], Ho Chi Minh, Ban Cai Tao Nong Nghiep Mien Nam, 1984: p.17.

tenure and farming systems in An Giang and elsewhere in the Mekong Delta; it converted the existing system that had allowed rural labor and capital to move from one region to another into a system in which peasants and their resources were tied to their residences. This not only undermined peasants' capacity to exploit unpopulated areas but also aggravated differentiation of population density and levels of economic development among areas in the region. For example, under the prohibition policy, districts such as Cho Moi in An Giang became highly populated, while places such as Tu Giac Long Xuyen and Dong Thap Muoi had low population density and under used land. In some places local officials took advantage of the policy to appropriate peasants' land (*chiếm dụng đất*) for their own use, a problem discussed in the next chapters.

Land readjustment: 'eliminating exploitation' or 'share one's rice and clothes'

In response to the resolution No.24, directive No.253-NQ/TW (20 September 1976) and directive No.28 CT/TW (26 December 1977), officials in An Giang and many other provinces in the Mekong Delta carried out a land reform aimed at 'eliminating vestiges of feudalism' or 'eliminating exploitation on land'. In An Giang, the land reform was often interpreted by authorities as 'taking back the land' (*thu hồi ruộng đất*), 'mobilizing land donations' (*vận động hiến điền*), and 'readjusting land among peasants in the spirit of sharing one's rice and clothes' (*san sẻ ruộng đất cho nhau trong nội bộ nông dân với tinh thần nhường cơm sẻ áo*).¹⁰⁷ A former member of the Provincial Committee for Agricultural Transformation remembered emphasizing 'sharing one's rice and clothes' rather than

¹⁰⁷ These terms can be found in 'Tai lieu hoi ve hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Inquiry about collective farming], in *Thong Tin Pho Thong* [General Information], NXB So van hoa va thong tin tinh An Giang, 1978 (9): p.9; BCNTNNAG, 'Bao cao tinh hình cai tao xa hoi chu nghĩa' [Report of socialist agricultural transformation], Long Xuyen, 13 December 1978; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cong tac dieu chinh ruong dat o tinh nha' [Land redjustment in the province], 6 September 1982; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Trich dien van cua dong chi Le Van Nhung' [An extract from Le Van Nhung's speech], 10 May 1985.

‘eliminating exploitation’ during reform in An Giang from 1976-1980.¹⁰⁸ The provincial authorities also paid great attention to economic objectives rather than focusing on the political goals of the reform. To guide the implementation of land readjustment, provincial leaders stressed, ‘land readjustment is a state policy aiming at better using labor and land to produce abundant food for society. Therefore, readjusting land needs to comply with facilitating production’.¹⁰⁹

According to a Cho Moi party cell report, during the military control period (May 1975 to February 1976), the district had ‘confiscated 2,214 ha of land of fled-aboard reactionaries and temporarily granted land to 3,760 landless and land-poor households’.¹¹⁰ However, from 1976-1978 district authorities emphasized ‘land redistribution’ (*chia cấp ruộng đất*) in the spirit of ‘sharing one’s clothes and rice’ among the peasants rather than eliminating exploitation’. Indeed, the authorities encouraged the land-rich households to share any land beyond their farming capacity with landless and land-poor households.¹¹¹

People in Long Dien B confirmed this emphasis, remembering this period as ‘one of sharing’ (*chia cơm sẻ áo*), ‘land distribution’ or ‘land giving’ (*tràng trải ruộng đất*). A former official of Long Dien B commune, who had been in charge of the commune’s agricultural transformation, said that the first post-1975 land policy that he carried out in his commune was ‘land readjustment’ (*điều chỉnh ruộng đất*). In his opinion, the land reform was aimed at ‘lifting the poor up and taking the rich down so that the two classes became equal to each other’.¹¹² Similarly, a former hamlet vice-chief in Long Dien B commended, ‘after reunification, our country considered agriculture a top priority. Therefore, we practiced

¹⁰⁸ Interview, Long Xuyen, An Giang, 31 May 2005.

¹⁰⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, ‘Tra lời ban đọc về việc điều chỉnh ruộng đất’ [Answering readers’ questions about land readjustment], 4 April 1982.

¹¹⁰ BCHDBHCM, *Lịch Sử Đảng Bộ Huyện Cho Moi 1927-1995* [The history of the Cho Moi party cell: 1927-1995], Cho Moi, 1995: p.173

¹¹¹ Ibid: p.173.

¹¹² Interview, Long Dien B, 29 July 2005.

‘sharing’ so that the poor had land on which to make a living.’¹¹³ Thus, these local officials viewed land readjustment as ‘mobilizing’ (*vận động*) the land-rich households to share some of their land with the land-poor and landless households rather than ‘eliminating exploitation’ as instructed in the official documents of VCP leaders.

Local officials in Long Dien B commune also recognized that land readjustment was complicated because it faced resistance from land-rich peasants and even from some of beneficiaries (landless and land-poor households). A former vice-chairman of Long Dien B commune recalled,

Land-rich people were dissatisfied with the policy. Even now they still curse us; a few carried long knives to the field to resist sharing their land. But because people at that time feared the new authorities, they did not dare fight us violently. Meanwhile, [poor] peasants were so heavily influenced by capitalist and feudalist thoughts that they refused to receive redistributed land. People said, “it was weird to take others’ land”. It was a difficult time for us. Some cadres did not want to share their land but we did not dare discipline them because our staff members were few. We also did not dare touch land of higher officials for fear of their revenge (*sợ bị trừ dập*).¹¹⁴

In order to overcome peasants’ resistance, Long Dien B commune authorities decided to carry out land readjustment in a way which tackled the ‘easiest first, hardest later’ rather than ‘doing it carelessly’. The former vice-chairman recalled that communal and religious land was easier to appropriate than individual land. Therefore, authorities focused on redistributing communal land first and then mobilized individuals who had more land (such as more than 10 hectares) to share some of their land with others. At the same time commune authorities implemented other policies such as adopting high-yielding rice, increasing the number of crops per year (*chuyển vụ*), building production solidarity teams and monopolizing the supply of fertilizers and fuel to peasants. These policies facilitated land sharing among peasants.¹¹⁵ For instance, adopting high-yielding rice which required attendant use of irrigation, fertilizers and pesticides made many land-rich peasants unable to cultivate all their

¹¹³ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 July 2005

¹¹⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 July 2005.

land. Commune authorities took advantage of the situation to ‘mobilize’ land-rich households to share their uncultivated land with land-poor and landless households. A former commune official recalled,

Due to a shortage of fuel for using water pumps, people had to water their fields by scooping. It was impossible for those who had more than 50-100 *công* of land (5-10 hectares) to manage all their land. Therefore, we mobilized those who had more than 50 *công* of land to share their land with others. If they were able to manage all their land, they would not need to share it. But if not, the land would be shared with the land-poor and landless households. No land was allowed to be uncultivated.¹¹⁶

Despite commune authorities being flexible and ‘softening’ the content of land reform, land readjustment was not well received by either land-rich peasants or land-poor peasants. An old man in Long Quoi II hamlet, Long Dien B commune, described his discontent,

The policy of sharing “one’s rice and clothes” was not suitable for people here. A majority of peasants did not want it. Those who had more land did not want to share some of their land because they had accumulated it with sweat and tears (*bằng mồ hôi nước mắt*). Those who did not have land did not want to take the land of others. They feared that when receiving land, they would have to adopt new rice seeds and two rice crops per year with which they were unfamiliar with and would be unable to make it profitable.¹¹⁷

Apart from economic reasons, some beneficiaries refused to accept readjusted land because they felt weird (*kỳ cục*) taking others’ land or were afraid of hurting others’ feelings. Some did take readjusted land but did not dare accept a large amount because they were afraid of being unable to grow high-yielding rice. Some others said they took readjusted land because they did not want to be moved to the new economic zones. Meanwhile, some land-rich peasants were able to avoid land readjustment by dividing their fields among their children and relatives. Local officials encouraged them to do this.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 July 2005.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 June 2005.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, June - August 2005; local peasants said that after reunification they were informed that the state would take the landless and land-poor to New Economic Zones. Therefore, in order to avoid going to New Economic Zones, they had to take readjusted land.

A former production unit cadre in Long Dien B remembered the practice to 'share one's rice and clothes' was primarily implemented on the basis that the land-rich lent some of their fields (*cho mượn đất*) to land-poor households to make a living'. Because of the requirement to adopt two-rice crops cultivation, some land-rich households who could not manage all their farmland had to "lend" some of it to others.¹¹⁹ Other people confirmed that during land readjustment, land-rich peasants 'lent' them a few *công* of land to make a living. When lending the fields, the land-rich peasants said, 'now I lend you the area for high-yielding rice cultivation. But if you fail to grow and the state gives up the requirement of growing high-yielding rice and returns to traditional rice (*lúa mùa*), then please return the field to me'.¹²⁰

Despite the land readjustment in Long Dien B from 1975-1978 reducing land differentiation among peasants, the results were very different to policy targets. One of the main aims of land readjustment was to redistribute land to landless and land-poor households. However, many landless peasants in Long Dien B did not receive any land during the period of 1975-1978. A landless resident in the commune recalled that he did not receive any land until 1982; he argued that the 'share one's rice and clothes' policy benefited only a small proportion of landless households because the land-rich had distributed their land to their children and relatives before the state could touch it.¹²¹ In other words, the beneficiaries of land reallocations in Long Dien B from 1975-1978 were mainly relatives of the land-rich households rather than the land-poor and landless households targeted by VCP policy.

According to a Cho Moi party cell report, by end of 1978 district authorities had redistributed about 3,026 hectares of land (about 10 percent of the cultivated area) to 5,474

¹¹⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 24 June 2005.

¹²⁰ Interview, Long Bien B, June-August 2005.

¹²¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 2005.

landless and land-poor households.¹²² In general, the results of land readjustment from 1975 to 1978 in An Giang province were modest. By the end of 1978, the province had taken 20,000 hectares of land from 'landlords and feudalists' to redistribute among the land-poor and landless households.¹²³

According to a report from Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south (BCTNNMN), Vietnam's Southern Region (*Nam Bo*), which included the Mekong Delta and Southeast Region, had confiscated and redistributed 191,931 hectares of 'exploitation' land to the landless and land-poor households between 1976 and 1978. Of that amount, 'Tien Giang province had confiscated 12,000 hectares of land from 174 landlords, 468 rich peasants, rural capitalists, and reactionaries'; Long An province confiscated 15,543 hectares of land, Ben Tre province: 55,600 hectares, Dong Thap: 13,321 hectares, An Giang: 28,800 hectares and Minh Hai: 19,814 hectares.¹²⁴ The report commented that

Land reform during 1976-1978 focused largely on nationalizing the land of foreign farms and confiscating land of landlords, capitalist-compradors and reactionaries ... A large proportion of this land was abandoned and occupied illegally.¹²⁵

Moreover, the report revealed that in many locations local authorities did not know how to use the confiscated land. Some used it for establishing state farms, collectives, or production units or lent it to military, state and mass organizations to produce food. Only a small part of the land was used for redistribution among the land-poor and landless households despite the fact that they still made up a large proportion of the rural population.¹²⁶

¹²² BCHDBHCM, *Lịch Su Đảng Bộ Huyện Cho Mội 1927-1995* [The history of Cho Mội party cell: 1927-1995], Cho Mội, 1995: p.173.

¹²³ STTVHAN, *Thông Tin Phổ Thông* [General Information], Long Xuyên, NXB So Thông Tin Văn Hóa An Giang, 1978 (9): p.9.

¹²⁴ BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông thôn Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the Southern Region], Hồ Chí Minh, 1984: p.9. It is worth noting that the report gave a higher figure for land readjustment in An Giang (28,800 hectares) than that of An Giang's report (20,000 hectares).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid: p.8-9.

According to a survey carried out by the Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south, the landless and land-poor households still accounted for 18-31 percent of the rural population and occupied 10 percent of the land in July 1978 (see table 3-2 below).

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

In many areas of the south eliminating the vestiges of feudal and landlord exploitation has not been carried out fully. In many areas [local authorities] do not understand clearly the need to eliminate rich peasants', rural capitalists' and some upper-middle peasants' exploitation ... in many areas, party members who have come from the exploiting class still hold key leadership positions in the commune and hamlet authorities; they have not been enlightened (*giác ngộ*) about the party, nor yet understand clearly the policy of the party-state; even some try to protect the interests of the exploiting class.¹²⁷

Therefore, it urged local authorities to 'continue to be resolute in eliminating the exploitation of the exploiting class and to share some of their fields with others. These households were allowed to retain a limited amount of land equal to the land per capita in the commune.'¹²⁸

Under directive No.57, land readjustment and collectivization sped up in many provinces of the Mekong Delta. However, according to a BCTNNMN report,

In this period [1979-1981] exploitation elimination and land readjustment had not been carried out seriously. The implementation of the directive No.57 among provinces and districts did not follow common regulations nor under a regular and close leadership.

¹²⁷ DCSVN, 'Chi thi cua bo chinh tri so 57' [Politburo's directive No.57], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 39, 1978*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.468.

¹²⁸ Ibid: p.469, 472.

Table 3-2 Social structure in 7 typical hamlets in 7 provinces of the Mekong Delta in July 1978

| Type of households ¹²⁹ | | An Giang | Dong Thap | Long An | Kien Giang | Minh Hai | Tien Giang | Ben Tre |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|---------|------------|----------|------------|---------|
| I: non-farming households | % of households | 3.32 | 1.42 | 1.43 | 2.73 | 1.42 | 8.14 | 2.67 |
| | % of land | 0.35 | 0.11 | 0.04 | 0.1 | 0.16 | 0.45 | 0.45 |
| II: poor households | % of households | 25.5 | 31.31 | 20.43 | 24.2 | 21.09 | 18.3 | 19.3 |
| | % of land | 7.7 | 11.8 | 5.46 | 9.21 | 8.17 | 6.84 | 11.9 |
| III: middle-households | % of households | 47.0 | 45.54 | 56.46 | 59.79 | 50.47 | 63.7 | 71.88 |
| | % of land | 33.0 | 48.39 | 47.2 | 65.13 | 53.0 | 67.79 | 73.0 |
| IV: upper-middle households | % of households | 17.1 | 16.64 | 15.23 | 11.79 | 20.06 | 13.0 | 5.74 |
| | % of land | 29.48 | 28.2 | 27.3 | 20.29 | 33.7 | 20.4 | 14.1 |
| V: rich households | % of households | 7.1 | 4.09 | 6.45 | 1.47 | 2.96 | 1.86 | 0.41 |
| | % of land | 29.7 | 11.5 | 20.0 | 5.21 | 4.98 | 4.6 | 0.55 |

(Source: Tran Huu Dinh, *Qua Trình Bien Doi Ve Che Do So Huu Va Co Cau Giai Cap o Nong Thon DBSCL (1969-1975)*, Ha Noi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1994: p.103).

Table 3-3 Land holdings and social composition of one typical hamlet in An Giang in 1978

| Type of households | Number of households | The percentage of households (%) | Total area of land holdings (ha) | The percentage of holdings (%) | Per capita land (m ²) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| I: non-farming households | 15 | 3.3 | 3 | 0.31 | 657 |
| II: poor households | 115 | 25.5 | 73.24 | 7.7 | 1,151 |
| III: middle-households | 212 | 40 | 314.2 | 33.04 | 2,396 |
| IV: upper-middle households | 77 | 17.1 | 280 | 29.48 | 2,774 |
| V: rich households | 32 | 7.1 | 280 | 29.47 | 14,563 |

(Source: Nguyen Thanh Nam, *Viec Giai Quyét Van De Ruong Dat Trong Qua Trình Di Len San Xuat Lon o Dong Bang Song Cuu Long 1975-1993* (PhD thesis), Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH&NV, 2000: p.47)

¹²⁹ Type I: non-farming households; Type II: poor households including land-poor and landless households who were engaged in waged labor; Type III: middle households who had enough land for their farming; Type IV: upper-middle households who had sufficient land; some of them hire waged labor; Type V: rich households who had much land and machines and engaged in capitalist business.

Therefore, during the three years 1979-1981, the 13 provinces of the Southern Region readjusted only 71,292 hectares of land which accounted for only one third of land readjustment during the period 1976-1978. From 1979-1981, An Giang readjusted 6,000 additional hectares of land (previously readjusting 20,000 hectares), Hau Giang: 13,588 hectares and Kien Giang: 4,890 hectares.¹³⁰

The context of collectivization explains why in 1979-1980 land readjustment in An Giang and other provinces in the Mekong Delta slowed. The period paralleled the first wave of collectivization in the region, which faced great difficulty due to peasant resistance (see next section). Under directive No.57, local authorities in An Giang implemented land readjustment and collectivization simultaneously. Considerable peasant resistance hampered the widespread implementation of both collectivization and land readjustment.

In general, the results of land readjustment in An Giang during 1975-1980 varied from one district to another. Some districts in which land per capita was high and one crop per year was still common, the result of land readjustment was very modest. For example, Thoai Son was among the districts of An Giang which had high levels of land per capita and many villagers who cultivated only one rice crop per year. By 1980, 5 years after reunification, the number of landless and land poor households was high. The district had 1,879 households with more than 5 hectares of land, while 4,127 households were classified as landless and land-poor. Local cadres had taken advantage of land reform to appropriate much of peasants' land for themselves rather than redistributing it to land-poor households.¹³¹

Cho Moi district in which land per capita was low and the adoption of two rice crops per year was widespread, land readjustment achieved better results. However, land readjustment was only carried out in areas where local authorities were establishing production units and adopting two rice crops per year. In such areas, local authorities often

¹³⁰ BCTNNMN, 'Bao cao tinh tinh ruong dat' [Report of land readjustment], Ho Chi Minh, 1984: p.11.

¹³¹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cai tao nong nghiep o Thoai Son' [Agricultural transformation in Thoai Son], 7 December 1980.

confiscated rich and upper-middle peasants' land and redistributed it to poor peasants. A rich peasant in Long Dien B recalled that his family had about 10 hectares. In order to avoid land redistribution, he distributed the land amongst his four children beforehand; each received 20 *công* (2 hectares). His wife and he retained 2 hectares (20 *công*). However, in 1979 when establishing a production unit in the hamlet, authorities brought some poor peasants to whom they wished to redistribute his fields without informing him. Knowing what had happened, he went to the field to meet these people. A hamlet official said to him, 'so, you have already agreed to offer your land (*hiến điền*) to us!' He denied this and went home. Regardless of his discontent, the authorities redistributed the fields to some poor households and left his family a few *công* of land according to land per capita in the commune and the number of people in his family. He did not know whether the authorities labeled him a landlord or rich peasant; the reason they confiscated his land was that he had land beyond the allowed limit per capita in the commune.

Another well-off peasant, who had 10 hectares of land and farm machinery, shared a similar story. To avoid land confiscation, he divided the fields among his married children and relatives and retained only 3 hectares. However, in 1979 the local authorities said that he still had an amount of land beyond the land retention limit and redistributed large tracts of his land to the land-poor and landless households. They left his family only a few *công* of land according to land per capital and family size.¹³² An Giang newspaper on 8 June 1980 posted a petition of Nguyen Van Rum who lived in An Long hamlet, An Thanh Trung commune, Cho Moi district. Mr. Rum wrote that he had previously reclaimed and owned 3 hectares of land in An Tinh hamlet, in the same commune since 1955. After 1975 he continued working on the land and paid his taxes (*đầy đủ*) to the state from 1976 to 1980. At the end of 1980 the commune vice-chairman invited him to his office to discuss the land readjustment policy. At

¹³² Interview, Long Dien B, 22 September 2004.

the meeting, he agreed to share 2 hectares of his land with others and retained one hectare for his five person family. The vice-chairman agreed and promised to allow him to retain 1 hectare of land. But the commune authorities took and redistributed all the land and left him none. So, he was writing to request the return of one hectare of land on which to make living.¹³³

In summary, the land reforms in An Giang and other provinces in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1980 did not meet the target of eliminating exploitation and redistributing land to the land-poor households. Indeed, land readjustment in An Giang from 1975-1980 had redistributed only 26,000 hectares of land which accounted for 43 percent of the target (60,225.3 hectares).¹³⁴ Despite this, land reform had significantly weakened the landed class, undermined their capacity to produce commodity rice, and transformed the existing land tenure system. The reasons why land adjustment was modest were strong peasant resistance and the weak commitment of local cadres to agricultural transformation, a problem discussed in the next chapter.

Adopting two rice crops per year (chuyển vụ): ensuring food security of the country

VCP leaders viewed the Mekong Delta as the 'rice granary' (vựa lúa) of the country, but they also considered the region under-cultivated and under-exploited. Despite some parts of the Mekong Delta having adopted two high-yielding rice crops per year since the 1960s, 'floating rice' and the traditional single rice crop per year were still the main crops of the region. In 1975 the area in which two rice crops per year were grown made up only about 250,000 hectares of the delta's two million hectares of agricultural land.¹³⁵ Therefore, quickly after reunification, central authorities sent a group of researchers to study the agricultural potential

¹³³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Kien nai nuong dat' [Petition on land], 8 June 1981.

¹³⁴ In mid-1980, An Giang's leaders announced to have basically completed the land readjustment with 60,225.3 hectare (see *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hoan thanh co ban cong tac cai tao nong nghiep' [The basic completion of agricultural transformation], 22 November 1985).

¹³⁵ Phan Quang, *Dong Bang Song Cuu Long* [The Mekong Delta], Ha Noi, NXB Van Hoa, 1981: p.77-8.

of the region. The study concluded that the region had great potential to increase food production by adopting high-yielding rice with two crops per year. In response to the study, the central government urged farmers in the Mekong Delta to adopt two rice crops per year as early as the winter-spring season of 1975-1976.¹³⁶

In An Giang province, authorities called for transforming 'floating rice' into 'high-yielding rice' farming. For the period 1976-1980, they considered the crop transformation essential to facilitate agricultural development in An Giang as well as land readjustment and the building of collectives.¹³⁷

Adopting high-yielding rice and the two crops per year strategy moved quite swiftly in An Giang. The regions of high-yielding rice land had increased from 31,509 hectares in 1976 to 79,066 hectares in 1980.¹³⁸ The area of high-yielding rice in Cho Moi district increased from 3,120 hectares in the winter-spring 1976-1977 to 16,430 hectares in the winter-spring 1978-1979 which accounted for nearly a half of the total rice land in the district (38,387 hectares). Some communes in Cho Moi district, such as Hoa Binh, Nhon My and Hoi An, now had completed the adoption of high-yielding rice and the two crops requirement.¹³⁹ Phu Tan district, in which local authorities were weak and 90 percent of the population was the Hoa Hao, implemented crop transformation extensively, too. The area of high-yielding rice had increased from 6,600 hectares in 1975 to 17,500 hectares in 1980.¹⁴⁰

Despite the rapid adoption of high-yielding rice and two crops per year in An Giang province and elsewhere in the Mekong Delta, the policy faced strong peasant resistance. For

¹³⁶ Ibid: p.77.

¹³⁷ According to Vo Tong Xuan, the area of land used for floating rice in An Giang before 1975 was about 180,000 hectares, accounting for a larger proportion of rice land. (Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11: Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Trien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CTPTNTAG, 1994: p.31)

¹³⁸ Ibid: p.32.

¹³⁹ BCHDBHCM, *Lich Su Dang Bo Huyen Cho Moi 1927-1995* [The history of Cho Moi party cell: 1927-1995], Cho Moi, 1995: p.171; SVHTTAG, 'Mot thach thuc moi' [A new challenge], in *Thong Tin Pho Thong* [General Information], Long Xuyen, NXB So Thong Tin Van Hoa An Giang, 1978 (9): p.14.

¹⁴⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phu Tan day manh phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Phu Tan intensified collectivization], 27 November 1980.

various reasons, they did not care much for two crops per year. Peasants in the Mekong Delta had a long history of cultivating 'floating rice' (*lúa nổi*) which had adapted well to the annual flooding and other local ecological and cultural conditions. The productivity of floating rice was lower than the high yield variety but more stable. Moreover, floating rice cultivation did not demand a large investment of fertilizers, pesticides, labor and land preparation. With floating rice, a peasant could cultivate it on a large tract of land and with little effort. Local peasants referred to floating rice cultivation as 'caring little but getting real harvest' (*làm chơi ăn thật*); they cultivated one rice crop a year and enjoyed a lot of spare time during which they could fish and conduct other economic and cultural activities.

Villagers in Long Dien B preferred cultivating floating rice or traditional rice (*lúa mùa*) to high-yielding rice (*lúa thần nông*). In their words: 'cultivating traditional rice is much easier. In March (of lunar calendar) we sow rice and then go home until we come back to harvest it.' 'Having sowed one *công* of traditional rice, we get 10 to 15 *giạ* (200-300 kilograms) of rice paddy. Growing traditional rice, we seldom have a bad harvest.' 'Traditional rice does not require weeding; when the level of water in the flood season rose, the rice also rises accordingly. Being inundated, the weeds die away.' 'With cultivating traditional rice, we only plow gently (*cày sơ sơ*). It does not require leveling the surface like high-yielding rice.' 'Traditional rice does not require fertilizers and pesticides and it also does not require irrigation.' 'Traditional rice could be cultivated on a large tract of land which enables us to use tractors.' 'After harvesting traditional rice, people could cultivate subsidiary crops such as corn, cucumber and watermelon.' 'When cultivating traditional rice, in the flood season, people could go fishing.'¹⁴¹

Many peasants in the region were unfamiliar with and had little know-how about cultivating high-yielding rice. The high-yielding rice required inputs such as fertilizer and

¹⁴¹ Interview, Long Dien B, June-October 2005.

pesticides, intensive caring and leveling the land. Unable to afford such extras, many peasants resisted the high-yielding rice cultivation. Meanwhile, land-rich peasants feared not being able to manage all their fields with the adoption of high-yielding rice.

Some peasants in Long Dien B remembered trying before 1975 to adopt high-yielding rice on parts of their land. However, they had little understanding of it and inadequate fertilizer and pesticides, so their high-yielding rice cultivation attempts were not profitable. A secondary school teacher in Long Dien B who adopted high-yielding rice 3 years before 1975 recalled,

In the past, my family had adopted high-yielding rice No.8 (*lúa thần nông 8*) on trial basis. At that time the land had not been leveled (*chưa bằng phẳng*) and I was busy teaching and did not have much time to care so I grew only a small amount. Because high-yielding rice had not been adopted extensively in the field, mice and all insects attacked my crops. So, the rice productivity was poor. The highest productivity I gained was about 20 *giạ* per *công* (equal to 4 tones per hectare) but it cost me a lot (*chi phí quá nhiều*).¹⁴²

Another man in Long Dien B remembered that when the authorities mobilized people to adopt high-yielding rice, he resisted and decided to abandon his fields. He explained why:

Before reunification (*trước tiếp thu*), I had already adopted high-yielding rice in my fields. I cultivated more than two hectares. But unfortunately my fields were attacked by insects so I was bankrupted. I had to sell property to pay my debt. Then I decided to grow traditional rice again. After reunification, the authorities asked us to grow high-yielding rice. I knew that it was impossible. In fact, high-yielding rice here resulted in three bad years in a row.¹⁴³

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

¹⁴² Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

¹⁴³ Interview, Long Dien B, 17, August 2005.

The authorities did things forcibly (*làm mạnh*). My watermelon field was growing well and nearly ready for harvest. The morning of that day, my son and I went to water the field as usual. Then in the afternoon the authorities ("*mấy ông*") suddenly set the field on fire without informing me. The whole field (*cả cánh đồng*) burned. Many people lost their watermelon crops shouted and cried (*la chửi và khóc*). Some had lost 7 to 10 *công* of watermelon. The authorities did an odd thing (*làm kỳ cục*). They said that they did so in order to plow the field for second rice crop transformation. However, it took three months from firing to plowing the field. Therefore, people grew more upset.¹⁴⁴

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

At that time, I was a tractor team member (*đội máy kéo*). Nobody dared to plow the field but I did. Some of my relatives criticized me and considered me a person without ancestors (*người không có ông bà*). But I knew that we could not refuse to comply with the policy (*chủ trương*). Adopting two rice crops per year and planting high-yielding rice were compulsory so we had to follow. When I was plowing the fields, there were some guys who carried long-knives (*dao mác*) to block the tractor's path. Frankly speaking, I did not dare plow the field without the support of authorities. At that time, officials from the commune's agricultural department, commune's police, and even the commune chairman himself came to support us. Without them, nobody dared plow. Besides, those who disagreed with the policy tried to threaten us rather than openly confront us because they too were afraid of the authorities. Everyone was afraid to upset the Vietnamese Communist cadres' (*nói đến ba ông Việt Cộng ai cũng sợ*).¹⁴⁵

A former district's Committee for Agricultural Transformation cadre witnessed that when supervising transformation in Kien An commune (nearby Long Dien B commune), a lady ripped off her clothes and lay down in the path of the tractor on her field to block it. He also concluded that crop transformation faced strong peasant resistance in Cho Moi district and in other parts of An Giang province.¹⁴⁶

Experiments of the collective period

Building pilot collectives in the Central Coast

Selecting and preparing places to build pilot collectives

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 June 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Cho Moi, 30 June 2005.

Two years after resolving their post-war problems, QN-DN provincial leaders seemed to trust their ability to meet not only the food subsistence requirements of the province but also to bring its agriculture towards socialist large-scale production.¹⁴⁷ In September 1977, the QN-DN provincial party cell released the resolution 'on development and agricultural transformation' (*Nghị quyết về phát triển và cải tạo nông nghiệp*) which stipulated two main on-going tasks. One focused on economic development, which contained several targets to be achieved in 1980 such as, producing 500,000 ton of paddy-equivalent (double the 1977 figure), extending a further 25,000-30,000 hectares of agricultural land, taking 30,000 people into new economic zones (and so on). The second are focused on the schedule for agricultural transformation such as, building pilot collectives and pilot districts in 1977, extending pilot collectives in 1978 and 1979 and accelerating and completing collectivization by 1980.¹⁴⁸

Like VCP national leaders, provincial authorities believed that collectivization would help eliminate exploitation and poverty. They worried that with individual farming, poverty in QN-DN would not be eradicated. They worried that landholding inequality and exploitation by a landed class would increase. Besides, they considered individual farming fragmented, backward and small-scale to which it was difficult to apply advanced science, mechanization, irrigation and pesticides on a large-scale to meet production deadlines. They also claimed that 'peasants in other socialist countries had taken this path and achieved a great deal and became increasingly prosperous. In the past twenty-two years, peasants in the north used collectives as foundations for the country's reunification and to increase the material and cultural living-standards of the people'.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, provincial leaders argued,

¹⁴⁷ This statement can be found in *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Giong duong cay thang loi' [Be victorious in agriculture], 26 April 2006.

¹⁴⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị ban chấp hành đảng bộ tỉnh (khoa 11) về vấn đề phát triển và cải tạo nông nghiệp' [Resolution of the eleventh provincial party congress on agricultural transformation], 7 September 1977.

¹⁴⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xã Duy Phước trước bước ngoặt lịch sử' [Duy Phước commune and its historical turning-point], 24 September 1977; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Duy Phước, Hòa Tiến, Bình Lành đi vào con đường làm ăn tập thể' [Duy Phước, Hòa Tiến, and Bình Lành entered into collective farming], 4 October 1977

establishing collectives in rural areas 'not only fulfilled the aims and ideals of the Communist Party but also were peasants' reward for enduring great losses during the wars.'¹⁵⁰

As an initial step, provincial leaders decided to build three pilot collectives in three different districts: a commune-sized pilot collective (Duy Phuoc collective) in Duy Phuoc commune, Duy Xuyen district, a half-commune-sized collective (Hoa Tien 1 collective) in Hoa Tien commune, Hoa Vang district, and a commune-sized pilot collective (Binh Lanh collective) in Binh Lanh commune, Thang Binh district. While the first two collectives were located in the lowland area where land was more fertile and peasants were more prosperous, the last one was located in undulating area where land was less fertile.

I found no detailed information in official documents mentioning why these locations were selected to build pilot collectives. According to Mr. D, a former chairperson of Binh Lanh collective, the main criteria provincial leaders used were that the place had to be an ex-revolutionary base (*cơ sở cách mạng*) and its party cell had to be 'strong' and decisive. For example, one reason for selecting Binh Lanh commune was that the area had been a strong revolutionary base. Despite only a few surviving party members (about 9 people in 1975), the Binh Lanh party cell was 'strong' and loyal to the party's agricultural transformation policy. Second, although land in the commune was less fertile compared to the plains, it was more extensive and more fertile than that of the other communes in the midlands and mountainous areas. Finally, Binh Lanh had an irrigation system from the Cao Ngan dam, which district authorities had employed a great number of people to build soon after reunification.¹⁵¹

To establish these pilot collectives successfully at the outset and extend collectivization to the next stage, QN-DN province undertook considerable preparations. The provincial authorities set up a provincial committee for agricultural transformation (*Ban cải*

¹⁵⁰ This was cited from the speech of Ho Nghinh, the Communist Party Secretary for the province, at the meetings for establishing Hoa Tien 1 pilot collective and Binh Lanh pilot collective (*QN-DN newspaper*, 'Mô đại hội xã viên thành lập hợp tác xã sản xuất nông nghiệp Binh Lanh và Hoa Tien' [Holding members' congress to establish Binh Land and Hoa Tien collectives], 5 November 1977.

¹⁵¹ Interview, Binh Lanh commune, 20 October 2004.

tạo nông nghiệp) to assist the provincial party committee to implement and monitor socialist agricultural transformation in the province.¹⁵² The authorities launched a widespread campaign which urged all locations (*địa phương*) and all party cells (*đảng bộ*) to 'study the provincial party committee's resolution on the development and transformation of agriculture'.¹⁵³ In addition, the authorities opened a collectivization school (*trường hợp tác hoá*) to train cadres. For example, this school had trained 37 cadres and 8 accountants for Duy Phuoc collective, 17 cadres and 6 accountants for Binh Lanh collective and 15 cadres and 5 accountants for Hoa Tien collective.¹⁵⁴ A former vice-chairperson of Binh Lanh collective remembered that before establishing pilot collectives, he and other cadres in Binh Lanh were sent to train in Da Nang city for 4 months.¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, to prevent peasants from slaughtering and selling draft animals before establishing the collectives, the provincial People's Committee released a directive forbidding people from buying draft animals. The directive stipulated that 'buying draft animals within the commune requires the permission of the local People's Committee (*Ủy ban Nhân Dân xã*); exchange of stocks between two communes requires permission from the district People's Committee; and buying and selling animals between two districts requires permission from the provincial People's Committee.' It also forbade peasants from intentionally injuring, poisoning and slaughtering their draft animals.¹⁵⁶

In order to build pilot collectives in their communes, local authorities in Duy Phuoc, Hoa Tien and Binh Lanh communes also undertook considerable groundwork. Each commune established a Committee to mobilize farmers to establish collectives (*Ban vận động*

¹⁵² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thành lập Ban cải tạo nông nghiệp' [Establishing a committee for agricultural transformation], 4 October, 1977.

¹⁵³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Phan khai nghiên cứu học tập nghị quyết của tỉnh ủy về phát triển và cải tạo nông nghiệp' [Studying the provincial party committee's resolution on agricultural transformation], 10 September 1977.

¹⁵⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tổng kết xây dựng thí điểm hợp tác xã sản xuất nông nghiệp' [Summing up establishing pilot collectives], 27 May 1978.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Binh Lanh, 14 October 2005.

¹⁵⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nghiem cấm thương nhân mua trâu bò để giết thịt' [Prohibiting private merchants from purchasing and slaughtering livestock], 24 September 1977.

thành lập hợp tác xã). These committees were in charge of preparing procedures to collectivize land, labor, draft animals, production tools and machinery in the bounds of the collective. More importantly, they endeavoured to mobilize and convince peasants to join collectives through study meetings on 'collectivization policy' or visiting 'difficult' peasant households who refused to join collectives.¹⁵⁷

Building pilot collectives and glorifying their performance

After a few months of preparation, provincial authorities started to establish pilot collectives. An October 1977 article in QN-DN newspaper reported that 100 percent of peasant households in Duy Phuoc commune, 96 percent in Binh Lanh and 95 percent in Hoa Tien 1 had 'voluntarily signed the form to participate into collectives'. It also urged 'peasants in the province to follow the path of collective farming of Duy Phuoc, Binh Lanh and Hoa Tien'.¹⁵⁸ In late October 1977, local authorities announced the completion of three pilot collectives and collective members' congresses (*đại hội xã viên*) to select their managerial boards (*ban quản trị hợp tác xã*). The percentage of peasant households joining collectives was also higher than before such as, 98.3 percent in Binh Lanh collective and 99 percent in Hoa Tien No.1 collective.¹⁵⁹ Almost all land, draft animals and other means of production were collectivized: 'One hundred percent of agricultural land in Duy Phuoc (704/704 hectares), 97.7 percent in Binh Lanh (562 per 564 hectares) and 100 percent in Hoa Tien (373 per 373 hectares)'. Approximately eighty-seven percent of draft animals in Duy Phuoc, 90.1 percent in Binh

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Binh Lanh and Binh Dinh communes, October-December 2005.

¹⁵⁸ QN-DN newspaper, 'Ba con nong dan trong tinh hay theo con duong lam an tap the cua Duy Phuoc, Binh Lanh, Hoa Tien' [Peasants in the province should follow the paths of Duy Phuoc, Binh Land and Hoa Tien people], 11 October 1977.

¹⁵⁹ QN-DN newspaper, 'Mo dai hoi xa vien thanh lap xa nong nghiep Duy Phuoc' [Holding members' congress to establish Duy Phuoc collective], 29 October 1977; 'Mo dai hoi xa vien thanh lap hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep binh lanh va hoa tien', 5 November 1977.

Lanh and 100 percent in Hoa Tien 1 were collectivized. Besides, 'production tools, machinery and other implements necessary for collectives were also collectivized.'¹⁶⁰

Villagers in Binh Lanh collective recalled that in order to establish the pilot collectives there, central, provincial and districts' authorities provided considerable assistance and resources to the commune. Seven northern cadres, including the chairpersons of the 'advanced' collectives in Thanh Hoa province, came to stay in the commune for 7 months to provide help. They even directly managed the collectives. The district's authorities sent a vice-chairperson of its economic department to work as a chairperson of the Binh Lanh collective. Moreover, central and provincial government had invested a great deal in Binh Lanh collective, namely hundreds tons of cement, lime, fertilizer and other resources.¹⁶¹

Although the official document claimed that most peasants joined pilot collectives voluntarily, few residents recalled being enthusiastic. Many peasants in Binh Lanh claimed that they did not like joining the collective but they had to do so. They were 'coerced' (*bắt buộc*) or 'pressured' (*bắt bĩ*) and fearful of being isolated (*sợ cô lập*). Some had an indifferent attitude and just followed what others did. Some, especially land-poor but labour-rich families, seemed to be more eager to join. Some decided to join because they believed that the state would take care of them and not let them die of hunger regardless of the collectives' performance.¹⁶² (See more about this in next chapter 4).

Because many peasants did not believe in collective farming, in the first few months the pilot collectives found it difficult to mobilize members to work in the fields. During the first days of collective farming, only 33 percent of collective members in Binh Lanh, 37 percent in Duy Phuoc and 40 percent in Hoa Tien No.1 participated in collective work. Moreover, some peasants engaged in obstructive practices such as selling their draft animals

¹⁶⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket xay dung thi diem hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep' [Summing up establishing pilot collectives], 27 May 1978.

¹⁶¹ Interview, Binh Lanh, October-December 2005.

¹⁶² A lady in Binh Lanh argued, 'entering collective means hunger, but the party could not let people die of it', Interview, 20 October 2005.

beforehand, renting land in uncollectivized communes or seeking outside jobs to make a living.¹⁶³

[In the Binh Lanh pilot collective], when leadership and administration were loose, peasant's negativism and backwardness emerged. Some people refused to have their draft animals collectivized because the collective did not pay them fully or quickly ... While the collective transplanted seedlings, many people only focused on growing their subsidiary crops (*màu*) in the five-percent-land or land that the collective had not yet used.¹⁶⁴

Mrs. Ch., a former brigade No.15 leader of Binh Lanh, recalled that the first few months of the collective was a difficult time for her to mobilize people to work. Some people who did not trust collective farming continued to work individually, for example, collecting rattan, firewood (*bút mây, đốn củi*) and making charcoal in the mountains. Meanwhile, the brigade lacked people to transplant seedlings. Therefore, she had to visit every household to entreat them (*lạy họ*) to go to work in the fields.¹⁶⁵

In response to the situation, the party cell in Binh Lanh commune had to launch 'a wide and intensive education campaign' in order to 'enhance the consciousness of building collectives (*ý thức xây dựng hợp tác xã*) for peasants. Besides, authorities had to resort to rewards and sanctions for peasants who worked more or less than the stipulated number of workdays (*công điểm*). Peasants were not allowed to look for work elsewhere or to collect firewood or make charcoal in the mountains. Because of these restrictions, the number of collective members participating in collective work increased.¹⁶⁶

Despite many peasants not liking collective work, the establishment of pilot collectives in the three places in QN-DN faced weak resistance from peasants. Local authorities were able to take control of peasants' land and other means of productions and

¹⁶³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket xay dung thi diem hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep' [Summing up establishing pilot collectives], 27 May 1978

¹⁶⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang loi buoc dau cua Phong trao Hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [The first victory steps of collectivization], 13 May 1978.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Binh Lanh, 15 Oct 2005.

¹⁶⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Mua xuan va mua dong o hop tac xa Binh Lanh' [The achievements and challenges of Binh Lanh collective], 11 February 1978.

mobilize peasants into collective work. Similar to QN-DN, other places of the Central Coast which built pilot collectives confronted few difficulties. For example, Nghia Binh, neighboring QN-DN province, also 'succeeded' in building pilot collectives, among them one in Nghia Lam commune in which 99.9 percent of peasant households joined.¹⁶⁷

Table 3-4 The performance of pilot collectives in first winter-spring 1977-1978

| items | Duy Phuoc collective | Binh Lanh collective | Hoa Tien 1 collective |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| area of rice crop (hectare) | 300 | 362.4 | 225 |
| paddy productivity (ton per hectare) | 3.1 | 2.43 | 3.3 |
| area of sweet potatoes crop (hectare) | 192 | 11 | 4.9 |
| sweet potato productivity (ton per hectare) | 4.7 | 2.05 | 4 |
| area of corn crop (hectare) | 11.5 | 0 | 0 |
| corn productivity (ton per hectare) | 3.5 | 0 | 0 |
| total yield of food (ton) | 1162.5 | 771.2 | 700 |
| state's share (ton and percent) | 246 (21.3%) | 165 (23.3%) | 120 (17.7%) |
| collective's share (ton and percent) | 120 (10.3%) | 86 (12%) | 51 (7.4%) |
| collective members' share (ton of paddy and percent) | 796 (68.4%) | 520 (64.8%) | 528 (74.9%) |
| average seasonal income per collective member (kilogram of paddy) | 80 | 102 | 100 |
| payment per workday in paddy (kilogram) | 3 | 2.9 | 3 |
| income per workday in cash (VND) | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.4 |

(Source: *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket xay dung thi diem hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep' [Summing up building pilot collectives], 27 May 1978)

In May 1978, when the pilot collectives had their first harvest, QN-DN newspaper reported 'a victory in the first step' (*thắng lợi bước đầu*). Staple food production and

¹⁶⁷ 'Kinh nghiệm xây dựng hợp tác xã Nghĩa Lam, tỉnh Nghĩa Bình (Nghĩa Bình is a combination of Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh)' [Experiences from establishing collective Nghĩa Lam in Nghĩa Bình province] in *Con Đường Lam An Tap The của Nông Dân* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al., eds), NXB TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 1978: p.147.

productivity in the three pilot collectives, said the report, reached the highest figure ever, and the income of collective members was higher than that of individual farmers.¹⁶⁸

At a conference summing up the state of pilot collectives in May 1978, Ho Nghinh, the Communist Party secretary for QN-DN province, praised their achievements:

that victory confirmed the correct and politic policies of our party, reflected the superiority of the mode of socialist collective production ... that victory defeated the propaganda and distorted statement of the enemy as well as solved doubts (*hồ nghi*) and anxiety (*băn khoăn*) of some cadres and peasants.¹⁶⁹

Peasants in Binh Lanh collective confirmed that for the first season the collective had a bumper harvest. Collective members received 3 kilogram of paddy per workday, a level never repeated in the later years of collective farming. Many villagers attributed the bumper crop to favorable weather, 'good soil' and a huge investment.¹⁷⁰ Some peasants and former staff of collectives revealed that the high payment per workday that peasants received for the first season was a fake figure which the authorities used to attract peasants in other places to join collectives. In order to increase the payment per workday for peasants, pilot collective leaders had transferred some of peasants' current work-points to the next seasons. A former cadre of Binh Lanh collective confirmed this deception,

The payment per workday was actually about 2 kilograms at that time. However, by trickily transferring part of the amount of work-points (*gối điểm*) to the next season, payment per workday reached 3 kilograms. That's why we never achieved that figure again.¹⁷¹

In short, although peasants in QN-DN and other parts of the Central Coast were not eager to join collectives, the establishment of pilot collectives in QN-DN faced weaker resistance from peasants compared to other regions in the south. Besides, local authorities

¹⁶⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang loi luoc dau cua phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [The first victory steps of collectivization], 13 May 1978.

¹⁶⁹ Ho Nghinh, 'Thang loi cua viec xay dung thi diem hop tac xa la thang loi co y nghia cua toan dang bo va nhan dan toan tinh' [The success of pilot collectives is significant victory] in *QN-DN newspaper*, 27 May 1978.

¹⁷⁰ Villagers said that good land resulted from soil that had been left uncultivated for a long time. Besides, the collective used a huge number of agricultural inputs such fertilizers, limes and manure.

¹⁷¹ Interview, Binh Lanh, 20 October 2005.

were able to collectivize peasants' land and their other main means of production and mobilize them to do collective work.

Building pilot collectives and pilot production units in the Mekong Delta

Experimenting with large and small scale collectives

Party leaders anticipated strong peasant resistance to collectivization in the Southern Region (the Mekong Delta and the Southeast Region), so they cautiously experimented with pilot collectives in the region. Instead of requesting each province to build its own pilot collectives, as in the Central Coast, party leaders built only one pilot collective for the whole region in Tan Hoi commune, Cay Lay district, Tien Giang province in February 1977. Tan Hoi commune was selected because it had been a revolutionary base of the NLF.

At first, leaders built a commune-sized pilot collective in Tan Hoi, called Tan Hoi collective (*Hợp Tác Xã Tân Hoi*), which contained 904 households and 525 hectares of land. In order to make Tan Hoi collective a shining example for the whole region, authorities had to invest considerable resources. For example, the central government sent more than 100 cadres from 'advanced collectives' (*hợp tác xã tiên tiến*) in the north to help. Despite these great efforts, the collective still faced significant difficulties and many members dropped out. By 1978 only 234 peasant households remained in the collective. In order to save the collective, authorities decided to divide it into two. However, neither collective was able to hold out and both were dismantled (*tan rã*).¹⁷²

Realizing that a "large-scale" (*qui mô lớn*) collective had failed, party leaders tried a smaller-scale pilot. They chose Phu Quoi hamlet, Yen Binh commune, Go Cong district of Tien Giang which to build a hamlet-sized pilot, called Phu Quoi collective. The main criteria for selecting Phu Quoi were (1) the natural conditions were favorable for the adoption of

¹⁷² Huynh Thi Gam, *Nhung bien doi kinh te xa hoi o nong thon Dong Bang Song Cuu Long tu nam 1975 den nam 1995* (PhD thesis) [Socio-economic changes in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1995], Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH & NV, 1998: p.80.

intensive farming (high-yielding rice) and increasing the number of crops per year, (2) peasants in the hamlet had been trained in production solidarity teamwork, and (3) cadres and mass organizations were strong and capable of building a successful collective.¹⁷³

After one month of preparation, Phu Quoi pilot collective was officially established on 17 May 1978. It had 257 households (98.4 percent of total households), 309.84 hectares of land (97.4 percent of total land), and nearly 100 percent of the machinery and draft animals in the hamlet. Unlike the previous experiments, the Phu Quoi collective stood firm after a few months of operation and was considered an exemplary case for other provinces.¹⁷⁴ Learning from this experience, some other provinces in the Mekong Delta shifted to experimenting with small-scale pilot collectives and production units (*Tập đoàn sản xuất*).¹⁷⁵

In October 1978 An Giang province began to build pilot collectives. Among them were the Hoa Binh Thanh collective in Chau Thanh district and Tay Hue collective in Long Xuyen town. Despite the failure of the Tan Hoi commune-sized collective, provincial leaders in An Giang attempted to establish a commune-sized one in Hoa Binh Thanh.

Despite having the direct assistance of the provincial government, building the Hoa Binh Thanh collective failed badly in terms of peasants' participation and performance. An recent official document revealed that 'in order to mobilize peasants into joining the collective, policemen had to stand at the edges of the rice fields and request peasants to destroy their vegetable crops in order to give the land to the collective'.¹⁷⁶ Authorities faced great difficulties making peasants hand over their machines and tools to collective organizations. Among the 900 households in Hoa Binh Thanh were some 70 tractors,

¹⁷³ Dang Bo Huyen Go Cong, 'Van dong thanh lap hop tac xa thi diem o Go Cong' [Mobilizing and establishing pilot collectives in Go Cong], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al., eds), NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p. 129-130.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid: p.133-4.

¹⁷⁵ Huynh Thi Gam, *Nhung bien doi kinh te xa hoi o nong thôn Dong Bang Song Cuu Long tu nam 1975 den nam 1995* (PhD thesis) [Socio-economic changes in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1985], Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH & NV, 1998: p.80.

¹⁷⁶ Xuan Thu and Quang Thien, 'Dem Truoc Doi Moi: Cong pha "luy tre"' [The night before renovation: Breaking the bamboo hedges], in *Tuoi Tre online*, 4 December 2005, retrieved on 17 January 2006.

harrows, water-pumps and other farming machines owned by individuals. The collective forced peasants to hand over this farming equipment (*tập thể hoá bằng mọi giá*). Some owners strenuously objected. They 'intentionally removed some machine accessories; some broke the machines' chains or axles before handing them to the collective'. Moreover, after collectivizing, machines were managed by new owners who lacked the skill and motivation necessary to look after them. Therefore, 'after one season, 100 percent of machines were broken and had to be put into storage; hundreds of hectares of land were not plowed in time and left uncultivated'.¹⁷⁷

It was reported that

seedlings were going to die due to the cold weather and the time of transplantation was going to pass. Urgently, the collective mobilized peasants to transplant seeds but they went to the fields sluggishly as if they were going to meetings. They worked casually, chatting to each other, waiting for the bell to ring to stop work.

Generally speaking, the collective's performances were bad. This was due to the peasant's everyday practices of working carelessly and sluggishly, damaging machinery or not even showing up for work, all amounting to resistance to collectivization. As a result, peasants received low income equal to a quarter of their previous individual farming.¹⁷⁸ Thus, Hoa Binh Thanh collapsed.

Tay Hue, a hamlet-size collective, was able to stand firm despite its poor performance in the first few seasons. When the collective was established, 211 out of 244 households joined. Although the collective was able to 'mobilize 70 percent of the labor force to work in the fields, the quality of work (*chất lượng lao động*) was not as high as expected'. As a result, paddy productivity was a modest 1.2 tons per hectare in the first season and 1.7 tons per hectare in the second season. And the collective also faced a high peasant drop-out rate.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hợp tác xã Tay Hue qua 6 năm lam an tập thể' [Tay Hue collective over the past 6 years], 30 December 1983: p.2.

In general, pilot collectives were not successful in An Giang and other Mekong Delta provinces. So, central and provincial leaders in the Mekong Delta shifted full collectivization from collectives to production units, which they now considered a basic form of collectivization.¹⁸⁰

Experimenting with production units

After the failure of pilot collectives, many districts of An Giang built the more modest production units instead. The size of the production units ranged from 40 to 50 hectares of land and 50 to 100 households.

Cho Moi district began to build production units at the end of 1978. By the end of 1979, the district authorities announced that 19 production units had been created. However, constructing, managing and guiding production units were so confusing (*lúng túng*) that the majority were weak and unstable (*không vững chắc*). In response to the confusion and instability, the Cho Moi district's Communist party committee (*huyện uỷ*) decided to choose Long Dien B commune as the area in which to build pilot production units.¹⁸¹ In order to build them according to socialist collective principles, some cadres from the northern province of Thanh Hoa were sent to Cho Moi district and Long Dien B commune to help.

According to a former official of Long Dien B commune, with the direct assistance of some local and northern cadres in the summer-autumn season of 1979, Long Dien B's officials decided to build pilot production unit No.1 (*tập đoàn sản xuất số 1*) in Long Phu 1 hamlet. One reason for selecting Long Phu 1 hamlet was that its authorities were strong (*chính quyền áp mạnh*), especially the hamlet chief, who was 'powerful' and 'enthusiastic' (*nhật tình*) about agricultural transformation. Second, a large proportion of the population in Long Phu 1 were Catholics; most of the land in the hamlet had been owned by the local

¹⁸⁰ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural development in Vietnam: A north/South study [1955-1988]*, Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.191.

¹⁸¹ BCHDBHCM, *Lịch Sử Đảng Bộ Huyện Cho Moi 1927-1995* [The history of Cho Moi party cell: 1927-1995], Cho Moi, 1995: p.175.

church (*đất ông cha, đất nhà chung*) but rented to peasants. So, land in Long Phu 1 was like a communal land rather individual land. Authorities believed that when the church leaders agreed to hand over the land to them, collectivizing land would be acceptable to peasants. Finally, the proportion of landless and land-poor households in Long Phu 1 was relatively high compared to other hamlets. Authorities expected such households to be more eager to farm collectively than better-off households.¹⁸²

In order to establish the production unit No.1, Cho Moi district, northern and commune cadres came to work with their counterparts in the hamlet to select cadres to fill the production unit's management board, zone land boundaries and mobilize peasants to join.¹⁸³ After framing 55 hectares of land to form the production unit No.1, local authorities organized meetings and mobilized peasants to join. Peasants in the hamlet who had their land within the boundaries of production unit No.1 were preferred. Landless households in the hamlet or neighbouring hamlets were also invited to join.

Marshalling peasants to join the production unit was not easy. Villagers recalled that 'of 10 households invited, only about 5-6 households participated.' 'The number of poor households joining the production unit was more than that of the better-off households.' 'Some better-off households who had more than 30 *công* of land detested (*chê*) collective farming in the production unit. So, they ran off to hire land in other places to make a living.' 'Some who lost land was so upset that they refused to join'.¹⁸⁴ When asked why they joined, many former members of the production unit replied 'for fear of the new authorities' (*sợ chính quyền mới*), 'fear of being taken to new economic zones' (*sợ đưa đi vùng kinh tế mới*), 'we were being coerced' (*bị ép buộc*), and 'in order to keep the land' (*vào để giữ đất*). A man

¹⁸² Interview, Long Dien B, 29 July 2005.

¹⁸³ Ibid. The production unit's management board consisted of five staff who were considered to have come from 'revolutionary tradition related families' (*gia đình có truyền thống cách mạng*). Five staff consisted of the chairperson, one vice-chairperson in charge of labour management, another vice-chairperson in charge of planning, one accountant, and one storekeeper.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 2-30 June 2005.

in Long Phu commented, 'out of 100 people, only five who were landless and loved farming liked to join. The remaining were coerced into joining; if we didn't participate how could we make a living and keep our land?'¹⁸⁵ Despite such difficulties, 83 households were reported to have joined the production unit No.1.

Production unit No.1, with 83 households and 55 hectares of land, began to operate in the summer-autumn of 1979.¹⁸⁶ Unlike a collective, the production unit collectivized land but not machines, draft animals or other peasant-owned resources. A machinery unit (*tập đoàn máy*) was in charge of controlling and collectivizing peasants' farm machinery. Villagers referred to the former as the 'land unit' (*tập đoàn đất*) to distinguish it from the machinery unit. Both units were to become teams or brigades in a future collective. The production unit operated according to a work-points system in which peasants farmed collectively and were rewarded according to the number of points. Although official policy encouraged payment for land (*trả hoa lợi ruộng đất*), leaders of production unit No.1 did not apply it.

Despite considerable assistance from district and northern cadres and a significant investment in the pilot production unit, its performance was not good. Many people were reported to have 'joined the production unit but did not go to work in the fields' (*vào tập đoàn nhưng không ra đồng*); some sent their children and other 'subsidiary labor' (*lao động phụ*) to work while 'the main labor' (*lao động chính*) in the households made a living in other ways. Villagers also mentioned that peasants did production unit work unenthusiastically and carelessly; 'no one took care of common property' (*cha chung không ai khóc*). Moreover, the production unit was not able to mobilize peasants to 'complete work on time' (*làm không kịp việc*). For example, weeding the rice fields of the production unit went so slowly that 'the

¹⁸⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 25, September 2004.

¹⁸⁶ The total number of households which belonged within the boundaries of the production unit was about 150 (interview, Long Dien B, 17 August, 2005).

weeds grew faster than the speed of weeding'.¹⁸⁷ A man outside production unit No.1 recalled,

I went to see how people in the production unit worked collectively. When I saw the weeds were overgrown, I lost my interest (*thấy mà mất ham*) in collective farming. Meanwhile, in individuals' rice fields, I could not see any weeds (*không thấy một cọng cỏ*). At that time I was afraid that collective farming would expand into my hamlet.¹⁸⁸ (See more about peasants' everyday politics in the next chapter.)

According to a former cadre of production unit No.1, for the first season (summer-autumn 1979), paddy productivity was about 60 percent of individual farming rates. Because the number of peasants participating in working in the fields was few, the total number of peasants' work-points was small. As a result, payment per workday for peasants was relatively high (about 10 kilogram per workday). Therefore, production unit No.1 was known as an exemplary case of the Cho Moi district. Party leaders presented it as a typical case (*đi báo cáo điển hình*) at provincial and central conference on pilot collective in 1979.¹⁸⁹

In the winter-spring of 1979-1980 authorities in Long Dien B commune decided to create another production unit, called unit No.2 in Long Phu 2, at nearby hamlet Long Phu 1. Production unit No.2 faced similar difficulties in mobilizing and managing peasants and its performance was poor from the outset, too. Although the performance of these two pilot collectives steadily deteriorated, local cadres tried their best to keep them from collapsing. The reasons why the collectives and production units faced many difficulties in An Giang and the Mekong Delta will be discussed further in the next chapters.

Conclusion

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 27-30 June 2005.

¹⁸⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005.

After the war, in response to the VCP's post-1975 agrarian policies, local authorities in QN-DN in the Central Coast and An Giang in the Mekong Delta focused on resolving post-war problems and preparing for collectivization. Despite Thang Binh district being heavily damaged by the war, the new authorities there and many other districts of QN-DN had swiftly consolidated their power and implemented the main contents of the VCP's post-1975 agrarian reform. The new authorities in Cho Moi and districts of An Giang still faced difficulties to building government and implementing VCP's post-1975 agrarian policies.

At least two main reasons for 'better' achievements in implementing the VCP's post-war agrarian policies in QN-DN than An Giang. First, after the war, QN-DN inherited a larger number of ex-revolutionaries and southerners returning from the north than An Giang. QN-DN cadres at district, commune and village levels had more experience with VCP's policies and northern collectivization and were more loyal to VCP's socialist transformation of agriculture than their counterparts in An Giang. For instance, authorities in QN-DN carried out preparatory measures for collectivization forcefully and simultaneously. Meanwhile, An Giang authorities cautiously implemented these policies. Peter Nolan also shows that the relative strength and quality of the Communist party apparatus at village level is one of reasons for more socio-economically successful collectivization in China than USSR.¹⁹⁰

Second, the consequences of war in QN-DN were more severe than An Giang. After the war most of peasant households in QN-DN were extremely poor and the social and economic structure of rural communities was flattened and relatively homogeneous. After the war most peasants engaged in subsistence production and struggled to make a living. Given extremely difficult conditions in QN-DN, most poor and powerless villagers tended to comply with post-1975 agrarian policies to avoid any political, social and economic advantages imposed by powerful authorities. In addition, some post-1975 agrarian policies

¹⁹⁰ Peter Nolan, Collectivization in China: Some Comparison with USSR, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 3 January 1976): p.195-197.

such as, labour exchange teams, land sharing seemed to fit well with local culture and practices. Because of the absence of market relations, cultural patterns of behaviors such as reciprocity and exchanging labor were popular in QN-DN.

Meanwhile, because the consequences of war in Cho Moi, An Giang were less severe than those in QN-DN, peasant households were better-off, lived in more open, highly stratified and occupation-diverse rural communities. Given such conditions, An Giang villagers had a greater capacity to evade and resist state policies unattractive to them. Moreover, some post-1975 agrarian policies such as production solidarity teams, land readjustment, non-resident cultivator prohibition did not fit with local practices and conditions in which market relations and private land tenure had well been established. So, these policies encountered strong peasant resistance in An Giang and elsewhere in the Southern Region (discussed more in the next chapter).

Chapter 4 ACCELERATING AND SOLIDIFYING COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS UNDER THE WORK POINT SYSTEM 1978-1981

Introduction

After a few years preparing for and experimenting with collectives, VCP leaders accelerated the process in all regions of the south and planned to complete collectivization by 1980. Collectivization occurred rapidly in the Central Coast but faced many difficulties in the Mekong Delta. By the end of 1979 collectivization was 'basically completed' in the Central Coast while it accounted for only a modest proportion of land and peasant households in the Mekong Delta.

This chapter examines how collectivization was accelerated and strengthened in the Central Coast and the Mekong Delta; and how local authorities, cadres and peasants in both regions reacted to collectivization. In particular, it examines to what extent the everyday practices of local cadres and peasants affected the result of the collectivization policy in both regions and contributed to modifications of the national policy.

Accelerating collectivization

In April 1978 VCP leaders released directive No.43-CT/TW (14 April 1978), which stressed 'firmly grasping the task of agricultural transformation and speeding it up in the south'.¹ It advocated that local officials in the south should make agricultural transformation their 'central

¹ DCSVN, 'Chi thi cua Bo chinh tri, so 43-CT/TW ve viec nam vung va day manh cong tac cai tao nong nghiep o Mien Nam (14 April 1978)' [Politburo's resolution No.43 on intensifying agricultural transformation in the south] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 39, 1978*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.183-191.

and regular task' (*nhiệm vụ trọng tâm và thường xuyên*) and should carry it out in a 'positive, unhesitant and not overhasty and careless manner'.²

In August 1978 VCP leaders organized a conference on 'the consolidation of agricultural collectives in the south'.³ Despite failed experiments of pilot collectives in the Southern Region, party leaders praised the success of pilot collectives elsewhere in the south in mobilizing peasants and collectivizing their means of production. They had attracted 90 percent of peasant households within their territory and collectivized 96 percent of peasants' land and 80 percent of machinery and draft animals.⁴ Moreover, 'production in [pilot] collectives had increased compared to that of individual farming. Collective members' incomes remained the same or increased. The collectives had accumulated some capital and fulfilled their obligation to the state'.⁵

At the conference, party leaders also revealed that Vietnam now faced a 'new situation' relating to China 'inciting' Cambodia to have a border war against it. The party leaders stressed 'this new situation requires us to speed up agricultural transformation and try our best to implement it in the south'.⁶ Party leaders also planned to implement a great wave of collectivization in the south in 1979 in order to complete the establishment of collectives and

² Ibid.

³ Nguyen Thanh Tho, 'Ra sức tiến hành hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp' [Do the best to implement collectivization], in *Con Đường Lam An Tập Thể Của Nông Dân* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB T.P. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.13). According to Nguyen Thanh Tho, by August 1978, there were 132 pilot collectives established in the south. However, the majority of pilot collectives were located in the Central Coast (108 collectives); the Mekong Delta had only two; the Southeastern region had 12 and the Central Highlands 18.

⁴ Vo Chi Cong, 'Con đường lam an tập thể của nông dân' [Collective farming for peasants], in *Con Đường Lam An Tập Thể Của Nông Dân* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB T.P. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: pp.53-60.

⁵ Nguyen Thanh Tho, 'Ra sức tiến hành hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp' [Do the best to implement collectivization] in *Con Đường Lam An Tập Thể Của Nông Dân* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB T.P. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.13.

⁶ Ibid: p.9.

production units by 1980.⁷ The following sections examine how collectivization was accelerated in QN-DN in the Central Coast and An Giang in the Mekong Delta.

QN-DN in the Central Coast

Following the three initial pilot collectives, QN-DN established four more pilot collectives (*hợp tác xã nông nghiệp*) in the spring-summer of 1978. According to QN-DN newspaper accounts, by June 1978 the province had established seven pilot collectives which reportedly operated well. The provincial leaders attributed the 'good' performance of pilot collectives largely to 'the correctness of agricultural transformation policy' and 'the superiority of new production relations'.⁸ Excited with the performance of pilot collectives and in response to VCP's directive No.43 (14 April 1978), QN-DN's leaders called for a rapid and extensive increase in collectivization for the winter-spring season of 1978-1979.⁹

By October of 1978, QN-DN had established 113 collectives involving 46 percent of the province's peasant households and 35 percent of its agricultural land.¹⁰ By that time, officials in Duy Xuyen, a 'key' district which had established the first pilot collective in QN-DN, announced that collectivization was largely completed, thus making it the first district in QN-DN, as well as in the entire south, to achieve completion.¹¹ Duy Xuyen had established

⁷ Vo Chi Cong, 'Con duong lam an tap the cua nong dan' [Collective farming for peasants], in *Con Duong Lam An Tap The Cua Nong Dan* [Collective farming for peasants] (Vo Chi Cong et al, eds), NXB T.P. Ho Chi Minh, 1978: p.71.

⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xa luan: xay dung quan he san xuat moi trong nong nghiep' [Building new production relations in agriculture], 4 June 1978; these four pilot collectives included Hoa Tien No.2 collective in Hoa Vang district, Quyen Tien collective and Tien Phong collective in Dien Ban district, and Tam Thanh collective in Tam Ky district.

⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tich cuc chuan bi mo rong phong trao to chuc hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep' [Be positive towards the extension of collectivization], 10 June 1978.

¹⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thanh lap xong 98 hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep' [98 agricultural collectives have been established], 11 October 1978.

¹¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Doan can bo ban cai tao nong nghiep trung uong, cac tinh mien trung va hoi lien hiep phu nu Viet Nam tham huyen Duy Xuyen' [Central coast cadres and agricultural transformation committees visited Duy Xuyen district], 25 October 1978.

19 collectives, which almost all of the peasant households in the district reportedly joined.¹² Inspired by the high speed of collectivization, QN-DN's provincial leaders decided in October 1978 to shorten by one year the schedule for fulfilling the main targets of its five-year 1976-1980 agricultural plan. This meant that the province's authorities planned to complete collectivization and fulfill the production target of 500,000 tons of staple food by 1979 instead of 1980.¹³

By April 1979, one year after the issue of VCP's directive No.43, QN-DN had established 164 collectives, accounting for 70 percent of total peasant households. Collectivization in other provinces of the Central Coast was also rapid. By April 1979 the Central Coast had largely completed collectivization in two forms: collectives and production units (see table 4-1).¹⁴

Table 4-1 The number of collectives and the percentage of peasant households joining collectives in 5 provinces of the Central Coast by April 1979

| <i>Name of provinces</i> | <i>Number of collectives</i> | <i>Percentage of total peasant households (%)</i> |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Binh Tri Thien | 231 | 85.5 |
| Quang Nam-Da Nang | 164 | 70 |
| Nghia Binh | 246 | 57.8 |
| Khanh Hoa | 180 | 80 |
| Thuan Hai | 183 | 55.4 |
| The whole region (Central Coast) | 1,026 | 70.3 |

(Source: *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cung voi ca mien nam tinh ta khan truong hoan thanh hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Our province, together with southern provinces, hurry to complete collectivization], 27 June 1979).

Nhan Dan newspaper on 29 April 1980 reported that by the end of 1979, the Central Coast had established 1,114 collectives and 1,500 production units, which accounted for 83

¹² Duy Xuyen had 2,8000 hectares of natural land, 11 communes and 19,462 households. It had 7,000 hectares of agricultural land including 3,400 hectares of rice land and land per capita was 1 sao and 11 thuoc (equal to 867 m²). The composition of the population in farming households accounted was 81.4 percent of the population, fishery (3.4 percent), handicraft (9.4 percent), traders (1.4 percent) and other professions (4.1percent) (*QN-DN newspaper*, 'Duyen Xuyen khan truong xay dung huyen de chi dao va quan ly cac hop tac xa' [Duy Xuyen district's rush to build capacity to lead collectives], 25 October 1978)

¹³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xa luan phan dau hoan thanh nhung muc tieu ve san xuat va cai tao nong nghiep de ra trong nam nam 1976-1980 cua tinh vao nam 1979' [Do the best to meet targets of production and agricultural transformation by 1979], 21 October 1978.

¹⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cung voi ca mien nam tinh ta khan truong hoan thanh hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Our province, together with southern provinces, hurry to complete collectivization], 27 June 1979.

percent of peasant households and 76 percent of agricultural land. The article praised collective farming for better paddy productivity, staple food production and food contribution to the state than those of individual farming.¹⁵

By the end of 1979, QN-DN provincial authorities announced the completion of collectivization in the lowland and midland area. The province had established 235 collectives including 18,400 peasant households (nearly 93 percent of the province's peasant households) and 106,000 hectares of agricultural land (84 percent). The remaining peasant households and land were located in mountainous areas where ethnic minorities lived.¹⁶ The size of collectives ranged from 200 to 700 hectares of agricultural land. Among these were 48 collectives, the size of a commune (*xã*). On average each collective had 421 hectares of agricultural land, 1,542 workers, and 762 households.¹⁷ The acceleration of collectivization in QN-DN is illustrated in table 4-2:

Table 4-2 Collectivization acceleration in QN-DN according to seasons from 1977 to 1979

| | The winter-spring of 1977-78 | The spring-summer of 1978 | The summer-autumn of 1978 | The winter-spring of 1978-79 | The spring-summer of 1979 | The summer-autumn of 1979 | By the end of 1979 |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Number of collectives | 4 | 4 | 7 | 114 | 132 | 164 | 235 |
| Percentage of peasant households | n/a | n/a | n/a | 50 | 57.8 | 70 | 92.9 |

(Source: *QN-DN newspaper's* accounts: 2 December 1978, 14 March 1979, 13 June 1979, 17 October 1979 and 1 December 1979)

In Thang Binh, like many other districts in QN-DN, collectivization was rapid and did not face strong peasant resistance. After 'successfully' establishing the experimental collective of Binh Lanh, in mid-1978 the district's leaders called for setting up collectives in other

¹⁵ *Dan Nhan newspaper*, 'Nam nam cai tao xa hoi chu nghia doi voi nong nghiep o Mien Nam,' 29 April 1980: p.1. This praise of collective farming was also in *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cung voi ca mien nam tinh ta khan truong hoan thanh hop tac hoa nong nghiep', 27 June 1979; The Dat, *Nen Nong Nghiep Viet Nam Tu Sau Cach Mang Thang Tam nam 1945* [Vietnam's agriculture after 1945], Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1981: p.215-6.

¹⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nam 1979 tinh ta can ban hoan thanh nong nghiep o cac huyen dong bang' [The midlands of our province has completed collectivization by 1979], 17 October 1979.

¹⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep: su kien va con so' [Overview of collectivization], 15 June 1983.

communes. By September 1978 Thang Binh district had established 10 collectives in 5 out of its total of 20 communes.¹⁸ By June 1979, Thang Binh had established 17 collectives in 13 communes which made up 54 percent of peasant households and 44 percent of agricultural land; and among these, 10 communes had largely completed collectivization.¹⁹ By the end of 1979 Thanh Binh's authorities announced the completion of collectivization with 36 collectives across its 20 communes.

Binh Dinh commune of Thang Binh district had completed collectivization by October 1979. The commune had two collectives: Binh Dinh collective No. 1 and Binh Dinh collective No.2 (where I did fieldwork and interviews in 2004 and 2005). A former cadre of Binh Dinh collective No. 2 recalled that after one month mobilizing peasants, almost all households in the area had joined the collective. Only 20 peasant households declined; most of them were elderly households comprising elderly persons who were too old to work.²⁰ The reasons for the high rate of peasant participation and the high speed of collectivization in QN-ND will be discussed later in this chapter.

In summary, collectivization in QN-DN and many other provinces of the Central Coast was done quickly and smoothly. Within two years of establishing pilot collectives and one year after launching the collectivization campaign, QN-DN had met the agricultural transformation target set by VCP leaders. Collectivization here was even faster than in the north, where collectivization took 2 years to complete.²¹ Strengthening collectives, making them work properly and fulfilling the economic objectives of large-scale production, however, did not go smoothly, a situation I discuss later.

¹⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang Binh chuan bi xay dung 10 Hop Tac Xa' [Thang Binh is about to establish 10 collectives], 9 September 1978.

¹⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang Binh so ket phong trao hop tac hoa non nghiep, phat dong thi dua voi hop tac xa Duy Phuoc, Dinh Cong, Vu Thang' [Preliminary summing up of collectivization in Thang Binh], 2 June 1979.

²⁰ Interview, Binh Dinh, 20 April 2004.

²¹ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p. 69.

The Mekong Delta

As chapter 3 showed, in 1977 authorities in the Mekong Delta had great trouble establishing experimental commune-sized collectives. Hence, in 1978, the authorities scaled back their expectations and concentrated on setting up hamlet-sized ones and then production units (*tập đoàn sản xuất*) with between 30-50 hectares of land. At the conference on agricultural transformation in the south held in Cuu Long province in April 1979, national leaders claimed that production units were the most suitable collective organizations in the Southern Region as a whole and in the Mekong Delta in particular. Therefore, they called for the region to accelerate collectivization in the form of production units instead of collectives. However, national leaders still wanted to experiment with collectives and hoped that many more collectives could be set up later by consolidating well-established production units.²²

In 1979, in response to national leader suggestion, An Giang and other Southern Region provinces (including the Mekong Delta and South-eastern region) accelerated the formation of production units. According to a report of BCTNNMN (the Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south), by November 1979, the Southern Region had 13,178 production units and 272 pilot collectives, accounting for 33.5 percent of peasant households and 26.9 percent of agricultural land.²³ However, according to *Nhan Dan* newspaper in April 1980, few of these collectives operated well; many failed to show 'the superiority of new production relations' and failed to be an appropriate form of collectivization.²⁴ Moreover, only 7,000 production units in the Southern Region actually farmed collectively (*làm ăn chung*) and even they still faced many difficulties. The remaining production units had not yet actually started to

²² BCTNNMN, 'Thông báo về cuộc họp từ ngày 22-24 tháng 10 năm 1979 của Ban Cải tạo Nông Nghiệp Miền Nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 5 November 1979: p.8.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Dan Nhan newspaper*, 'Năm năm cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp ở Miền Nam' [Five years of socialist agricultural transformation in the south], 29 April 1980: p.1; the article also shows that most of pilot collectives in the Southern Region were located Song Be province (152 collectives) and Tien Giang (70

farm or 'had started to farm collectively but had failed'. Production unit members 'still did not feel secure' (*vẫn chưa an tâm*), even in some of the 'good' performing units. Some units deviated in production (*tiêu cực trong sản xuất*), illegally giving 'blank contracts to households' (*khoán trắng cho hộ*) and verging on collapse (*sắp tan rã*).²⁵

A typical example is Minh Hai province of the Mekong Delta, where collectivization accelerated extensively in 1979. Within a year the province had 1,114 production units, accounting for 45.8 percent of households and 36 percent of agricultural land (see table 4-3).

Table 4-3 Accelerating collectivization in Minh Hai province in 1979

| time | tasks | the number of production units |
|--------|--|--------------------------------|
| Jan-79 | <i>experimental pilot production units</i> | 3 |
| Mar-79 | <i>extending pilot production units</i> | 12 |
| Apr-79 | <i>accelerating collectivization</i> | 100 |
| May-79 | | 500 |
| Jun-79 | | 800 |
| Aug-79 | | 1081 |
| Oct-79 | | 1114 |

(Sources: BCTNNMH, 'Du thao bao cao: Nhan dinh, danh gia tinh hình cai tao nong nghiep thoi gian qua ...o Minh Hai' [A draft report: Evaluation of agricultural transformation in Minh Hai], 13 November 1979)

Only 300 out of 1,114 production units were actually farming collectively (*tập đoàn ăn chia*), and only 130 out of these 300 units had socialist qualities (*tập đoàn theo đúng tính chất xã hội chủ nghĩa*), that is, produced collectively and distributed output according to the work-points members earned. The remaining 170 production units only did semi-collective farming. This means that while some farming was done collectively, individual households privately cultivated part of their own land or the production unit's land.²⁶

In response to the poor results of collectivization in the Southern Region, party leaders in November 1979 instructed everyone to 'try their best to strengthen production unit

collectives).

²⁵ BCTNNMN, 'Thông tri về kịp thời và ra sức củng cố các tập đoàn sản xuất nông nghiệp' [Announcement on doing the best to improve production units], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1 November 1979: p.1-2.

²⁶ BCTNNMH, 'Du thao bao cao: Nhan dinh danh gia tinh hình cai tao nong nghiep thoi gian qua, phuong huong nhien vu va bien phap chu yeu tiep tuc cai tao nong nghiep tu nay den nam 1980 va 1981-1982 doi voi tinh Minh

organizations'.²⁷ The national leaders also lowered their expectations and called for accelerating collectivization in a 'positive and sure-footed way' (*phương châm tích cực và vững chắc*) instead of the urgent way (*khẩn trương*) advocated by previous policies. Besides this, they instructed the Southern Region to focus on solidifying (*củng cố*) existing collective organizations rather than accelerating the formation of new ones. Especially, the region had to put much more emphasis on creating 'necessary conditions' for and improving the quality of local cadres to avoid carrying out collectivization in a subjective, hasty and coercive way, which was perceived as harming production and living-standards.²⁸

Despite the VCP leaders' effort, by early 1980 more than two thirds of the production units in the Southern Region had collapsed. For example, for the 2,653 production units established in Hau Giang province in 1979, 'there were no more than 100 production units which could stand firm'.²⁹ By the end of 1980, the number of production units and collectives remaining in the Southern Region were 3,729 and 137 respectively.³⁰ These collective organizations accounted for only 8 percent of peasant households and 6 percent of the land.³¹

An Giang province

Dissatisfied with the performance of pilot collectives, authorities in An Giang province shifted their focus to building production units. By the end of 1979, An Giang had 308 production units, 6 pilot collectives and 55 machinery units (*tập đoàn máy*); collective organizations

Hai' [A draft report: Evaluation of agricultural transformation in Minh Hai), TP. Ho Chi Minh, 13 November 1979.

²⁷ BCTNNMN, 'Thông tri về kịp thời và ra sức củng cố các tập đoàn sản xuất nông nghiệp' [Announcement on doing the best to improve production units in the Southern Region], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1 November 1979: 1-2.

²⁸ DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 6 Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Đảng (khoa IV)' [Resolution of 6th plenum], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap*, *Tap 40*, 1979, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004: p.362.

²⁹ Phan Quang, *Dong Bang Song Cuu Long*, NXB Van Hoa, 1981: p.83.

³⁰ Vu Oanh, *Hoan Thanh Dieu Chinh Ruong Dat Day Manh Cai Tao Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Doi Voi Nong Nghiep Cac Tinh Nam Bo* [Completing land readjustment and speeding up agricultural transformation in the Southern Region], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1984: p.11.

³¹ Le Thanh Nghi, *Cai Tien Cong Tac Khoan San Pham De Thuc Day San Xuat Cung Co Hop Tac Xa Nong Nghiep* [Improving the product contract system to solidify agricultural collectives], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1981: p.33.

accounted for about 5 percent of agricultural land and 7 percent of peasant households.³² A majority of these production units were classified as weak and inadequate in quality (*chura đúng tính chất*). For example, Phu Tan district had established 6 production units in 1979 but only two of them were collective-farming ones. Likewise, only 9 out of 94 production units in Chau Thanh district had 'socialist characteristics'.³³ Some production units faced difficulties due to peasants' resistance and were dismantled a few months after being established. In some districts where a majority of people were of Khmer extraction, such as Tinh Bien and Tri Ton no production units had been established.³⁴

Faced with great difficulties in extending the number of production units and making them function as collectives, An Giang provincial leaders in 1980-1981 put more effort into consolidating existing production units rather than rapidly creating more (see more detail in next section). As a result, collectivization during this period stagnated. At the end of 1980, An Giang had 317 production units, 6 collectives, 1,584 production solidarity teams and 64 machinery units.³⁵ By the end of 1981 An Giang still had but 6 collectives and the number of production units had risen to 357, an increase of 40. These collective organizations occupied about 20,675 hectares of agricultural land, a mere 8.5 percent of the total, and had 10 percent of peasant households.³⁶

In Cho Moi district of An Giang, as well as experimenting with pilot production units, authorities cautiously extended the number of production units. By the end of 1979, the district had established 19 production units. However, most of these units were 'weak' and 'unstable'

³² *An Giang newspaper*, 'An Giang vung vang di toi' [An Giang is doing well], 06 January 1980; the proportion of land and peasant households belonging to collective organizations was based on my own calculations.

³³ To Sy Hong, 'Phong trao hop tac hoa tiep tuc di vao chieu huong on dinh va phat trien theo huong phuong cham tích cực và vững chắc' [Collectivization in An Giang has progressed positively and steadily] in *An Giang newspaper*, 7 June 1981: p.2.

³⁴ Interview with provincial cadres in An Giang, 31 May 2005; local archives almost kept silent on this matter so I can not know exactly how many production units were dismantled in 1979.

³⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Trong tháng 12, 1980 tỉnh phát triển thêm được 14 tập đoàn sản xuất' [In December 1980, An Giang has established 14 more production units], 11 January 1981.

(không vững chắc) and cadres managing them were 'confused' (lúng túng).³⁷ According to a former Cho Moi official, because of difficulties in extending them, authorities emphasized solidifying existing units, so in 1980 collectivization stagnated.³⁸ Only a few units were established in the district in 1980.³⁹ Thus, by the end of 1980 Cho Moi had established only 21 production units, which accounted for about 5.7 percent of peasant households and 4.7 percent of agricultural land.⁴⁰ By 1981 the district had established 19 additional production units. Therefore, during 1979-1981, Cho Moi district had established 40 production units, which accounted for only 10 percent of the peasant households and 8.5 percent of the agricultural land.⁴¹

In Long Dien B, after establishing two pilot production units in 1979, and with help from district leaders, authorities established in 1980 two more production units, located near the previous ones. District and commune officials strove to make these four production units work properly and act as exemplary cases. A former Long Dien B commune official claimed that because of such efforts, commune authorities did not extend collectivization further. Therefore, between 1979-1981 Long Dien B had established only 4 production units which accounted for a modest proportion of agricultural land and peasant households in the commune.⁴²

In short, collectivization in An Giang and other provinces of the Mekong Delta met with substantial difficulty and went very slowly. Regional collectivization had accounted for

³⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phong trao hop tac nong nghiep o An Giang tung buoc duoc cung co di len' [Collectivization in An Giang has progressed], 18 November 1981: p.1.

³⁷ BCHDBHCM, *Lich Su Dang Bo Huyen Cho Moi* [The history of Cho Moi party cell], Cho Moi: 1995: p.174-5.

³⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005.

³⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Qua hoi nghi cong bao hoan thanh co ban hop tac hoa nong nghiep o cho moi' [Report from a conference announcing the completion of collectivization in Cho Moi], 15 April 1985; BCHDBHCM, *Lich Su Dang Bo Huyen Cho Moi* [The history of Cho Moi party cell: 1927-1995], Cho Moi: 1995: p.174-5.

⁴⁰ My calculation was based on figures in *An Giang newspaper*, 'Qua hoi nghi cong bao hoan thanh co ban hop tac hoa nong nghiep o Cho Moi' [Report from a conference announcing the completion of collectivization in Cho Moi], 15 April 1985 and in TKCM, *Niem Giam Thong Ke 1976-1984 Huyen Cho Moi tinh An Giang* [Cho Moi year book 1976-1984], Cho Moi, 1984: p.43.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interview, Long Dien B, 17, August, 2005.

only a small proportion of land and peasants (less than 10 percent), which fell far short of the VCP's policy target of completing collectivization by 1980. The following sections discuss the reasons why An Giang in the Mekong Delta failed to fulfill the VCP's collectivization targets while QN-DN in the Central Coast succeeded.

Explaining the degree of collectivization and peasant participation

As discussed above, collectivization went fast and attracted a high proportion of peasants in QN-DN and other provinces of the Central Coast while it faced many difficulties, went slowly and attracted only a small proportion of peasants in An Giang and many provinces of the Mekong Delta. According to Joel Migdal, the capability of the state to implement its policies depends on social structures and the nature of society in which state policies are carried out.⁴³ This can mean that in a country of regions with different socio-economic and natural conditions, the result of state policies varies from one area to another. By comparing local conditions, especially peasants' and local cadres' behavior, this section will explain different collectivization performances between An Giang (in the Mekong Delta) and QN-DN (in the Central Coast). I will argue that the 'better' result of collectivization in QN-DN came from 'stronger' local authorities and weaker resistance from peasants. Furthermore, I argue that the difference in behavior came from differences in the contingencies bearing on people's efforts to make a decision to join or not join the collective.

Fast collectivization in QN-DN, the Central Coast:

Strong authorities and strong cadre commitment

As discussed in chapter 3, thanks to the large number of ex-revolutionaries and southern returnees, local authority in QN-DN had quickly been established and consolidated after the

war. The local authorities themselves seemed to be highly loyal to VCP's agricultural transformation policy, one of main factors contributing to rapid collectivization in the province.

In explaining why collectivization in QN-DN went 'fast and firmly', Ho Nghinh, the province's Communist party secretary, gave four reasons in May 1979. First, the VCP's collectivization policy was 'correct' and clear because national leaders had learnt a lot from collectivization in the north. Second, authorities in the province 'strove decisively (*phấn đấu quyết liệt*) and complied absolutely with the central party policy line'. Third, 'the majority of peasants followed and had a close relationship with the party'; peasants 'absolutely trusted in the party leadership'. Finally, after reunification, the province had done a great deal of preparation for collectivization such as organizing peasants into labor exchange teams, training a large number of cadres and establishing pilot collectives.⁴⁴ Similarly, another article in QN-DN newspaper in December 1979 attributed fast collectivization in the province to 'most of provincial, district, commune, and sub-commune party members and cadres being loyal to collectivization policy'.⁴⁵

In 2004, a provincial official who was familiar with collectivization at that time explained why local cadres from provincial to commune levels in QN-DN were devoted to the policy. After reunification, he said, cadres consisted of local ex-revolutionaries and returnees from the north. Although there were equal numbers of each, southerners returning from the north had the political upper-hand. They knew the north's collectivization model and could apply it to QN-DN. Second, due to living in poor conditions and close to the Hue feudal dynasty (Vietnam's feudal state), where the influence of Confucian values were strong, people

⁴³ Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988: p.64.

⁴⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Đe đua phong trào hợp tác xã hóa nông nghiệp tiến lên mạnh mẽ và vững chắc' [To speed up collectivization forcefully and firmly], 12 May 1979.

⁴⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cuối năm 1978: Ra đời 107 hợp tác xã, nay toàn tỉnh có 114 hợp tác xã, bao gồm 96,704 hộ nông dân chiếm 50% số hộ trong tỉnh' [By the end of 1978, QN-DN had established 114 collectives accounting for 50 percent of total households], 2 December 1979.

in QN-DN had a long history of complying with state policies (*phục tùng nhà nước*). Therefore, after reunification, in response to VCP's agricultural transformation policy, local cadres and residents tended to comply with it.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, looking at the 'quality' of local cadres, a former official of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation said that those of the Central Coast were more 'Bolshevik' and 'fascist' than their counterparts in the Southern Region, so they used coercive measures to force peasants to join collectives.⁴⁷

A former vice-chairman of Binh Dinh collective No.2 admitted that at that time he was loyal to VCP's agricultural transformation policy because he was taught that socialism was ideal, and the main task of the new authorities was to transform the old economy and build a new one. Collectivization was the only way to prosperity, justice and the elimination of exploitation. He acknowledged that at first he trusted the VCP's agricultural transformation policy. He reasoned, 'in the war with American, the north carried out collectivization and supported the south to win the war. As far as I knew most of the chairpersons of agricultural collectives in the north were women. So, we men could do it'. Moreover, 'northern cadres kept us in the dark - they did not tell us the shortcomings of collectivization in the north. Even so, some southern returnees did'.⁴⁸ Likewise, a former chairman of Binh Lanh collective mentioned that in 1979 he had an opportunity to visit some typical collectives in the north. He realized that the performance of these collectives was so poor and the value of the collective work-day low, ranging from 0.5 to 0.6 kilograms of paddy. However, when he came back home, he did not dare mention anything bad about northern collectives.⁴⁹

With high expectations of collectivization and loyalty to the VCP, local cadres were keen to bring peasants into collectives. Some former local cadres recognized that they had to use several tactics, even using 'tricky measures' (*thủ đoạn*) and various harsh sanctions to force

⁴⁶ Interview, Tam Ky, Quang Nam, 10 October 2004.

⁴⁷ Interview, TP. Ho Chi Minh, 26 December 2005.

⁴⁸ Interview, Binh Dinh commune, 6 October 2004.

peasants to comply. For example, local cadres persuaded or threatened peasant households who declined to join. Villagers who refused to join faced obstacles in their individual farming efforts and encountered problems with official papers, especially those to do with children's schooling, and access to healthcare and state goods. These measures were quite similar to those used in the north during 1959-1961.⁵⁰ A former cadre of Binh Dinh collective No.2 recalled that in theory, each collective was built on three principles: voluntary membership, mutual benefit and democratic governance. In reality, these standards were absent. Peasants were actually coerced into joining the collective. For example, authorities did not allow non-collective members to work their own land; instead, they were given barren fields often located at the foot of hills or the bank of brooks.⁵¹ Similarly, a former chairman of Binh Lanh collective recalled,

The first principle of collectivization was coercion. Livestock (*trâu bò*) and land were all collectivized. Right before establishing the collective, application forms were sent to ask peasants to sign. If someone declined to join, his land was replaced with barren land far away so that peasants joined out of fear.⁵²

Therefore, to survive most households decided to join collectives. Only 12 households, most of whom were elderly, lived near the boundaries and had land in neighboring communes, refused to join.⁵³ A man in Thanh Yen village commented,

People were coerced into collectives. Peasants did not volunteer, but were forced to sign ready-made application forms. Land was collectivized and livestock was bought by the collective at very cheap prices compared to market prices.⁵⁴

In short, local authority's strong commitment to collectivization and the sanctions they imposed on non-collective members were the two main reasons collectivization in QN-DN happened quickly.

⁴⁹ Interview, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2004.

⁵⁰ See Ben Kervkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.71.

⁵¹ Interview, Binh Dinh, 20 October, 2004.

⁵² Interview, Binh Lanh commune, 21 October 2004.

⁵³ Interview, Binh Lanh commune, 14 October 2005.

⁵⁴ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh commune, 8 October, 2004.

Little peasant resistance: Joining collectives to avoid disadvantage

According to Quang Truong, peasants in the Central Coast living in unfavorable conditions and 'hoping for a better life' preferred collective farming; this was one of main reasons collectivization occurred swiftly there.⁵⁵ Although agreeing that local conditions were important in explaining peasants' behavior, I learned that peasants in the Central Coast joined the collectives not so much because they trusted collective farming but mainly because they wanted to avert the disadvantages that local authorities imposed on them. In other words, given the unfavorable conditions in which they had to live and the presence of 'strong' authorities, peasants in QN-DN and other places in the Central Coast joined the collectives to avoid economic, social and political disadvantages.

In order to understand how Central Coast peasants reacted to collectivization, we need to examine their living conditions. As discussed in chapter 3, wars had devastated the social, economical and ecological balance of the Central Coast. Conditions in the Central Coast, especially, the destructive legacy of wars, dry and infertile soil and high frequency of natural calamity meant that in the first few years after 1975, most peasants in the region were merely subsistence producers; most of them struggled to produce enough food for their own consumption.

Significantly, the post-1975 land readjustment brought poor peasants some land to till. However, land per capita in the region was small, about 700-800 square meters per farmer. The reform increased the number of small subsistence producers rather than petty commodity ones.⁵⁶ Therefore, before collectivization, market relations and agricultural commercialization had not been as well developed as in parts of the Mekong Delta. In other words, before the start

⁵⁵ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.207.

⁵⁶ The figure was cited from BCTNNMN, 'Bai cua dong chi Vo Chi Cong: Ket luan hoi nghi cai tao nong nghiep cac tinh B2 cu' [Vo Chi Cong's speech at the conference on agricultural transformation in the old B2 zone], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 26 August 1979: p.2

of collectivization, the rural economy and the social structures of peasant communities in the Central Coast were quite similar to those in the north in 1950s when it started collectivization.

Like the north, the Central Coast's post-1975 land readjustment in many areas had distributed land more or less equally among peasants.⁵⁷ Social composition was relatively homogeneous; the rural economy was virtually subsistence; almost all rural residents farmed. They had few economic opportunities apart from farming. In other words, the majority of peasants were poor rural cultivators; their main means of production was land and they relied on cultivation to live. Their main concern was survival and subsistence.⁵⁸

During the collectivization campaign, local newspaper accounts often praised peasants for their eager and voluntary participation in collectives. Many peasants, however, were not enthusiastic. A recent unpublished essay reported that when pilot collectives Binh Lanh, Duy Xuyen and Hoa Tien No.1 were established, peasants in other areas of QN-DN worried about (*lo lắng*), doubted (*ngghi ngờ*) and feared (*sợ hãi*) that collectivization would reach them.

Despite many explanations and discrediting of the rumor that collectivization in the north had bad consequences, these assurances could not stop peasants in many areas of QN-DN from slaughtering and selling their animals beforehand, destroying plants, and selling their agricultural machinery.⁵⁹

Likewise, despite the peasants in Binh Lanh and Binh Dinh communes of Thang Binh district, being poorer than in other places, many did not join collectives 'excitedly and voluntarily' as QN-DN newspaper reported.⁶⁰ Villagers in Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh commune admitted to slaughtering or selling their draft animals to avoid collectivizing them.⁶¹

⁵⁷ According to Kerkvliet, the agrarian reform in the north in mid-1950s had distributed land more and less equally among peasants (Ben Kerkvliet, 'Village-state relations in Vietnam: the effect of everyday politics on decollectivization', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (May, 1995): p.401.

⁵⁸ Lam Quang Huyen, *Kinh Te Nong Ho va Kinh Te Hop Tac Trong Nong Nghiep Viet Nam* [The peasant household economy and the collective economy in Vietnam], TP. Ho Chi Minh: NXB Tre, 2004: p.117.

⁵⁹ L.K., 'Tu khoa khu den hien tai: Muoi lam nam ay' [From past to present: over the past 10 years], unpublished article (1990). I was given this article when I interviewed the author, a former QN-DN newspaper journalist, on 20 October 2005.

⁶⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, '96 phan tram ho nong dan o Binh Lanh tu nguyen ky don vao HTX [96 percent of households in Binh Lanh voluntarily signed forms to join the collective]', 4 October, 1977)

⁶¹ Interview, Binh Dinh, October 2004 and October 2005.

Villagers in Hien Loc village of Binh Lanh commune also recalled not being convinced, despite local cadres saying good things about collective farming. Some land-poor peasants might have liked to join collectives to have some land to farm but they did not believe collectivization would improve their lives and they disliked the idea of working together and distributing revenue according to work-points. Instead, they wanted to have enough land to farm independently. A 76-year-old lady in Hien Loc village, who supported revolutionaries during the war but did not support collectivization, shared her story:

At the meeting, northern cadres propagandized that if you joined the collective, you would have a better life in the future. They promised people would not have to carry things on their shoulders anymore (*gánh trên vai*); ox and buffaloes would no longer be used to plow. Machinery would replace all these burdens. [In the long term], the collective would be responsible for cooking so people could eat collectively. The collective would take care of everything. But peasants did not believe what the cadres said. We whispered to each other: we did not expect these things; we only hoped to have enough clothes to wear and enough food to eat straight away. When the cadres said individual farming was backward, people whispered: It was backward but it did not make people hungry. It was not certain that collective farming was better than individual farming!⁶²

Although many peasants doubted the benefits of collective farming, most joined. Villagers in Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villages claimed that if they did not join collectives, they would have to confront problems and suffer economic, social and political disadvantage. Asked whether he volunteered to participate, a 55 year-old man in Thanh Yen village of Binh Dinh commune, Thang Binh district, recalled:

If we did not participate, we had to endure a lot of disadvantages; we could not keep our land but were given bad land far away. During the collectivization campaign, local cadres warned that if we did not join, our cows and buffaloes would not be allowed to graze on, even go through collective fields. Moreover, if we did not join, we would be isolated from other people; we could not buy goods from the state; our children would not have access to education and other things.⁶³

An elderly man in the village justified his decision to join the collective,

⁶² Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 20 October 2005.

⁶³ Interview, Thanh Yen, 17 October 2004; it was said that peasants joining collectives received purchasing books (*sổ mua bán*) which enabled them to buy fuel, soap, salt, clothes and other goods in state shops. Non-collective members could not access these goods (Interview, Thanh Yen village, 7 October 2005).

We could not help but join the collective (*không vào không được*). If we did not join, the authorities would not certify our legal papers and documents (*chứng giấy tờ*) when needed; if our children needed certifying for school paperwork, they refused to sign. If we did not join, the collective would give us land far away and when we are sick, nobody comes to visit.⁶⁴

Similarly, many villagers who joined recalled 'being coerced', 'fearing isolation' (*sợ bị cô lập*), 'fearing disadvantage' (*sợ bị thua thiệt*), 'being ignorant' (*không biết*) or 'just following the others' (*họ vào thì mình vào*), and that 'being poor together was Okay' (*nghèo thì nghèo chung*).⁶⁵

Many peasants also feared the new authorities. They did not dare resist openly because they understood that open resistance could be labeled as anti-revolutionary. A peasant in Thanh Yen village who disliked collective farming recalled,

Had we resisted, we would have received no benefits and instead suffered many disadvantages so many people kept silent for safety. At that time, the new authorities were heavy-handed. Those who previously had any contact with the Saigon government did not dare to open their mouths but obeyed the state polices.⁶⁶

A peasant in Hien Loc village gave reasons for not resisting collectivization:

Collectivization was state policy (*pháp lệnh nhà nước*). If you did not participate, you were labeled 'anti-government'. When the collectivization policy was launched, many people joined; if you lived outside the collective, people considered you 'backward' (*lạc hậu*). How awful a life it is if others considered you backward!⁶⁷

A former vice-chairman of Binh Lanh acknowledged that the new authorities were heavy-handed, so peasants were fearful and did not dare resist. He witnessed only one peasant who publicly opposed collectivization by refusing to put his land into the collective. But 'when he brought his ox to plow the field, the collective's leaders ordered guerrillas (*du kích*) to stop him right away and asked him to carry his own plow to the commune's police station'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 31 October 2005.

⁶⁵ Interview, Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villages, October 2004.

⁶⁶ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 17 October 2004.

⁶⁷ Interview, Hien Loc, 14 October 2005.

⁶⁸ Interview, Binh Lanh, 14 October 2005.

Villagers in Thanh Yen village noted that the landless and land-poor households might have liked to join the collectives but households with enough land did not. They estimated that more than two thirds of the peasant households did not really like collective farming. However, in the end, most households decided to join.

Only two households in Thanh Yen village did not join the collective. One was an elderly person who was too old to work; the other was a widow with an only child. (Because the widow did not join the collective, she was given bad land located far from the village.) These two households did not join because they could live by farming land the collective did not use, raising poultry, and collecting firewood and vegetables in the forests. A man in the village commented, 'it was no problem for these ladies to avoid the collective but if we did not join, we would certainly die of hunger'.⁶⁹

At first collectivization in Thanh Yen village faced resistance from a few land-rich households; but in the end they also decided to join. An elderly lady, who had about 3 hectares at that time, recalled refusing to sign the application form to join the collective, saying that much of her land had already been given over to the collective. However, the collective's cadres still tried to persuade her to join. She had to explain her refusal to join to the police office. Fed up with dealing with the local cadres, she gave in.⁷⁰ A man, who had 2 *mẫu* of land (one hectare) and 6 cows, shared a similar story:

The cadres tried to mobilize people who had land and property like me. The cadres visited my family day and night. At first they spoke to me sweetly but after many failures, they turned to harder measures (*sự dùng biện pháp*). They 'invited' me to the local police office. They asked me why I had not joined and what I found wrong with the collective. I answered: I had land and cows. You should let me farm outside the collective to make a living. If I joined the collective, how could I raise my children? They threatened to put me into the re-education camp. I was invited to the commune's office day after day. Because my children worried they insisted I join the collective. Therefore, I did.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 9 December 2005.

⁷⁰ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 31 October 2005.

⁷¹ Interview, a group of peasants in Thanh Yen, 8 October 2004; one *mẫu* is equal to a half hectare.

Another reason why peasants in QN-DN decided to join collectives was that many of them had had some favorable experiences with the Communist party during the French war and Saigon-American war. They wanted a peaceful and normal life. So, the end of turmoil made many peasants happy. Moreover, the early steps taken by local authorities to recover abandoned land and stabilize agriculture in the aftermath of the war helped increase the legitimacy of the QN-DN authorities. Villagers felt somehow indebted to and trusted the new authorities who made them comply with their policies. Although some doubted the benefits of collective farming, they did believe that the state would guarantee them a minimum subsistence. A former staff member of Binh Dinh collective No. 2 recalled,

The war was so devastating that people did not sleep soundly at night (*không có một giấc ngủ yên*). They only needed peace. So, reunification satisfied them. Joining the collective may make them hungry but they will hardly die of hunger. Therefore, when the state carried out collectivization, most people followed though they did not like it particularly.⁷²

In short, in the aftermath of war most villagers in QN-DN and in the Central Coast were poor and subsistence-oriented cultivators; land was their main means of production. Non-farming job opportunities during the late 1970s were rare. Therefore, given extremely poor conditions and strongly coercive local authority whose early performance earned more and less legitimacy, villagers in QN-DN hardly had any options but to join the collective though many did not believe the benefits of collective farming.

Slow collectivization in An Giang, the Mekong Delta

Collectivization in the Mekong Delta went slowly and faced many difficulties because local cadre commitment to collectivization was weak and peasant resistance was strong.

Local cadres' weak commitment to collectivization

⁷² Interview, Thanh Yen, 10 October, 2004.

After reunification local authorities in many locations of An Giang province faced numerous difficulties in consolidating their power. A crucial problem in An Giang province was a shortage of cadres to fill positions of local authority. Additionally, southerners returning from the north seldom worked at local levels. So, to find new cadres, local authorities had to recruit people who were not familiar with and did not have any experience with VCP's agrarian policies, especially collectivization. BCTNNMN's report revealed that many local cadres in the Southern Region did not grasp fully the content of collectivization policy. They had not studied the policy thoroughly. So they were unable to guide and explain the policy to the lower-level cadres and the masses and erred in their instructions [which made collectivization even harder to implement].⁷³

VCP leaders criticized local cadres in the Southern Region for being 'simpleminded', and 'hasty' and 'propagandizing and mobilizing the masses inadequately' (*thiếu tuyên truyền và vận động quần chúng*), 'coercing the masses' and being 'negative' in collective management.⁷⁴ Party leaders linked cadres' problems to the poor performance of collectivization. Le Thanh Nghi, a Politburo member, criticized,

A number of cadres' hastiness and over-simplification of things had created adverse consequences. As a result, collective organizations had been built in a hasty, impetuous and ill-prepared manner, and peasants in certain areas had been forced to join these organizations. This shortcoming had caused many production units to achieve poor results.⁷⁵

Second, in evaluating the obstacles to collectivization in the Southern Region, VCP leaders complained that,

⁷³ BCTNNMN, 'Thông báo về cuộc họp từ ngày 22 đến ngày 24 tháng 10 năm 1979 của Ban cải tạo nông nghiệp Miền Nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 5 November 1979: p.6.

⁷⁴ Ngo Vinh Long, 'Some Aspects of Cooperation in the Mekong Delta', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David Marr and Christine White, eds), Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.166; BCTNNMN, 'Thông tri về việc kịp thời và ra sức củng cố các tập đoàn sản xuất nông nghiệp ở Nam Bộ' [Announcement on doing the best to improve production units in the Southern Region], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1 November 1979: p.2.

⁷⁵ Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990: p. 77-8.

Local cadres and party members including key cadres have not yet sympathized with the agricultural transformation revolution (*chưa cảm tình với cách mạng cải tạo nông nghiệp*). They still neglect (*thờ ơ*) and do not support it. They stand outside and leave the task of collectivization to other specialized departments. Besides this, some negative cadres who were pursuing their own interests did not want to implement collectivization. When it went smoothly, they were silent but when collectivization went badly, they criticized it by amplifying its shortcomings and exacerbating the situation. They tolerated 'bad elements' who harmed the process.⁷⁶

At later stages when collectivization became bogged down in 1980, party leaders criticized local cadres in the Southern Region for being 'hesitant (*do dự*), tentative (*chần chừ*) and undetermined (*thiếu kiên quyết*) in carrying out collectivization, and too relaxed about agricultural transformation (*buông lỏng cải tạo*)'. Some resorted to manipulating VCP's 'positive and firm principles' of collectivization to delay it.⁷⁷

Similarly, when collectivization was difficult and went slowly in An Giang in 1980 and early 1981 provincial leaders shifted all blame to lower-level local cadres. They said that local authorities, especially in the communes lacked 'determined, integrated and concerted leadership'. 'Some local leaders were lax about agricultural transformation'. Second, local cadres were 'inadequate and weak' (*thiếu và yếu*) so 'the capacity of local agricultural transformation bodies did not match with their function and obligations'. Third, 'some cadres had not grasped or intentionally misunderstood the content of the VCP's policy on agricultural transformation'. 'They resorted to the VCP's principle of firm collectivization and voluntary membership to maintain individual farming'. Finally, at the production unit level, 'negativism occurred in some management boards'. 'Some production units achieved poor outcomes so

⁷⁶ BCTNNMN, 'Thông báo về cuộc họp từ ngày 22 đến ngày 24 tháng 10 năm 1979 của Ban cải tạo nông nghiệp Miền Nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 5 November 1979: p.5.

⁷⁷ DCSVN, 'Chỉ thị của Ban bí thư, số 93-CT/TW (30 June 1980)' [Secretariat's directive No.93], in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 41, 1980*, Hanoi, NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004: p.204.

living conditions [of the people] had not been improved'. All of these 'raised doubts and undermined peasants' confidence in VCP's agricultural transformation policy'.⁷⁸

Despite local cadres in the Southern Region being criticized as hesitant and less devoted to collectivization, there was no evidence to show that they resisted VCP's policy publicly. A former cadre of An Giang's BCTNN confirmed that during collectivization local cadres had to comply with agricultural transformation policy because they feared being sacked (*sợ bị sa thải*). So, despite some disagreeing with the policy, they did not dare resist openly. He shared his own experience of a meeting on agricultural transformation in which he merely suggested that production units should not collectivize garden land. The vice-chairman of BCTNNMN strongly criticized him for having 'no ideological stance' (*không có lập trường tư tưởng*).⁷⁹

According to a former cadre of An Giang's BCTNN [An Giang Committee for Agricultural Transformation], despite trying to secure their positions, some local cadres were less devoted to collectivization because 'the policy was at odds with peasants' sentiments (*không hợp lòng dân*). So some cadres 'let the process of agricultural transformation drift'.⁸⁰ Sharing similar view, a cadre of An Giang's BCTNN added,

Implementing collectivization in the Mekong Delta seemed less harsh than in the Central Coast because local authorities tended to use persuasion and less coercion to force peasants to participate in collective organizations. Therefore, agricultural transformation in the Mekong Delta had not been carried out completely (*không triệt để*). Collectivization went slowly because of peasants' reaction and cadres' hesitance.⁸¹

Another reason why local authorities in An Giang province were less devoted to collectivization was that An Giang province was preoccupied with two other priorities: food procurement (*giao lương*) and soldier recruitment (*giao quân*). Central government

⁷⁸ To Sy Hong, 'Phong trào hợp tác hóa tiếp tục đi vào chiều hướng ổn định và phát triển theo phương châm tích cực và vững chắc' [Collectivization in An Giang has progressed positively and firmly] in *An Giang newspaper*, 7 June 1981: p.2.

⁷⁹ Interview, Long Xuyen, An Giang, 6 June 2005.

emphasized food procurement.⁸² A survey of articles in An Giang newspapers of the late 1970s and early 1980s shows that provincial leaders were more preoccupied with 'agricultural production' 'crop transformation' and 'food procurement' than 'collectivization'.⁸³ In addition, the province's 1980-1981 resolution stated, 'the top priority [of the province] was agricultural production ... the province had to focus on food and foodstuff production in order to ensure provincial peoples' living standard and meeting the food obligations of the whole country'.⁸⁴ Thus, given food production was the top priority, local authorities were hesitant to push collectivization extensively.

Some former local cadres in Long Dien B, Cho Moi district also admitted that despite being concerned about their jobs, they were not able to accelerate collectivization because it faced strong peasant resistance. A former cadre of BCTNN Cho Moi recalled,

The policy came from the top and we lower cadres had to follow. Despite some not liking the policy, most local cadres had to toe the line (*chấp hành chủ trương*) for fear of being sacked. Some lower-level cadres such as hamlet and production unit cadres might let things drift because they were incompetent or tried to please the people. If they followed the line exactly, the people would hate them.⁸⁵

Besides cadres' incompetence, their corruption was a significant obstacle to extending collectivization in Long Dien B during 1980-1981. A former Long Dien B cadre recognized that after building four production units operating according to socialist principles, the commune authority was not able to construct any more because,

Many of these guys (*những thằng*) who participated in the management boards of production units did not undertake agricultural transformation but instead pursued their own interests. They tried to take whatever was of benefit to themselves. They bought and sold farm machinery to make a quick profit; they stole original machine parts and replaced them with low quality ones; they embezzled fertilizers, fuel,

⁸⁰ Interview, Long Xuyen, An Giang, 6 June 2005.

⁸¹ Interview, Long Xuyen, An Giang, 6 June, 2005.

⁸² Interview, Long Xuyen, An Giang, 6 June, 2005.

⁸³ After 1975, food procurement (obligatory sales) became a major task for provinces in the Mekong Delta in order to ensure food security for the whole country. And recruiting soldiers for the army was also important to secure the country when Vietnam had border wars with Cambodia in 1978 and China in 1979.

⁸⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Đại hội của trí tuệ tập thể và niềm tin thề lời' [A meeting with collective faith and trust], 6 January 1980: p.1.

⁸⁵ Interview, Cho Moi, 17 June 2005.

work-points and so on; they used fake receipts. They did tasks incorrectly. So, the managerial boards of production units changed so many times that make people were fed up.⁸⁶

Asked why collectivization in the district stagnated in the early 1980s, a former Long Dien B production unit cadre recalled:

Production units' performance gradually declined. Those who were in them wanted to get out; those who had not been in them did not like such farming. Therefore, local cadres carried out the agricultural transformation policy in order to secure their positions (*vì cái chức*) but they were not very enthusiastic. Some cadres who had substantial land were not content with the policy. Even the district's Communist party secretary whose family had 7 hectares of cajuput forest (*rừng trầm*) seemed to be reluctant to accelerate agricultural transformation. As far as I can remember, at the district conference on agricultural transformation, instead of giving a speech saying good things about collectivization in order to encourage lower-level cadres, he talked about the difficulties faced by collectives he's just visited in the north. Therefore, how could lower-level local cadres be enthusiastic in carrying out collectivization?⁸⁷

Peasants' strong resistance to collectivization

Compared to their counterparts in the Central Coast, peasants in the Mekong Delta lived in more favorable conditions and were less affected by the war, so they were better-off. Many were petty commodity producers, a step or two beyond being subsistence farmers. Land in the Southern Region, including the Mekong Delta, was more fertile and abundant; agricultural land per capita was higher, ranging from 2,000 to 4,000 square meters (in 1979) compared to 700-800 square meters in the Central Coast.⁸⁸ The Mekong Delta also possessed abundant sources of fish and shrimp, giving peasants more options to make a living besides rice farming. The region also had reached a high level of agricultural commercialization, market penetration, and urban-rural linkage.⁸⁹ Therefore, before the start of collectivization the rural economy in the Mekong Delta was more diverse and the agrarian structure was more heterogeneous than in

⁸⁶ Interview, Long Dien B commune, 29 July 2005.

⁸⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 June 2005.

⁸⁸ BCTNNMN, 'Bai cua dong chi Vo Chi Cong: Ket luan hoi nghi cai tao nong nghiep B2 cu' [Vo Chi Cong's speech at the conference on agricultural transformation in the old B2 zone], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 26 August 1979.

the Central Coast. The rural population consisted of agricultural wage-laborers, middle peasants, rich peasants, rural capitalists, small traders and other non-farming people. Among these groups, middle peasants accounted for the majority (70 percent) of the rural population and held 80 percent of the land and 70 percent of the machinery, which played an important role in agricultural development and commercialization.⁹⁰

Previous scholars such as Quang Truong, Ngo Vinh Long and Huynh Thi Gam considered the high level of commercialization in agriculture, the predominance of middle peasants and individualistic tendency of southern peasants the main obstacles to collectivization in the Mekong Delta.⁹¹ However, these scholars provided inadequate information and analysis on why peasants in the region were able to resist collectivization more strongly than other regions. In addition to these factors, I argue that favorable natural and economic conditions, the diversity of the rural economy and the agrarian structure and 'weaker' local authorities created more options for Mekong Delta peasants to evade or resist collectivization more strongly than their counterparts in the Central Coast.

VCP's leaders also recognized that before the collectivization, 'material and technical bases' in the Southern Region were much better compared to those in the Central Coast and the north. In particular, 'agricultural machinery in the region was relatively widespread while in the north and in the Central Coast before collectivization, mechanization was insignificant'. Besides industrial machinery, 'in some locations of the region 50 to 60 percent of agricultural products were commodities'. 'The free market [that peasants engaged in] was so wide';

⁸⁹ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Mien Nam Viet Nam* [Land revolution in southern Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.187.

⁹⁰ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p.216.

⁹¹ See Ngo Vinh Long, 'Some Aspects of Cooperation in the Mekong Delta', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David Marr and Christine White, eds), Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988: p.166-9; Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987: p. 204, 215-6; Huynh Thi Gam, *Nhung Bien Doi Kinh Te Xa Hoi O Nong Thon Dong Bang Song Cuu Long Tu 1975-1995* [Socio-economic changes in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1985] (PhD thesis), TP. Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH&NV, 1998: p.34.

'peasants were sensitive to market'. All of these factors caused difficulties for collectivization.⁹² A recent study of An Giang shows that before collectivization, its agriculture and that of many other provinces in the Southern Region had surpassed self-subsistence production levels and reached a high level of commercialization. So, the imposition of a northern collectivization model on the region was a setback to its agricultural development.⁹³

Many villagers in Long Dien B recalled that before collectivization they were relatively well off and had enjoyed sufficient livelihoods (*sung túc*). Even agricultural workers could lead a comfortable life (*sống thoải mái*). This explains why most peasants, even poor peasants, did not want to join production units with work-point systems in which they would earn only a little (*không có ăn*). Some said that they did not like collective farming because it constrained the freedom (*bị gò bó*) and liberties they had previously enjoyed under individual farming.⁹⁴ A man in Long Dien B commune commented,

People in the Central Coast and in the north were used to living in poverty (*sống kham khổ quen rồi*) so, they could accept collectives but people in this region had become used to enjoying a sufficient and free life. They did not like life in the collectives with little freedom. Peasants could not be like factory workers; the bell rings and they march off to work. Peasants here wanted more time to enjoy breakfast, coffee or to take care of their children and animals. Moreover, peasants here did not like joining production units because they did not see any immediate and visible benefit in collective farming (*không thấy lợi trước mắt*).⁹⁵

Likewise, another man remarked,

People in the north were used to collective farming but people here were different. People in the north had little land while people here had quite a lot of land and many other "endeavors" (*nhiều cơ sở khác*). We had already been used to living with capitalism (*sống quen với tư bản*). Those who were poor could make a living by working for others as wage laborers. The new authorities loved the poor and did

⁹² BCTNNMN, 'Bai cua dong chi Vo Chi Cong: Ket luan hoi nghi cai tao nong nghiep B2 cu' [Vo Chi Cong's speech at the conference on agricultural transformation in the old B2 zone], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 26 August 1979: p.2.

⁹³ Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11: Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Trien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CTPTNTAG, 1994: p.38.

⁹⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, June to August 2005.

⁹⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 05 August 2005.

not want them to work for wages (*làm mướn*), but be masters (*làm chủ*). But they failed because people here did not like collective farming.⁹⁶

Living in beneficial natural and economic conditions, peasants in the Mekong Delta tended to resist collectivization more strongly than their counterparts in the Central Coast. In some locations of the Mekong Delta peasants boycotted and organized strikes against collective farming and even threatened to assassinate or in some cases actually did assassinate officials. According to Vo Nhan Tri, peasants in some locations of the Mekong Delta 'refused to harvest crops in time, abandoned large stretches of land, slaughtered livestock, destroyed fruit trees, sold machines and farm implement before joining the production units'.⁹⁷ Similarly, according to To Huu, a party leader, at the time of the pilot collectives' experiments, 'some peasants in locations near pilot collectives had abandoned their fruit trees and slaughtered their livestock'.⁹⁸ Peasants in Tan Hoi pilot collective, Cai Lay district in Tien Giang refused to do collective work. When receiving fertilizers and seeds from the collective, peasants did not use them for collective fields but threw them away onto abandoned fields and went to find jobs elsewhere.⁹⁹ A report from BCTNNMN revealed,

In some locations in Long An province collectivization was so stressful that peasants, incited by the enemy, formed groups to demand their departure from production units, protested against collective farming and rallied support for individual farming (*chống đối làm ăn chung ủng hộ làm ăn riêng lẻ*) ... [Moreover] taking advantage of the difficulties of collectivization, counter-revolutionaries and bad elements conducted sabotage activities. They carried out psychological warfare such as distorting agricultural transformation policy, sabotaging production, assassinating local key cadres and inciting the masses to strike against the government, destroying production units' seed stores, beating local cadres and

⁹⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 July 2005.

⁹⁷ Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990: p.79.

⁹⁸ To Huu, 'Phat dong phong trao quan chung thuc hien thang loi cong cuoc cai tao xa hoi chu nghi doi voi nong nghiep Mien Nam' [Campaign to succeed in socialist agricultural transform in the south], in *Khan Truong Va Tich Cuc Day Manh Phong Trao Hop Tac Hoa Nong Nghiep Mien Nam* [Be positive and hurry up the acceleration of collectivization in the south] (Vo Chi Cong et al. Eds), NXB Su That, Hanoi, 1979: p.54.

⁹⁹ Luong Hong Quang, *Van Hoa Cong Dong Lang Vung Dong Bang Song Cuu Long Thap Ky 80-90* [Village cultures in the Mekong Delta from 1980s-1990s], Hanoi, NXB Vien Van Hoa, 1996: p.107.

harvesting collective rice illegally. Some tried to enter the managerial boards of production units and collectives and so on.¹⁰⁰

In Vung Liem district, Vinh Long province, some 'counter-revolutionaries' (*bọn phản động*) who were dissatisfied with the agricultural policy threatened or in some cases even injured or killed some production units' chairmen and hamlet cadres.¹⁰¹ People in Long Dien B also recalled in the late 1970s some peasants in the commune participated in an anti-government political organization named 'Thanh Long Phục Quốc' [the Blue Dragons for Restoration of National Independence] whose leaders were former officials in the Saigon government. A former Long Dien B hamlet cadre disclosed that Thanh Long Phục Quốc had plotted to assassinate some hamlet and production unit cadres in the commune. However, the leaders were arrested before they could execute the plan.¹⁰²

Such open, confrontational and organized resistance occurred only in some locations of the Mekong Delta, amongst a small group of peasants. Many peasants in Cho Moi where I did research said that they were afraid of the new authorities, so despite disliking collective farming, few dared to oppose collectivization openly. Instead, they resisted quietly or tried to evade collective farming as much as they could.

Long Dien B residents recalled that when authorities established production unit Nos.1 and 2, more than half the households decided to join. Most of these households were landless and land-poor. Their common reasons for joining were 'fear of the new authorities', 'fear of being taken to the New Economic Zones' and 'coercion' (*bị ép buộc*). A man in L.Q.I hamlet commented that peasant resistance to collective farming was weaker in Long Dien B than those in some other locations of the Mekong Delta. He explained,

¹⁰⁰ BCTNNMN, 'Thông báo về cuộc họp từ ngày 22 đến 24-10-1979 của Ban cải tạo nông nghiệp Miền Nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 5 November 1979: p.4.

¹⁰¹ Lê Thị Lạc Mai, *Quan Trĩnh Gia Quyẽt Van De Ruong Dat Va Phat Trien Nong Thon o Vinh Long Gia Doan Doi Moi 1986-1996* [Dealing with land problems to facilitate rural development in Vinh Long in the period of 1986-1996], (Master's thesis), Truong Dai hoc KHXH&NH, 2001: p.40.

¹⁰² Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

Because the region was a non-revolutionary or 'white area' (*vùng trắng*), many peasants did not dare openly oppose despite disliking collectivization policy; they were afraid of being labeled 'anti-government'. Peasants in Dong Thap Muoi (the plain of Reeds) previously lived in 'revolutionary areas' (*vùng cách mạng*); the majority of them were revolutionary people (*dân cách mạng*), so they dared resist strongly production units.¹⁰³

Despite not daring to resist openly, many peasants in Long Dien B were able to evade collective farming or 'joined but not do collective work' (*vào nhưng không làm*). A male middle peasant who did not join a production unit said,

I was asked to join production unit No.2 but I refused. At that time, about 60 percent of households had joined but most of them were the landless households. Households with land did not like collective farming because it was not profitable. I could not live by collective farming so I decided to abandon my land [to the production unit] and made a living elsewhere.¹⁰⁴

An upper-middle peasant who had 30 *công* (3 hectares) of land told a similar story:

I saw that working in production units according to work-points would not be profitable so I refused to join. People here did what they saw as profitable. Working together was certainly not profitable because people just went through the motions of working (*làm qua chuyện*) not actually doing what was needed.

Despite his refusal to join the production unit, his family was able to live without farming thanks mostly to their previous wealth.¹⁰⁵

Some landless and land-poor households in Long Dien B also refused to join production units. A landless man in the commune argued that earnings from collective farming were less than wage labor income. Besides, people in production units received their produce at the end of the season. Meanwhile, independent laborers received wages on a daily basis.¹⁰⁶ Another landless man who had previously sympathized with the revolution but refused to do collective farming recalled production unit cadres inviting him to join the unit in his helmet. If he did not join, the cadre warned, there would be no land to bury his body after he died. If later

¹⁰³ Interview, Long Dien B, 13 June 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Long Bien B, 17 August 2005

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 2005. Local people also claimed that without joining production units some rich households in the commune could live on their own wealth for 'the rest of their lives' (*sống mãi đời*).

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005.

he faced hunger, the production unit would not lend him rice. Regardless of what cadres threatened, he refused to join. He reasoned that under collective farming he earned much less than at his current job, raising pigs and gleaning leftover paddy in the fields and laboring for wages. He laughed and added, 'ultimately, not me but members of production units came to borrow my rice'.¹⁰⁷

An Giang News on 13 March 1980 noted many peasants refusing to join 'Phu Thuong No.1' (Long Kien commune, Cho Moi district) because working for production units earned them little at its establishment. They considered production units state organizations, so the state took whatever peasants produced.¹⁰⁸ Some other districts of An Giang province faced similar problems. An Giang News reported authorities in Phu Quy hamlet (Phu An commune, Phu Chau district) establishing a production unit with 27 household members and 24 hectares of land in the spring-winter of 1980-1981. But by the summer-autumn of 1981, all the members 'had disappeared'. An investigation revealed that the production unit managerial board recruited poor peasants from elsewhere because local people refused to join. These peasants lacked farm equipments and experience. Therefore, the production unit's performance in the spring-winter of 1980-1981 was so bad and all of its members and even two out of the five production unit cadres reportedly 'disappeared'.¹⁰⁹ A man in Thoai Son district recalled how collective farming failed in his area:

When peasants were already preparing rice seedlings, the production unit managerial board announced collective farming. Therefore, the production unit was able to mobilize peasants to work one season. The next season, most peasants refused to work in the fields, so the production unit had to be dismantled. At that time, someone passed by my house and called me to do collective work but I replied that I was sick. I would rather fish or catch mice to make a living than work to earn work-points. Because land there was abundant, those who refused to do

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 23 June 2005.

¹⁰⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vu san xuat dau tien cua tap doan san xuat Phu Thuong' [The first crop of the Phu Thuong production unit], 13 March 1980: p.2.

¹⁰⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vai net ve mot tap doan yeu kem' [Some portraits of a weak production unit], 6 September 1981.

collective work could make a living in other places where there was not yet collectivization.¹¹⁰

A former cadre in Long Dien B who knew collectivization well from his experience in Cho Moi district and other parts of An Giang commented,

In general peasants did not like the policy of northern-styled collectivization, so they resisted (*nên sinh ra chống đối*) it. The agricultural transformation was to impose the north's economic model on the south. Southern peasants loved their land (*yêu mến ruộng đất*), so they did not like collective farming. Wherever the policy reached, peasants abandoned their land and made a living elsewhere. Meanwhile, some joined but did not cooperate; they were 'willing by face but unwilling by heart' (*bằng mặt chứ không bằng lòng*). This was why collective farming was inefficient.¹¹¹

In short, before collectivization peasants in An Giang and the Mekong Delta were better-off and enjoyed a better life than their counterparts in QN-DN and the Central Coast. So, they tended to resist collective farming because it was less productive, flexible, sensible and individualized than their previous modes of farming. Besides, favorable natural and economic conditions and local cadres' incompetence and weak devotion to collectivization enabled peasants in An Giang to evade and resist more strongly than their counterparts in QN-DN, in the Central Coast. That was one reason why collectivization went slowly and faced many difficulties in the region.

Strengthening collective organizations

QN-DN in the Central Coast

The structure and management of collectives

By 1979-80 collectives (*hợp tác xã*) were the main collective farming organizations in QN-DN and in other provinces of the Central Coast. A typical collective in QN-DN encompassed most

¹¹⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 13 June 2005. I had the opportunity to interview two peasants from Thoai Son district who visited their relatives in Long Dien B during my stay in the commune. Thoai Son district was among the low-population density districts of An Giang.

or all of a commune and had from 200 to 700 hectares of agricultural land. On average collectives in QN-DN were as large as, or even larger than, typical collectives in the north in 1974.¹¹² For example, the Binh Lanh commune-sized collective in Thang Binh district had 1,900 hectares of natural land, 564 hectares of agricultural land, and 1,050 households.¹¹³

QN-DN provincial leaders defined collectives as 'socialist agricultural production economic organizations established voluntarily by peasants and under the leadership of the party with the guidance and help of the state'.¹¹⁴ Peasants aged above 16 were supposed to do collective work. When participating in the collective, each member had to contribute a share (*cổ phần*) to the collective's assets. Households were allowed to retain part of their land, called five-percent land, mostly from their garden, for the family economy (*kinh tế gia đình*). All other land and livestock were supposed to be in the collective.¹¹⁵

The distribution of produce was based on the contribution of labor, a socialist distribution principle. In general, the principle of distribution was that 'the more one works the more one gets. If one has labor potential but does not work, one gets nothing' (*làm nhiều hưởng nhiều, làm ít hưởng ít. Có sức lao động mà không làm không hưởng*).¹¹⁶ Besides, the distribution of produce within the collective had to ensure 'the principle of harmonizing three interests' (*kết hợp hài hoà ba lợi ích*): the state, the collective and collective members, in descending order of priority. The state was supposed to get 20 percent of the produce, then the

¹¹¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 22 June 2006.

¹¹² Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.138; the enlarged collectives in the north in 1974 averaged about 200 hectares of land and 350 households.

¹¹³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'HTX Binh Lanh tu yeu vuon len tien tien' [Binh Lanh collective is moving away from a position of weaknesses], 9 June 1979.

¹¹⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Mot so quy dinh ve xay dung hop tac xa' [Some regulations on establishing collectives], 26 August 1978.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'To chuc lai san xuat, phan cong lai lao dong nham phat trien va mo rong lai nganh nghe san xuat tieu thu cong nghiep va kinh te gia dinh trong hop tac xa tren dia ban huyen' [Reorganizing production and labour to facilitate development of handicrafts and household economy in the district], 13 December 1978.

collective, 15 percent and collective members, 65 percent.¹¹⁷ So, collective members often actually got the remainder after the produce was distributed to the state and the collective.

The collective was run by a managerial board, which consisted of several departments such as the Control Board (*ban kiểm soát*), Planning, Work-Norms, Accounting, Animal Husbandry, Cultivation and Field Caring. Collective members were organized into several basic production brigades and specialized teams. The former was mainly engaged in cultivation industry (*ngành trồng trọt*) and animal husbandry (*chăn nuôi*) while the latter specialized in other non-farming industries (*chuyên ngành*) or in specific phases of agricultural production (*chuyên khâu*). For example, Duy Phuoc collective, in Duyen Xuyen district, in 1979 had 22 basic production brigades and 13 specialized teams. Sixty-three percent of its collective members did cultivation, 3.5 percent did animal husbandry, 16 percent did non-farming work and 4.5 percent did managerial work.¹¹⁸ Similarly, 80 percent of Binh Lanh collective members did cultivation, some in specialized teams, 3 percent did animal husbandry and 17 percent were engaged in other non-farming industry and in management in 1979.¹¹⁹

Strengthening collectives

Soon after pushing the swift establishment of collectives, QN-DN's authorities launched several campaigns to strengthen them. Among these campaigns was 'a campaign to compete with and overtake Dinh Cong and Vu Thang collectives' [the most advanced collectives in the north] launched in March 1979. Authorities sent a large number of chairpersons to the north to learn from these collectives' experiences. Authorities also urged collectives to adopt the 'three

¹¹⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Huong dan phan phoi thu nhan vu dong xuan' [Income distribution guidelines for the winter-spring crops], 21 April 1978; the state's share included taxes and food duty (*nghĩa vụ lương thực*); the collective's share consisted of seeds, and food reserve (*dự trữ lương thực*), public welfare fund (*quỹ công ích*), and food for animal husbandry (*QN-DN newspaper*, 'Một số quy định về xây dựng hợp tác xã' [Some regulations for establishing collectives], 26 August 1978.

¹¹⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hợp tác xã Duy Phuoc ngon cơ đầu của phong trào hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp tỉnh ta' [Duy Phuoc is the leading collective in QN-DN], 16 May 1979.

contract' system (*ba khoán*), which had been used in the north since the early 1960s.¹²⁰ Under the three contracts system, collectives set the quotas for work-points, costs (*khoán chi phí*), and end-products (*khoán sản phẩm*) that each production brigade was expected to attain. This method was supposed to reduce negative activities such as 'the inflation of work-points and prolonged work' (*rong công phóng điểm*), and the leakage of inputs (*thất thoát vật tư*) while at the same time motivated brigade cadres to be diligent.¹²¹

Despite these efforts, from 1979-1980 few collectives in QN-DN adopted the three contract system because cadres were 'befuddled' (*lúng túng*) and not familiar with it. Some collectives adopted a part of it, for example, the work-points contract only. Some tried to adopt it fully but ultimately found the quotas irrelevant and frequently adjusted quotas to match real production levels.¹²²

Along with trying to improve the management of collectives, provincial authorities focused on cadres' problems and peasant's negativism. In June 1979 QN-DN leaders, besides praising collectives' achievements, recognized that the organizations still had several shortcomings. For example, some cadres became entangled in red tape or, worse, embezzled collective assets. Many collectives did not comply with procedures (*qui trình kỹ thuật*), nor did they cultivate all available land; others operated in unplanned ways.¹²³ It was the same story in Thang Binh district in which collectives 'operated incorrectly, especially in making plans and managing production and labor'.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'HTX Binh Lanh tu yeu vuon len tien tien' [Binh Lanh collective is moving away from a position of weaknesses], 9 June 1979.

¹²⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Phat dong phong trao thi dua va vuot cac hop tac xa Dinh Cong va Vu Thang' [A campaign to compete with and overtake Dinh Cong and Vu Thang collectives], 3 March 1979.

¹²¹ See Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.91, 99.

¹²² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Qua viec thuc hien ba khoan cho doi san xuat trong vu Dong-Xuan' [An evaluation of implementing the three contracts for brigades in the winter-spring], 30 May 1981.

¹²³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tang cuong cong tac xay dung Dang trong hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Intensifying building party organization in the collectives], 6 June 1979.

¹²⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thanh Binh so ket hop tac hoa nong nghiep, phat dong thi dua voi HTX Duy Phuoc, Dinh Cong va Vu Thang' [A preliminary summing up of collectivization in Thang Binh], 2 June 1979.

Provincial leaders attributed these shortcomings to the weak party organizations. To tackle this, in June 1979 the province's Communist Party Committee stipulated the 'strengthening of the party organization in the collectives'.¹²⁵ Moreover, realizing cadres hindered 'the collective mastery rights' [ownership rights] (*quyền làm chủ tập thể*) of peasants and discouraged them from working enthusiastically, the provincial party committee in July 1979 urged all party cells, collective management boards, and members of collectives in the province to undertake 'criticism and self-criticism' (*phê và tự phê*) and engage in 'study courses' (*đợt học tập*).¹²⁶

From June-December 1979, some districts in QN-DN launched 'study courses' to correct cadres and collective members' problems. For example, Dien Ban was the first district to have all of collectives conducting the study course. The result of the study course showed that,

A 100 percent of collective management boards [in the district] more or less violated the collective mastery rights of members; some cases were severe. The most common violations were excessive bureaucracy, authoritarianism, inadequate transparency on finance and distribution of produce and non-compliance with official policies and regulations. Besides these misdemeanors, collusions and embezzlement occurred.

Meanwhile, collective members admitted that they

did not fully understand their "collective mastery rights" and their obligations. They did collective work like working for wages, pursuing work-points only, being lazy, stealing collective property or even assisting cadres and others to commit wrongdoing.¹²⁷

At a conference on agricultural transformation held in December 1979, authorities in QN-DN admitted that despite some improvement, many collectives in the province, especially the newly established ones, were still weak and inadequate in quality. Therefore, provincial

¹²⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tăng cường công tác xây dựng Đảng trong hợp tác xã nông nghiệp' [Intensifying building party organization in the collectives], 6 June 1979.

¹²⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tiến hành đợt học tập trong các hợp tác xã nông nghiệp' [Undertaking criticism and self-criticism in collectives], 28 July 1979.

leaders urged continued efforts to strengthen them, their party cells and the mass organizations.¹²⁸

Despite several campaigns to improve collectives, progress was modest. Some problems were temporarily corrected. The success of these campaigns was uneven and, in general, lower than expected. Moreover, 'many districts had not even carried out them, so the result was still unclear'.¹²⁹ Improving collective management proved difficult too. Despite several campaigns, by May 1981 when the province had begun to experiment with the product contract system (a new farming arrangement), there were only 174 out of 241 agricultural collectives that had adopted the three contracts system. Some districts did not adopt it seriously. For example, only 4 out of 14 collectives in Tien Phuoc district and 13 out of 33 collectives in Que Son district had used it. Moreover, one third of collectives in which the three contracts system had been adopted were classified as weak. These collectives had not applied sanctions and rewards properly and had to undo the contracts (*tháo khoán*) midstream.¹³⁰

In short, though QN-DN authorities put great efforts into importing the northern model, many collectives in QN-DN were unable to adopt it fully. With inadequate organization, collectives tended to have more room for local practices. Despite several campaigns aimed at correcting cadres' and peasants' negativism, collectives were a site of perennial conflict between cadres, the state and peasants. I will discuss everyday local practices and interactions after looking at the status of collective farming in An Giang.

¹²⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Huyen Dien Ban so ket hoc tap phat huy quyên lam chu tap the cua xa vien trong hop tac xa nong nghiep' [A preliminary summing up of undertaking criticism and self-criticism in collectives], 15 September 1979.

¹²⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi Ban cai tao nong nghiep Tinh: Ra suc cung co HTX de lam tot vu san xuat Dong-Xuan' [A conference held by the Provincial Committee for agricultural transformation to solidify collectives], 26 December 1979.

¹²⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Quyét tam dua chuc dau tranh chong tieu cuc trong nam 1981 len thanh cao trao quan chung, deu khap vung chac' [Be resolute in fighting 'negativism' comprehensively in 1981], 14 January 1981.

¹³⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Qua viec thuc hien ba khoan cho doi san xuat trong vu dong-xuan' [An evaluation of implementing the three contracts for brigades in the winter-spring], 30 May 1981.

An Giang in the Mekong Delta

As discussed earlier, collectivization the Mekong Delta faced many difficulties in 1979, and two thirds of production units had collapsed a few months after being established. According to BCTNNMN's report, poor collectivization resulted mainly from local cadres' weaknesses and 'bad element's sabotage activities'.¹³¹ In response, VCP leaders urged local authorities in the delta to combine building with strengthening collective organizations. In order to strengthen collective organization, local authorities were requested to extend training programs for cadres, crack down on bad elements and purge 'bad' cadres.¹³²

An Giang province by January 1980 had 298 production units. Of these, only 143 were classified as average and good quality. The remaining 155 were weak or very weak. Therefore, authorities called for 'intensifying strengthening, continually extending production units' and upgrading all these weak production units to good and advanced ones (*tập đoàn khá và tiên tiến*).¹³³

An Giang newspaper in June 1980 reported that that despite the central and provincial governments' efforts, the 'phenomenon of negativism' remained severe. Negativism included widespread embezzlement and the stealing of collective property, wages and work-points. In tackling these problems the article called for 'intensifying the fight against negativism' and requested the production units to make transparent (*công khai*) collective activities and businesses related to peasants' interests.¹³⁴

¹³¹ BCTNNMN, 'Thông tri về việc kịp thời và ra sức củng cố các tập đoàn sản xuất nông nghiệp ở các tỉnh Nam Bộ' [Announcement on doing the best to improve production units in the Southern Region], TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 1 November 1979; BCTNNMN, 'Thông báo về cuộc họp từ ngày 22 đến 24-10-1979 của Ban Cải tạo Nông Nghiệp Miền Nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 5 November 1979.

¹³² BCTNNMN, 'Thông tri về việc kịp thời và ra sức củng cố các tập đoàn sản xuất nông nghiệp ở các tỉnh Nam Bộ' [Announcement on doing the best to improve production units in the Southern Region], 1 November 1979: p.8.

¹³³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Day mạnh củng cố và tiếp tục phát triển tập đoàn' [Intensifying solidification of production units and extending more], 20 January 1980: p.3.

¹³⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tăng cường công tác chỉ đạo chống tiêu cực' [Intensifying the fights against negativism], 8 June 1980.

From June 1980 to early 1981, An Giang authorities campaigned to strengthen production units. For example, in June 1980 Phu Tan district had 6 production units but only two of these farmed collectively. By the winter-spring of 1980-1981, however, these 6 production units had improved and been upgraded to collective farming-production units. Chau Thanh district had 94 production units, only 9 of which actually operated according to collective principles. By early 1981, however, 42 out of the 94 production units had improved.¹³⁵ The investigations in the district also discovered 4 cases of wrongdoing in which 9 cadres were accused of embezzling VND 25,056 and 7,345 kilograms of paddy.¹³⁶

Despite the several campaigns, the quality and performance of most production units in An Giang had not improved as much as provincial leaders had expected. By mid-1981, only 40 percent of production units and collectives in the province actually farmed collectively.¹³⁷ By the end of 1981, An Giang had 357 production units and 6 collectives but only 35 of these were 'advanced'. The lead article of An Giang newspaper on 6 September 1981 reported,

Collectivization in An Giang has been uneven, infirm and not extensive. The proportion of land and peasants in collectives is low. The number of strong production units and collectives is small. Some policies such as land payment (*hoa lợi ruộng đất*), family economy (*kinh tế phụ gia đình*), and non-resident cultivator prohibition has not been implemented correctly or seriously.¹³⁸

During the work-points period, the strengthening of production units in An Giang was modest. Despite production units being small (equal to a production brigade of collectives in QN-DN), the management of them was difficult. The phenomena of local 'negativism' fluctuated but never disappeared. The following sections examine the reasons for local negativism and the forms it took during collective farming.

¹³⁵ Ibid; To Sy Hong, 'Phong trào hợp tác hóa tiếp tục đi vào chiều hướng ổn định và phát triển theo phương châm 'tích cực vững chắc' [Collectivization in An Giang has progressed positively and firmly], in *An Giang newspaper*, 07 June 1981.

¹³⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Đào tạo cán bộ cốt cán cho các tập đoàn sản xuất và hợp tác xã' [Training key cadres for production units and collectives], 1 February 1981.

¹³⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Đẩy mạnh công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp' [Speeding up agricultural transformation], 7 June 1981.

Everyday local practice in collective organizations during the work-point system

QN-DN in the Central Coast

Peasants' everyday practices in QN-DN's collectives

In theory, collectives were established according to the principles of voluntary membership, mutual benefit, and democratic management. Peasants, according to public pronouncements, were the 'masters of the collective'. During the collectivization campaigns, local authorities in QN-DN often asserted, 'the collective was the home and its members were the masters (*hợp tác xã là nhà, xã viên là chủ*)'. However, peasants did not join collectives voluntarily but were coerced into doing so. Most peasants preferred individual farming rather than pooling their resources. They often doubted collective farming methods and considered them to belong to the state.¹³⁹ Many worried that the collective was managed poorly and that much of what the collective produced would be stolen. Therefore, collectives became sites of conflict and struggle between peasants, cadres and the state, and even among peasants themselves. In struggling for their livelihoods, peasants tended to do what favored their own interests often at odds with those of collective. The next section examines the peasants' everyday practices in the collectives in QN-DN during the period of work-point system (1978-1981).

Optimizing working points rather than the quality of production

Peasants in QN-DN were relatively poor and hardly had any economic options outside the collective, work-points were very important. The larger their number, the more income they were supposed to receive.

¹³⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan cong tac cai tao nong nghiep o tinh An Giang' [Agricultural transformation in An Giang], 6 September 1981.

¹³⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vai tro cua dang vien trong doi san xuat' [The role of party members in production brigades], 28 June 1978.

Many poor peasants in Hien Loc and Thang Yen villages claimed that they had to fight for work-points (*tranh giành công điểm*); but they did work as fast as possible in order to acquire more work-points. A widow with four small children recalled,

I took advantage of any opportunity to get more work-points. As soon as people harvested, I jumped to hoe the corner of the plot in order to take over plowing it. If I did not do so, others would. As soon as I had finished, I changed to another plot. My little girl aged 13 also pulled up rice seedlings to get points. If an adult got 10 points a day, she got 5. At that time I did not have time to rest.¹⁴⁰

Similarly, another widow said, 'I had to struggle to get work-points (*phấn đấu để lấy điểm*). I was the only laborer in my family. We lacked labor because of loss of men force during wars. So, we had to work hard by day and night to get work-points'.¹⁴¹ Asked why peasants struggled to get work-points, an old man in Thanh Yen village responded, 'today we can seek other jobs in Saigon or Danang city but at that time if we did not work, we would die of hunger. So, we even had to do a job that earned only a very few work-points'.¹⁴²

A QN-DN newspaper in December 1978 reported that despite 90-95 percent of peasants participating in collective work, many of them only focused on earning work-points; 'the doctrine of work-points (*chủ nghĩa công điểm*) started to encroach upon peasant's awareness of collective mastery'. For example, when peasants were requested to attend public meetings or do public work, they asked whether such things brought them any work-points. Besides, peasants were choosy. They refused to do low work-points work and preferred to do higher points work. 'They were only concerned with the work-points ... without caring about what the brigade leaders and others did and expected'.¹⁴³

Villagers in Thanh Yen village remembered doing their collective work carelessly and deceitfully (*làm gian làm dối*) in order to get as many work-points as possible. For example,

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 15 October 2005.

¹⁴¹ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 15, October, 2005.

¹⁴² Interview, Thanh yen village, Binh Dinh, 31 October 2005.

¹⁴³ QN-DN newspaper, 'Nhin vào đồng ruộng tập thể: Chủ nghĩa công điểm' [Looking at collective fields: 'work-pointism'], 13 December 1978.

when plowing, they did one row and skipped another' (*cày một hàng bỏ hàng*). When transplanting, 'they did it densely at the edge but sparsely in the center'. Similarly, when weeding, 'they did it carefully on the edges but carelessly in the center'.¹⁴⁴ Peasants could earn work-points by selling their manure to the collective. In order to increase its volume, they mixed manure with other easy-to-find things such as rice stubble, soil and leaves.¹⁴⁵ When peasants were asked to carry manure to distant plots, they did some but poured the remaining close by or in the bushes on the way. So, 'close plots received considerable manure while distant plots, little'. Moreover,

When spreading the manure, people spread it unevenly. So, some areas got too much manure while some others got nothing (*chỗ có chỗ không*). In some cases people did not spread manure at all before plowing and raking.¹⁴⁶

When peasants were assigned to pull up seedlings to get work-points according to the number of bundles, they made them small in order to maximize their work-points.¹⁴⁷ A lady in Hien Loc village recalled cadres coming with a new method of transplanting: putting seedlings in lines. But people resisted because this method was slow. 'We transplanted only a few rows half a day at a time. We complained a lot because transplanting like that meant fewer work-points. Finally, they [cadres] gave up the technique,' she said.¹⁴⁸

A local newspaper report of December 1978 stated,

Some peasants only pursue their own interests, so they do collective work deceitfully and carelessly (*làm ẩu*), never ensured work quality, nor did they comply with technical procedures. People preferred to do easy jobs and refused to do hard ones ... they did not harmonize interests of individual, the collective and the state.

The article also attributed such problems to inadequate education.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh, 5 October 2004.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh, 9 December 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lan, 20 October 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lan, 17 December, 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lan, 15 October 2005.

¹⁴⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'To chuc lai san xuat, phan cong lai lao dong nham phat trien va mo rong lai nganh nghe san xuat tieu thu cong nghiep va kinh te gia dinh trong hop tacc xa nong nghiep tren dia ban huyen' [Reorganizing

Peasants did collective work carelessly because they did not link work quality with end-of-harvest rewards. But they did see the connection between the work-points and the reward: the more work-points they had, the more produce they were likely to get. Asked why they did collective work deceitfully and carelessly, many often responded that they did so 'in order to get as many work-points as possible'; 'work honestly, eat gruel; work deceitfully, eat rice (*làm thật ăn cháo, làm láo ăn cơm*)'. This means that those who tried to do collective work properly and honestly would get fewer work-points than those who did things carelessly and deceitfully. Such everyday peasant practices in QN-DN, whose aim was to accumulate a maximum number of work-points rather than production, was quite similar to those in the north, studied by Kerkvliet. For example, a similar saying '*làm tốt ăn cháo, làm láo ăn cơm*' (work well, eat gruel; work deceitfully, eat rice) was also popular in northern collectives in late 1970s.¹⁵⁰

To justify local people's behaviors, a man in Hien Loc village argued,

People could not do the collective work as carefully as working for themselves. For example, if someone was assigned to plow a plot within a day to get 10 work-points. If it took him a day and half to complete the job, he suffered loss. If so, how could he make a living? People only worked carefully when working on their own land.¹⁵¹

A lady in the village agreed, 'everyone had to try and make a living. If you traded, you sought a profit; if you worked for the collective, you had to try to get work-points; so, people did collective work carelessly in order to get as many work-points as possible'.¹⁵²

Lack of incentive and 'neglect of common property' (cha chung không ai khóc)

production and labour to facilitate development of handicrafts and household economy in the district], 13 December 1978.

¹⁵⁰ See Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.163.

¹⁵¹ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 19 October 2005.

¹⁵² Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2005.

That peasants did collective work carelessly and deceitfully reflected not only their strategies to maximize work-points but also their disillusionment with collective farming. A man in Hien Loc village recalled that people were disappointed because they received few rewards. Therefore, they did collective work badly, just went through the motions of working and only tried to complete the job as soon as possible in order to go home. When collective work was assigned to a group, 'they often dragged their feet so that by 7-8 am they hadn't even started yet. Those who arrived early did not work until the whole group had come'.¹⁵³

Peasants did not want to work hard because they realized that no matter how hard they worked, they did not get a significant extra reward. A man in Thanh Yen said why some peasants did not work hard: 'the collective took all of what we produced; the collective paid us about 0.5 kilograms a work-day (10 work-points) and took all the remainder. So, peasants just went through motions of working'.¹⁵⁴ An elderly man in the village had a similar comment: 'no matter how hard you worked, you could only get 10 points a day at maximum. No matter how industriously you worked, the produce belonged to the collective. So, there was no much difference between industrious workers or lazy workers. We worked without any incentive (*làm không có động cơ*)'.¹⁵⁵

Some peasants at first were eager to fight for work-points but when they received little reward, they felt disappointed. They did not want to go to work or labored enthusiastically.¹⁵⁶ A brigade leader in Hien Loc village commented on decreased income in the Binh Lanh collective:

The living conditions of people went down dramatically. At first people received 3 kilograms per work-day, then went down to 1.5 kilograms [in 1978]. When I called the people to transplant, some refused to work; they complained that they had

¹⁵³ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 19 October 2005.

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh, 5 October 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh, 20 October 2005.

¹⁵⁶ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 15 October 2005.

previously received 3 kilograms but now only 1.5 kilograms per work-day and wanted to know why?¹⁵⁷

Another common peasant practice in QN-DN collectives was 'not caring about collective properties'. QN-DN newspaper in June 1979 noted that Dien Ban district peasants 'considered the collective belonged to the managerial board and brigade leaders, so they were not active in protecting collective properties from loss or damage'.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, an elderly man in Hien Loc village said,

Working in the collective, Mr. Brigade leader (*ông đội trưởng*) was in charge of everything while we were only concerned with work-points. Today, I have the red book [the certificate of the land right use] for my land, so I have made the edges of my plots straight and have leveled the surface because I am the owner of the land. But at that time we did not control the land. If I saw edges of the plot broken, at most I might inform the brigade leader. If he gave me some work-points to repair it, I did. Otherwise, I did not. But if that plot was ours, we would do it immediately.¹⁵⁹

A former member of the collective's specialized team shared a similar story:

When working for the collective, I did not care about what others did. I did not care about whether others were alive or dead. I only worked according to whatever the collective assigned me to do. In the morning, I went to work with a bag on my shoulder and returned home in the evening. I tried to get as many work-points as possible without caring about whether rice fields were good or bad. Regardless of what others did, if we got 20-30 work-points a day, we'd succeeded (*thắng lợi rồi*).¹⁶⁰

Another man recalled, 'working for the collective, we did not need to think; when finishing work, I went to bed without worrying about tomorrow. We let the brigade leader

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 14 October 2005; in response to low peasant participation in collective work, Binh Lanh collective started to increase sanctions by setting the number of compulsory work-days for peasants and restricting or forbidding peasants from doing non-collective work. (*QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hop tac xa Binh Lanh vuot kho khan gianh thang loi buoc dau' [Binh Lanh collective overcame difficulties and gained first good results], 13 May 1978; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Chi Bo Binh Lanh lanh dao xay dung hop xa nong nghiep' [Binh Lanh party cell leads building the agricultural collective], 14 June 1978).

¹⁵⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Ket qua va kinh nghiem phat huy quyen lam chu tap the o HTX san xuat nong nghiep 1 Dien Nam' [Result of and experiences from facilitating collective mastery in Dien Nam collective No.1], 27 June 1979.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 19 October 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2005.

worry about matters. When he asked me to plow, I plowed. Only later when I worked for myself did I plan everything'.¹⁶¹

Interest in the family economy and the plundering of the collective's resources

Besides collective farming, peasants were allowed to farm individually on their garden land, called 'the five-percent land', which the collective set aside for the peasant family economy. In the lowlands and midlands, households were able to retain about 500 square meters; in the highlands, about 750-1000 square meters.¹⁶² Farming on garden land became a central part of peasants' family economical activities because there were only a few economic options outside the collective. Peasants in Binh Dinh collective No. 2 and Binh Lanh collective often grew sweet potatoes, cassava and other staple food on the five-percent land. Besides this, some peasants tried to cultivate on land which had been abandoned by the collective.

Peasants were supposed to harmonize their family economy with the collective economy. However, peasants tended to favor the former because they saw the direct connection between their efforts and rewards. So, peasants often devoted as much of their time and resources as possible in their family economy in order to supplement food that the collective fell short on supplying. Villagers in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen recalled that despite limited individual land, the family economy contributed a great part of their livelihoods. A man in Thanh yen village recalled,

When joining the collective, I retained my garden land as five-percent land. (The collective granted five-percent land to those who did not have enough garden land). The land was a great help. During the period of the work-points system, our family received only 90-100 kilograms per season from the collective. This amount was enough for my family to consume within one month. But thanks to our five-percent land, we grew sweet potatoes and cassavas which enabled us to survive.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh lanh, 15 October 2005.

¹⁶² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Mot so quy dinh ve xay dung hop tac xa', 26 August 1978.

¹⁶³ Interview, Thanh Yen, 9 November, 2005.

Villagers also commented that people made use of any available resources (e.g., time, land and inputs) and invested them in their individual farming. For example, they used quality manure for their own sweet potatoes and cassava plots while they gave the collective bad manure in exchange for work-points.¹⁶⁴ Some did collective work fast and carelessly in order to have more time to devote to their own work. Some made use of land that the collective did not use. For example, they reclaimed the uncultivated corners of collective land, the lakes, banks of the streams and forest lands. As an elderly lady mentioned, 'at that time we reclaimed land anywhere; we reclaimed even a small piece of land to plant sweet potatoes and cassava'.¹⁶⁵

Because peasants were concerned with their own interests, there were conflicts between collective and family work. For example, QN-DN newspaper in January 1981 reported that in Que Tan collective in Que Son district, 'after transplanting seedlings, the collective leaders were not able to mobilize peasants to weed because they were busy growing cassava in their own gardens'. In response, 'the collective leaders had to rely on local authorities and mass organizations' to force people to work.¹⁶⁶ QN-DN newspaper in February 1981 reported that peasants practicing 'neglect of the common property' had become prevalent in collectives. This led to a situation in which individual plots in a collective were lush, collective plots were stunted and full of weeds.¹⁶⁷

Villagers recalled that people made use of collective resources for their own family economy. For example, when fertilizing collective fields, people often hid some in bushes and took it later for their own plots.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, when harvesting, carrying, threshing, and drying the grain, peasants often snitched some for themselves. Villagers in Thanh Yen recalled that children following their parents to glean the rice ears which were intentionally dropped off

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2005.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh 14 October 2005.

¹⁶⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hop tac xa Que Tan I: Xay dung con nguoi, xay dung hop tac xa' [Que Tan collective No.1: Training people and building collective], 21 January 1981: p.2.

¹⁶⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhin vao dong ruong tap the: Giong lua' [Looking at collective fields: Rice seeds], 28 February 1981.

when peasants harvested the crops when parents harvested crops. When carrying the sheaves of grain from the fields to the drying sites, some peasants hid sheaves in the bushes and took them later. Those who brought kettles of water to the harvesters often came back home with kettles full of grain. When threshing, peasants tried to leave some rice-ears on the straw so that they could thresh again at home.¹⁶⁹ A brigade leader in Binh Lanh collective recalled,

Whenever we did not pay enough attention to watching collective grain, peasants stole it. So, at the harvest time, we had to watch day and night. When harvesting, if checkers were absent, people hid grain in the fields. When threshing, if the checkers were negligent, people often hid the grain in the straw they carried home.¹⁷⁰

As early as April 1979 QN-DN newspaper reported 'the phenomena of [peasants] stealing grain and collective property were widespread'.¹⁷¹ Another article also reported,

When harvesting, there were too many rice-gleaners. Those who carried grain to the drying site of the brigades often dropped into the collective members' houses. When threshing at the brigade's yards, collective members threshed deceitfully and let straw still retain many grains so that after taking the straw home, they could get more grain from it.¹⁷²

Villagers also commented that the economic efficiency of secondary crops such as peanuts, sugar cane and sweet potatoes even worse than rice crops because these plants were often stolen at plant and harvest times. A collective leader in Binh Lanh recalled that when sowing peanut seeds, peasants planted the flat-sized ones and put the full-sized ones into their pockets. When harvesting, they ate some and hid some which significantly reduced the quantity of the produce.¹⁷³ In retrospect, a lady in Hien Loc recalled,

For the peanut crop, the collective leaders did not allow young people to harvest because they feared they would eat too many peanuts. Instead, they used elderly people who were toothless and could not eat much. But they could not keep people from stealing. How can we catch a thief living in our own house? It didn't make

¹⁶⁸ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 2004.

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 9 November 2005.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 19 October 2005.

¹⁷¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thanh lap 32 hop tac xa trong vu he thu toan tinh co 164 hop tac xa' [With 32 more collectives established, QN-DN has 164 collectives by the summer-autumn crops], 19 April 1979.

¹⁷² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Chong hao hut mat mat san pham nong nghiep khi thu hoach' [Preventing loss of collective produce during harvesting], 1 December 2005.

¹⁷³ Interview, Binh Lanh, 20 October 2004.

sense to keep watching people all the time. They certainly needed to absent themselves. Likewise, when harvesting cassava and sweet potatoes, peasants often hid good ones in the soil and returned to get them later.¹⁷⁴

In short, despite peasants being labeled as ‘the masters of the collectives’, everyday practices undermined what party leaders expected. In order to secure their livelihoods and survive, peasants deployed various strategies such as optimizing work-points, snitching collective’s resources and stealing produce. The main objectives of these peasant practices were to minimize the disadvantage and maximize their livelihoods. In other words, individually these actions were merely peasant strategies of livelihood and survival. However, the aggregate of these numerous individual actions conveyed a powerful political meaning because they effectively derailed collectivization.¹⁷⁵ I will discuss this in more detail in next sections.

Local cadres’ practices

Despite many cadres being loyal to the VCP’s agrarian policy, some in the Central Coast abused their power at the expense of the state’s interests. QN-DN newspaper in May 1979 reported,

Some party members were bad learners. Some were opportunistic, corrupt, conservative, and small minded, embezzling and colluding. Some displayed bureaucratic, autocratic, and patriarchal behaviors. They made decisions without consulting the masses.¹⁷⁶

QN-DN newspaper in June 1979 censured,

Because of inadequate awareness of bad thoughts, some party members were corrupt and self-interested; they were not good examples for the masses. Cadres embezzling [collective properties] either individually or collectively were prevalent. Many cadres and party members behaved excessively bureaucratically and were autocratic and aloof ... they falsified the actual crop productivity,

¹⁷⁴ Interview, Hien Loc 15 October 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.23.

¹⁷⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, ‘Đe dua phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep tien len va vung chac’ [To speed up collectivization forcefully and firmly], 13 May 1979.

underreported the output [to the state], poorly managed, stole produce and minimized food contributions to the state (*tính thiệt hơn với nhà nước*).¹⁷⁷

At the brigade level, some leaders took advantage of their power in managing labor, cost, production and produce, assigning tasks and giving work-points to benefit themselves. Villagers in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen thought of brigade leaders as 'landlords' who had 'power over life and death' (*quyền sinh sát*). A man in Hien Loc village commented, 'the brigade leader was prejudiced (*thành kiến*). If he disliked someone, he assigned him difficult work. He also took revenge on those who dared to criticize him in public meetings'.¹⁷⁸ QN-DN newspaper in October 1979 reported a typical case of a brigade leader abusing his power in assigning work and giving out working-points. He was accused of stealing the brigade's inputs, 'prolonging work and inflating work-points':

Regardless of stipulated work norms and work contracts, he gave work-points to collective members at his discretion ... if someone gave him a cup of wine, he could increase their tally by 10-20 work-points. He assigned tasks with many work-points to those who were close to him. He also granted five-percent land to collective members at his discretion. Therefore, many collective members said that they 'feared the brigade leader first, God second' (*nhất đội nhì trời*).¹⁷⁹

Brigade leaders were also in charge of collective produce after harvesting, so they had more opportunities to pilfer some of the collective's produce. A lady in Thanh Yen village claimed that brigade leaders took a considerable amount of collective produce because it was concentrated in their hands.¹⁸⁰ An elderly man commented, 'some brigade leaders took as much as they liked. They had a party eating chicken and ducks [very valuable food] every night. The people knew, but did nothing'.¹⁸¹ A former Binh Dinh collective No.2 cadre admitted that he

¹⁷⁷ QN-DN newspaper, 'Tăng cường công tác xây dựng đảng trong các hợp tác xã nông nghiệp' [Intensifying building party organization in the collectives], 6 June 1979.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 19 October 2005.

¹⁷⁹ QN-DN newspaper, 'Xã viên làm chủ phát hiện một đối tượng pha hoại hợp tác xã nông nghiệp' [Members discovering a pilferer in a collective], 6 October 1979.

¹⁸⁰ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 31 October 2005.

¹⁸¹ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 31 October 2005.

colluded with brigade leaders to share the benefits during harvesting time. For example, they underreported the actual crop so that they could take the difference for themselves.¹⁸²

Villagers in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen also complained that people who were collective leaders were in those positions because of their revolutionary credentials, not their education and management skills (*không có trình độ, hồng hơn chuyên*). So, they did not know how to manage the collective well. Besides, most of them were self-interested and corrupt. These circumstances led to the leakage (*thất thoát*) of considerable collective property. Some villagers claimed that such leakage was greater at the collective level than at the brigade level.

A former brigade leader in Thanh Yen also said,

Leakage was greatest at the collective level. The collective took 60 percent of the brigade's output and left 40 percent for peasants. For example, if the brigade harvested 20 tons of paddy, the collective took 12 tons and left 8 tons to distribute among peasants. Therefore, peasants received too little paddy, so they had to supplement with their own sweet potatoes and cassava. The collective leaders were supposed to use the produce to buy machines, tractors, fertilizers and to build infrastructure. But they embezzled a great deal through buying these things. For example, when buying a threshing machine (*máy tuốt*), they could embezzle a half of the value by colluding with sellers to write a receipt that doubled the actual price. They embezzled 'legally', so the people could not sue them. People saw collective leakage, so they become disappointed and did not want to work anymore. But they had to work because if they did not, they did not have food to eat.¹⁸³

Another former brigade leader added,

At that time, the collective spent too much on buying machines and construction. The collective subsidized too much. All mass organizations such as women's unions, peasant associations, schools, hospitals, irrigation teams, specialized and industrial teams, 'priority' families such as martyr and wounded soldier families, poor peasants, party cells and even higher-level cadres all came to ask for subsidies from the collective. Some leakage was due to cadre stealing which was reported as loss (*hao hụt*) or unknown theft (*trộm cắp*). There was an annual one meeting for the collective's financial disclosure but the people were not able to check everything.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Interview, Binh Dinh, 9 November, 2005.

¹⁸³ Interview, Thanh Yen, 5 November 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 9 December 2005.

QN-DN newspaper in November 1979 reported that collectives in Thang Binh did not record income, expenditures, inputs and outputs correctly. For example, Binh Nguyen No.2 and Binh Dao collectives had falsified all accounts of funds, inventories, cash, receipts and expenditures.¹⁸⁵

Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villagers attributed their low income to the quality and the number of collective cadres. A man in Thanh Yen said that on average each collective had to support hundreds of cadres. The salary of each cadre was about 200-300 kilograms of paddy per season, which was much higher than the annual income of an average member. Apart from the salary, cadres enjoyed many other benefits such as attending parties, meetings, and buying paddy at low prices (*mua lúa điều hòa*).¹⁸⁶ A man in Hien Loc said,

The collective produced a great deal of produce but 'leakage' was high. Much of the produce was taken to feed a large number of cadres. So, the people often complained, 'the worn rain hat [peasants] worked so that the pith helmet [cadres] enjoyed (*cởi làm cho cối ăn*).'¹⁸⁷

An Giang in the Mekong Delta

Peasants' everyday practices in production units

'Joining production units but not participating in working' and 'the outside foot was longer than the inside foot'

Unlike many peasants in QN-DN who tended to devote much of their time to collective work in order to get work-points, many peasants in production units in Long Dien B commune of Cho Moi district in An Giang were uninterested (*thờ ơ*) in work-points; many peasants joined the production units but did not do much collective work. Villagers in Long Dien B recalled that the number of production unit members devoted to collective work 'full-time' were few; most

¹⁸⁵ QN-DN newspaper, 'Huyen Thang Binh tong ket 2 nam cai tao nong nghiep' [Thang Binh summing up 2 years of agricultural transformation], 7 November. 1979.

¹⁸⁶ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 5 December. 2005. According to a former collective cadre in Binh Lanh, the salary of the collective chairman was 140 percent of the income of the advanced laborer in the collective. The salary of the vice-chairman and accounting chief was equal to 95 percent of the chairman's salary; the salary of other collective cadres was 90 percent of the chairman (interview, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2004).

of these full-time workers were the poor and landless peasants. Meanwhile, a large number of better-off peasants refused to work or only occasionally worked for production units because they could make a living by doing jobs outside the production units, or living on their own wealth. A former team leader of production unit No.1 in the commune recalled,

Some people joining the production unit simply as a formality (*vào hình thức*). They signed up to join but did not go to do collective work, so at the end of the season they did not have any work-points to receive paddy. Some families let one or two members participate in the production units while the others worked outside, such as working for wages, fishing or farming elsewhere.¹⁸⁸

In order to persuade peasants to do collective work, production units in Long Dien B did not grant household plots (five-percent land) to peasant. However, this policy did not help to persuade peasants into doing collective farming. A landless man in production unit No.1 recalled,

Because we were poor, we tried to work in the production unit to make a living. We got many work-points, so every year my wife and I were often rewarded by the production unit. Meanwhile, the better-off families were disappointed with (*chán nản*) collective farming because the income was small. They previously had considerable land and had a better life. But now they were forced to do collective work which they thought of laboring, so they refused to work. Therefore, during the whole season some of them did not get any work-points; some had about 10 to 20 points in order to avoid being labeled anti-government.¹⁸⁹

Similarly, another full-time member of a production unit whose husband was a production unit cadre recalled,

Others worked only three out of ten days. We worked ten out of ten days. Some better-off people joined but rarely went to work. The production unit had more than 400 *công* [40 hectares] of land and 100 laborers but only about 7-8 people went to do collective work in the field daily. Therefore, we had to work a lot, working to death (*làm muốn chết*).¹⁹⁰

A man whose family had five main laborers recalled that the income from collective farming was so small that his family received only 4 to 5 *gạ* of paddy [80 to 100 kilograms] for

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh 14 October 2005.

¹⁸⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 2005.

a whole season. Therefore, he decided to pull out of the unit and made a living elsewhere. He added that many other households had done the same. Because collective farming did not supply adequate food, many people had to do extra jobs outside the unit. Production unit cadres often neglected these peasant practices because they were not able to secure the peasants' livelihoods with collective farming.¹⁹¹

Many poor peasants were also dissatisfied with the low rewards and the methods of distribution in the production units. A former young landless man recalled,

At first we worked enthusiastically but later we felt discouraged. In fact, the production unit produced a considerable amount of paddy but production unit cadres took much of it. Therefore, we received almost nothing. My wife and I were both full-time laborers but the income we received from work-points was not enough for us to survive (*không đủ sống*). If we worked for wages, we received cash immediately on daily basis. But for the production unit, we only received paddy at the end of the season. How could the poor live on this? Therefore, some people felt so discouraged that they quit and labored elsewhere.¹⁹²

A landless widow with four little children explained why she worked for a production unit for just one month and then quit:

After reunification, Mr. T [the hamlet chief] granted me 4 *công* of land to make a living. Later, at his suggestion, I put all the land into the production unit. I followed others working in production unit for almost a month but I did not receive any cash or paddy. My children at home were hungry, so I had to give up doing collective work and labored for others to raise my little children.¹⁹³

A former chairman of production unit No.2 recalled,

We actually coerced people into joining the production unit, but they did not trust collective farming. Some worked for production units for just one or two seasons and then were so disappointed they found jobs elsewhere. So, the percentage of peasants who did collective work in the fields was low, about 10 to 20 percent.

He explained further that the low rate of peasant participation in collective work was because many peasants, even some production unit cadres focused on alternative or extra jobs outside

¹⁹¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

¹⁹² Interview, Long Dien B, 17 June 2005. He meant that the value of collective farming work-day was less than that of wage labor. Local people mentioned that before reunification the value of a day working for wages was

the unit. For instance, those who had boats went to do trading; those who had relatives in the places in which collectivization had not yet been established borrowed land to make a living there.¹⁹⁴ A former chairman of production unit No.1 fits the pattern:

Our production unit was established in 1979. In the first season, the value of work-point was really good [more than 10 kilograms per work-day] but after that the value of work-points deteriorated. At the end of 1980, because of the flood, the value of work-points was only 0.7 kilogram. At that time many peasants left the production unit to do outside jobs. But in the following season many of them came back to the production unit because of the increased value of work-points. The higher the value of work-points peasants received, the larger the number of peasants who participated in the production unit.

He also admitted that many peasants, cadres, even his family had to ‘keep one foot within and another outside the production unit’ (*giữ chân ngoài chân trong*).¹⁹⁵

This phenomenon of ‘one foot inside and another outside the production unit’ was widespread across many collectives in An Giang. An Giang newspaper in August 1980 reported that when authorities in My Luong commune of Cho Moi district established production unit No.2,

Many peasants resisted it fiercely; some joined but still kept one foot within and another outside; the “outside foot” was longer than the “inside one” (*chân ngoài dài hơn chân trong*). So, the number of laborers doing collective work in the fields was very low; sometimes only 20-30 laborers (out of 113 laborers) worked in the field.¹⁹⁶

Peasants in production unit No.1 in Chau Long 4 hamlet behaved similarly.

Some people did not trust collective farming; they kept the outside foot longer than the inside one. If the performance of production unit was good, they kept in; but if it was bad, they could leave. Some families let only one member to work for the production unit and kept the remaining members outside it in order to manage their livelihoods (*xoay sở cuộc sống*).¹⁹⁷

about 2 *giạ* [40 kilograms] of paddy. Meanwhile the value of a collective farming work-day was less than 10 kilograms, even as low as a few kilograms.

¹⁹³ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

¹⁹⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

¹⁹⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, ‘Về tham tập đoàn số 2 My Luong’ [A visit to production unit No.2 in My Luong], 7 December 1980: p.2.

¹⁹⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, ‘Tập đoàn sản xuất 1, khóm Châu Long 4 vùng bước tiến lên’ [Production unit No.1, Chau Long 4 subcommune is progressing], 9 August 1981.

In short, peasants in Long Dien B and An Giang did not devote their time, energy and resources to collective farming. Because they lacked confidence in collective farming, many peasants practiced 'one foot within and another outside the production units'. This common practice shows that peasants in An Giang had more options to evade or minimize the disadvantages of collective farming than their counterparts in QN-DN.

Careless work and neglect of common property

Apart from low level of participation in collective work, another common problem in Long B Dien production units was the manner in which the peasants worked. They were unenthusiastic and sluggish (*làm không nhiệt tình, làm lê thê*). One of the 'good laborers' in the production unit No.1 of Long Dien B, recalled,

Many people did collective work sluggishly; the enthusiastic people were few. Some men had broad shoulders but carried small sheave of grains. Meanwhile, I, a woman, carried much bigger sheaves than they did. When weeding, others did only a little. They said earning work-points was not profitable, so they did not want to work hard. Some just went through the motions of working, waiting for day's end rather trying to finish work.¹⁹⁸

A better-off man in Long Dien B described how peasants did collective farming in his production unit:

Collective farming according to work-points was poor. People just went through the motions of working without taking care of collective property. When passing by the collective rice plots, if they saw weeds they would not stop and pull them up as they would have done for their own plots. They worked with their minds elsewhere. People only worked carefully if they worked for themselves. How could the production unit be profitable? I felt sad that our land was pooled for others to work together. But because they were landless and the land was not theirs, they did not love the land at all; they worked for points, so they did not take care of land. Working together was certainly impossible. I think that only those like uncle Ho and uncle Ton Duc Thang could work collectively but peasants could not. The central leaders were kind; they thought peasants were like them but peasants were not; they were selfish and different.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

¹⁹⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005. Uncle Ho is Ho Chi Minh, the first president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; Ton Duc Thang, born in An Giang, was Ho Chi Minh's successor

In looking back on how peasants resisted work-points collective farming in a production unit, An Giang newspaper in April 1982 summarized,

When preparing rice seeds to sow, nobody cared whether they were too dry or too soaked. When transporting seeds to the fields, people carried the sacks carelessly and dropped many. When the seeds reached their destination, people did not have enough baskets to take them to the fields. Moreover, people just went through the motions of working until the end of day. When the seeds were ready to sow, they were left sitting in the fields. When it rained slightly, the people refused to work. When it was a bit sunny, many people complained of headaches. After weeding for a while, many people grumbled about backache.²⁰⁰

That peasants refused to work or worked unenthusiastically affected the operation of the production units. People in Long Dien B recalled that the units were not able to mobilize peasants to complete tasks on time. So, some fields were left uncultivated and rice plots unweeded. A former chairman of production unit No.1 of Long Dien B admitted that his unit was unable to complete weeding in time because of low level of peasant participation in work schedules. So, 'weeds were often more numerous than rice shoots' (*cỏ thường nhiều hơn lúa*).²⁰¹ A former chairman of production unit No.2 commented,

For individual farming, peasants prepared the soil and weeded carefully, so the fields hardly had any weeds. But under collective farming, the rice fields were full of weeds because of carelessness. If weeds were not pulled out properly, they would flourish.²⁰²

Villagers also admitted that weeds in collective rice fields were so overgrown that they looked like a wilderness during the period of collective farming. People in Long Phu hamlet had a popular saying to describe the situation: 'Please come to Long Phu and see weeds that touch the sky' (*Ài về Long Phú mà xem, âm u cỏ rác phủ xanh rợp trời*).²⁰³ A former cadre of Cho Moi district observed,

Because peasants did not see efficiencies in collective farming, they did not want to work for production units. They were better off leaving the units and finding jobs

²⁰⁰ An Giang newspaper, 'Vu lua khoan o tap doan 3 Tay Khanh B' [The results of contracted rice crops in production unit No.3 in Tay Khanh B commune], 18 April 1982: p.3.

²⁰¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

²⁰² Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

²⁰³ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 2005. Long Phu was a hamlet of Long Dien B, Cho Moi district, An Giang.

elsewhere. Therefore, wherever production units were, the weeds thrived (*tập đoàn đi tới đâu thì cỏ đi tới đó*). At that time, Mr. Do Vuong, a northern cadre criticized us for not allowing peasants to join production units voluntarily. But I argued with him that no matter how much we propagandized and educated the peasants, they never volunteered to join, because they considered collective working as working for cadres.²⁰⁴

Besides doing collective work sloppily and slowly, local officials accused peasants in Long Dien B of not caring for and even sabotaging collective property. A former production team leader recalled that floods in 1980 affected the rice fields, so cadres called on people to harvest crops as soon as possible. Nobody responded. People said the rice belonged to the production unit. It was not theirs. He added,

People were so negative that they even ate sugar cane seedlings [during transplanting] and said: anyone who did not eat them was stupid. That was annoying because the production unit had to buy those seedlings. Moreover, when people worked in the fields, they saw broken paddy walls, they should have fixed them. But they did not. They said: why should when it was not ours? I ask you, how could the rice survive? A few people had a good attitude but those who had a bad attitude were numerous. Working collectively was certainly impossible.²⁰⁵

Similarly, a lady in the production unit recalled, 'We tried to plant sugar cane and corn but when the crops were ready to harvest, people snatched or destroyed them all'. So, the production unit gave up planting secondary crops.²⁰⁶ A former chairman of production unit No.2 admitted that secondary crops were a financial failure because of careless cultivation and peasants' sabotages. Therefore, in 1980 he decided to give the secondary crop land to peasants to cultivate individually. In return, peasants paid tax to the state via the production unit.²⁰⁷

In summary, unlike their counterparts in QN-DN who tried to compromise with collective farming and pursue work-points, peasants in Long Dien B and An Giang tended to evade collective farming. Some joined the production units but worked infrequently; some

²⁰⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 22 August 2005; Chau Thanh was one of An Giang districts that had low population density. Peasants here had more economic options to evade collective farming so the performance of collective farming here was much worse than other parts of An Giang, such as Cho Moi district.

²⁰⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 2005.

²⁰⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

worked sluggishly and unenthusiastically and did not care much about the collective property. These practices significantly affected the performance of collective farming which will be discussed in the next section.

Local cadres' practices

Party leaders accused local cadres in the Mekong Delta of being unenthusiastic about agricultural transformation, having 'weak, messy and slack management of labor, finance, production and distribution of produce' and committing embezzlement. All these factors made collectivization in the region difficult.²⁰⁸ Provincial authorities accused local cadres in An Giang of displaying 'negative practices such as stealing collective property, materials, cash and peasants' work-points, appropriating illegally peasants' land and belongings and bullying the masses (*ức hiếp quần chúng*).²⁰⁹

Long Dien B peasants complained that production unit cadres behaved badly. A man in the commune recalled,

At that time, cadres enjoyed a comfortable life. They controlled everything such as work-points, materials, cash and paddy; the unit members did not know anything about those things. After harvesting, they controlled all paddy and only distributed part of it to each person according to the amount of work-points. We did not know exactly how they used the remaining.²¹⁰

Some argued that cadres did not make public (*công khai*) the production unit's income and expenses; they only released one financial report a year. And these were often ghost (fake) reports (*báo cáo ma*).²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005. He argued that his production unit granted secondary crop land to peasants without higher authorities' consent. Each household received about a half a *công* of land (500 meter) to farm individually.

²⁰⁸ BCTNNMN, 'Thông báo về cuộc họp tu ngày 22 đến 24-10-1979 của ban cải tạo nông nghiệp Miền Nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 5 November 1979: p.4.

²⁰⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tăng cường chỉ đạo công tác chống tiêu cực' [Intensifying the fights against negativism], 8 June 1980.

²¹⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 June 2005.

²¹¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 20 June 2005.

An Giang newspaper describes many cases of embezzlement in production units. For example, 27 inspections in May 1980 found 40 cadres had been embezzling collective property. Authorities received 361 complaints from peasants; most of these complained about cadres' stealing and bullying.²¹² In 1981 Cho Moi district inspectors also discovered that the managerial board of production units in Long Dien B embezzled collective property. As a result, some production unit cadres were sentenced to a few months imprisonment.²¹³ Informants complained that although some cadres were sacked or imprisoned, they were not able to eliminate corrupt cadres. Initially, new cadres might be better but later, they committed the same wrongdoings. Some attributed the cadres' problems to policy mechanisms (*do cơ chế chính sách*) which gave considerable power to cadres in terms of controlling and managing production units.²¹⁴

A poor man who at first supported the new authorities and worked enthusiastically for the production unit shared his story:

At that time, the authorities told us that from now on, people had to join production units to work collectively because individual farming was not allowed. We obeyed and joined to work for the production unit. But the authorities cheated people (*lừa dối dân*). We conformed to the policy while many production unit cadres, even higher officials, left to work individually.

He explained why the cadres committed wrong-doings:

Most cadres were self-interested; they stole collective property with no conscience pangs. It was common that production unit cadres stole collective paddy and were caught by members. As far as I remember, Mr. Ba Truc at the Hau Giang school of Agricultural Transformation said that if a production unit operated according to socialist principles, it was a heaven on earth for poor households. But if it went wrong, it was much worse and crueler than previous landlords. He explained that the landlords forced peasants to fill their store houses full of paddy but people could borrow it back when they needed some. Meanwhile, production unit cadres only focused on (*chỉ có biết*) stealing, pilfering and embezzling collective property.

²¹² *An Giang newspaper*, 'An Giang day manh cong tac chong tieu cuc' [An Giang speeds up the fight against negativism], 8 June 1980.

²¹³ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

²¹⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, June to August 2005.

All of these certainly made collective farming go to ruin and peasants suffer starvation.²¹⁵

Some Long Dien B peasants also complained that cadres showed favoritism when assigning work tasks and grading work-points. A poor man whose family joined a production unit but infrequently went to work commented,

People who were close to production unit cadres got many points because the unit assigned them light tasks with many points ... I did not have any relatives who were production unit leaders, so I had to rely on doing outside jobs to make a living and let my children work for the production unit. So, during that time, my family got only few work-points.²¹⁶

Other production unit cadres tended to give the same points to everyone, undermining any incentive people might have to work well. A team leader of production unit No.1 recalled,

At first, I was a production unit member. Because I worked hard, I was elected team leader in charge of grading points for the whole team. It was impossible to follow the grading regulations because I feared hurting others' feelings (*sợ mất lòng*). For example, according to the regulation, if someone came to work one hour late, I had to subtract his work-points. The regulation said so but in practice, we were afraid of hurting others' feelings so we distributed work-points to people evenly (*cào bằng*). At first, some peasants worked enthusiastically but later lost their incentive because there was no difference between those who worked hard and those who worked sloppily.²¹⁷

Local cadres also too often mismanaged state resources and did not serve the people responsibly. During the work-points period, An Giang newspapers reported numerous cases of problem cadres. For example, a November 1980 article accused cadres of snitching (*ăn xén*) fertilizer from bags sold to peasants in a state trading shop of Chau Phu district. A bag of fertilizer should weigh 50 kilograms, but at the district many bags were only 46 or 47 kilograms. Peasants also discovered salt and other stuff had been mixed with the fertilizer.²¹⁸

Similarly, in the winter-spring of 1980-1981, cadres in storehouses of Thoai Son district embezzled 310 tons of paddy, which they simply reported as missing. Cadres colluded

²¹⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

²¹⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 June 2005.

²¹⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June, 2005.

²¹⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: An xen cua dan' [Pilfering peoples' resources], 23 November 1980.

with private merchants buying paddy such that both cadres and merchants gained financial benefits at the expense of the state and food supplies.²¹⁹

Figure 4-1 Rice production unit



A husband worm says to his wife, “Do not be afraid of moving here, we’ll be safe because the production unit managers have already sold all of the pesticides on the black market!” (Drawn by Van Thanh in *An Giang Newspaper* 22 March 1981)

Figure 4-2 Food procurement station



At the food procurement station: a guy who sells rice bribes the official so that the official ignores water and sand mixed in his rice. He ponders, ‘in life, sometimes a word can increase the weight!’ n Thoai (Drawn by Van Thanh, in *An Giang newspaper* 3 May 1980)

In explaining the increased prices of paddy in An Giang, a local newspaper reported that some of the cadres responsible for controlling free markets and extending socialist markets were actually corrupt and colluded with private rice merchants. This created favorable conditions for an illicit rice trade. At the same time cadres 'blocked transport and prohibited markets' (*ngăn sông cấm chợ*) of ordinary laboring people.²²⁰ A man in Long Dien B recalled, 'I went to harvest rice crops for wages (*cắt lúa mướn*) in Thoai Son district and took home a few *giạ* of paddy. But cadres from a food purchasing station stopped me and told me to surrender my paddy to them. I was angry and poured all my rice into the river. I think that they should at least have bought rather than confiscate my paddy'.²²¹ Another man commented, 'policies said that peasants were not allowed to cultivate and transfer paddy across borders. But if you had money to bribe the cadres you could do this without any difficulty'.²²²

Long Dien B peasants and An Giang newspapers accused local cadres of misusing common properties. They frequently organized meetings and parties (*nhậu nhẹt*), wasting time and other resources which made the state's organizations function poorly and significantly affected people's social and economic activities. The following cartoons help us to understand these problems:

²²⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vi sao gia lua leo thang?' [Why does the rice price go up?], 27 October 1980.

²²¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 9 August 2005.

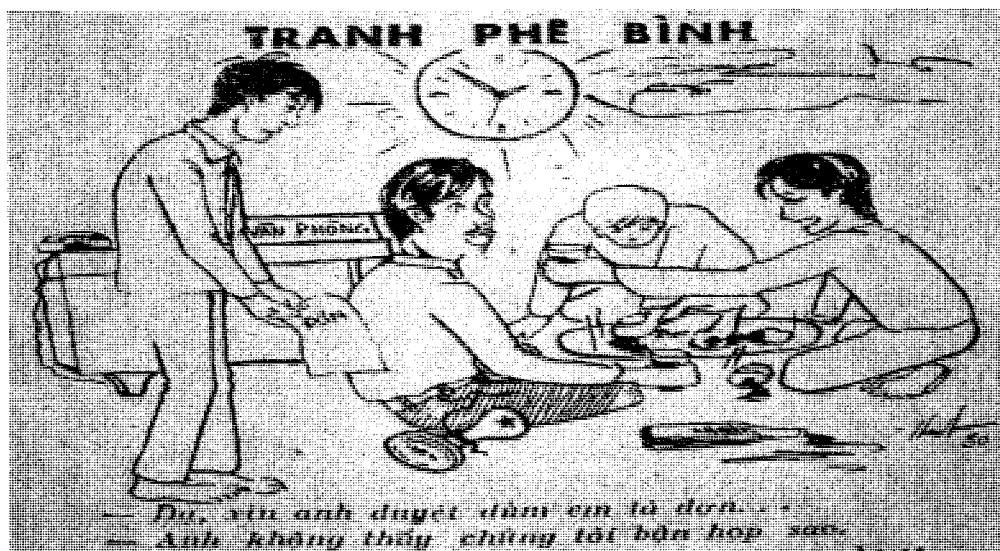
²²² Interview, Long Dien B, 30 June 2005.

Figure 4-3 A farmer and a merchant at food procurement station



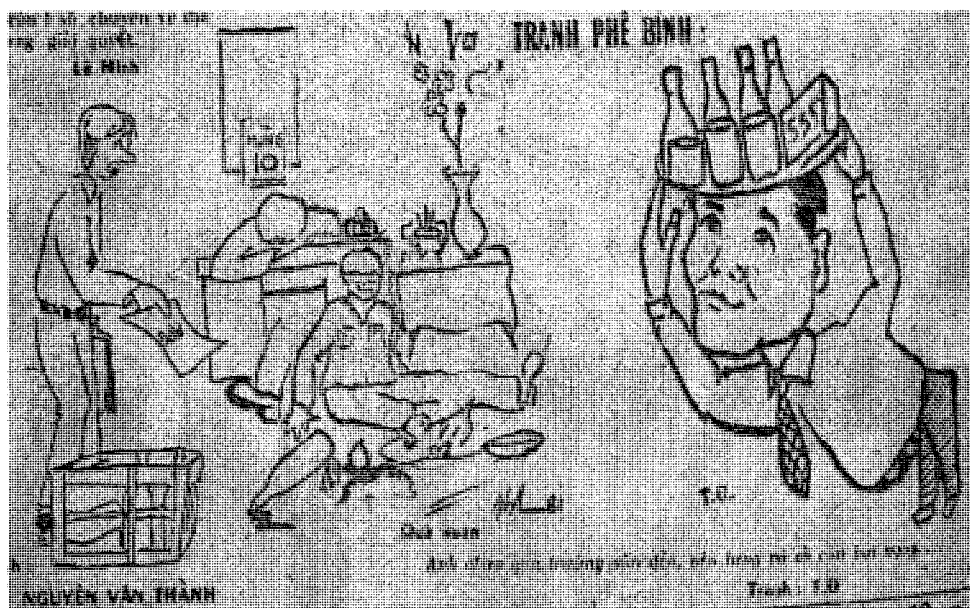
A local officer, who is in charge of preventing private trading, points his left hand at a farmer with two chickens and shouts 'hand them over!' Meanwhile, his right receives a bribe from a merchant with many bags of rice and beans. She says, 'here are my permission papers to transport goods'. (Drawn by Nhi, in *An Giang Newspaper* 12 October 1980)

Figure 4-4 Drinking at work



A farmer comes to a local office at 2 p.m, showing a form to an official and shyly says 'Sir, please consider my form'. The officer, who is drunk and in the middle of a drinking session, shouts at him, 'don't you see we are busy with our meeting?' (Drawn by Van Thanh, in *An Giang Newspaper* 16 November 1980)

Figure 4-5 Tet (New Year) gifts



An officer submits a form to a higher official on the New Year without including a 'gift', and he is criticized for not behaving properly (like the man on the right).
(Drawn by Van Thanh, in *An Giang Newspaper* 22 February 1981)



The ambulance carries a patient surrounded with smuggled MSG, textiles and cigarettes
(Drawn by Van Thanh, in *An Giang Newspaper* 4 January 1981).

The performance of collective organizations under the work-points system of collectivization

QN-DN in the Central Coast

In the first years after reunification, staple food production in QN-DN had reportedly increased rapidly from 149,062 tons in 1975 to 380,000 in 1978. Inspired by this achievement, QN-DN leaders believed that under their close leadership, the province could produce 550,000 tons of staple food by the end of the 1976-1980 five year plan. They reasoned that collectivization with 'three revolutions' enabled agriculture to meet that target.²²³

However, in contrast to their expectations, when collectivization in the province was extensive, food production stagnated and did not match the increase in cultivated areas and agricultural investment. A lead article of QN-DN newspaper in September 1979 titled 'Urgent measures to push up staple food production in order to stabilize living conditions of the people' reported: 'The rice productivity of the spring-summer of 1979 is low while the coming summer-autumn is under the threat of drought and flood. Starvation has occurred in some locations'. Besides bad weather, the article argued, the poor performance of staple food production was because local authorities mismanaged and underutilized agricultural land (especially secondary land) and labor. To improve food production, the article urged collectives to temporarily lend secondary land to collective members for 3 years.²²⁴ Similarly, the chairman of the provincial Committee for Agricultural Transformation admitted that the area and yield of secondary crops had decreased compared to pre-collectivization times. So, he urged collectives to lend secondary land to collective members.²²⁵ Hien Loc and Thanh Yen

²²³ *QN-DN newspaper*, '29-3-1975 – 29-3-1979: 4 năm lon mạnh về kinh tế' [From 29 March 1975 to 29 March 1979: 4 years of economic expansion], 28 March 1979.

²²⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Các biện pháp cấp bách thúc đẩy mạnh sản xuất lương thực, thực phẩm tiếp tục ổn định đời sống nhân dân' [Some urgent measures to increase food production], 15 September 1979: p.1.

²²⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhân thức đúng đắn và thi hành nghiêm chỉnh việc tạm giao đất chuyển trong mau cho xã viên sản xuất' [Understanding well and seriously implementing a temporary redistribution of secondary land to members], 19 September 1979.

also recalled secondary crops doing badly because of peasants' pilfering produce. Finally, in 1980 collective leaders decided to redistribute secondary land to households temporarily.²²⁶

QN-DN newspaper accounts showed that the province still had bad harvests in the winter-spring of 1979-1980; the average rice productivity was about 2.5 tons per hectare compared to 2.92 in the previous winter-spring of 1978-1979. Thousands of hectares of rice yielded no crop (*mất trắng*). For example, Tam Ky district suffered failed rice crops on 557 hectares. Que Son district had 188 hectares producing no harvest.²²⁷ Similarly, Thang Binh district had 4,500 hectares of rice in the winter-spring of 1979-1980, of which 800 hectares yielded no crop and 1,600 hectares with poor yields. The average rice productivity in Thang Binh district fell to 1.47 tons per hectare.²²⁸

Despite QN-DN authorities' efforts to expand irrigation and agricultural land, increase the number of crops per year and use chemical fertilizers; by 1980, the province's staple food production reached only 460,000 tons of paddy, falling short of the expected target (550,000 tons).²²⁹ According to the SNNTTNTQN's recent report, QN-DN's grain production (including rice and corn) in 1980 was 285,426 tons of paddy equivalents.²³⁰ Thus, based on the above figures, by 1980 QN-DN's non-grain staple production was about 174,574 tons, accounting to 38 percent of the province's total staple food. As discussed in previous section, from late 1979, QN-DN authorities redistributed secondary land to peasant households to produce non-grain food. It is likely that most QN-DN's non-grain food (174,574 tons) came from peasant households' production.

²²⁶ Interview, Thanh Yen and Hien Loc, October to December 2005.

²²⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vu dong xuan 1980-1981 duoc mua ca lua va mau' [QN-DN harvested good rice and secondary crops in the winter-spring of 1980-1981], 23 May 1981.

²²⁸ *QN-DN newspaper* 'Huyen Thang Binh phan dau dat 65,000 tan luong thuc nam 1981' [Thang Binh is striving to produce 65,000 tons of food], 9 September 1981.

²²⁹ SNNPTNNQN, 'Ket qua san xuat nong nghiep nam 1976-2004' [Agricultural production 1976-2004] (SNNPHTNQN report, 2005): I received this report during fieldwork in Quang Nam in 2005.

²³⁰ CCTKQN, *Quang Nam 30 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien* [Quang Nam's socio-economic development over the past 30 years], Tam Ky, 2005: p.95.

Many other provinces of the Central Coast faced similar food production shortfalls. In assessing the effects of collectivization on Central Coast agriculture, a study found,

The Central Coast was the region in which collectivization occurred most quickly and thoroughly and was most like the northern models. In this region, all peasants' means of production became collective property; labor was tightly controlled by centralized leadership; household economy is highly restricted and even prohibited (so, they generated only a little staple food). Therefore, during the peak period collectivization, the region faced a severe problem of staple food production. For example, thousands of hectares of secondary crop land in Thang Binh district of QN-DN were abandoned in 1978.²³¹

Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villagers recalled that their living conditions dramatically deteriorating during the work-point period. At the beginning of collective farming, the value of a work-day in Binh Dinh collective No.2 was 0.5 kilograms of paddy; later it fell to 0.3 kilograms. An elderly man in the village recalled, 'collective farming caused hunger. The value of work-day was 0.3 to 0.5 kilograms of paddy. How could we live? This amount was not enough to feed a rooster'.²³² A former brigade leader of Binh Dinh collective No.2 recalled,

The value of a work-day during the first harvest (in the summer-autumn 1979) of the collective was 0.5 kilograms of paddy. In the following season, the winter-spring of 1979-1980, the collective had such a bad harvest that collective cadres had to go elsewhere to buy food for their families. The value of work-day in that season was less than 0.3 kilograms of paddy. In the summer-autumn of 1980 season the harvest was also bad. In the winter-spring of 1980-1981 the collective enjoyed a good harvest but the district's authorities took a large quantity of collective paddy. So, the value of a work-day never reached 0.5 kilogram of paddy during the work-point system.²³³

Binh Lanh collective faced a similar situation; the value of a work-day fell from 3 kilograms of paddy in 1977 to 2 kilograms of paddy in 1978, 1.5 kilograms in 1979 and 0.5 kilogram in 1980.²³⁴

²³¹ Nguyen Sinh Cuc, *Thuc Trang Nong Nghiep, Nong Thon va Nong Dan Viet Nam 1976-1990* [Vietnam's agriculture from 1976-1990], Hanoi, NXB Thong Ke, 1991: p.32.

²³² Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh, 31 October 2005.

²³³ Interview, Thanh Yen village, Binh Dinh, 9 December 2005.

²³⁴ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh 23 October 2004; Interview, Hien Loc, 22 October 2005.

When asked about their living conditions during work-point collective farming, Hien Loc and Thanh Yen villagers often used slang poems to respond. For example, they said: 'during the work-points period people had so little rice to eat so they had to lick rice clinging to their chopsticks' (*lúa điểm là liếm đũa*); 'working for the collective, there were no clothes to cover one's privates' (*hợp tác hợp te không có miếng vải mà che cái L*); 'in the evening, people had dinner with sweet potatoes to sleep; in the morning, people had breakfast with sweet potatoes to work; at noon, people opened their mouth to chew sweet potatoes again' (*tối ăn khoai đi ngủ, sáng ăn củ đi làm, trưa về hả hàm nhai khoai*).²³⁵

Villagers also recalled people living on sweet potatoes and cassava. An elderly man in Hien Loc recalled, 'we did not have enough rice, so we ate two cassava meals and one rice meal a day. The rice meal was actually a mixture of cassava with a little bit of rice'.²³⁶ Another elderly man in Thanh Yen recalled, 'at that time, we substituted sweet potatoes for rice. Sweet potatoes were our main staple food. During one season of working for the collective my family received only 20 kilograms of paddy; how could we live? The collective took much of what we produced'.²³⁷ A widow with three children recalled,

After harvesting, the state concentrated all produce on brigade's house. They took all whatever we produced and distributed to each family a few *ang* (equal to 5 kilograms) of fresh paddy. My family received four *ang* of fresh paddy per season (equal to 20 kilograms) which was not enough for my family's consumption. At that time we were so miserable that words could not express our suffering. We ate only sweet potatoes with cassava powder. We ate them three times a day. Sometimes we had a little rice mixed with sweet potatoes for our little children and the elderly people. Fortunately, the state gave up collective farming. If not, the people would certainly have died of hunger.²³⁸

²³⁵ (*Lúa điểm là liếm đũa* is a kind of back slang: *lúa điểm* means the amount of rice that peasants received according to work-points; *liếm đũa* literally means 'licking chopsticks'. Licking chopstick metaphorically means that rice was so little that after meals people were still hungry; '*hợp tác hợp te không có miếng vải mà che cái L*' is a modified version of government slogan: 'working for collectives, few people went on foot; many went by bus' (*hợp tác hợp te đi bộ thì ít đi xe thì nhiều*).

²³⁶ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lan, 22 October 2005.

²³⁷ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh 31 October 2005.

²³⁸ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 11 October 2004.

Villagers considered the poor performance of collective farming (low productivity), high levels of leakage (*thất thoát*) and waste of collective resources (*lãng phí*) the main reasons for their deteriorating living-conditions. According to villagers' views, collective farming meant low productivity.

Collective farming always produced bad harvest because people did not do collective work as carefully as they did private work; people just went through the motions of working and did not take care of collective fields. At that time, one load of manure (*gánh phân*) was used for three square meters of collective land while one load is now used for one square meter of individual land. Moreover, the quality of manure was poor. Therefore, how could collective rice produce a good harvest?²³⁹

Collective farming certainly meant low productivity. People did not take care of collective plots evenly; they chased work-points and selected light work, so they performed certain tasks in some plots and skipped others. For example, people carried manure to the plots which were close but skipped the distant ones. So while some nearby plots produced good harvests while others were bad. In general, the harvest was always bad because plowing, spreading manure and weeding was careless. Therefore, at first we received three kilograms of paddy per work-day, but later we received only 0.5 kilogram, even 0.3 kilograms of paddy.²⁴⁰

If collective farming had continued, people would be unable to transplant anymore because the soil would become hard. Moreover, for years of collective farming, the collective plots would significantly decrease in size because people did not plow the soil properly; they did not hoe the corners and clear the edges properly.²⁴¹

These quotations convey the views of many villagers that the poor productivity of collective farming largely resulted from people's everyday practices and their survival strategies. The aggregate sum of these everyday practices led to the poor performance of collective farming.

Hien Loc and Thanh Yen villagers also considered 'leakage and waste' in collectives as another major reason for their low income. The 'leakage', villagers said, resulted from not only peasants' snitching, collective cadre's embezzlement but also extraction from the collective and the state. They argued that because a large amount of collective produce was extracted to

²³⁹ Interview, Hien Loc, 15 October 2005.

²⁴⁰ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 14 October 2005.

²⁴¹ Interview, Thanh Yen, Binh Dinh, 10 October 2004 and 5 December 2005.

support cadres, subsidize mass organizations, and pay the state taxes and obligations, collective members received little income. Despite members being supposed to share more than 60 percent of collective produce, 'leakage and waste' meant that collective members received less than a half of this.²⁴² This problem was not confined to Binh Lanh and Binh Dinh collectives but was common to many collectives of the Central Coast. According to a BCTNNMN's report in November 1979,

In some Central Coast locations, the state's share in collective food distribution was about 30 to 40 percent, together with collective funds and supplies for local guerrillas, local cadres, party and mass organizations which meant that collective members received less than 60 percent of total produce, as regulated. Even in some locations collective members received only 40-50 percent of produce. Meanwhile, peasants' secondary crops produced a bad harvest. So, the living-standards of collective members were very low; many households faced difficulties in earning enough to live. Starvation occurred in some places such as Tam Ky district, QN-DN.²⁴³

Another problem that work-point collective farming faced was managing resources efficiently. Villagers argued that the collective size was too large, so collective cadres could not control resources (such as agricultural inputs, land and labor), production and output. Since it was unable to utilize all of agricultural land and labor, some land was often left uncultivated or cultivated late. Moreover, collective farming was not able to weed, care for fields or dry produce as efficiently as individual farming. A Hien Loc villager recalled delivering grain to the brigade's house and then to the collective storages. However, the grain had not dried properly well but was still put into storage. Later much of this produce rotted. So, collective farming wasted a lot of resources.²⁴⁴ Another man argued, 'the state thought that centralized leadership and management made agriculture stronger but it failed to do so. I thought that individual farming was much more efficient than collective farming'.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Interview, Thanh Yen and Hien Loc village, October-December 2005.

²⁴³ BCTNNMN, 'Thong bao ve cuoc hop tu ngay 22 den 24-10-1979 cua ban cai tao nong nghiep Mien nam' [Report of Central Committee for Agricultural Transformation in the south on 22-24 October 1979 meeting], TP. Ho Chi Minh, 5 November, 1979: p.2.

²⁴⁴ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 19 October 2005.

²⁴⁵ Interview, Hien Loc, Binh Lanh, 20 October 2005.

An Giang in the Mekong Delta

As discussed in the previous section, Long Dien B peasants often expressed their objections to collective farming by seldom doing collective work or doing it unenthusiastically. These practices or actions and local cadre's mismanagement of collective farming led to poor performance.

Long Dien B peasants admitted work-point collective farming was less efficient than individual farming. The common reasons they gave were that 'people did collective work unenthusiastically and sluggishly'; 'no one took care of common property'; 'production unit cadres embezzled collective resources'; and 'management of the production units was slack'. Some commented that the income of production unit members in the work-point period was even worse than that of tenants in the period of landlordism. An elderly man argued,

In the French time, the tenants who did not have land could farm on the landlord's; the rent was not too much and tenants could make a living. Furthermore, at that time wild fish were still numerous which enabled people to make a living easily (*dễ sống*). When joining the production unit, people worked miserably and results were low. Because people did not want to work collectively, they did collective work sloppily (*làm khơi khơi*) and weeded carelessly, so weeds overgrew. Therefore, at that time peasants' income was less than previously.²⁴⁶

A former chairperson of production unit No.1 in Long Dien B recalled that initially a collective work-day was valued at more than 10 kilograms but later decreased. At the end of 1980, affected by heavy floods, the value of a work-day was only 0.7 kilograms (which was equal to that in QN-DN). Therefore, peasants felt disappointed and wanted to quit collective farming.²⁴⁷ A former cadre of production unit No.2 in Long Dien B also admitted that because collective farming was less efficient, the income peasant received from collective farming was not adequate to feed their families. Therefore, they had to keep 'the outside foot longer than the inside one'.²⁴⁸ A landless man who worked full-time for production units recalled he and his

²⁴⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 20 June 2005.

²⁴⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

²⁴⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 14 June 2005.

wife receiving about only 20 *gia* of paddy (400 kilograms) for a whole season not enough to feed his family and much less than his previous income from doing wage labor.²⁴⁹

The low value of a work-day was not limited to collective farming in Long Dien B, but occurred across many places of An Giang too. A man in production unit No.3, Tay Khanh B commune of Long Xuyen recalled,

In the last winter-spring [1980-1981], I worked hard and full-time but received only 10 *gia* of paddy (200 kilograms) per season. The reason for the low income was that many households sent their subsidiary laborers to work for the production unit, while their main laborers tried to make a living outside the production unit.²⁵⁰

A Cho Moi district official who had experience of collectivization in the 1979-1981 period observed,

The living conditions of peasants in collective farming production units deteriorated. Where local authorities carried out collectivization exactly according to the state policy, peasants faced many difficulties in making a living. But where local authorities loosely applied the policy of collectivization, peasants found it easier to make a living.²⁵¹

The provincial resolution No.017/NQTU (26 November 1981) also admitted, 'in many production units and collectives, production had not increased, it had even decreased; the living conditions of production unit members have not improved'.²⁵²

An Giang newspaper in June 1981 reported that rice productivity of the Tay Hue collective in the winter-spring of 1979-1980 was about 1.5 tons per hectare (compared to 4-5 tons per hectares of individual farming). Moreover, 'leakage' (*thất thoát*) and cadre embezzlement accounted for 50 percent of its produce. So, the living conditions of collective members were worse.²⁵³ Another example was Phu Quy production unit in Phu An commune

²⁴⁹ Interview Long Dien B, 23 June 2005.

²⁵⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vu lua khoan o tap doan 3 Tay Khanh B' [The results of contracted rice crops in production unit No.3 in Tay Khanh B commune], 18 April 1982.

²⁵¹ Interview, Cho Moi, 23 June 2005.

²⁵² Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11 Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Trien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CTPTNTAG, 1994: p.33.

²⁵³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen bien moi o hop tac xa Tay Hue' [Good progress in Tay Hue collective], 7 June 1981.

of Chau Phu district. The land of the production unit was assessed as fertile, and before collectivization the average rice productivity was about 5-6 tons of paddy per hectare. However, after collectivization rice productivity fell to 1-2 tons of paddy per hectare.²⁵⁴

By 1981 collectivization in An Giang accounted for less than 10 percent of the agricultural land and peasant households, and the effect of collectivization policy on the province's agricultural production was minor compared to QN-DN in the Central Coast. However, the whole effect of agricultural transformation including collectivization, non-resident cultivator prohibition, land readjustment, double-crops conversion, low-price grain procurement and free market restriction had significantly hindered the development of An Giang's agriculture. For example, grain procurement cheap prices discouraged peasants from increasing production. Instead, they produced enough grain for their own family's consumption. The non-resident cultivator prohibition limited the productive capacity of peasants who previously enjoyed the relative freedom of residence and selecting their own businesses. According to Nguyen Minh Nhi, a former party secretary of An Giang, from 1976 to 1979 food production in An Giang stagnated and fluctuated at about 500,000 tons of paddy equivalent. Due to heavy floods in 1978, the province's food production fell to less than 400,000 tons and starvation occurred in some places.²⁵⁵ Despite much effort to modernize production, rice productivity during 1975-1981 did not increase as much as expected (see table 4-4).

²⁵⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vai net ve mot tap doan yeu kem' [A weak production unit], 6 September 1981.

²⁵⁵ Nguyen Minh Nhi, 'An Giang: Lich su thao go, dot pha va chu dong hop nhap kinh te the gioi' [An Giang dealt with economic difficulties and integrated into the world economy], SNNPTNN AG, 15 August 2004: p.1; Apart from collectivization and other policies, some provincial officials explained that at that time the purchasing of food at cheap prices discouraged peasants from increasing their food production. They only produced enough for their consumption (interview, Long Xuyen, 6 June 2005).

Table 4-4 An Giang's cultivated area, food yield and rice productivity from 1975-1981

| | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| The area of annual food crops (hectares) | 224,572 | 232,174 | 254,648 | 250,402 | 252,111 | 303,882 | 301,099 |
| Food production (tons) | 465,465 | 496,286 | 476,500 | 363,192 | 525,814 | 737,874 | 691,561 |
| Rice productivity (tons per hectare) | 2.13 | 2.25 | 1.97 | 1.55 | 2.27 | 2.52 | 2.34 |

(Source: Cuc thong ke An Giang, *Tong hop dien tich, nang suat san luong cay trong hang nam va so luong gia suc gia cam giai doan 1975-2005* [Area, productivity and output of annual crops in An Giang from 1975-2005], Long Xuyen, 2005).

The stagnation of food production occurred not only in An Giang but also in the whole Mekong Delta region. According to Nguyen Sinh Cuc, before 1975 the Mekong Delta was one of the largest commodity rice producing regions. However, after reunification, in the period 1976 to 1980 despite peaceful times, the region's staple food production did not increase but fluctuated. In particular, rice production in the region fell from 1976 to 1978 and slightly increased from 1979 to 1980 (table 4-4). Nguyen Sinh Cuc argued that apart from bad weather, the fall in rice production was closely linked to the expansion of collectivization. Moreover, he attributed the slight increase in rice production in 1979-1980 largely to the collapse of a large number of production units which released peasants and considerable land from collective farming.²⁵⁶ In general, food production in the region fell short of what the VCP's leaders expected, and aggravated the severe food shortage of the whole country in early 1980s.

Table 4-5 Rice crop area, paddy production and rice productivity in the Mekong Delta from 1976-1980

| | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| The area of rice crop (thousand hectares) | 206,2 | 209,9 | 206,2 | 208,6 | 209,6 |
| Paddy production (thousand tons) | 420,648 | 347,804 | 356,520 | 464,969 | 483,547 |
| Rice productivity (tons per hectare) | 2.04 | 1.66 | 1.73 | 2.23 | 2.3 |

(Source: see the footnote.)²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Nguyen Sinh Cuc, *Thuc Trang Nong Nghiep, Nong Thon va Nong Dan Viet Nam 1976-1990* [Vietnam's agriculture from 1976-1990], Hanoi, NXB Thong Ke, 1991: p.31-2.

²⁵⁷ Ibid: p.28 (I calculated the paddy production)).

Performance of Vietnam's agriculture in 1976-1980 and national agrarian policy's modification

According to Nguyen Sinh Cuc, from 1976-1980 land redistribution and collectivization had a negative effect on the south's agriculture. He argued that peasants' negative practices resisting collectivization (such as abandoning their land and farming, neglecting to care for rice fields), egalitarian land redistribution and cadres' corruption contributed significantly to the poor performance of agriculture in the south. In particular, paddy productivity and yield stagnated during 1976-1980 (see table 4-6).

Table 4-6 Area, productivity and output of rice crops in southern Vietnam 1976-1980

| | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Area of rice (thousand hectares) | 2,909 | 3,034 | 3,010 | 3,011 | 3,236 |
| Output (thousand tons) | 6,346 | 5,887 | 5,014 | 6,431 | 7,207 |
| Productivity (tons per hectare) | 1.97 | 1.94 | 1.67 | 2.14 | 2.23 |

(Source: Nguyen Sinh Cuc, *Thuc Trang Nong Nghiep, Nong Thon Va Nong Dan Viet Nam 1976-1990* [Vietnam's agriculture from 1976-1990], 1991: p.8)

Ben Kerkvliet's study of the north showed that due to everyday politics regarding land, labor, and harvest, staple food production there decreased from 1974 to 1980. In particular, paddy production fell by 20 percent; and the staple food per capita decreased from 276 kilograms in 1974 to 215 kilograms in 1980. Moreover, the performance of collective organizations deteriorated during 1976-1980 and many could not meet tax and other obligations to state agencies.²⁵⁸

In general, Vietnam's agriculture and staple food production stagnated in the period of 1976-1980. The country could not meet many of the targets in the government's 1976-1980 five-year plan. Staple food production, for example, reached only 68.5 percent of the target. Food production could not meet needs of consumption and inputs for industry. Vietnam had to increase the food imports from 1.2 million tons of food in 1976 to 2.2 tons in 1979.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.174-5.

²⁵⁹ Nguyen Sinh Cuc, *Thuc Trang Nong Nghiep, Nong Thon va Nong Dan Viet Nam 1976-1990* [Vietnam's

Table 4-7 Vietnam's staple food production in 1976-1980

| | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Staple food production (thousand tons) | 13,400 | 12,579 | 12,255 | 13,986 | 14,382 |
| Staple food per capita (kilograms per people) | 274 | 250 | 237 | 266 | 267 |
| Paddy production (thousand tons) | 11,828 | 10,576 | 9,789 | 11,362 | 11,047 |
| Paddy productivity (tons per hectare) | 2.23 | 1.95 | 1.79 | 2.07 | 2.11 |

(source: Nguyen Sinh Cuc, *Thuc Trang Nong Nghiep, Nong Thon Va Nong Dan Viet Nam 1976-1990* [Vietnam's agriculture from 1976-1990], 1991: p.8)

Vietnam in the late 1970s faced persistent food shortages and widespread hunger that alarmed national leaders.²⁶⁰ Other aspects of the economy also were in bad shape. The growth rate of GDP in industries was -4.7 percent in 1979 and -10.3 percent in 1980. Additionally, from late 1978 Vietnam was at war with Cambodia and from early 1979 it endured armed conflict with China which consumed high levels of the country's resources.²⁶¹

In response to the food crisis, the poor performance of collective organizations and widespread local arrangements of 'illegal contracts' (*khoán chui*) in collectives across Vietnam, VCP leaders released the directive No.100 in January 1981 called for the expansion of new farm arrangements called 'the product contract to individual workers or groups of workers' (*khoán sản phẩm đến nhóm và người lao động*). These arrangements largely approved local practices and marked a significant modification in Vietnam's agrarian policies (discussed in next two chapters).²⁶²

agriculture from 1976-1990], Hanoi, NXB Thống Ke, 1991: p.9.

²⁶⁰ Ibid: p.9; Pham Van Chien, *Lich Su Kinh Te Viet Nam* [History of the Vietnamese economy], Hanoi, NXB Dai Hoc Quoc Gia, 2003: p.159.

²⁶¹ Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.176-177; Pham Van Chien, *Lich Su Kinh Te Viet Nam* [History of the Vietnamese economy], Hanoi, NXB Dai Hoc Quoc Gia, 2003: p. 155-156.

²⁶² BCHTU, DCSVN, 'Chi thi cai tien cong tac khoan, mo rong "khoan san pham den nhom lao dong va nguoi lao dong" trong hop tac xa nong nghiep (13 January 1981)' [Directive on improving the product contract system], in *Chu Truong Chinh Sach Cua Dang, Nha Nuoc Ve Tiep Tuc Doi Moi Va Phat Trien Nong Nghiep Va Nong Thon* [Vietnam's agrarian policies] (BNN&CNT), Hanoi, NXB Nong Nghiep, 1993; Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.184.

Conclusion

One year after launching the collectivization campaign, QN-DN province and provinces of the Central Coast had largely completed the process, while An Giang and the Mekong Delta had brought into collective farming less than one tenth of peasant households and land. In QN-DN, collectivization went fast due mainly to weak peasant resistance and strong local cadre commitment. Collectivization in An Giang and the Mekong Delta faced many difficulties because of strong peasant resistance and inadequate local cadre commitment. Therefore, the extent of collectivization depended largely on the socio-economic conditions of each region. Villagers in QN-DN in 1970s, like their counterparts in the north during 1959-1961, were living in extremely difficult conditions within corporate communities and had few non-farming opportunities. Villagers' main concern was subsistence and survival. Moreover, the strong local authorities who were insisting on implementing state policies were ready to impose or threatened to impose heavy sanctions on non-compliers. Therefore, to avoid disadvantages, many decided to join collectives though many did not believe the benefits of collective farming. Another factor was that QN-DN authorities earned a fair degree of legitimacy thanks to ending the war and carrying out previous land reforms. These achievements made peasants more inclined to comply with official policy. Meanwhile, peasants in An Giang were better off and lived in diverse socio-economic structures. Market relations and individual land tenure had been well established. Moreover, "weaker" and less legitimate local authorities who were hesitant and incompetent to forcefully carry out socialist agricultural transformation enlarged the scope for villagers to evade the state policies. Living in such conditions, An Giang villagers tended and were able to resist or evade agrarian projects which were unattractive or unprofitable to them. In other words, they had more economic power and more options to resist and evade collective farming, which they saw as inferior to their previous farming.

However, authorities in QN-DN and An Giang had faced similar difficulties in tackling everyday peasant practices and cadre problems which were at odds with the requirements of collective farming. During 1978-1980 collective organizations became sites in which peasants struggled for their survival and livelihood and local cadres took advantage of their power to benefit themselves. Despite authorities in both regions putting great effort into correcting peasants' and cadres' 'negative practices', those behaviors increased.

Kerkvliet's study on northern collectives showed that everyday peasant politics, which was at odds with what authorities thought, could significantly affect the performance of collective farming.²⁶³ This was also true in both QN-DN and An Giang provinces during 1976-1980. Despite differences in form and degree, these everyday peasant and local cadre practices largely contributed to the poor performance of collective farming in both provinces.

Like their counterparts in northern collectives, peasants in QN-DN tried to maximize the number of work-points rather than production. Meanwhile, peasants in An Giang tended to evade collective farming and focused more on outside jobs to make a living. As a result, food production in QN-DN, An Giang, the Central Coast and the Mekong Delta fell short of what the authorities expected.

At the national level, despite VCP's leaders carrying out several campaigns to improve the collective organizations in the north as well as in the south, the performance of collective organizations and agriculture fell short of what national leaders expected. By the late 1970s, faced with a staple food production crisis and stagnated agriculture, national leaders finally approved previous 'illegal' local farm arrangements, which marked a new phase of Vietnam's agriculture.

²⁶³ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.28.

Chapter 5 COLLECTIVIZATION AND LAND REFORM UNDER THE PRODUCT CONTRACT SYSTEM 1981-1988

Introduction

From 1981-1988, product contracts were the backbone of collective organizations in Vietnam and especially so in the south. The party thought the product contract was not a departure from collective farming but rather an improvement to it. Under VCP's directive No.100 (January 1981), collective organizations were asked to continually perfect the existing three contracts system by more strictly applying the rules of reward and punishment at the brigade level. At the same time, collective members were given more responsibility to manage and control farm-work. This enhanced modification was called 'the product contract to groups of workers and individual workers' (*khoán sản phẩm đến nhóm và người lao động*).¹

This will discuss how authorities in QN-DN and An Giang adopted and extended product contracts; and how collectivization and land redistribution progressed, especially in An Giang in the Mekong Delta. It also examines how authorities in both regions coped with obstacles to their efforts.

Adopting product contracts

According to directive No.100, in order to make product contracts each brigade divided collective land among peasant households according to the number and capacity of workers (primary workers and secondary workers). Usually each household received several small fields and a quota (*mức khoán*) of how much each field should produce. Frequently the quota

¹ BCHTU, DCSVN, 'Chi thi cải tiến công tác khoán, mở rộng khoán sản phẩm đến nhóm lao động và người lao động trong hợp tác xã nông nghiệp (13 January 1981)' [Directive on improving the product contract system], in *Chu Truong Chinh Sách Cua Dang, Nha Nuoc Ve Tiep Tuc Doi Moi Va Phat Trien Nong Nghiep Va Nong Thon* [Vietnam's agrarian policies] (BNN&CNT), Hanoi, NXB Nông Nghiệp, 1993.

was 10-15 percent more than the average production during the previous three to five years.² Collective leaders also determined which phases of farm-work should be done collectively or individually. Farm-work was often divided into eight major phases; individuals were responsible for three: planting (*cây trồng*), tending (*chăm sóc*) and harvesting (*thu hoạch*) which closely affected the end product (*sản phẩm cuối cùng*). The remaining phases, considered 'technically complicated', were preparing the land, providing seeds, ensuring irrigating, fertilizing, and preventing and controlling diseases. Specialized teams and brigades did these tasks collectively.

Under the product contract system, the income of collective members was supposed to come from two main sources: work-points earned in collective work and income from the amount each household produced beyond the quota. According to VCP leaders, using the economic incentive of earning from produce beyond the quota, the product contract system would motivate peasants to work enthusiastically and productively, utilize land, labor and production tools in order to increase productivity and yield and enlarge their contributions to the collectives and the state. Besides this, VCP leaders expected that if implemented correctly, the product contract system would strengthen and perfect collective farming.

The following sections examine how the system was adopted in QN-DN and An Giang.

QN-DN in the Central Coast

Soon after the issue of directive No.100, QN-DN leaders held meetings to discuss product contracts and prepare a directive to guide local authorities. The directive urged each district in QN-DN to select one collective with which to experiment with product contracts on paddy

² Le Thanh Nghi, *Cải Tiến Công Tác Khoan Mò Rong Khoan Sản Phẩm Để Thúc Đẩy Sản Xuất Công Cộng Hợp Tác Xã Nông Nghiệp* [Improving the product contract to solidify collectives], Hanoi, NXB Sự Thật, 1981: p.64-5; Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.193.

fields. To avoid any deviation, it warned that the product contract policy was not to redistribute collective land to farm individually or to make a 'blank contract' (*khoán trắng*). 'Blank contract' means that after redistributing land to households, a collective allows peasants to do all phases of farming but still charges them the quota, fees and funds. The aim was to strengthen collective farming, facilitate production, increase labor productivity, improve 'new production relations' and better harmonize the interests of the state, collectives and individuals. The directive also outlined five principles with which local authorities had to conform in implementing the policy. First, each collective was required to manage and control firmly the collectivized means of production (land, farm tools, draft animals, fertilizers and so on); no collective was allowed to return the collectivized means of production to members. Second, the collective was required to manage and monitor labor. Third, the collective had to make a production plan based on the district plan. Fourth, the collective had to control the end-product and distribute it in a unified and correct way. Finally, the collective had to facilitate collective mastery of members in management and production.³

According to a QN-DN newspaper account, by May 1981 15 collectives experimented with product contracts. The performance of these collectives reportedly improved significantly. Collective members' responsibility for tending paddy fields had been enhanced in an 'unprecedented way'. 'Everyone was daily and nightly concerned about how to exceed the quota'. Peasants usually worked on their contracted rice fields, even on the 30th of lunar December, one day before the *Tết* (Vietnam's New Year festival). Second, collectives had cultivated the fields fully and on time, prepared land properly, transplanted paddy according to the right techniques, weeded assiduously and so on. Third, members had improved

³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Ban ve cong tac khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong trong san xuat nong nghiep' [Discussing about the product contract], 18 March 1981; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Huyen Hoa Vang lam thu viec khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong' [Hoa Vang district experiments with the product contract], 8 April 1981.

agricultural intensification on contracted fields; and collective members had used much more manure on their paddy fields than previously. Many of them bought extra chemical fertilizers from the free markets to supplement their contracted paddy fields. Fourth, staple food production, labor productivity and yield had increased substantially. For example, the time of transplanting was shortened to half of that in the previous work-points system. In the six collectives adopting product contracts, the yields increased by 40 percent. Meanwhile, the yields in collectives using three-contracts-system (old management method) increased only 15 percent. Finally, all of the three interests (the state, the collective and individuals) had been enlarged. In general, according to the report, collectives with product contracts had performed better because their members put more effort into tending the fields; even old and young people and those who previously had not participated in collective work now were eager to labor on the contracted fields of their households.⁴

Excited with the good performance of collectives adopting product contracts, in early July 1981 QN-DN provincial chairman Pham Duc Nam called for intensifying the adoption of product contracts. He asserted that the product contract was correct policy which met collective members' aspirations and needs. So, collective members whole heartedly responded to the policy, which helped enhance further collectives' economic performance. Besides contributing to an increase of 40 percent in paddy productivity, he argued, the product contract helped strengthen collective organizations, especially those on the edge of collapsing. In addition, the product contract helped improve collective management and fought against negativism rather than reviving peasants' consciousness of individual farming, as some critics worried.⁵

Finding that product contracts on paddy fields had achieved good results, in August

⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Qua cac hop ta xa nong nghiep lam thu viec khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong' [An evaluation of the performance of collectives adopting the product contract], 23 May 1981.

⁵ Pham Duc Nam, 'Tich cuc tuc hien khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep' [Be positive in implementing the product contract], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 1 July 1981.

1981 QN-DN leaders called for expanding the use of them to secondary crop fields. They urged collectives to retrieve secondary crop land, which had been previously lent to peasants, in order to implement product contracts.⁶

By the end of July 1981, 165 out of 241 collectives in QN-DN had adopted product contracts; in Dai Loc and Hoa Vang districts all collectives had implemented the policy. By the end of the winter-spring 1981-1982 all collectives in QN-DN had completed the adoption of product contracts.⁷

In Thang Binh district, the implementation of product contracts also went quickly. By October 1981 all collectives in the district had adopted product contracts.⁸ Villagers in Hien Loc recalled that Binh Lanh collective adopted the product contract in 1981. Under product contracts there, peasants were in charge of three phrases (*ba khâu*) somewhat different from the national policy: plowing and harrowing, planting and tending, and harvesting. The collective teams supplied seedlings, applied fertilizers, irrigated the fields, controlled and prevented diseases, and monitored distribution after the harvest.⁹

The implementation of product contracts in many other provinces of the Central Coast and the Central Highlands was also swift. In the winter-spring of 1980-1981, 341 out of 1,101 collectives in the Central Coast and 105 out of 285 collectives in the Central Highlands began to experiment with them.¹⁰ Moreover, by July 1981, 53.8 percent of collectives in these regions had adopted product contracts. At a conference on collectives in the Central Coast and Central Highlands in July 1981, party researchers argued that the product contract policy

⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham tren dat mau de lam vu dong xuan tot nhât' [Making contracts on secondary crop land], 15 August 1981.

⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket 3 nam thuc hien khoan san pham den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep (1981-1984)' [Summing up three years of 1981-1984 implementing the product contract], 6 July 1985.

⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cac hop tac xa o Tam Ky, Thang Binh, Tien Phuoc can ban hoan thanh khoan san pham vu dong xuan' [Collectives in Tam Ky, Thang Binh and Tien Phuoc have completed the adoption of the product contract in the winter-spring crop], 28 October 1981.

⁹ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh commune, 19 October 2005.

¹⁰ BQLHTXNNTU (Ban Quan Ly Hop Tac Xa Nong Nghiep Trung Uong), *Khoan San Pham Trong Hop Tac Xa va Tap Doan San Xuat Nong Nghiep* [The product contract in collectives and production units], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1982: p.65.

met the aspirations of people and local cadres so it significantly contributed to increased productivity in the collectives of the two regions. Local 'negative practices' were also significantly reduced. At the conference, Nguyen Ngoc Triu, a Vietnam government agricultural minister also asserted that product contracts played an important role in strengthening collectives and facilitating agricultural production. He called for completing the adoption of product contracts in these two regions by the winter-spring of 1981-1982.¹¹ Therefore, within one year almost all collectives in the Central Coast had implemented product contracts.

Product contracts immediately enhanced the performance of collective farming and boosted agricultural output in QN-DN. According to the provincial chairman of QN-DN, they helped to unleash and facilitate peasants' production capacity, to better utilize land and other means of production and agricultural inputs, to strengthen collective organizations, and to, especially, save many collectives on the edge of collapse.¹² To illustrate these improvements, a QN-DN newspaper in 1981 posted several articles praising the positive effects of product contracts. Among these was a peasant's letter which criticized old farming arrangements and praised the new product contract system in his village. He wrote that previously, under the work-points system, villagers merely pretended to work. As detailed extensively in chapter 4, when plowing, people did one line and skipped another. When carrying manure to the fields, they dropped a lot along the road. They did not take care of collective production but accumulated as many work-points as possible. But now under the product contracts system, everyone took care of their contracted fields. They plowed their land properly. They transplanted and spread fertilizers and manure according to the right techniques. Many of

¹¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi khoan san pham trong hop tac xa nong nghiep ven bien trung trung bo va cac tinh tay nguyen' [A conference on the product contract in the Central Coast and Central Highlands collectives], 8 July 1981.

¹² Pham Duc Nam, 'Phat huy thang loi buoc dau mo rong khoan san pham cuoi cung o tat ca cac hop tac xa nong nghiep ca tinh' [Extending the product contract to the rest of the collectives], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 23 September 1981.

them increased the use of fertilizers and manure. All of these showed that villagers wanted to produce beyond the quota.¹³

QN-DN newspapers also reported several typical cases of collectives whose performance was significantly improved thanks to the adoption of product contracts. Tam Ngoc collective in Tam Ky district was an example. The performance of collective farming during the work-points system was very bad; in the spring-summer of 1980 average productivity of paddy was 1.1 tons per hectare. So, the collective was not able to fulfill its food obligation to the state, rather it owed 8 tons of paddy. In the spring-summer of 1981, collective leaders adopted product contracts and set a quota of 1.2 tons per hectare. Thanks to product contracts, paddy productivity increased to 2.0 tons per hectare, exceeding the quota of 0.8 ton per hectare. So the income of collective members increased; the collective was able to pay its previous debt but also to fulfill its state obligation of 42 tons of paddy. The reason for the increase in paddy productivity was, the article argued, mainly the product contract system that encouraged members to care for their contracted fields more than ever before.¹⁴

Another example was Dai Minh collective in Dai Loc district. Under the previous work-points system, the collective had faced many difficulties in managing production and improving the living conditions of members. For example, in the winter-spring of 1979-1980, unable to manage and monitor production productively, collective leaders decided to redistribute 'secretly' collective fields and make a 'blank contract' to households. Provincial leaders later knew and criticized this arrangement as 'lending land and receiving rent' (*phát canh thu tô*). In the winter-spring of 1980-1981, the collective began to implement the three-contract system. However, the situation had not improved because 'collective members still lacked enthusiasm' (*thiếu phấn khởi*). As a result, paddy productivity reached only 2.2 tons

¹³ QN-DN newspaper, 'Thu xa vien: cach khoan moi o que toi' [Member's letter: new method of contracts in my village], 4 July 1981.

¹⁴ QN-DN newspaper, 'Mot vai cach van dung khoan san pham cuoi cung ve cay lua o hop tac xa Tam Ngoc' [Application of the product contract for rice fields in Tam Ngoc collectives], 12 September 1981.

per hectare, falling short of the expected target of 3.4 tons. However, after the collective adopted product contracts in the winter-autumn of 1981, despite inadequate water, paddy productivity increased to 4.2 tons per hectare, the highest figure the collective had ever had.¹⁵

In general, QN-DN newspaper accounts showed that under product contracts, the performance of collective farming in the province had significantly improved. For the first time since reunification, in 1981 the province had produced nearly 500,000 tons of staple food in 1981, which was close to the province's own consumption.¹⁶ Staple food production in 1982 reached 525,000 tons of paddy equivalents. Staple food per capita increased from 303 kilograms in 1979 to 342 kilograms in 1982.¹⁷ Kerkvliet's study of the northern collectives also showed similar improvements; thanks to product contracts the staple food production of the north had increased in 1981 and 1982, averaging a 24 percent increase over 1980.¹⁸

Table 5-1 Rice production in QN-DN from 1979-1982

| year | area (ha) | yield (tons) | Annual growth of yield (%) |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1979 | 124,739 | 319,917 | |
| 1980 | 123,329 | 310,742 | -2.87% |
| 1981 | 122,734 | 332,211 | 6.91% |
| 1982 | 123,575 | 347,572 | 4.62% |

(Source: *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien bien san luong lua cua ca tinh qua cac nam' [Paddy production over the past years], 14 September 1983.)

¹⁵ Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy, 'May kinh nghiem khoan san pham cuoi cung cua Dai Minh' [Some experiences from using the product contract in Dai Minh], in *QN-DN newspapers*, 19 August 1981; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hop tac xa Dai Minh khoan san pham den nguoi lao dong' [Dai Minh collective has adopted the product contract], 4 July 1981.

¹⁶ *QN-DN newspapers*, 'Mat tran san xuat nong nghiep: Thanh tuu cua nam 1981 va nhien vu vu dong xuan 1981-1982' [The achievements of year 1981 and the on-going tasks for the winter-spring of 1981-1982], 28 October 1981; *QN-DN newspapers*, 'Tong ket san xuat nong nghiep nam 1981 va phat dong thi dua gianh vu dong xuan 1981-1982 thang loi toan dien, vuot bac' [Summing up agricultural production in 1981 and calling for high achievements in the winter-spring of 1981-1982], 4 November 1981.

¹⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien bien san luong lua ca tinh qua cac nam' [Paddy production over the past years], 14 September 1983.

¹⁸ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.194.

A few seasons after adopting product contracts, however, collective farming in QN-DN started to falter. Although QN-DN leaders made great efforts to strengthen them, collectives became weaker. Staple food production in QN-DN stagnated, especially during 1985-1988 and the living conditions of collective members deteriorated. Villagers in Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villages recalled that the product contracts improved the performance of collective farming in the first few seasons, but then their living conditions went down because they were unable to produce beyond the quota, a serious problem discussed in the next chapter.¹⁹

An Giang in the Mekong Delta

Directive No.100 helped to strengthen existing collective organizations and to accelerate collectivization and land redistribution in the Mekong Delta, which had stagnated since the late 1970s.²⁰ The fifth party congress officially changed the target for completing collectivization in the Southern Region (*Nam Bộ*, which includes the Mekong Delta and Southeast Region) from the end of the 1976-1980 five year plan to the end of the 1981-1985 five year plan.²¹ The following sections will discuss the process of adopting product contracts and accelerating collectivization and land redistribution in An Giang.

Adopting the product contracts

The Southern Region began to experiment with product contracts in summer-autumn of 1981, a season later than their counterparts in the Central Coast.²² In mid-1981, An Giang province leaders called for product contracts trials in the two production units in Binh Phu commune

¹⁹ Interviews, Hien Loc and Thanh Yen, October 2004 and October-December 2005.

²⁰ Nguyen Duc Binh, 'Tiep tuc suy nghi ve khoan san pham trong nong nghiep' [Some ideas about the product contract] in *Khoan San Pham Che Do Quan Ly Moi Trong Nong Nghiep* [The product contract and new management methods in agriculture], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1983: p.9.

²¹ DCSVN, *Van kien Dai Hoi Dai Bieu Toan Quoc Lan Thu V*, Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1982: p.87.

²² BQLHTXNNTU (Ban Quan Ly Hop Tac Xa Nong Nghiep Trung Uong), *Khoan San Pham Trong Hop Tac Xa va Tap Doan San Xuat Nong Nghiep* [The product contract in collectives and production units], Hanoi, NXB Su That, 1982: p.65.

of Chau Thanh district.²³ However, by the winter-spring season of 1981-1982, 180 out of 394 production units and 5 out of 6 collectives in the province had adopted product contracts.²⁴

Like their counterparts in QN-DN, the adoption of product contracts had improved collective farming performance in production units in An Giang. Members of production units and collectives were 'enthusiastic' with the new contract system because of their increased income.²⁵ Some members who had previously doubted collective farming now had confidence in it and 'actively worked the contracted fields'. Many members 'spontaneously dug channels to ensure sufficient water for their paddy fields and overcome the fertilizer shortage by using manure or extra compost bought from the free markets'.²⁶ Some collective members who had been fed up with the work-points system and had dropped out now returned to receive contracted fields. As a man in production unit No.3 in Tay Khanh B hamlet (Long Xuyen) commented,

I had previously neglected collective farming and left out because I saw people mistrusting each other on every task (*nghĩ hẹ nhau*). I, a primary laborer, tried to work hard while other households sent their young children to work for farm's sake. Now under product contracts, I will not neglect farming any more.²⁷

According to An Giang newspaper accounts, the product contract brought the following achievements. First, food production increased mainly because the new contracts made peasants 'enthusiastic and eager to work' (*tự giác lao động*). Paddy productivity in collective farming increased from 2-3 tons per hectare in the winter-spring of 1980-1981 to 4-

²³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phong trào hợp tác hóa An Giang từng bước củng cố đi lên' [Collectivization is gradually progressing], 18 November 1981; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Ra sức phấn đấu đưa phong trào cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp ở tỉnh ta tiến lên một bước mới' [Do the best to take collectivization in An Giang one step forwards], 18 November 1981.

²⁴ Ban Nông Nghiệp Tỉnh Ủy An Giang, 'Thắng lợi của việc khoán sản phẩm trong nông nghiệp ở tỉnh nhà' [The victory of the product contract in An Giang] in *An Giang newspaper*, 4 July 1982: p.3; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Kết quả tốt đẹp của khoán sản phẩm trong nông nghiệp' [Good results of the product contract], 23 May 1982: p.1.

²⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phân khởi với cách khoán mới' [Enthusiasm with the product contract], 14 March 1982.

²⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vụ lúa khoán đầu tiên ở thị xã Long Xuyên' [The first contracted rice crop in Long Xuyen town], 14 March 1982.

²⁷ Cited from *An Giang newspaper*, 'Vụ khoán ở tập đoàn 3 Tay Khanh B' [The contracted crops in production unit No.3 in Tay Khanh B], 14 April 1982: p.3.

4.5 tons per hectare in the winter-spring of 1981-1982. For example, in Cho Moi district, paddy productivity increased from 2.5-3 tons per hectare to 6-8 tons in the winter-spring of 1981-1982.

Second, the living-conditions and income of collective members increased accordingly. The amount of paddy that each hectare of rice fields produced beyond the quota ranged from 300 kilograms to 1.5 tons. In Cho Moi district, besides the extra quota per hectare was from 1 to 2 tons, the value of work-points increased from 1.2-5 kilograms of paddy under work-points system to 10 kilograms of paddy in the winter-spring of 1981-1982.

Finally, product contracts helped improve and strengthen collective farming in production units and collectives. Under the new contracts:

Land, inputs and labor had been better used. The incidents of abandoning land, laziness, foot-dragging, dropping-out and embezzlement had been significantly reduced. Many production units and collectives had fulfilled two-way-exchange contracts (*hợp đồng hai chiều*) with the state, paying irrigation fees and old debts, food procurement (mobilization) and sales (*huy động lương thực*) to the state increased to the amount of 1.2-2 tons per hectare.²⁸

Satisfied with these achievements, provincial leaders urged the expansion of product contracts. By the winter-spring of 1982-1983, 896 production units (accounting for 86 percent of the total) and 6 collectives (100 percent) in An Giang had adopted product contracts.²⁹

In Cho Moi district, the adoption of product contracts was also rapid. By the winter-

²⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham cuoi cung den nhom va nguoi lao dong, mot hinh thuc thich hop mang lai nhieu ket qua to lon' [The product contract is suitable and brings about good results], 30 May 1982; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Ket qua tot dep cua khoan san pham' [The good results of the product contract], 23 May 1982: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Huyen Cho Moi ap dung khoan san pham co ket qua' [The product contract in Cho Moi brings about good results], 9 May 1982: p.3; Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy An Giang, 'Thang loi cua viec khoan san pham trong nong nghiep o tinh nha' [The victory of the product contract in An Giang] in *An Giang newspaper*, 4 July 1982: p.3.

²⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cac tap doan san xuat, hop tac xa tien vao vu dong-xuan 1982-1983 voi nhieu khi the moi' [Production units and collectives entered into the winter-spring of 1982-1983 with new enthusiasim], 2 January 1983.

spring of 1981-1982, 39 out of 40 production units had the system.³⁰ The four production units in Long Dien B took up product contracts in the winter-spring of 1981-1982. Villagers there recalled that in order to take up these contracts, collectivized land in the four production units had to be randomly (*bóc thăm*) divided equally among each household's primary worker. Each primary worker received one *công* of contracted land (0.1 hectare) and a subsidiary worker received a half *công* of land.³¹ An Giang newspaper in May 1982 reported that in the winter-spring of 1981-1982, the production units in Long Dien B of Cho Moi district had all produced a bumper harvest; the average productivity of paddy was 6 tons per hectare. In explaining the increased performance, the article quoted one peasant: 'frankly speaking, under product contracts, every member took care of the paddy fields, so every member had a bumper harvest. I had never seen abundant harvests like these since the beginning of production units!'³²

A former cadre of production unit No.1 commented that product contracts had saved some production units from collapse and facilitated collectivization in the Southern Region. The main reason was peasants' resistance to collective farming under product contracts was weaker than it had been to the work-points system.³³ However, like their counterparts in QN-DN, a few seasons later, collective farming in An Giang began to flounder and became a site of struggle between the state, cadres and peasants over land, labor and other resources.

Collectivization under product contracts

At the Fifth Party Congress in March 1982, VCP leaders acknowledged the failure of socialist transformation in the previous five years and outlined a new socio-economic five

³⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Huyen Cho Moi khoan san pham co ket qua' [The product contract brings about good results in Cho Moi], 9 May 1982: p.3.

³¹ Interview, Long Dien B, June to August 2005.

³² *An Giang newspaper*, 'Ket qua khoan o Long Dien B' [The results of the product contract in Long Dien B], 2 May 1982.

³³ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005.

year plan 1981-1985. Party leaders still emphasized the need for moving to large-scale production and regarded development of agriculture a top priority.³⁴ From the Fifth Party Congress onwards, the Southern Region had intensified both collectivization and land redistribution.³⁵

Like many provinces in the Southern Region, An Giang's authorities since 1982 had focused on carrying out collectivization and land readjustment. From 1982-1985 collectivization in An Giang was more extensive and faster than in previous periods. For example, from 1979-1981 Phu Tan district established only 30 production units. However, using product contracts, the district established 40 production units during the first six months of 1982. The main reason for this acceleration was that peasants did not resist as strongly as before. In some areas, some peasants even mobilized each other to form production units.³⁶ A former cadre of An Giang Committee for Agricultural Transformation asserted that product contracts made it easier to mobilize peasants into collective organizations because peasants were allowed to farm on their own land.³⁷

An Giang newspaper accounts showed that since the issue of product contracts, collectivization in the province moved more quickly than before. At the end of 1981, An Giang had only 384 production units and 6 collectives accounting for less than 10 percent of peasant households and agricultural land. A year later, however, An Giang had 1,044 production units and 6 collectives, accounting for 34 percent of total peasant households and 19.2 percent of agricultural land. So, during 1982 the province had established 660 production units, double the number of production units set up between 1978-1981.³⁸

³⁴ Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990: p.126.

³⁵ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Mien Nam Viet Nam* [Land revolution in southern Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.193.

³⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phu Tan tien nhanh trong phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Collectivization in Phu Tan advanced fast], 8 August 1982.

³⁷ Interview, Long Xuyen, 6 June 2005.

³⁸ Ban Tuyen Huan Tinh Uy An Giang, 'Thanh tích cai tao nong nghiep cua tinh An Giang' [The achievements

Collectivization in An Giang and many other provinces of the Southern Region began to slow down during the period 1982-1983. During the first ten months of 1983 An Giang established only 164 production units.³⁹ The reasons for this were unclear. It seemed that a shortage of cadres was one important factor. Besides this, from 1982-1983 authorities put much more effort into strengthening the newly-established collective organizations and training cadres rather than expanding the number of new production units.⁴⁰ In explaining the slowing of collectivization in the province in 1983, a former Cho Moi district official argued that after seeing collective farming's unpleasant outcome, the provincial party wanted to halt its process. Moreover, in the early 1980s many northern cadres who came to provide support for agricultural transformation returned home on expiry of official duty or conflict with local cadres.⁴¹

According to party leaders, the main reason for slow collectivization in the Southern Region from 1981-1983 was that local authorities in the region had not carried out land redistribution completely. Therefore, in May 1983 the Central Secretary Committee issued directive No.19-CT/TW (3 May 1983) urging the Southern Region to complete land redistribution by 1983 and accelerate the socialist transformation of agriculture.⁴²

In September 1983 An Giang newspaper reported that collectivization in the province had been extended 'slowly and not widely in all districts. There were still 28 communes where no production unit had been established'. So, provincial leaders called for intensifying agricultural transformation again and urged the completion of collectivization by 1985 as a

of agricultural transformation in An Giang] in *An Giang newspaper*, 2 January 1983.

³⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Day manh cai tao quan he san xuat nong nghiep' [Speeding up agricultural transformation], 25 September 1983: p.2.

⁴⁰ *An Giang newspapers* in 1983 often called for strengthening production units and collectives, such as 'Toan tinh day manh cung co va phat trien tap doan san xuat' [Intensifying solidification and extension of product units], 16 June 1983; 'Cac dia phuong tap trung cong tac cung co, nang chat va phat trien tap doan san xuat' [Local authorities must focus on solidifying, improving and extending production units], 7 August 1983; 'Xa luan: cung co, nang chat khau can bo quan ly trong cac htx, tdsx va tdksx', 7 August 1983.

⁴¹ Interview, Cho Moi, 18 June 2005.

⁴² DCSVN, 'Chi Thi Cua Ban Bi Thu so 19/CT-TW (3 May 1983)' [Secretariat's directive No.19] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 44, 1983*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2005: p.190.

national target.⁴³ In October 1983 the provincial party committee released an urgent acting plan (*chương trình hành động*) pushing each district to determine the main causes of slow collectivization and set about reversing it. Provincial leaders also insisted that some key districts such as Long Xuyen, Cho Moi and Chau Doc had to complete collectivization by 1984.⁴⁴

According to a study, from 1984-1985, collectivization in An Giang was 'extended hurriedly'.⁴⁵ The ratio of collectivized land per total agricultural land jumped from 20.6 percent in October in 1983 to 30 percent in June 1984 and 47.6 percent in February 1985.

Table 5-2 Extending collectivization in An Giang, 1982-1985

| Time | Number of production units | Number of inter-production units | Number of collectives | Percentage of agricultural land collectivized | Percentage of peasant households collectivized |
|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| Dec-81 | 384 | 0 | 6 | 7% | n/a |
| Dec-82 | 1044 | 2 | 6 | 19.16% | 34% |
| Oct-83 | 1216 | 57 | 6 | 20.61% | 42.08% |
| Jun-84 | 1633 | 106 | 7 | 29.7 % | 56.8% |
| Feb-85 | 1957 | 116 | 7 | 47.6% | n/a |
| May-85 | 2326 | 121 | 7 | 80% | 77.13% |
| Nov-85 | 2607 | 132 | 7 | 93% | 86% |

(Sources: *An Giang newspapers* (see footnotes)).⁴⁶

By February 1985, the province was half way towards completing collectivization. To

⁴³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Day manh cai tao quan he san xuat nong nghiep' [Speeding up agricultural transformation], 25 September 1983: p.2.

⁴⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi tinh uy de ra chuong trinh hanh dong tu nay den day nhung thang nam 1984' [Provincial party committee meeting to make a plan of action from now to 1984], 23 October 1983; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Day manh cai tao quan he san xuat nong nghiep' [Speeding up agricultural transformation], 25 September 1983: p.2.

⁴⁵ To Thanh Tam, 'Van de ruong dat va hop tac hoa nong nghiep o An Giang' [Land and collectivization issues in An Giang], in *Thong Tin Ly Luan* (Vien Mac-Lennin), August 1990 (8): p.18.

⁴⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Thanh tich cai tao nong nghiep nam 1982 cua An Giang' [The achievements of agricultural transformation in An Giang], 2 January 1983; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Toan tinh hien co 1216 TDSX, 57 lien tap doan va 70 tap doan may nong nghiep' [An Giang now has 1,216 production units, 57 inter-production units and 70 machinery units], 23 October 1983: p.2; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Khap noi trong tinh' [Everywhere in the province], 12 July 1984: p.4; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Toan tinh thanh lap duoc 1957 TDSX, tap the hoa 106,798 ha' [An Giang has 1957 production units, collectivizing 106,798 hectares], 28 February 1985: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Dua phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep cua tinh nha len vung chac' [Advancing collectivization firmly], 7 June 1985: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'An Giang hoan thanh co ban cong tac cai tao nong nghiep' [An Giang has completed agricultural transformation], 22 November 1985: p.1.

achieve full collectivization to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Vietnam's reunification, provincial leaders pushed even harder again collectivization towards the total. As a result, by the end of May 1985, collectivization accounted for 80 percent of agricultural land, a minimum index for basic collectivization.⁴⁷ Still, unsatisfied with this achievement, in July, the province's Communist Party's Committee issued directive No.17-CT (23 July 1985) urging even more rapid take up of collectivization. By November 1985, An Giang had established 2,607 production units, 132 inter-production units and 7 collectives, accounting for 93 percent of the land and 86 percent of peasant households.⁴⁸

Collectivization in many other provinces of the Mekong Delta was also extensive during the period 1984-1985. For example, by early 1984 Tien Giang province had established 2,515 production units and 27 collectives which collectivized 85,953 hectares of land (77.7 percent) and 143,158 peasant households (78.2 percent).⁴⁹ By May 1985 Cuu Long province had established 17 collectives and 4,721 production units which accounted for 76 percent of agricultural land and peasant households. Besides these achievements, 'there were still many communes in which no production units, even no production solidarity teams had been established'. However, by 20 October 1985, Cuu Long province announced the completion of collectivization by and large. In particular, the province had established 18 collectives and 5,337 production units accounting for 97 percent of peasant households and 94 percent of agricultural land.⁵⁰ Similarly, by June 1985, Hau Giang province had established 6,983 production units and 36 collectives accounting for 86 percent of

⁴⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Dua phong trao hop tac tac hoa nong nghiep cua tinh nha len vung chac' [Advancing collectivization firmly], 7 June 1985: p.1.

⁴⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'An Giang hoan thanh co ban cong tac cai tao nong nghiep' [An Giang has completed agricultural transformation], 22 Nov 1985: p.1; To Thanh Tam, 'Van de ruong dat va hop tac hoa nong nghiep o An Giang' [Land and collectivization issues in An Giang], in *Thong Tin Ly Luan* (Vien Mac-Lenin), August 1990 (8): p.18.

⁴⁹ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Mien Nam Viet Nam* [Land revolution in southern Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.197.

⁵⁰ Nguyen Thanh Nam, *Viec Giai QUYET Van De Ruong Dat Trong Qua Trinh Di Len San Xuat Lon o Dong Bang Song Cuu Long 1975-1993* [Dealing with land problems in the process of transforming agriculture into large-scale farming in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1995] (PhD thesis), TP. Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH&NV, 2000: p.78.

agricultural land and 85 percent of peasant households. By 30 September 1985 Hau Giang announced the completion of collectivization in most of the province too. Specifically, the province had established 7,420 production units, 219 inter-production units and 36 collectives which accounted for 93 percent of land and 94 percent of peasant households.⁵¹

In general, by early 1984, the whole Southern Region had established 20,341 production units and 296 collectives which accounted for 38 percent of agricultural land and 45 percent of peasant households.⁵² Insisting on the rapid up take of collective structures during the period 1984-1985, by late 1985 the Southern Region, including the Mekong Delta, had largely completed collectivization. However, a former cadre of BCTNNMN recalled the hasty way in which provinces in the Southern Region collectivized 'just signing the names' (*đánh trống ghi tên*) in order to complete collectivization by 1985. Therefore, the quality of collective organizations was poor.⁵³

Cho Moi district of An Giang province

During the period 1978-1981 Cho Moi had established only 40 production units. However, from 1982-1984, by using product contracts, district authorities were able to accelerate collectivization extensively in the district. For example, in 1982 Cho Moi established more 122 extra production units and 7 inter-production units; by the end of 1984 district authorities announced the completion of collectivization (Cho Moi was considered the first district of An Giang province to complete collectivization). Specially, the district established 411 production units and 29 inter-production units, which accounted for 86 percent of land and 78.3 percent of peasant households. At a conference summing up Cho Moi's collectivization in April 1985, district leaders applauded product contracts as an important part of mobilizing

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách Mạng Ruộng Đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in southern Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.196.

⁵³ Interview, TP. Ho Chi Minh City, 6 July 2005. Literally, '*đánh trống ghi tên*' means banging drums to get signatures.

peasants into collective organizations.⁵⁴

A former production unit leader in Long Dien B recalled in 1983 how authorities decided to build unit No.10 in his hamlet. In order to do so, authorities came to mark its boundaries (*đóng khung*) and then invited peasant households to join. Local cadres had to visit each household to persuade them to participate. About 70 percent of invited households decided to join'.⁵⁵ A former commune cadre who was in charge of agriculture said,

When establishing production units and readjusting land, some merchant households initially did not join because they could make a living elsewhere. But later they had difficulty in trading because the state tightened control of free markets so they returned, asking for land and joining production units ... In general, those who did not join production units accounted for about 10 percent of households in the commune.⁵⁶

A former Long Dien B cadre recalled authorities announcing the completion of collectivization in late 1984, but many collective organizations had not even started operating. For example, 28 production units and 4 inter-production units in Long Dien B had been formed. But their quality varied and was generally poor (*không đúng tính chất*).⁵⁷ Another former inter-production unit cadre commented that many production units in Cho Moi were not functioning well despite the district being hailed as the first district to complete collectivization.⁵⁸

Peasants in Long Dien B remembered many villagers deciding to join production units in order to keep their land or to receive readjusted land under the product contract system. However, some upper-middle peasants who lost much of their land due to readjustment decided to give up farming and refused to join production units (see more in the

⁵⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Qua hoi nghi cong bao hoan thanh co ban HTH nong nghiep o Cho Moi: Bai hoc gi duoc rut ra?' [Lessons learned from the completion of collectivization in Cho Moi], 15 April 1985.

⁵⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 15 August 2005.

⁵⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 August 2005.

⁵⁷ Interview, 20 June 2005.

⁵⁸ Interview, 3 August 2005.

land readjustment sections).⁵⁹ Asked in 1983 why he decided to join production units with product contracts, a middle peasant who had lost some of his land due to readjustment in 1983 said, 'I was discontented with the policy but could not avoid joining the production unit. Because bureaucratic and subsidized policies were imposed on us, we, citizens, had to obey the state'.⁶⁰ Another middle peasant explained,

We could not help joining the production unit because it managed agricultural materials such as fuel, diesel, fertilizers and pesticides. If we did not join, we could not buy these things and were disadvantaged (*chịu thiệt thòi*). We could not even buy toothpaste [from the state].⁶¹

When interviewed some peasants said that authorities did not allow peasants to farm privately (*làm ăn cá thể*) before 1986. When they marked the production unit boundaries, those who had land within these lines had to join or lose their land. So those who wanted to keep their land and continued farming had to join.⁶² An Giang newspaper in September 1984 reported that some local cadres commanded peasants to 'join the production units or lose their land!' The article commented that coercion was an effective tool for extending collectivization but failed to make them strong.⁶³

In short, from 1982-1985 collectivization in An Giang spread more widely and rapidly than in earlier periods. This was partly because of national party leaders pressing to complete collectivization by 1985. Local cadres in the province and the Mekong Delta exerted themselves to extend collectivization.⁶⁴ They even used heavy measures, like their Central Coast counterparts, to force peasants to join, such as confiscating and collectivizing all peasant land within the boundaries of production units. Also, local authorities

⁵⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, June to August 2005.

⁶⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

⁶¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 20 August 2005.

⁶² Interview, Long Dien B, 20 August 2005; 28 August 2005.

⁶³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: Khan truong nhung vung chac' [Hurry up and be firm in collectivization], 20 September 1984.

⁶⁴ By examining a series of VCP's policies from 1981-1985 such as Directive No.93 (June 1980), two circulars No. 14 (April 1981) and No. 138 (November 1981), directive No.19 (May 1983) and so on, one can see that the party put great emphasis on completing collectivization in the Southern Region.

implemented socialist transformation on trading and industries which narrowed peasant capacity to escape or evade collective farming. Moreover, by using product contracts and allowing peasants to farm on their own land, collectivization did not face much resistance.

The second wave of land readjustment

Along with collectivization was a continuous process of land readjustment in the Southern Region from 1981-1985. In April 1981 VCP leaders released announcement No.14-TB/TW (30 April 1981), which called for 'resolutely and hurriedly implementing the policy of land readjustment in rural areas' of the Southern Region. VCP leaders complained that the landless and land-poor still made up a large proportion of rural population in the Southern Region despite land readjustment.⁶⁵ An investigation into 80 different rural areas in the region in May 1981 showed that the landless and land-poor still occupied 25 percent of peasant households and possessed only 10 percent of land. While rich peasants accounted for 2.42 percent of peasant households, they occupied 7.1 percent of agricultural land.⁶⁶ So, it was essential, party leaders argued, to continue to implement land readjustment policy whose main contents had already been pointed out in the previous directive No.57-CT/TW (November 1978).⁶⁷ Party leaders released circular No.138-TT/TW (11 November 1981) to guide the implementation of product contracts in production units and collectives in the

⁶⁵ DCSVN, 'Thông báo 14-TB/TW, ngày 20 tháng 4 năm 1981: Ket luan cua Ban bi thu tai hoi nghi ban viec xuc tien cong tac cai tao nong nghiep o cac tinh Nam Bo' [Circular No.14 on facilitating agricultural transformation in the Southern Region] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 42, 1981*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2005: p.198-9.

⁶⁶ Nguyen Thanh Nam, *Viec Giai Quyet Van De Ruong Dat Trong Qua Trinh Di Len San Xuat Lon o Dong Bang Song Cuu Long 1975-1993* [Dealing with land problems in the process of transforming agriculture into large-scale farming in the Mekong Delta from 1975-1995] (PhD thesis), TP. Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH&NV, 2000: p.88; Dao Duy Huan, *Cung Co Va Hoan Thien Quan He San Xuat Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Trong Nong Nghiep Tap The Hien Nay o Vung Dong Bang Song Cuu Long* [Solidifying and perfecting socialist production relations in the agriculture of the Mekong Delta] (PhD thesis), Hanoi, Hoc Vien Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1988: p.36; Lam Quang Huyen, *Cach Mang Ruong Dat o Mien Nam Viet Nam* [Land revolution in southern Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1985: p.181.

⁶⁷ DCSVN, 'Thông báo 14-TB/TW, ngày 20 tháng 4 năm 1981: Ket luan cua Ban bi thu tai hoi nghi ban viec xuc tien cong tac cai tao nong nghiep o cac tinh Nam Bo' [Circular No.14 on facilitating agricultural transformation in the Southern Region] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 42, 1981*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2005: p.198-199.

Southern Region. The circular also stressed 'strictly controlling land' in order to make contracts to collective members.⁶⁸

According to BCTNNMN's report, many provinces of the Southern Region again intensified land readjustment (redistribution) which had been almost neglected in 1980 and early 1981. This was response to the announcement No.14-TB/TW (April 1981), the circular No.138-TT/TW (November 1981), and directive No.100 (the product contracts). During 1982 thirteen provinces of the Southern Region had readjusted 54,934.5 hectares. That together with the 247,963 hectares reallocated during 1975-1981 brought the total readjusted area in the Southern Region during 1975-1982 to 302,896 hectares.⁶⁹

Unsatisfied with the results of land readjustment in the Southern Region, in May 1983 VCP leaders issued directive No.19-CT/TW (3 May 1983), which stressed the completion of land readjustment by 1983 and the intensification of collectivization there. The directive reasserted 'socialist agricultural transformation executed class warfare to deal with "who triumphed over whom" between capitalism and socialism'. Therefore, each province had to carry out 'land readjustment positively and completely' by appropriating land that was above the work capacity of each rural capitalist, landlord, rich peasant and upper-middle peasant household to share with the landless and land poor household according to land per person in the commune.⁷⁰ Despite the directive's content being similar to No.57 (November 1978), the language of policy was urgent and emphatic.

According to BCTNNMN's report, after issuing directive No.19, every province in the Southern Region implemented land readjustment vigorously.

[They] were resolute to complete land readjustment by 1983 to meet the target of

⁶⁸ DCSVN, 'Thong tri cua Ban bi thu, so 138-TT/TW ngay 11 thang 11 nam 1981' [Circular No.138] in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap: Tap 42, 1981*, Hanoi, NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2005: p.443.

⁶⁹ BCTNNMN, 'Bao cao tinh hình ruong dat va qua trình dieu chinh ruong dat o nong thon Nam Bo' [Report of land adjustment in the rural Southern Region], TP. Ho Chi Minh, January 1984: p.12, 18.

⁷⁰ DCSVN, 'Chi thi cua Ban Bi Thu, so 19-CT/TW ngay 3 thang 5 nam 1983' in *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap-Tap 42*: p.192.

the central leader policy. In 1983 the Southern Region had readjusted 72,779.8 hectares of land ... [which was] equal to the total amount of land readjustment from 1979-1981. So, by the end of 1983 the whole region had readjusted about 375,677.24 hectares.⁷¹

From 1983-1985, the whole Southern Region had readjusted 186,286 hectares. By late 1985, it had largely completed the process. In total for 1975-1985, 489,183 hectares had been reallocated.⁷²

In assessing land readjustment, the 1984 BCTNNMN report in admitted that it had some mistakes despite great achievements in eliminating rural exploitation, strengthening revolutionary authorities and boosting collectivization. First, land readjustment was uneven across different locations of the Southern Region. For example, some local authorities had carried out land readjustment completely while others had not carried out it well. In many mountainous areas and one-cropping areas, local authorities had not implemented land readjustment at all.

Second, many local authorities had implemented land readjustment hastily without distinguishing among types of land receivers and land givers. They often appropriated land and redistributed it among households equally (*cào bằng*) according to land per worker in the commune. Such land readjustment harmed 'the interests of a large number of middle peasants and caused disunity among peasants and conflicts in rural areas, manifest in peasant's complaints and petitions (*thưa kiện*)'.

[Finally], due to the low level of socialist consciousness, some cadres and party members were not able to distinguish between laborers and exploiters. Some wanted to retain individual farming and exploitative economic activities. Some took advantage of their positions to capture public and readjusted land, good and

⁷¹ BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông dân Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the rural Southern Region], TP. Ho Chi Minh, January 1984: p.18.

⁷² Đào Duy Huan, *Củng Cố Và Hoàn Thiện Quan Hệ Sản Xuất Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Trong Nông Nghiệp Tạp The Hien Nay ở Vùng Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long* [Solidifying and perfecting socialist production relations in the agriculture of the Mekong Delta] (PhD thesis), Hanoi, Học Viện Nguyễn Ái Quốc, 1988: p.37.

fertile land, for themselves and to exploit peasants.⁷³

The amount of land redistributed in the Southern Region in 1975-1985 was less than the 564,547 hectares the Vietminh had reallocated there from 1945-1954.⁷⁴ It was much more than the 245,851 hectares the Ngo Dinh Diem government redistributed during the period 1955-1963, but less than half of about one million hectares that Nguyen Van Thieu government's land reform brought to tenants during 1968-1974.⁷⁵

A major difference is that those previous land reforms boosted commercial agricultural production whereas the 1975-1985 redistribution weakened it. One reason is it reduced the productive capacity of households classified as middle and upper-middle and rich peasants. In the late 1980s, when facing severe food shortage, production stagnation and emerging conflicts over land in the Southern Region, VCP leaders recognized that there were shortcomings in previous land policies, especially directive No.19 (3 May 1983) which equalized (*cào bằng*) and upset (*xáo canh*) land holdings by redistributing land equally among rural households without taking into account the capacity and occupation of each household. 'Therefore, commercial agriculture in the Southern Region had been set back one step'.⁷⁶ Another reason is that collective organizations were usually less productive than the household farming they displaced.

The following section discusses in more detail how the second phase of land readjustments took place in An Giang province.

⁷³ BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông dân Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the rural Southern Region], TP. Ho Chi Minh, January 1984: p.22-3.

⁷⁴ Lam Quang Huyen, *Cách mạng ruộng đất ở Miền Nam Việt Nam* [Land revolution in southern Vietnam], Hanoi, NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1985: p.25.

⁷⁵ The figures for the Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu governments include a small but unknown amount of redistributed land in the Central Coast (Prosterman and Riedinger, 'Waiting for Crisis: Pursuit of Family Farm in South Vietnam', in *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University press, 1987: p.139.).

⁷⁶ Ban Tuyên Huan Trung Ương, *Dang Tra Loi Nong Dan Mot So Van De Cap Bach Ve Ruong Dat* [The party's response to urgent land problems], TP. Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tuyên Huan, 1988: p.6-7

In An Giang

On 5 June 1982 An Giang provincial leaders released directive No.44 calling for a speeding up of the land readjustment which had been largely neglected in 1981 and early 1982, and which they planned to complete by 1983.⁷⁷ Since the issue of directive No.44, according to newspaper accounts, many districts in the province intensified land readjustment. For example, by June 1982, Chau Thanh and Chau Phu districts had readjusted 2,557 hectares of land. Of these, only 500 hectares were granted to land-short and landless households; the remaining land was used by the state and district farms or was 'borrowed' by local cadres to produce food.⁷⁸

From reunification until September 1982, An Giang province had reallocated 39,157 hectares of land to 51,818 land-short and landless households. Nevertheless, a large proportion of land-short and landless households remained. In areas where one-rice-crop-per year land had not been converted into double-rice crops, the percentage of land-short and landless households was particularly high, about 21.6 percent.⁷⁹

In response to central directive No.19 (May 1983) authorities in An Giang again agitated for quick land readjustment. In October 1983, realizing that the land-short and landless households still accounted for 18 percent of the total, the provincial party committee repeated its call for rapid land readjustment to meet the end-of-1983 deadline.⁸⁰

Despite many districts implementing land readjustment, the results fell short of expectations. By late 1983 the province had not yet completed the task. In December 1983

⁷⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cong tac dieu chinh ruong dat o que nha' [Land readjustment in An Giang], 6 September 1982: p.4.

⁷⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Trong thang 6 phat trien 39 tap doan san xuat: Tinh hien co 474 tap doan' [An Giang established 39 production units in June and now has 474 units], 11 July 1982.

⁷⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cong tac dieu chinh ruong dat o que nha' [Land readjustment in An Giang], 6 September 1982: p.4.

⁸⁰ Van Phong Tinh Uy An Giang, 'Tiep tuc dieu chinh ruong dat cung co va phat trien tap doan san xuat' [Continuing land readjustment, and the solidification and extension of production units], in *An Giang newspaper*, 9 October 1983.

An Giang's provincial standing party committee released resolution No.05 (12 December 1983) calling for the equal redistribution of land among members in each commune (*điều chỉnh theo định suất đất toàn xã*). That policy seemed to be at odds with the VCP's policy, which only referred to reallocating appropriated land equally to poor peasants.⁸¹ Reallocating land equally to commune members was carried out not only in An Giang but in several provinces of the Southern Regions such as Tien Giang, Cuu Long and Kien Giang. In these provinces, land readjustment was implemented at the same time as the establishment of production units; land in the bounds of production units were readjusted equally among members regardless of their work capacity. Authorities allowed landed households to retain a part of their land according to the number of people in their households but appropriated the excess for reallocation to land-short and landless families.⁸²

In 1984 authorities in An Giang executed land readjustment extensively to the tune of about 10,000 hectares.⁸³ From 1975-July 1984, the province had appropriated 57,594.8 hectares and readjusted 56,778.9 hectares to 71,756 landless and land-short households.⁸⁴ By 30 April 1985 (from 1975-1985) the province had largely completed land readjustment, having redistributed 60,225.3 hectares to 75,558 landless and land-short households. Therefore, land readjustment in An Giang had affected about 27 percent of the total agricultural land (224,356.5 hectares) and benefited 32 percent of the province's 23, 3612 peasant households.⁸⁵ According to provincial documents, in 1975 landless and land-short

⁸¹ Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy, 'Tinh hình điều chỉnh và quy hoạch ruộng đất ở xã Vĩnh Phú' [Land readjustment in Vĩnh Phú commune], in *An Giang newspaper*, 9 August 1984: p.3.

⁸² BCTNNMN, 'Báo cáo tình hình ruộng đất và quá trình điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở nông dân Nam Bộ' [Report of land readjustment in the rural Southern Region], TP. Hồ Chí Minh, January 1984: p.17.

⁸³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Toàn tỉnh thành lập được 1957 tập đoàn sản xuất, tập thể hóa 106,798 ha' [An Giang has 1957 production units, collectivizing 106,798 hectares], 28 February 1985: p.1.

⁸⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Khắp nơi trong tỉnh' [Everywhere in An Giang], 12 July 1984: p.4; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xã luận: Day mạnh cải tạo quan hệ sản xuất nông nghiệp' [Intensifying agricultural transformation], 9 August 1984: p.1.

⁸⁵ Nguyễn Văn Nhung (the former provincial party secretary of An Giang), 'Mít tỉnh trong 10 năm giải phóng tỉnh An Giang và 40 năm Liên Xô chiến thắng Phát Xít Đức' [A meeting to celebrate 10 years of liberation anniversary], in *An Giang newspaper*, 10 May 1984: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Toàn tỉnh đã xây dựng được 2570 TĐSX, 7 HTX và 21 liên tập đoàn sản xuất' [An Giang has 2,570 production units, 7 collectives,

households in An Giang accounted for 40 percent of total peasant households. So, land reform from 1975-1985 had reportedly brought land to 81.05 percent of the targeted beneficiaries.

However, later it was discovered that a large amount of readjusted land did not go to the poor peasants but fell into the hands of local cadres. This angered peasants; several sent petitions to authorities at all levels. For example, in July 1987 a local newspaper reported that authorities in Thanh My Tay commune had implemented the policy incorrectly and redistributed land irrationally (*bất hợp lý*). 'Most of people in Thanh My Tay were discontented with the results of land readjustment because they considered it based on individual sentiment and injustice and because it favoured commune and district cadres' families'. People claimed that 'cadres were made the foundation' (*lấy cán bộ làm gốc*) rather than the average people; cadres accumulated a large amount of land for themselves and then lent it to others. Meanwhile, many poor households received low quality land and inadequate amounts. Some landless did not receive any land at all.⁸⁶

In May 1987 An Giang newspaper concluded,

In past years, the implementation of land readjustment has not been correct. Some cadres, especially local cadres took advantage of their power (*lợi dụng chức vụ*) and gave themselves, their relatives and families good land. Some local cadres did not directly cultivate but tried to accumulate land. Many state agencies at provincial and district levels also made use of their collective names to misappropriate land. On the other hand, due to the constraints of administrative mechanisms [such as prohibiting non-resident cultivators], a large amount of land was abandoned ...This led to many peasant households not having land or enough land for their production.⁸⁷

and 21 inter-production units], 2 August 1985; *An Giang newspaper*, 'An Giang hoàn thành cơ bản công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp' [An Giang has largely completed agricultural transformation], 22 November 1985: p.1.

⁸⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Con thắc mắc về việc điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở xã Thanh Mỹ Tây' [Some queries on land readjustment in Thanh My Tay commune], 31 July 1987: p.6

⁸⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Y kiến: không nên ngo nhận giữa việc phân bổ chia chấp đất đai cho hợp lý với việc trả lại ruộng đất cho chủ cũ' [Don't mistake rational reallocation of land for returning land to previous landowners], 29 May 1987: p.1.

Villagers in Long Dien B commune recalled two types of land readjustment between 1975 and mid-1986. The first was land readjustment according to the 'sharing one's clothes and rice' policy, which took place from 1975 to 1981 (before the adoption of product contracts). The second was allocating an equal amount of land to each laborer in the commune (*chia theo định suất*). That started after the adoption of product contracts and continued to 1986.⁸⁸

Under product contracts, land in four collective farming production units in Long Dien B was initially divided equally and randomly among collective members. In addition to four production units, commune authorities often combined implementing directives No.100 and No.19 with establishment of new ones. For example, when establishing a production unit, land within its boundary was supposed to be readjusted equally among its members. In practice, land-surplus households had the rights to retain any part of their own equal to the amount allowed to everyone else. The surplus was distributed to land-short and landless households. A middle peasant recalled, 'I had 15 *công* of land. After readjusting according to land rations, I only had a few *công* left. My household had 5 workers so I only retained 5 *công*. We selected some of our land according to our land ration and surrendered the remaining land for others'.⁸⁹ An old couple who retained only one *công* of land recalled,

We had 12 *công* but almost all of our holdings were destroyed (*phá tan hết*). At that time [about 1983-1984] the state made all decisions without listening to us. Anyone was granted land; the poor and the rich had the same amount of land. A woman aged above 55 years old and a man above 60 each received only one half *công* of land. The children received the same.⁹⁰

A poor man in production unit No.15 commented,

When entering the production unit, everyone had land. That of land-surplus households was cut to give to the landless and land-short. This was compulsory

⁸⁸ Interview, Long Dien B from June to August 2005.

⁸⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

⁹⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

for households; each main laborer retained only one *công* of land. But the land-short and landless had the right to refuse the readjusted land.⁹¹

Local cadres in Long Dien B allowed the land-surplus households to redistribute part of their land to their relatives and acquaintances. A former cadre of inter-production unit No.3 (*liên tập đoàn 3*) remembered that allowing landowners to redistribute their land to relatives meant the readjustment was not resisted strongly. He only readjusted whatever land remained beyond each household's retention limit that owners had not been able to disperse.⁹² A former leader of production No.16 recollected completing land readjustment in only two days (in 1984).

I organized a meeting and told landowners with substantial holdings to distribute their land to relatives but not anyone else. They all agreed. So, land readjustment took only two days. In other production units, cadres confiscated good land to grant to their own brothers and sisters.⁹³

Similarly, a former leader of production unit No.13 said,

At the time of production solidarity teams [1978-1984] amount of land owned still varied among households. But at the peak time of production units [1984, 1985] land was divided equally among members according to land per capita in the commune. My method was to let the land-surplus households redistribute their land to their family members and relatives. They had the right to retain the best land. Then the production unit readjusted the remaining surplus land. We conducted redistribution in this way in order to avoid hurting feelings (*khỏi mất lòng*).⁹⁴

An old man in the commune shared his memory of land readjustment,

At that time [around 1983-1985], many people came to ask me to borrow their land because they trusted me. But I accepted only a few *công* of land. They said to me that now they lend land to me to grow the high-yielding rice. If later the state returned to the cultivation of traditional rice (*lúa mùa*), please return the land

⁹¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 11 August 2005.

⁹² Interview, Long Dien B, 20 June 2005.

⁹³ Interview, Long Dien B, 11 August 2005.

⁹⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 20 August 2005.

to them.⁹⁵

In general, from 1982-1985 land readjustment in Long Dien B achieved better results and faced less resistance than that of previous periods. There were some reasons for these relatively positive outcomes. First, many years after reunification, local authorities were strengthened significantly; the number of local cadres increased and had been better trained. Moreover, under strong pressure from higher authorities to complete agricultural transformation by 1985, local cadres resorted to harsh measures. For example, Long Dien B peasants remembered that when implementing land readjustment, authorities often sent armed cadres to the fields; they were ready to arrest anyone who dared to resist the policy openly.⁹⁶ A local newspaper in 1985 posted a peasant's letter complaining that authorities in Long Kien commune of Cho Moi district took advantage of their power to redistribute peasant's rice fields which were under cultivation and handcuffed people who tried to prevent cadres from doing land readjustment.⁹⁷

Second, after several campaigns of socialist transformation in rural areas (including agriculture, trading and industry transformation), in the mid-1980s the economic power of large landowners had been weakened significantly. In addition, the state forced the adoption of high-yielding rice which depended heavily on state inputs. Realizing they were not able to farm all their land, many land-surplus households gave out some of their land to others.⁹⁸

Finally, despite some poor households refusing to receive others' land, local authorities faced fewer problems redistributing the appropriated land thanks to a large number of land receivers. Land receivers were not only peasant households who were landless and land-short, but included non-farming people who had previously made their

⁹⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

⁹⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 June 1985.

⁹⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tra loi ban doc: ve viec dieu chinh ruong dat o xa Long Kien' [Replying to reader's letter on land readjustment in Long Kien commune], 27 September 1985: p.3.

⁹⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 7 August 2005.

living as small merchants, transporters, handicraft-makers and others. Due to the socialist transformation on trading and industries, these people returned to get land in their hamlets. A land receiving lady recalled,

At the time of land readjustment, many people wanted to receive land because they feared that if they did not have land, they would be sent to the New Economic Zones. So, we accepted the land although we knew that a few *công* was not enough for us to make a living. We thought we could combine farming with working for wages (*làm mướn*).⁹⁹

Another lady in the commune also asserted that some non-farming households who accepted land because they feared being taken to New Economic Zones.¹⁰⁰ An official of Cho Moi district's department of agriculture and rural development who was familiar with post-1975 land readjustment commented,

An Giang was one of the provinces in the Mekong Delta which implemented forceful socialist agricultural transformation. Under the directive No.100, An Giang had peasantized all rural population (*nông dân hoá mọi người*). Bike-taxi riders (*xe thồ*), pedi cab riders (*xe xích lô*) and small merchants in Cho Moi town were put into production units to receive land. So, landholdings became fragmented. This led to the poor performance of agriculture.¹⁰¹

Some peasants, especially those who had lost a large amount of land due to non-resident cultivator prohibitions, refused to accept others' land. A better-off man in Long Dien B recalled,

I had 60 *công* in Thoai Son district but lost it due to the state prohibiting non-resident cultivators. The production unit here asked me to accept a few *công* but I refused. How could I take their land when I saw others crying? So, I decided to work for wages instead.¹⁰²

Similarly, a lady who had lost 130 *công* in the late 1970s due to the non-resident cultivation

⁹⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 3 August 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Cho Moi, 23 June 2005.

¹⁰² Interview, Long Dien B, 7 August 2005.

prohibition also refused to accept readjusted land. She said,

I did not receive readjusted land because I was afraid of making the landowners unhappy. Like us, they had suffered a lot to accumulate land. It was not right to take others' land. Rather, we worked for wages. Later I borrowed 10 *công* of my sister's land to make a living.¹⁰³

Another lady whose family had only 1.5 *công* also refused more land. She recalled,

At the time of land readjustment, authorities offered me some land but I did not accept. I thought that if I had land being taken to give to others, I would feel sad. So were they. So, I decided to farm whatever I had. If we could not live on farming, we could supplement by working for wages.¹⁰⁴

Despite the theory that the land readjustment in Long Dien B meant equal distribution among households, in practice it was different. A peasant commented that local authorities did not appropriate surplus land of their relatives or of powerful cadres (*người có chức có quyền*) but they redistributed every bit of land of those who were powerless.¹⁰⁵ Besides, land receivers accepted bad and unproductive land while local cadres took good and productive land for themselves and their relatives (a practice detailed in the next chapter).¹⁰⁶

In short, the second round of land reform in Long Dien B and An Giang fulfilled the targets of weakening large landowners and peasantizing the rural people. However, due to misuse of their position at the local level, cadres redistributed land in unexpected way. Cadres and their relatives were the beneficiaries rather than landless and land-short households.

Strengthening collective organizations under the product contracts system

QN-DN in the Central Coast

Late in the year 1981 QN-DN provincial leaders began to realize that after implementing

¹⁰³ Interview, Long Dien B, 10 August 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 7 August 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 August 2005.

product contracts in many collectives endangered the collective means of production and socialist production relations. Some collectives had already allowed 'blank contracts' (*khoán trắng*) and let members do all farming phases individually. Provincial leaders warned that despite enhancing collective management, the product contract system was not a panacea for the problems of collective farming. Therefore, in order to implement product contracts correctly, they urged provincial collective leaders to manage the collective means of production and labor closely. Otherwise, product contracts, provincial leaders argued, could weaken collective farming.¹⁰⁷

A June 1983 QN-DN conference concluded collectivization still faced many problems that needed to be corrected immediately. First, the quality of collective organizations varied across districts and communes. Second, weak collectives were accounted for about 28 percent of the total. In these collectives, the main means of production (land and draft animals) had not been fully collectivized. Nor had they been managed collectively; 'the management of land, labor and production was loose and weak; the material bases of the collectives were very poor'. Finally, because many collective leaders did not understand the spirit of product contracts directives, they had deviated allowing 'blank contracts' and other improper variations (*nhiều lệch lạc*).¹⁰⁸

QN-DN newspaper accounts in late 1983 revealed several cases of weak collectives across districts of the province. For example, an investigation in June 1983 discovered that many collectives in Tam Ky district were weak and veered from party directives. In these

¹⁰⁷ Nguyen Dan Trung (the vice-chairman of the agricultural collective's management board of QN-DN province's department of agriculture), 'May van de can chu y trong viec khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong' [Some notes about about using the product contract], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 7 November 1981; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nang cao chat luong khoan san pham trong vu san xuat dong xuan' [Improving the quality of the product contract in the winter-spring crop], 25 November 1981.

¹⁰⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hom qua 14-6: Khai mac hoi nghi tong ket phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep tinh ta' [A conference of summing up collectivization in An Giang] 15 June 1983: p.1; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Cung co va phat trien quan he san xuat moi trong nong nghiep' [Solidifying and improving new production relations in agriculture], 15 June 1983; Pham Duc Nam (the provincial chairman of QN-DN), 'Cong tac truooc mat de cung co va phat trien quan he san xuat moi o nong thon' [On-going tasks for solidifying and improving new production relations in rural areas], 18 June 1983.

collectives, 'blank contracts' were popular at either the collective or brigade level. Draft animals had not been fully collectivized, so collectives could not use them. Land and labor were loosely managed so collective members' earnings from collective sector made up a minor proportion of their total income.¹⁰⁹ A close investigation of Tam Phuoc collective, one of the weak collectives in Tam Ky district, showed that after adopting product contracts, its collective relations of production weakened. The collective had 1,257 hectares of rice land and 563 hectares of secondary crop land. However, only a half of the rice land was used for collective farming. The remaining, especially secondary crop land was used by landowners for their household economy. Therefore, a large proportion of collective members' income came from their household economic activities.¹¹⁰

Another example was Que Son district where many collectives fell short of the authorities' aspirations. 'New socialist relations in agriculture' had not been well established yet. In particular, collective organizations in the district controlled and managed only 45 percent of agricultural land and most of that was rice land. Also, because draft animals had not been fully collectivized, many collectives were unable to use them.¹¹¹ Similarly, collectives in Thang Binh district encountered difficulties. A survey of 9 out of 38 collectives in three different district areas in August 1983 showed that although the productivity of paddy had increased somewhat, collective management and produce distribution of many collectives, even the good ones, tended to 'erode the collective economy' (*xói mòn kinh tế tập thể*). Generally, the management of land and labor was weak; some collectives used the unauthorized 'blank contracts' and mismanaged agricultural inputs.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *QN-DN newspapers*, 'Cung co va dua cac hop tac xa nong nghiep cua huyen Tam Ky tiep tục tiến lên' [Solidifying and advancing collectives in Tam Ky district], 4 June 1983.

¹¹⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tam Phuoc cung co hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Tam Phuoc solidified collectives], 9 July 1983; the article did not mention how the other half of rice land had been used. It seemed that this land was largely under the control of landowners.

¹¹¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Que Son tong ket phong trao hop tac hoa va cung co hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Que Son summed up the collectivization and solidification of collectives], 24 August 1983.

¹¹² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vu dong xuan 1983-1984 Thang Binh cung co hop tac xa gan lien voi tap trung chỉ đạo

In response to the growing number of weak collective organizations in the province, QN-DN leaders released directive No.09 (5 November 1983) on 'improving and perfecting the socialist relations of production in agriculture'. The directive revealed that for the past four years of agricultural collectivization, the process in QN-DN had enabled the expansion of irrigation, an increase in the number of crops per year, an intensification of farming, the adoption of new seeds and the transformation of fields. All these improvements contributed to an increase in crop productivity and staple food production. However, collectivization still fell short of expectations and was beset by difficulty. Weak collectives accounted for 35 percent of the total and were especially common in the midland, sandy and difficult areas of the province. Collective ownership of the means of production had not been established firmly; collective management was slack and weak; the product contract had been implemented incorrectly and 'blank contracts' were rife. 'Negativism' occurred in many collectives and was severe in some.¹¹³ In order to strengthen collective farming, the directive outlined the on-going tasks for local authorities for the years 1983-1985. The first was to increase the number of advanced collectives, reduce and gradually eliminate weak ones. The second was to solidify collective ownership of the means of production. Each collective was required to retrieve and implement product contracts on all land that it had previously lent to collective members. In addition, each collective was required to fully collectivize draft animals by giving full payment to collective members. The final task was to strengthen the capacity of district governments, build and strengthen party organizations in collectives and train collective cadres.¹¹⁴

Despite these efforts, one year after the implementation of directive No.09, the many

vung lua co san luong cao' [Thang Binh will solidify the collective and extend high-yielding rice in the winter-spring of 1983-1984], 9 November 1983.

¹¹³ Tỉnh Ủy Quang Nam Đà Nẵng, 'Nghị Quyết 09/NQ-TV về việc củng cố và hoàn thiện quan hệ sản xuất xã hội chủ nghĩa trong nông nghiệp vùng năm 1983-1984 (ngày 5-11-1983)' [Provincial party committee's resolution No.09 on solidifying and perfecting production relations in agriculture], in *QN-DN newspapers*, 11 November 1983.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

problems of collectives in QN-DN remained or had deepened. An investigation of 39 collectives in 9 different districts, done by the provincial department of agriculture, showed that all of the collectives had problems managing collective land and the area of land under control of collectives had decreased significantly. Collectives only managed and implemented product contracts on rice land and on parts of industrial crop land; almost all of secondary crop land still belonged to individual households. Some collectives were not able to control and manage even rice land. For example, many collectives in Tien Phuoc controlled only 40-50 percent of rice land; the rest was used individually by collective members. Moreover, under the product contract system, management of labor in collectives was relaxed (*bị buông lỏng*), some collective members refused to farm on collective land. Instead, they made a living elsewhere, doing 'illegal business' which brought higher income. This 'negatively affected the thoughts and minds of other collective members'.¹¹⁵

During the years 1985-1987 QN-DN authorities continued to put efforts into improving the quality of collective farming and collective ownership. However, the results were poor. QN-DN newspaper accounts showed that the number of collectives adopting blank contracts had not been reduced but had actually increased.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, collectives faced many new problems. The collective's debt to the state and household's debt to the collective had increased annually. Some households had an unpaid sum of thousand kilograms of paddy to the collective. Producing below the contract quota meant losses. Fed up with their growing debt, some collective members decided to return all or part of their contracted land to the collectives so that they could find outside jobs to make a living. In addition, inadequate irrigation and agricultural inputs (fertilizers, fuels), and unfair terms of

¹¹⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong nhung vuon mac va cach giai quyet' [The product contract: problems and solutions], 8 November 1984.

¹¹⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket 3 nam thuc hien khoan san pham den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep (1981-1984) [Summing up of three years 1981-1984 implementing the product contract], 6 July 1985; BCH Dang Bo QN-DN, 'Bao cao tinh hình va nhiem vu cua Ban chap hanh Dang bo tinh lan thu 14 Dang bo tinh Quang Nam-Da Nang' [Provincial party organization's 14th report of socio-economic situation and on-going tasks] in *QN-DN newspaper*, 4 October 1986.

trade damaged collective performance (see more in the next chapter).¹¹⁷

At a meeting about 'solidifying and strengthening production relations of agriculture' in June 1987, in the spirit of 'looking the truth straight in the eye' (*nhìn thẳng sự thật*) inspired by Doi Moi policy, provincial leaders recognized 'some problems and weaknesses' in the product contract. They admitted that weak collectives were still numerous. Out of 270 collectives in the province, 78 were weak (28.8 percent), 103 were average (38.1 percent) and 89 were good and advanced (accounting for 32.9 percent). Moreover, in the midland area, weak collectives accounted for 45.2 percent.¹¹⁸ Collectivization in Thang Binh district faced an even worse situation; 36 percent of collectives were classified as weak while good collectives accounted for only 19 percent.¹¹⁹

Provincial leaders issued directive No.03/NQ-TU (22 June 1987) which stressed continual improvement and perfecting the product contract in agriculture. In assessing collectivization over the past six years since adopting product contracts, the directive stated,

Agricultural collectives were still weak in many aspects. In the past few years, the performance of collectives has come to a standstill. Those in sandy soils and midland areas have not established firmly collective ownership of the means of production. The management of land was not good; the area of rice land decreased ... the number of good collectives stalled. Weak collectives have not improved yet. Some collectives existed only on paper (*hợp tác xã hình thức*).¹²⁰

In short, after the implementation of product contracts, collectives in QN-DN became a new battle between the collective economy and the household economy over the use of collective land, labor and other means of production. Despite provincial leaders putting great

¹¹⁷ *QN-DN newspapers*, 'Cung co hoan thien cong tac khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep' [Improving and perfecting the product contract], 25 October 1986.

¹¹⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi cung co va tang cuong quan he san xuat trong nong nghiep ket thuc tot dep', [The conference on solidifying agricultural production relations produced good results] 16 June 1987.

¹¹⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thang Binh mo rong hoi nghi cung co phong trao hop tac hoa' [Thang Binh held a conference on solidifying collectives], 18 August 1987.

¹²⁰ Tỉnh Ủy Quảng Nam – Đà Nẵng, 'Nghị quyết số 03/NQ-TV (22 June 1987): Tiếp tục cung co va tang cuong quan he san xuat, hoan thien co che khoan san pham trong nong nghiep' [Provincial party committee's resolution No.03 on improving and perfecting the product contract], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 9 July 1987.

effort into solidifying collective organizations, they had weakened in terms of collective ownership, management and production (which will be discussed in the local practices section of the next chapter).

An Giang in the Mekong Delta

Like their counterparts in QN-DN, authorities in An Giang were concerned that although the product contract helped improve collective farming's performance, it could weaken collective ownership if implemented incorrectly. After a few seasons of adopting product contracts, An Giang newspapers began to mention the occurrence of 'blank contracts' in production units. For example, a report of May 1982 said that leaders in some production units had virtually made 'blank contracts' and returned land to individual households. Meanwhile, in some other production units only one out of eight farming phases had been worked collectively.¹²¹ Another report of June 1982 described a typical case of a production unit chairman who was responsible for almost nothing except for determining the quota and collecting payments after harvesting. He allowed member households to do all phases of farming. He often secretly shared his view to members that the product contract was, in fact, to return land to individuals; 'everyone farmed for himself (*mạnh ai nấy làm*). So, you should take care of yourself'.¹²²

On 3 October 1982 a report mentioned that the province had only 235 production units and 6 collectives which had adopted product contracts. However, because cadres in many locations did not understand the contents of product contracts, they used blank contracts. As a result, many collective organizations were weak and performed poorly; many

¹²¹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Ket qua tot dep cua khoan san pham trong nong nghiep' [The product contract brings about good results], 23 May 1982: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Trong 6 thang phat trien 39 tap doan tinh hien co 474 tap doan', 11 July 1982.

¹²² *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: Ong tap doan truong' [Mr production unit leader], 13 June 1982: p.4.

households in these production units were not able to produce beyond the quota.¹²³

An evaluation of the quality of production units in June 1983 found that out of 1,114 production units, 324 (29 percent) were classified 'weak', 512 (46 percent) were 'average' and only 276 production units (25 percent) were classified 'good'.¹²⁴ Provincial leaders considered the poor quality of local cadres the main cause for the weaknesses of production units. They argued that in areas where local cadres were not exemplary (*guong mẫu*), collective farming was difficult. For example, agricultural inputs were lost or leaked out; food production did not increase; production units were unable to control labor or manage production according to collective farming principles. However, in areas where cadres did not embezzle and pilfer collective resources, production units were good. Therefore, in order to strengthen production units and collective farming, the most important task, provincial leaders argued, was to improve the quality of local cadres.¹²⁵

To tackle the weakness of production units, from 1983-1984 An Giang leaders focused on strengthening existing collective organizations rather than extending collectivization. However, despite several improvement campaigns, the production units did not seem to perform better. An investigation by the Agricultural Department of the Communist Party's Committee (Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy) and the Central Inspectorate (Doan Kiem Tra Trung Uong) in October 1984 showed,

The quality of many production units was very weak; some production units just existed in form and did not bear collective characteristics ... Many production units just had collective names (*danh nghĩa tập thể*) but, in fact, operated on the basis of individual farming; production did not increase and [peasant's] living-conditions were low. Many managerial boards took advantage of their positions

¹²³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Phat trien va cung co TDSX, HTX' [Improving and solidifying production units and collectives], 3 October 1982.

¹²⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Toan tinh day manh cung co va phat trien tap doan' [An Giang intensified the solidification and extension of production units], 12 June 1983.

¹²⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Cung co, nang chat khâu can bo quan ly trong cac hop tac xa, tap doan san xuat va to doan ket san xuat' [Improving and upgrading the quality of managerial cadres of production units and collectives], 7 August 1983: p.1.

to appropriate the state inputs illegally.¹²⁶

In response to the weakness of many production units and in implementing the sixth resolution of Fifth Party Congress, in September 1984 An Giang provincial leaders called for improving and upgrading weak collective organizations; transforming them into highly qualified ones by doing the three following tasks: (1) collectivizing the main means of production such as land, large and small machines and draft animals; (2) controlling labor in order to assign and direct it to do collective work; and (3) ensuring correct distribution of produce in collective organizations.¹²⁷

In order to complete socialist transformation of agriculture by 1985, from the late 1984-1985 authorities in An Giang shifted to emphasize on accelerating collectivization and land readjustment rather than improving its quality. However, after completing collectivization by mid-1985, provincial leaders again paid great attention to strengthening collective organizations. A lead newspaper article of 12 July 1985 titled 'Solidifying and upgrading the quality of production units and collectives is a very urgent and vital task' said,

Many production units were weak and did not operate according to collective principles. Some managerial boards took advantage of the production unit's status (*lợi dụng danh nghĩa tập đoàn*) and embezzled and stole collective resources and oppressed the masses. After their establishment, food production in some production units did not increase; the living conditions of their members were poor and food contributions to the state decreased.¹²⁸

An Giang newspaper accounts showed that from July 1985 onwards, local authorities often launched campaigns aimed at solidifying and upgrading the quality of production units.

The objectives of these campaigns were to strengthen the collective ownership of the means

¹²⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa Luan: Phai tap trung, cung co, nang chat cac tap doan san xuat' [The need to concentrate on improving and upgrading quality of production units], 18 August 1984.

¹²⁷ To Sy Hong (the chief of the Agriculture Department of An Giang Communist Party's Committee), 'Mot so net chinh trong cach quan ly o cac tap doan san xuat va hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Some major issues in the management of production units and collectives], in *An Giang newspaper*, 20 September 1984.

¹²⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Cung co, nang chat cac tap doan mot nhien vu het suc buc thiet' [Solidification and upgrading of production units are essential], 12 July 1985: p.1.

of production (such as land and agricultural machines), correct deviations in product contracts, and discipline local cadres. During June-September 1985 the province had reportedly improved and upgraded 393 production units and collectivized 310 plowing machines, 115 paddy threshing machines, 130 mill shops and 100 other machines.¹²⁹

However, the number of weak production units still increased over time. At a conference in November 1985, the vice-provincial Communist Party Secretary of An Giang stressed 'the need to look straight at the truth' and posed a number of questions. Why were 40 percent of production units in the province still weak (*yếu kém*)? Why did cadres of managerial boards still practice negativism? Why had these things not been stopped and dealt with and why had the rights of laboring people not been facilitated? To deal with these problems, he also stressed the need to 'strengthen and upgrade the quality of collective organizations entirely (*toàn diện*),' which included,

Strengthening local party bases; training cadres; building up material and technical bases; perfecting the collectivization of the means of production; perfecting the product contract; expanding the autonomy of production units and collectives; and extensively consolidating production units into inter-production units (*liên tập đoàn*) and collectives (*hợp tác xã*).¹³⁰

During 1986 An Giang authorities put a great deal of efforts into strengthening and upgrading the quality of collective organizations. In order to fight widespread negativism, authorities gave journalists more room for criticism. In addition, provincial authorities often carried investigations at the local level.¹³¹ For example, an investigation in Phu Tan district in April 1986 found that 45 production units and 5 inter-production units in the district had

¹²⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Trong qui III toan tinh cung co, nang chat 393 tap doan san xuat, tap the hoa 310 may cay' [An Giang has upgraded 393 production units, and collectivized 310 plowing machines in the third quarter of 1985], 27 September 1985: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: cung co nang chat 393 tap doan san xuat, hop tac xa nong nghiep' [Having solidified and upgraded 393 production units and collectives], 27 September 1985: p.1.

¹³⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phat bieu cua dong chi Vo Thai Bao, pho bi thu tinh uy tai hoi nghi tong ket hoan thanh co ban hop tac hoa nong nghiep tinh An Giang' [Vice-provincial party secretary, Vo Thai Bao, speech at a conference summing up the completion of collectivization in An Giang, 22 November 1985: p.1, 3.

¹³¹ *An Giang newspaper* on 17 January 1985 published the old directive No. 197-CT/TW (dated 13 March 1973) on expanding the scope of criticism in the press in order to encourage the fight against social negativism.

blank contracts. Moreover, almost all of production units in Phu An, Phu Binh and Hoa Lac communes of Phu Tan district had not established specialized teams (*đội chuyên*) on controlling and preventing diseases and preparing land and seedlings. The management method of production units in these communes was to 'make blank contracts with their members'.¹³² Another investigation in Dinh Thanh commune of Thoai Son district also discovered similar problems. All 25 production units and 8 inter-production units (*liên tập đoàn*) in the commune had blank contracts. Collective organizations there were responsible for only controlling and preventing diseases (*bảo vệ thực vật*). The management was so weak that 'an inter-production unit had the same characteristics as a production solidarity team'. As a result, in the winter-spring of 1985-1986, 406 hectares of two-crop-per-year-land in the commune were abandoned and the total debt of collective organizations to the state was 2,032 tones of paddy.¹³³ Cho Moi district was considered one of the strongest collectivization districts of An Giang and the first district to complete collectivization. However, an investigation of 9 production units and 2 inter-production units in mid-1986 found that the management was slack (*lỏng lẻo*) and product contracts were only implemented 'formally' (*hình thức*) which led to managerial cadres committing many transgressions.¹³⁴

In evaluating the quality of production units, a local newspaper report of 13 June 1986 commented that many locations implemented strengthening and upgrading production units after the completion of collectivization. However, recent inspections of some units discovered many instances of bad practices. For example, an inspection in Binh My and Vinh Thanh Trung communes of Chau Phu district found that almost all collective organizations there were inadequate in quality (*không đúng tính chất*).

¹³² *An Giang newspaper*, 'Qua thanh tra có 45 tập đoàn, 5 liên tập đoàn sản xuất khoán trắng' [Investigations found 45 production units and 5 inter-units committed 'blank contracts'], 18 April 1986.

¹³³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Nhưng khoảng cách trong sản xuất nông nghiệp ở Dinh Thanh' [The gaps between expectations and agricultural production in Dinh Thanh], 18 April 1986: p.2.

¹³⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Huyện Cho Mới tiến hành kiểm tra một số tập đoàn nông nghiệp' [Cho Moi district carried out investigations into some production units], 13 June 1986: p.1

The production plans (*kế hoạch sản xuất*) of production units were similar to each other, except for land area differences. The distribution plan (*phương án ăn chia*) consisted of only three items [which far different from official one]: state food obligations, allowance for production units' cadres, and collective funds. The managerial boards of production units did not know how much income the production units' members earned.

In addition, the managerial boards of production units embezzled and pilfered agricultural inputs; the proportion of resources the district sent down to the production units that were diverted to resale at free markets was bigger than that what the members received. The article added that these problems happened in Chau Phu district and many places of An Giang.¹³⁵

In response to widespread negativism in many collective organizations and state organizations, An Giang provincial leaders urged local authorities to implement 'criticism and self-criticism before the masses' (*phê bình và tự phê bình trước quần chúng*) and give people more room to criticize cadres. For example, a local news report of 27 June 1986 said that at the self-criticism meeting in My Hoi Dong commune of Cho Moi districts, peasants disparaged the commune's Secretary for being frequently drunk (*nhậu nhiều*), and bringing his relatives to work in commune offices. Peasants in Kien Thanh commune of Cho Moi district also condemned their commune's chairman for being aloof and colluding with the 'bad elements' to embezzle 15,000 liters of fuel and so on. Peasants criticized production unit cadres for pilfering collective inputs and misappropriating their land and not making financial issues transparent, to name a few misdeeds.¹³⁶

The An Giang newspaper editorial of 7 November 1986 revealed that 30.3 percent of total collective organizations were 'weak' while 38.3 percent were 'average' and 31.4 percent

¹³⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Qua kiểm tra chất lượng ở một số tập đoàn' [Evaluation of the quality of production units], 6 June 1986: p.2.

¹³⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Các huyện Cho Moi, Phú Tân, Châu Phú thực hiện phê bình trước quần chúng' [Cho Moi, Phú Tân and Châu Phú district undertook criticism and self-criticism], 27 June 1986.

were 'good'. The reason for the large number of weak production units in the province were that,

Local authorities had collectivized hastily and carelessly, overlooking many stages stipulated in official guidelines; peasants had not been fully enlightened on the matters of collective farming; and collective cadres had not been well trained ... To compound the problem, local authorities had not cared for or provided enough support for collective organizations in terms of inputs, capitals, seeds and so on.¹³⁷

In assessing collective organizations, a former An Giang provincial Committee for Agricultural Transformation official admitted that the adoption of blank contracts was widespread in the province during the product contract era.¹³⁸ Similarly, a former production unit cadre in Long Dien B commune of Cho Moi district who knew about collectivization in the region recalled,

In theory, we called it 'the product contract' but in fact, it was implemented only on paper in Long Dien B and the whole Southern Region. This meant that production unit cadres allowed peasants to do all phases of farming (*buông trắng cho dân*). No production unit here was adequate in quality (*đúng tính chất*).¹³⁹

A former production unit leader admitted trying to use the product contract, but being unable to conform with its terms exactly. He elaborated,

In implementing product contracts correctly, the production unit was supposed to set the work-day quotas as well as the product quota for contracted land. It was impossible to follow the policy because peasants did not agree. For example, they did not want to labor for daily work-points. Therefore, in order to make it just, we divided land into three gradations to determine contribution according to its quality. My production unit was higher in quality compared to others. Most of units faked a production plan (*phương án ma*) and often did it at the end of the

¹³⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Xay dung co che moi va chinh sach kinh te phu hop voi cac don vi san xuat nong nghiep' [Building new appropriate mechanisms to fit agricultural organizations], 7 November 1986: p.1.

¹³⁸ Interview, Long Xuyen, 6 June 2005.

¹³⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005; Long Dien B peasants often considered production unit No.7 as adequate in quality because it was led by Saigon's army officer who was highly educated and closely complied with what authorities requested.

year (harvest).¹⁴⁰

When ask about the product contract, most peasants did not know what it was. A lady in production unit No.12 recalled, 'We did not have product contracts. We only received fertilizers, fuel and pesticides from the production unit. After the harvest, we paid back these expenses with other funds and enjoyed the rest'.¹⁴¹ Another lady in production unit No.21 explained,

Farming in production units was similar to individual farming. After readjusting land, each peasant farmed his land. The production unit was only in charge of watering but we had to contribute fuel and water our fields. We were responsible for plowing [by hiring production unit machinery] and spraying pesticide.¹⁴²

A cadre of production No.10 also recognized, 'farming in production units was like individual farming. The difference was peasants contributing funds to the production unit and cultivating according to its guidelines'.¹⁴³

From late 1986 onwards, under the new political atmosphere inspired by the VCP's Doi Moi policies, strengthening collective organizations in An Giang faced even more challenges. In the spirit of Doi Moi which gave the people more freedom to speak, many peasants took advantage of this new atmosphere and sent petitions to ask for a return to their old land and machines and to complain about cadre embezzlement of collective resources, stealing their land and oppressing the masses. Moreover, in the spirit of Doi Moi, An Giang journalists were given more power to fight 'social evils'. During 1987 journalists exposed many cases of local cadres' misbehaviors such as embezzling resources, misappropriating peasant land, mismanaging collective funds and oppressing the masses (*ức hiếp quần chúng*). Many production units were also criticized for poor performance and their large debts. By the

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005 (production unit No.7 was established in 1982. It was considered one of the best qualified production units in Long Dien B).

¹⁴¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 August 2005.

¹⁴² Interview, Long Dien B, 28 July 2005.

¹⁴³ Interview, Long Dien B, 15 August 2005.

end of 1987, the total debt of collective organizations in An Giang had reached 10,000 tons of paddy.¹⁴⁴

In assessing collective organizations in September 1987, the chairman of An Giang's Agriculture Department concluded that weak production units and cadres' malpractices were still widespread. This hindered agricultural production and made peasants feel insecure and discontented. He attributed these problems to hasty collectivization and lack of well-trained cadres. In addition, he considered the bureaucratic red tape and subsidy mechanisms (*cơ chế quan liêu bao cấp*) harmful to agriculture and especially collective farming.¹⁴⁵

In late 1987 provincial leaders still urged continuous strengthening and improvement of collective organizations and considered this challenge one of their most basic and enduring tasks.¹⁴⁶ However, in early 1988, An Giang's provincial leaders began to question the direction of their policy and shifted to a preference for household farming which contributed to the major change in provincial agrarian policies in 1988 (see more in the next chapter).

Conclusion

In the first few years after adopting the product contract, the performance of collective farming improved significantly not only in QN-DN of the Central Coast but also in An Giang province of the Mekong Delta. As a result, product contracts were welcomed and adopted extensively by collective organizations' members in both provinces.

In An Giang, using product contracts and allowing households to retain part of their land, authorities were able to accelerate collectivization and land readjustment. However,

¹⁴⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Người nông dân đang cần phương thức đầu tư hợp lý phát triển sản xuất nông nghiệp' [Peasants need a rational method of agricultural investment], 23 October 1987: p.2.

¹⁴⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phong van Nguyen Vu: Nhân định khắc phục những yếu kém đưa TĐSX tiến lên bước phát triển mới' [Interviewing Nguyen Vu (the chairman of An Giang Agricultural Department): Be certain in correcting shortcomings to advance production units], 18 September 1987: p.2.

¹⁴⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phong Van Nguyen Huu Khanh: Phải nhanh chóng xử lý tiêu cực ở những TĐSX mà chính con do dự chưa giải quyết' [Interviewing Nguyen Huu Khanh (the vice-chairman of An Giang provincial people's committee): The need to quickly deal with the remaining negativism in production units], 4 December 1987: p.2

with strong pressure from central party leaders to complete collectivization by 1985, authorities in An Giang and elsewhere, extended collectivization and land readjustment hastily, especially from 1984-1985. By late 1985 those provinces had largely 'completed' collectivization but many collective organizations were unsteady.

Egalitarian land redistribution, collectivization and other policies from 1981-1985 changed major features of An Giang's economy. Subsistence farming essentially replaced commercial farming and the diverse rural economy of An Giang and many other locations in the Southern Regions. That is the reason why collective farming from 1981 to 1988 faced similar problems in An Giang and QN-DN and displayed comparable local practices (see more in the next chapter).

During the period 1981-1988 authorities in QN-DN and An Giang put much effort into improving and strengthening collective farming but failed in both provinces to do so. 'Blank contracts' and weak collectives were on the rise in both places. The household economy increasingly infringed on the collective economy. Collective farming performance went down alarmingly. All of these contributed to a major shift in agrarian policies in the late 1980s which will be detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 EVERYDAY LOCAL PRACTICES AND THE PERFORMANCE OF COLLECTIVE FARMING UNDER THE PRODUCT CONTRACT SYSTEM 1981-1988

Introduction

The chapter examines QN-DN and An Giang peasants and local cadres' common practices for earning a living and how that behavior adversely affected collective farming under production contracts (1981-1988). The chapter also discusses how local practices and arrangements contributed to derailing the Communist Party's agricultural collectivization policy.

Everyday practices during 1981-1988 in QN-DN, the Central Coast

Peasants' everyday practices

Household economy versus collective economy

Soon after experiments with product contracts began, QN-DN newspapers mentioned 'struggle among complicated thoughts' (*cuộc đấu tranh tư tưởng phức tạp*) in the countryside, which occurred as peasants tried to harmonize vital interests of the state, the collectives and themselves. Despite authorities confirming that under product contracts, members' earnings would come mainly from the value of their collective work-days (*giá trị ngày công tập thể*) and partly from the amount each household produced beyond the quota, many peasants were dubious. Therefore, many peasants wanted to lower quotas on their contracted fields so as to increase income coming from their own individual farming.¹

¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cac hop tac xa khan truong thu hien thu khoan san pham cuoi cung cho nguoi lao dong' [Collectives must hurry in implementing the product contract], 22 April 1981; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Qua cac hop tac xa nong nghiep lam thu viec khoan san cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong' [Results of experimenting with the product contract], 12 May 1981; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhìn vào đồng ruộng tập thể: lại chuyện chung và riêng' [Looking at collective fields: collective interest versus individual interest], 23 May 1981.

Despite being encouraged by authorities to care for collective interests, many peasants looked after their own household economies (*kinh tế gia đình*), in which they saw a direct link between their efforts and rewards. For example, according to a QN-DN newspaper, in the summer-autumn season of 1981, when ripe paddy fields of some collectives in northern parts of the province were suddenly flooded, many collective members took advantage of the situation and asked managerial boards to lower the quota. Otherwise, they would refuse to harvest. As a result, many paddy fields were not harvested in time and collectives suffered huge losses.² Likewise, according to a former brigade leader of Binh Lanh collective, during the time of product contracts, collective members and cadres continually argued about categorizing contracted land and determining quotas. Peasants wanted to have fields with modest quotas and refused to accept fields on which they were not able to produce more than the quota.³

Villagers in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen recalled that a few seasons after the implementation of product contracts many of them lost their enthusiasm for collective farming because they could not produce more than the quota and because the value of collective work-points was low.⁴ In explaining the poor earnings villagers received from collective farming under product contracts, a former chairman of Binh Lanh collective admitted,

At that time the quota was set too high. For example, the quota for a *sào* (500 square meters) of the best soil land was about 200 kilograms of paddy (equal to 4 tons per a hectare) and the quota of work was 5 work-days per *sào*. These quotas were stipulated by the district's authorities and readjusted within five years. In general, collective members received less than 50 percent of what they produced.⁵

A QN-DN newspaper in March 1983 evaluated the performance of Duy Phuoc, one of the leading collectives in the province, and revealed that although the paddy production in the

² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nâng cao chất lượng khoán sản phẩm trong vụ sản xuất đông xuân' [Improving the product contract in the winter-spring crop], 25 November 1981.

³ Interview, Hien Loc village, Binh Lanh, 24 October 2005.

⁴ Interview, Hien Loc and Thanh Yen villages, October to December 2005.

⁵ Interview, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2004.

collective had increased from 2,981 tons in 1978 to 3,577 in 1982, the living conditions of collective members had not improved much; the value of a work-day was still around 2-2.1 kilograms and 2 VND similar to that of the previous system. The reason was that the costs of production were huge, accounting for 75-80 percent of the total product. Only 43.7 percent of the production went to members. Therefore, income from collectives sector was far less than peasants' expectations.⁶

Fed up with the low rewards from collective farming, peasants started to devise their own arrangements. A man in Hien Loc village recalled,

After the implementation of contracts, everyone had to do other work (*làm thêm*) outside the collective sector. If not, we suffered from hunger. Some went to collect firewood and rattan to sale; some reclaimed and worked land abandoned by the collectives.⁷

Likewise, a poor old lady remembered:

At that time, we tried to reclaim any abandoned land on the banks of streams, small ponds, corners of contracted fields, and every little bit of land. Besides, we increased the number of crops on contracted fields. For example, on one-crop-a-year land, we grew two crops; on two-crops-a-year land, we grew three crops.⁸

Many peasants claimed that they often stole some of the collective resources, such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides to use in their own household farming (garden, five percent and reclaimed land) rather than on their contracted collective fields. A QN-DN newspaper in December 1983 reported that in many parts of the province, 'collective members appropriated collective land for their own farming ... they reclaimed new land, cleared the forest for cultivation, evaded paying taxes to the state and disobeyed the management of the collective'. Meanwhile, 'collective land was cultivated poorly or abandoned'. These problems were severe in some places, especially in midland areas. The article warned that if

⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hop tac xa Duy Phuoc chang duong 5 nam cua phong trao hop tac hoa nong nghiep' [Duy Phuoc collective over the past 5 years], 5 March 1983.

⁷ Interview, Hien Loc village, 24 October 2004.

⁸ Interview, Hien Loc village, 20 October 2005.

collective ownership was not well established soon, the increased expansion of the household economy would significantly harm the collective economy.⁹

Generally speaking, under product contracts peasant the household economies had expanded rapidly. Although the household economy was officially recognized in late 1979 as an integral part of the collective economy, QN-DN leaders in 1984 still expressed their concern about 'the transgression of the household economy over the collective economy', especially in weak collectives where the managerial boards were not able to control well land, draft animals and labor.¹⁰ For example, Tam Ngoc was among the weak collectives in Tam Ky district in which 'the struggle between two paths (collective, *tập thể*, and individuals, *cá thể*) was severe'. By early 1984 the collective controlled and managed only 30 percent of 'collectivized' land; and all draft animals had been returned to individual households. The collective was not able to control and manage labor, so each worker contributed on average only 80-90 days per year; the used the rest of their time for their household economies. Members' collective income was minor, accounting for only 13 percent of their total income. Therefore, 'they did not care much about the collective economy'.¹¹

According to a report of the Agricultural Department of QN-DN Communist Party's Committee (Ban Nông Nghiệp Tỉnh Ủy), by November 1984, the household economy accounted for 70 percent of a farming family's income while earnings from their collective work made up only 30 percent. In large paddy growing lowland areas of the province where collectives were able to manage and control almost all of the land, the share of the household

⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Củng cố và xác lập vùng chắc che do sở hữu tập thể trong hợp tác xã' [Solidifying collective ownership], 7 December 1983.

¹⁰ VCP had recognized and encouraged the development of the households economy since the sixth plenum of VCP Fourth Congress in 1979, particularly since its fifth plenum in 1982 (see Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990: p.130-1, Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p. 220-1).

¹¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cuộc đấu tranh giữa hai con đường đang diễn ra ở một hợp tác xã' [The struggle between two paths: collective and individual farming in a collective], 4 January 1984.

earnings and the collective earnings in a household's total income was approximately equal. However, in the midlands, where the area of secondary crop land was large, about 80-95 percent of peasants' total income came from the household economy.¹² In assessing the development of the household economy during 1981-1984, a provincial leader raised his concern,

Since 1981 thanks to adopting product contracts, the potential of the household economies has been exploited well, in the form of merging collective economy with the household economy. So far, the household economy has been recognized but has been loosely managed (*buông lỏng*). So, in many locations the household economy has developed in a spontaneous, unstable and incorrect way and relied largely on free markets; in some areas where the collective economy was weak, the household economy even clashed with and encroached upon the collective economy in terms of land, labor, fertilizers and so on¹³

In response to the uncontrolled expansion of the household economy, QN-DN provincial leaders in December 1984 issued directive No.53/CT-TV which, on the one hand, stressed continually encouraging the development of the household economy but, on the other, emphasized controlling and guiding the activities of the household economy to bring them in line with the collective economy.¹⁴

Despite inadequate support from local authorities, household economies in QN-DN continued to rise, especially after VCP leaders launched the economic reforms (*Doi Moi*) of 1986, which officially recognized the existence of non-socialist economic sectors, liberalized trading and allowed freer flow of capital and labor that created more job opportunities outside the collective. A former brigade leader in Thanh Yen village recalled,

In the late 1980s, especially after *Doi Moi*, many young peasants abandoned or returned part of their contracted land to the collective so that they could earn a living outside the collective. Some went prospecting for gold and some went on

¹² Tran Ngoc Cu (Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh QN-DN), 'Kinh te gia dinh o tinh ta' [The household economy in QN-DN], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 29 November 1984.

¹³ Ibid;

¹⁴ Ban Thuong Vu Tinh Uy QN-DN, 'Nghị quyết 53 CT-TV về việc tiếp tục khuyến khích phát triển kinh tế gia đình' [Provincial resolution No.53 on continually facilitating the household economy], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 20 December 1984.

trading. These people often got higher income than those clinging to the land. Therefore, many wanted to leave collective farming (*muốn chạy ra ngoài*).¹⁵

Similarly, a former brigade leader in Hien Loc village remarked that when the country's economy was opened (*mở cửa*), young people went to earn a living elsewhere. Some worked for state enterprises; some went to make a living in Dak Lak province [in the Central highlands].¹⁶

A former building worker (*thợ hồ*) of a specialized team in Binh Lanh collective recalled that at the later stages of product contracts, he did not want to work for the collective simply because the value of a work-day in the collective was about one kilogram of paddy. Working for individuals he received 3 *ang* of paddy per day (equal to 12-15 kilograms).¹⁷ A July article of the QN-DN newspaper revealed,

The biggest problem [that the collective faced] was that peasants in Binh Lanh wanted to escape collective farming (*thoát ly hợp tác xã*). By June 1987 at least 160 young people refused to accept contracted land or join specialist teams; this figure was on the rise ... The reason was that the value of collective work-day of Binh Lanh collective was about 1.35 kilograms of paddy; the share of the collective economy in collective household's total income was nearly 30 percent. The excess beyond the quota was small ... [Therefore] there were two trends in peasants' behavior. First, peasants wanted to receive less land so that they were able to intensify farming to exceed the quota. This gave them more time to care for their household economies. Second, some people, especially young people wanted to earn a living in towns and cities because they thought collective farming could not benefit them.¹⁸

In short, product contracts reduced the practices of going through the motions of collective farming in order to accumulate work-points. They were unable, however, to motivate peasants to maximize their efforts to enhance the performance of collective farming. Rather, peasants were mainly concerned with their household economies. Therefore, collective farming under product contracts was still a site of struggle between peasant and collective's interests. Peasants always tried to minimize the disadvantages and maximize the

¹⁵ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 9 December 2005.

¹⁶ Interview, Hien Loc village, 23 October 2004.

¹⁷ Interview, Hien Loc village, 20 October 2005.

¹⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Suy nghĩ về Binh Lanh: Su giàu có ở phía trước' [Binh Lanh: Prosperity in still ahead], 23 July 1987.

advantages of collective farming for themselves, using any available resource to increase their household economies at the expense of the collective economy.

Debt

In the first few years after implementing product contracts, the living conditions of collective members and food production in QN-DN had improved somewhat. However, at later stages, collective members' living conditions stagnated and even worse; peasants fell into debts to the collective and the state.

According to a QN-DN newspaper, by 1985 most collectives in Thang Binh district owed the state because members continually postponed paying (*dây dưa*) or refused to pay what they owed to collectives. District households owed about 800 tons of paddy. One reason was that cadres managed harvests and produce loosely. For example, in 1985 in Ha Lam collective No.1 each household was allowed to harvest individually. After harvesting, some households used the produce for their own consumption or sold some to meet their daily needs rather than paying their quota or other obligations to the collective. As a result, 250 out of 580 households had debts totaling 130 tons of paddy, accounting for 12 percent of total collective yield.¹⁹

A 1987 investigation (*điều tra*) found that despite authorities increasing agricultural input investments, staple food production and food procurement had not grown accordingly. Meanwhile, collective members' debts to collectives and the collectives' debts to the state had increased. For example, QN-DN collectives owed the state during 1984-1986 was 25,792 tons of paddy equivalents. The total debt in 1986 alone was 11,903 tons, equal to about 4.1 percent of the grain production in QN-DN that year.²⁰

¹⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tai sao tien do huy dong luong thuc o Thang Binh cham' [Why is the food procurement in Thang Binh slow?], 7 December 1985.

²⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dieu tra (investigation): No luong thuc van de can giai quyét hien nay' [Debt is a big problem], 29 October 1987.

According to QN-DN newspaper accounts, there were several reasons for the increased. First, cadres classified land and determined quotas irrationally, inaccurately and unfairly. Second, collectives did not fully service such farming phases as irrigating, supplying fertilizers and spraying pesticides. Instead, they made 'straight contracts' (*khoán thẳng*) or 'package contracts' (*khoán gọn*) to collective households. Third, collectives were not able to provide resources and services to members on time or with the right quantity or quality. Therefore, many households, especially those in areas where irrigation was not ensured, suffered losses which led to their accumulating debts to the collective. Fourth, the supply of state inputs to collectives was still hampered by bureaucratic red tape. For example, the amount of input for a collective was calculated according to the area of land rather than its agricultural needs. Fifth, the state set the terms of trade between agricultural inputs and agricultural produce to disfavor the latter. Finally, authorities imposed dozens of payments on collective households and collectives for bonds (*công trái thóc*), debt repayment (*nợ tiết kiệm thóc*), funds to help people affected by storms and floods and to train soldiers (*nợ thóc luyện tập quân sự*) and so on.²¹

Villagers in Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villages recalled that under product contracts, most households owed paddy to the collective. A former chairman of Binh Lanh collective asserted that by the end of the product contract system (mid-1988), collective households owed 500 tons of paddy to the collective; more than 70 percent of peasant households had debts to the collective.²²

An old man in Hien Loc remembered,

Product contracts had not made our lives much better. Many people owed debts to the collective because a plot produced 30 *ang* of paddy but we had to pay the collective 50 *ang* of paddy. I ask you, what did I have to pay them?²³

²¹ QN-DN newspaper, 'Cung co hoan thien cong tac khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep' [Solidifying and perfecting the product contract], 25 October 1986.

²² Interview, Binh Lanh, 24 October 2004.

²³ Interview, Hien Loc village, 14 October 2005

A former brigade leader of Binh Lanh collective admitted,

Under product contracts, the quota was often set inaccurately. Despite areas where production conditions were unfavorable, collective cadres still made contracts with relatively high quotas. Despite land not being suitable for growing rice, cadres still forced households to grow rice. Therefore, many suffered losses and fell into debt.²⁴

A son of a former landlord in Hien Loc village had a similar view,

In the period of product contracts many households owed debts to the collective because the implementation of product contracts was unreasonable and the quotas were set unfairly among households. Many could not produce more than the quota so they owed the collective. Most of them were poor, landless and cadre households.²⁵

A man blinded by M 79 rocket's explosion during land reclamation in 1975 explained his family's debt in the late 1980s.

During that time, ninety-five percent of the households here were in debt; even cadres of mass organizations (*cán bộ mặt trận*) too. I owed one ton of paddy to the collective because we were unable to produce more than the quota. Besides, I was not able to do collective work so I did not have many work-points to reduce the debt. Some households might have had the ability to pay but refused to. But I was really not able to pay. Collective leaders called me to the office some times but I told them the truth that my family did not have enough food to live so I was not able to pay. Finally, seeing my real situation, they had to accept it and gave up asking me.²⁶

Likewise, another poor lady justified not paying her debts,

We had a large debt but we did not pay because if we paid, how could we live? With one *sào* of land we could produce 20 *ang* of paddy (100 kilograms) but the quota was 200 kilograms. How could we pay? Meanwhile, my family had 5-6 mouths to feed. We were too hungry so when the collective asked us to pay, we told them the truth. If we were hungry, we had to eat. The harvest was not enough for our intake so how could we pay?²⁷

A man in Hien Loc village remembered,

My family received 1 *mẫu* and 5 *thước* of land (5,166 square meters). The collective coerced us to accept a large tract. My family had only 3 people: my mother, my elder sister and me; at that time I was seventeen years old. Among the contracted plots was 4 *sào* of land without irrigation (one crop per year). For this four-*sào* land, I could produce only 30 *ang* of paddy (150 kilograms) but had to

²⁴ interview, Hien Loc village, 23 October 2004.

²⁵ Interview, Hien village, 24 October 2004.

²⁶ Interview, Hien Loc village, 19 October 2005.

²⁷ Interview, Hien Loc village, 22 October 2005.

pay the collective 480 kilograms. I ask you, how could I pay? I had to owe the collective. At that time I often went to do collective work and accumulated a large number of work-points. So, the collectives used my work-points to reduce my debts but the remainder was still large. I had to plant sweet potatoes and cassavas to pay the remaining debt. We had a difficult life and always owed the collective. Some households owed tons of paddy. I did not understand why the collective set the quota so high. A *sào* of land without irrigation had a quota of 120 kilograms. How could we produce that amount? We knew that they had coerced us but we did not know what to do. Some people cried a lot and begged the collective to take back the land but that hardly succeeded.²⁸

Like their counterparts in Hien Loc village, about 90 percent of the households in Thanh Yen village owed the Binh Dinh collective. By the late 1980s the whole village (60 households) owed the collective about 22 tons of paddy. Some households owed more than one ton of paddy each.²⁹ An old man in the village recalled,

Under contract No.100, paddy productivity was low due to inadequate fertilizer. If we produced three *ví* (containers) of paddy, we had to hand over two *ví* to the collective ... collective farming was always unfair. Some worked to death while others relaxed but still enjoyed higher incomes [he was referring to collective cadres]. At that time every transaction was based on paddy; every fee was converted into paddy. For example, collective leaders raised a certain fund, they charged us in paddy; if we did not do collective work, they punished us in paddy. They charged us in paddy ceaselessly so every household ended up owing. Some owed tons of paddy to the collective.³⁰

Another old man in the village added,

Under product contracts, people did not want to receive much contracted land for fearing of falling below the quota. We contributed a lot, more than 70 percent of yield. It was too much. That's why many people owed the collective. The payment of the fertilizers (received from the collective) alone was a half the yield.³¹

A lady whose family owed two tons of paddy to the collective, the largest single debt in the village, explained,

Under product contracts, the collective forced us to accept large amounts of land. My family did not have cattle so we did not use manure to fertilize the fields. We did not have money to buy chemical fertilizers as others did. Moreover, my husband was fed up with collective farming and refused to work. I worked the

²⁸ Interview, Hien Loc village, 21 October 2005.

²⁹ Interview, 9 December, 2005.

³⁰ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 12 October 2004; *ví* is a large bamboo basket villagers often use to store paddy.

³¹ Interview, Thanh Yen village, 17 December 2005.

fields alone. Therefore, we always had bad harvests and were not able to pay our debts.³²

In response to the increased debts in the late 1980s, Binh Lanh and Binh Dinh hardened their collection procedures. According to a former Binh Dinh collective cadre, initially cadres relied on commune police to confiscate debtors' properties (such as cattle and bicycles). But the results of hard line property seizure were unpleasant. Later collectives hired district court cadres and police to collect debts by paying them 20 percent of funds reclaimed. However, results were unsatisfactory because many debtors had nothing to be confiscated. Finally, authorities gave up collecting peasants' debts.³³ A former brigade leader of Binh Lanh collective lamented,

Many people owed the collective; they said they did not have enough food to eat so they could not pay. They said that they would pay their debts when they could sell their fresh in the markets. They watched each other to see if others paid or not, if not, neither did they. They copied each other (*nghĩ với nhau*).³⁴

A 70 year old man commented, '[under product contracts], many people were in debt to the collective. If people were poor, the state failed. It was impossible for the state to kill people if they were not able to pay their debts'.³⁵

Abandoning or accepting less contracted land

The QN-DN newspaper in late 1984 reported that many collectives in the province used agricultural land wastefully and ineffectively. For example, collectives had abandoned a large amount of agricultural land or irrationally converted some of it into non-farming land. As a result, in 1984 alone QN-DN had lost 5,000 to 10,000 hectares of cultivated land.³⁶

³² Interview, Thanh Yen village, 9 November 2005.

³³ Interview, Thanh Yen, 9 December 2005.

³⁴ Interview, Hien Loc village, 15 October 2005.

³⁵ Interview, Hien Loc, 14 October, 2005.

³⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Chung quanh van de su dung dat nong nghiep' [The problem of using agricultural land], 15 August 1984; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi tong ket nam san xuat nong nghiep, phat dong chien dich san xuat vu dong xuan' [A conference of summing up five years of agricultural transformation], 30 October 1984.

A further investigation in 1985 found that one reason for the decrease in agricultural land was that peasants had abandoned collective fields. For example, in 1984 peasants in eleven districts of the province had abandoned 13,000 hectares; abandoned area in some collectives was hundreds of hectare each. In addition, people illegally appropriated collective land for building new houses, gardens and other private uses. Another reason for the diminution of agricultural land was that it was used wastefully for public work projects.³⁷

Villagers abandoned collective fields largely because costs of cultivating were too high. A QN-DN newspaper in November 1986 reported that after adopting product contracts,

Some collectives did not provide collective households with agricultural inputs or services sufficiently or on time, leaving them alone to take care of their crops. If collective households invested more in their contracted fields, the excess beyond the quota would not cover their expenditure ... It was worrying that collective members did not want to accept contracted land. Instead they wanted to return it to the collective in order to do outside work which brought them higher incomes.³⁸

An example of the problem was Duy Thanh collective. It had been one of the good collectives in Duy Xuyen district during the work-point system. A few years after adopting product contracts, however, the number of households producing beyond their quotas had significantly decreased. And the more peasants invested in collective fields, the more they suffered losses. Therefore, 'many returned the land or kept some land just as a formality (*lấy lệ*) so that they could set aside time to do other jobs to earn a living'. This led to a paradoxical situation in that the collective had 'a high population density but unused land'.³⁹ Similarly, in the winter-spring of 1985-1986, 30 percent of peasant households of Dien Nam collective

³⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hội nghị quản lý ruộng đất của tỉnh sử dụng tài nguyên đất với hiệu quả kinh tế cao nhất, chăm dứt việc cấp đất trái phép, xử lý nghiêm khắc những vụ lấn chiếm đất trái phép của nhà nước và tập thể' [Conference on land management], 25 April 1985; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Can quản lý và sử dụng đất nông nghiệp một cách hợp lý' [The need to use agricultural land rationally], 25 April 1985.

³⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Thúc đẩy coi nông nghiệp là mặt trận hàng đầu' [Agricultural sector needs to be regarded as top national priority], 27 November 1986; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Củng cố hoàn thiện công tác khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng đến người lao động trong nông nghiệp' [Solidifying and perfecting the product contract], 25 October 1986.

³⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hợp tác xã Duy Thanh từng bước hoàn thiện khoán sản phẩm đối với cây lúa' [Duy Thanh collective gradually perfected the product contract], 17 December 1987; the collective set a quota of 8.6 tons per hectare per year (in the winter-spring season: 3 tons per hectare, the spring-summer season: 3.2 tons and the third season: 2.4 tons).

No.2 in Dien Ban district decided to return collective land.⁴⁰ In mid-1986, for the same reasons 20 percent of households of Binh Trieu collective in Thang Binh district returned their contracted land.⁴¹

Another example was Binh Tu collective No.1, deemed one of the most advanced collectives of Thang Binh district in the early 1980s. In the first few years of adopting the product contract, especially using the Phu Ninh irrigation system, paddy productivity began to increase from 1.2 tons per hectare during the work-points period to 2.6-3.0 tons per hectare from 1982-1983. However, since the mid-1980s the number of households who were in debt to the collective had increased over time. By the end of 1986, 79 percent of households (836) owed the collective 298 tons of paddy. Therefore, peasants began to fear collective farming (*sợ ruộng*). Many believed that returning fields to the collective or abandoning them was the only way to deal with their increased debts. As a result, in late 1986, peasants had abandoned 35 hectares of collective land.⁴²

Binh Lanh and Dinh Dinh collectives in Thang Binh district faced problems similar to those in other districts of QN-DN. The number of peasants who abandoned or returned their contracted land increased annually. For example, according to a QN-DN newspaper, in 1984 hundreds of households in Binh Lanh collective decided to accept less contracted land or return some of their unfavorable land to the collective. As a result, villagers were unwilling to accept contracts on 30 hectares (*không có người nhận khoán*).⁴³ According to a former chairman of Binh Lanh collective, after *Doi Moi* began the number of households returning land to the collective increased on an average of 40-50 households per year. Some returned

⁴⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hop tac xa Dien Nam 2 khoan moi dong luc moi' [New farming arrangements created new incentives in Dien Nam collective No.2], 24 December 1987.

⁴¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Binh Trieu 2 qua vu dong xuan 1987-1988' [Performance of Binh Trieu collective No.2 in the spring-winter of 1987-1988], 10 May 1988.

⁴² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Su that ve khoan moi o Binh Tu 1' [The true story of new contracts in Binh Tu No.1], 23 June 1988.

⁴³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong, nhung vuon mac va cach giai quyet' [The product contract: Problems and resolutions], 8 November 1984.

land which was unfavorable for production; some returned land in order to earn a living in the Central highlands or elsewhere. Some tried to farm land not controlled by the collective.⁴⁴

Villagers in Hien Loc complained that under product contracts, the collective established many new specialist teams (*chuyên khâu*) and other non-agricultural industries (*chuyên ngành*), which recruited many laborers. Therefore, each cultivating laborer in the collective was assigned more land.⁴⁵ A man in the village recalled,

My family had 5 primary laborers; three of my children went to work for the specialized teams so my wife and I, two laborers, received 2 *mẫu* of land (one hectare). Some other households received 3 *mẫu* (1.5 hectares) each. We were responsible for a large amount of land, but were not able to farm it efficiently. In addition, because many were not able to do animal husbandry, they did not have enough manure to fertilize fields. As a result, productivity of their fields was low and they owed the collective. Concurrently, they did not have many work-points to reduce their debt burden. Therefore, they wanted to return the land to the collective. I also intended to return all of the land to the collective in order to migrate to the Central Highlands because I had a relative there.⁴⁶

A lady with a disabled husband and young children shared her story,

When authorities distributed land [by drawing lots] to make contracts, I drew a lot (*bóc thăm*) of one *mẫu* and seven *thước* (equal to 5,233 square meters). That was too big for me! My husband was disabled and my children were too young, how could I manage it? I tried my best to work but contributed almost all of the produce to the collective. Thanks go to Mr. Linh (Nguyen Van Linh) who saw our problems. If collective farming had continued, I guessed that the land would be completely exhausted [because people exploited land too much]. If product contracts continued for a few more years, all the people here would refuse to do collective farming.⁴⁷

Similarly, a former brigade leader in Thanh Yen village commented, 'thanks to Mr. Linh's ascension to power, people were freed from collective farming. If not, people in this village would have run away from the collective because they worked hard but received little'.⁴⁸

A widow with four young children in Thanh Yen village remembered,

Under the contract No.100, they [the collective] granted me two *mẫu* of land (equal to one hectare). At first, I pleaded with them saying my children were

⁴⁴ Interview, Binh Lanh, 21 October 2004.

⁴⁵ Interview, Hien Loc village, October-December 2005.

⁴⁶ Interview, Hien Loc village, 22 October 2005.

⁴⁷ Interview, Hien Loc village, 15 October 2005.

⁴⁸ Interview, Thanh Yen, 5 October 2005.

young and had no father, so how could we manage the land? But they would not take land back. I tried to work but my performance was bad because the fields were full of weeds [due to inadequate pesticides and lack of laborers]. We paid a lot of paddy to the collective while my children did not have enough rice to eat. Finally, I had to return some of my contracted land to the collective.⁴⁹

A man in the village who worked land that his neighbor had abandoned during the product contract period observed,

Under contract No.100, people did not want to accept much collective land. They wanted to go on trading or reclaim abandoned land around pools and banks of streams to supplement their income. Some people received land but let others farm it while they earned a living elsewhere. [For example], Mr. Nen abandoned all his contracted land and went on trading. The brigade leader requested me to work his land. That's why at that time I farmed a large amount of land. However, I got a little profit because we had to contribute more than two thirds of the produce to the collective.⁵⁰

A former chairman of Binh Dinh collective commented,

Under product contract No.100, many people wanted to return their contracted land. This raised big questions why under product contracts many people were not able to produce more than the quota; and why they wanted to abandon their land. In the past, landlords were thought to exploit peasants but nobody abandoned their rent land; peasants often competed with each other to hire land from landlords. But now why did peasants want to abandon land?

He assumed that national party leaders might raise such questions and finally decided to change their policy.⁵¹

In short, everyday peasant practices such as pursuing household economic activities, abandoning land, and accepting less collective land posed great challenges to collective farming. These practices contributed significantly to the failure of VCP's agrarian policies and their subsequent change in the late 1980s (discussed later in this chapter).

Local cadres' practices

In theory, product contracts diminished cadres' power and increased peasants' responsibility over managing collective farming. Villagers were permitted to do three phases of farm-work

⁴⁹ Interview, Thanh Yen, 31 October 2005.

⁵⁰ Interview, Thanh Yen, 17 December 2005.

⁵¹ Interview, Binh Dinh commune, QN-DN, 6 October 2004.

on their own and were supposed to work collectively to do the remaining five phases of farm-work. However, the new system created new opportunities for cadres to benefit at the expense of ordinary collective members. For example, managers were still given considerable power directing collective farming but they were not responsible for its performance. So they tended to shift their responsibilities onto villagers and embezzle major collective resources over which they had control, such as agricultural inputs, collective properties and a large portion of the produce.

A QN-DN newspaper in November 1981 warned that it was erroneous to think that after the adoption of product contracts all collective problems had been solved. In reality, cadres in many of the collectives and brigades 'were not positive about improving management'; they did not closely look after land, production tools and farm-work. Many offloaded the tasks of preparing seedlings and fertilizing land to the collective members without properly monitoring their performance.⁵² Villagers in Thanh Yen and Hien Loc also recalled that cadres often failed to fulfill their duties, such as spraying to prevent insects or watering the fields on time. Therefore, when seeing their paddy fields attacked by insects or being short of water, villagers often tried to save their fields first rather than waiting for a collective response. A former brigade leader of Binh Dinh collective said,

Since the outset of product contracts, the collective had nearly made "blank contracts" with peasants; soon after implementing contract No.100, the collective returned collective draft animals to households. In fact, the collective was only in charge of delivering fertilizers, spraying insecticides and supplying water. Meanwhile, peasants did everything else but they were obliged to the collective: paying tax, agricultural input's fees (fertilizers and insecticides) and irrigation's fee and contributing to collective funds.⁵³

According to a QN-DN newspaper, a few years after implementing product contracts, many collectives increased quotas but did not increase their investment accordingly. Some even tried to reduce production costs by lowering the price of manure and the value of a

⁵² QN-DN newspaper, 'Nang cao chat luong khoan san pham trong san xuat dong xuan' [Improving the product contract], 25 November 1981.

⁵³ Interview, Thanh Yen, 5 November 2005.

collective work-day.⁵⁴ Some other collectives where cadres were allowed to farm contracted land, cadres lowered the quota to ensure themselves a profit at the expense of collective earnings.⁵⁵

When authorities ordered loans of secondary crop land to households, collective cadres in some locations took advantages for themselves. Some saw it as an opportunity to appropriate land for their families and relatives. When authorities wanted those fields farmed collectively again, these cadres tended to delay.⁵⁶

In June 1983 QN-DN provincial leaders asserted that poor management of collectives resulted from local cadres' weaknesses. Due to inadequate training, local cadres were often incompetent and lacked discipline. Some even did things at odds with state and party policies.⁵⁷

During 1983-1986 provincial authorities launched several campaigns to improve collectives and train local cadres. Results fell below expectations. A QN-DN newspaper in October 1986 reported that collective cadres still 'implemented incorrectly the 5 phases-contracts signed with collective members' by letting households alone to do almost all of phases of farm-work; they did not conform to the requirements of managing production, inputs and outputs which significantly affected the performance of collective farming and diminished the value of the collective work-day.⁵⁸ Besides, in directing agricultural

⁵⁴ Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy, 'Nhung van de can giai quyét de phat huy tinh dong luc cua che do khoan moi trong hop tac xa san xuat nong nghiep' [Some ideas to facilitate the incentives for the product contract], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 24 November 1984.

⁵⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket 3 nam thuc hien khoan san pham den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep (1981-1984) [Summing up three years of 1981-1984 implementing the product contract], 6 July 1985.

⁵⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cung co va xac lap vung chac che do so huu tap the trong nong nghiep' [Solidifying the collective onweship], 7 December 1983.

⁵⁷ Pham Duc Nam (QN-DN provincial chairman), 'Cong tac truoc mat de cung co va phat trien quan he san xuat o nong thon' [On-going tasks for solidifying agricultural production relations], 18 June 1983.

⁵⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Cung co hoan thien cong tac khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong trong nong nghiep' [Solidifying and perfecting the product contract], 25 October 1986.

production, collective cadres 'put weighty emphasis on controlling the end-products but paid scant attention to supplying inputs, credits and technology'.⁵⁹

Since 1986 the press had more latitude to tackle 'social evils'. QN-DN newspaper began to reveal several cadre problems including leaders of collectives. For example, an investigation in Dien Phuoc collective No.2 in Dien Ban district found that 16,602 tons of stored paddy disappeared during the period 1983-1986. However, collective managers did not take responsibility for this loss. Instead, they considered that 'the paddy vanished naturally (*tự nhiên biến mất*) rather than being pocketed by anyone'. They asked collective members for their understanding (*thông cảm*). They also intimidated and chastised any member who did not agree with or dared to raise their voices in protest.⁶⁰

Investigations also found that cadres used dishonest weight standards, thereby cheating ordinary people. Inspecting 74 scales of several food-related-organizations in 8 of the largest paddy producing districts in 1986, authorities discovered that only 5 scales met proper standards. The article commented that by weighing incorrectly, staple food officials (*ngành lương thực*) had embezzled a large amount of food in the province.⁶¹

Cadres in Thang Binh district also embezzled inputs and outputs. In explaining the reasons for poor productivity in the winter-spring of 1986-1987 (paddy productivity was 1.6 tons per hectare on an average, the lowest productivity since 1976), an article revealed that 'a large amount of chemical fertilizers [supplied by the state] did not go directly to collective paddy fields but passed through the hands of private merchants and then to the fields [or peasant households]'. And, many collectives just 'fertilized on paper' (*bón phân trên giấy*). For example, investigations in 5 collectives in Binh Tu, Binh Sa and Binh Hai communes

⁵⁹ QN-DN newspaper, 'Thức su coi nông nghiệp là mặt trận hàng đầu' [Agriculture needs to be regarded as top national priority], 27 November 1986.

⁶⁰ QN-DN newspaper, 'Nhìn vào đồng ruộng tập thể: Hai ban cán ở hợp tác xã Dien Phuoc 2' [Looking at collective fields: Weighing at Dien Phuoc collective No.2], 8 August 1987.

⁶¹ QN-DN newspaper, 'Trách nhiệm của ngành lương thực trong việc để hao hụt một số khối lượng rất lớn lương thực' [State food agencies need to take responsibility for a considerable loss of staple food], 16 August 1986.

found that in 1986 alone, 120 tons of urea fertilizers had 'flown to free markets' (*bay ra thị trường*).⁶²

In 1987 authorities in QN-DN carried out several inspections and retrieved 599.4 million VND and goods worth 50 millions of VND, which cadres had embezzled. In agricultural collectives, inspectors found 'many cases of embezzlement and theft'. For example, 'a storehouse keeper of Dai Quang collective (Dai Loc district) embezzled 19 tons of paddy; an inter-brigades-accountant of Dien Thoai No.1 (Dien Ban district) embezzled 35 tons'.⁶³

In response to the local cadres' widespread negativism, the lead article of a QN-DN newspaper in September 1987 called for 'implementing extensively and fully socialist democracy'. It also complained,

Local cadres and party cadres have already forgotten the lesson of "taking people as the foundation" (*lấy dân làm gốc*) because they now lacked democratic spirit and were not close to the masses in order to hear their voices. Therefore, there were too many heart-breaking incidents such as violating the master rights of people, embezzlements and bribes which took place widely in many locations, even in some executive committees of local party organizations'.⁶⁴

Villagers in Hien Loc and Thanh Yen also complained that under product contracts, collective cadres set high quotas and raised numerous funds but used the income in ambiguous ways. Most funds went into the pockets of key collective cadres. A man in Thanh Yen village commented, 'people contributed a lot to collective funds but the collective did not do anything to benefit the people. Cadres took it all'.⁶⁵ A former brigade leader revealed that especially after the later stages of product contracts, 'collective cadres knew that the

⁶² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vi sao nang suat dong xuan o Thang Binh giam sut?' [Why did rice productivity in Thang Binh go down?], 28 April 1987; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vu dong xuan 1983-1984 Thang Binh cung co hop ta xa voi tap trung chi dao vung lua co san luong cao' [Thang Binh will solidify collectives and extend high-yielding rice in the winter-spring of 1983-1984], 9 November 1983; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tai sao tien do huy dong luong thuc o Thang Binh cham' [Why is the food procurement in Thang Binh slow?], 7 December 1985.

⁶³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'To chuc thanh tra cac cap tang cuong cong tac thanh tra,kiem tra nhanh chong phat hien nhung vu viec tieu cuc' [Intensifying investigations on negativism], 14 November 1987.

⁶⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xa Luan: thuc hien rong rai va day du nen dan chu xa hoi chu nghia' [Implementing fully the socialist democracy], 1 September 1987.

⁶⁵ Interview, Thanh Yen, 1 October 2005.

organization would sooner or later be dismantled so they gradually turned collective properties into their own'.⁶⁶ Another former brigade leader confirmed,

After the implementation of product contracts, collective properties such as tractors, water pumps and rice husking machines had gradually disappeared, falling into the pockets of collective cadres. People saw the collective properties spirited away (*hao mòn*) so they did not want to contribute to the collective anymore.⁶⁷

The excessive number of local cadres together with embezzlement consumed a large amount of villagers' produce. Villagers often complained, 'peasants worked, the cadres enjoyed' (*cời làm cho cối ăn*). A man in Hien Loc village recalled,

The apparatus of collective administration consisted of many cadres so they divided among themselves much of people's income. The collective opened up many non-farming industries so it needed more cadres to manage them: animal husbandry, brick-kilns, forestry, building, carpentry, and so on. All collective cadres and workers of these specialized teams had to be paid in paddy while the non-farming income went to collective funds. Therefore, collective members' income had to be reduced. Moreover, the collective had to subsidize the people's committee, invalid and martyr families and so on. The state should have taken care of these people but it did not. Because the party played a leadership role, when the authorities asked for something, the collective had to hand it over. Therefore, the collective's income was constantly drained (*hao mòn hoài*).⁶⁸

A former chairman of Binh Lanh collective asserted that in the period of the product contract system,

a collective was like a small state. The collective was in charge of all kinds of subsidies for education, healthcare and cadre welfare. For example, when having a meeting, the district's party committee came to ask for a cow to slaughter. We had to give them one. Individual cadres from district offices also asked for help. Because the district authorities directly monitored us, when they asked for something we had to give it to them. Commune authorities did the same. The commune people committee still owes the collective about 30 million VND.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Interview, Thanh Yen; *QN-DN newspaper* in November 1983 also mentioned that the privatization of collective properties through forms of 'illegal liquidation' (*thanh lý trái phép*) had begun to take place in some collectives in the province (*QN-DN newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Cung co hop tac xa van de cap bach dua san xuat nong nghiep len mot buoc' [Solidifying collectives is an urgent task to advance agriculture], 14 November 1983).

⁶⁷ Interview, Thanh Yen, 5 November 2005.

⁶⁸ Interview, Hien Loc, 19 October 2005.

⁶⁹ Interview, Binh Lanh, 8 December, 2005.

In short, local cadres' practices contributed significantly to the poor performance of collective farming and the failure of product contracts system in QN-DN.

Everyday local practices during period 1981-1988 in An Giang in the Mekong Delta

Peasants' everyday practices

Farming poorly and owing debts to production units

In An Giang province, product contracts had a brief positive effect on production units that had performed poorly under the work-points system. Product contracts also helped boost 'socialist agricultural transformation' and bring more land and peasants into collective organizations. However, despite this and earlier land readjustments, peasants' living-conditions and agricultural productivity did not improve, at least not for long. The reasons have to do with peasants' response to collective farming.

Villagers in Long Dien B commune in Cho Moi district recalled that land readjustment and the product contract system of collectivization provided landless and land-short households with fields to farm. However, many of them farmed unprofitably and ended up deeply in debt to production units. Meanwhile, some landowners who had lost land during land readjustment gave up farming or grew only enough for their own consumption. A former cadre of production unit No.9 (Long Dien B) argued,

Some guys who did not know how to farm were put into the production units to receive land. The production unit was supposed to teach them how to farm. Despite the production unit delivering fertilizers to them in advance, they did not know how to spread it properly. As you know, although the state was concerned about agricultural output, performance was low because many people did not know how to farm while professional cultivators had lost much of their land.⁷⁰

Non-farmers accounted for more than half of total land receivers in Long Dien B. Most of them had been small traders, laborers or had other businesses. Some lived in Cho Moi town (the capital of Cho Moi district) and My Luong (another town in Cho Moi). During

⁷⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

collectivization, these people received land but they did not know how to farm well or were unenthusiastic about farming. Therefore, a few seasons after receiving land, they often transferred, mortgaged or sold their fields to others and resumed doing non-farming work. A man whose family had been river traders (*nghe ghe*) for generations recalled,

I received land but did not care for farming because I had lived on the boats since childhood. Other non-farming people were also forced to accept land. After receiving it, they transferred it to others or farmed it so poorly that weeds filled rice fields.⁷¹

Similarly, another river trader recalled,

My family had long been trading on boats so we were not good at farming. My parents previously had three *công* of land but they lent it to others. At the time [about 1984], we found it difficult to continue trading on the boat because it was extremely difficult to buy fuels. Besides, it was rumored that anyone who did not have land would be put to the New Economic Zones. Therefore, I returned to farming. Because I had three *công* of land from my parents, I did not receive any land from others. But we farmed unproductively. My first three, four harvests were bad. I was not able to pay the fees of the B contracts (*hợp đồng B*) [agricultural inputs].⁷² [Consequently] because I was not able to pay to the production unit, I was put into custody (*bị nhốt*) by commune police [in 1986]. At that time, many others also owed to production units because they did not know how to farm. Besides, the production unit provided us with insufficient fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation while we contributed so much to the production units. The contribution accounted for more than a half of our harvest.⁷³

Apart from a lack of know-how, insufficient supplies of agricultural inputs and poor functioning of production units, many poor peasants complained that they could not farm well because they were destitute and lacked capital to invest in their fields. For example, unlike the better-off peasants, poor peasants were not able to buy extra fertilizers and pesticides from free markets; they did not have enough money to hire laborers or machinery from production units to level the land which was necessary for growing high-yielding rice.⁷⁴ Some poor villagers complained that land redistributed to them was infertile, undulating and

⁷¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 7 August 2005.

⁷² In the years 1979-1986, at the beginning of each season, authorities (through production units) supplied peasants with agricultural inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) in return for peasant's paddy after harvest according to the stipulated exchange rate. This arrangement was called B contracts.

⁷³ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 August 2005.

⁷⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

located in unfavorable conditions. So many suffered losses and fell deeply into debt. Ultimately some had to transfer or abandon collective land after a few seasons of farming.⁷⁵

An investigation in Cho Moi district in December 1985 found that 70 percent of the peasants in the district lacked capital to invest in their farming. Due to that, peasants began to return land to production units. This problem was widespread in An Giang.⁷⁶ Especially, after *Doi Moi* when An Giang abolished some agricultural subsidies and the B contracts, poor peasants faced more difficulties in attaining agricultural inputs to invest in their farming. For example, according to An Giang newspaper in July 1987, when Chau Phu and Phu Tan districts abolished the B contracts, some peasants began to abandon their contracted land because they could not buy fertilizer.⁷⁷

In retrospect, some poor villagers in Long Dien B argued that with a few *công* of land from land readjustment, their families could not live on farming alone. The income from their farming was often less than that from their previous jobs. So, they had to supplement their livelihoods by doing wage work or small trading. The more time they worked for wages, the less time they had for their own farming. A former land-short man remembered,

In the time of production units, besides farming, we, the poor, had to do wage work for the rich households. Despite their land being readjusted, the rich still had more land than us. They also had much money so they hired us to work for them. Consequently, because poor households did not have much time to care for their own, they always had bad harvests.⁷⁸

A better-off man who had previously worked on land which some poor households had abandoned due to losses and debt commented that high-yielding rice farming required capital. Most of the poor households did not have enough capital, while production units supplied inadequate agricultural inputs. Moreover, they used a lot of their time to do wage

⁷⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 August 2005.

⁷⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cho Moi vào vụ mới' [Cho Moi begins to cultivate a new crop], 20 December 1985: p.2.

⁷⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xung quanh chuyện đầu tư cho sản xuất nông nghiệp' [The problem of agricultural investment], 17 July 1987: p.2.

⁷⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 7 August 2005.

work for others so they did not have much time to work for themselves. So, they farmed unprofitably and ended up in debt.⁷⁹

A former chair of Long Dien B Commune Peasant Association shared a similar view,

At first, some poor peasants were happy to receive readjusted land but later they felt dissatisfied because their farming had poor results. A poor family with 5-7 people received only a few *công* of land; if all their members clung to farming, they could not survive because they could not do other business. So, they had to rely on doing wage work to supplement their livelihood. As a result, their farming was bad; their paddy productivity was about 10 *gia* per *công* (2 tons per hectare) [while better-off's was 4-5 tons per hectare]. Because they farmed inefficiently, they transferred and mortgaged (*cầm cố*) their land to others despite authorities not allowing them.

He also revealed that despite the commune authorities encouraging peasants to exchange labor with each other, those in the Southern Region refused to do so. Peasants wanted to hire laborers rather than exchange labor with each other.⁸⁰ That is why the rice fields of poor households often had more weeds and was unprofitable.

Similar to their counterparts in QN-DN, many poor peasants in An Giang could not afford the cost of agricultural inputs and taxes and other obligations to the production units and ended up in debt. Most commonly they owed paddy for agricultural inputs (*nợ vật tư*) or B contract's debts (*nợ hợp đồng B*). According to an An Giang newspaper, some poor peasants, after receiving them from production units, sold them in the free market to meet their daily needs rather than using them in their fields. So, they ended up with bad harvests and were not able to pay costs. Some others adopted the tactic of putting 'one leg inside and the other leg outside' of production units so that they could get state agricultural inputs at low prices to sell to the free markets at higher prices.⁸¹ However, many poor peasants were not able to pay their debts because they farmed unproductively but they had to pay production units a large debt measured in paddy. A poor man recalled,

⁷⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

⁸⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 9 August 2005.

⁸¹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Người nông dân đang cần phương thức đầu tư hợp lý phát triển sản xuất nông nghiệp' [Peasants are demanding appropriate methods of agricultural investment], 23 October 1987: p.2; Interview, Long Dien B, June to August 2005.

At that time we always had bad harvests. After paying fees for inputs, irrigation, and contributing to production unit's funds, we had almost nothing left. So, we owed the production unit. The authorities often came to force us to pay debts but when they saw that we were really poor, they gave up.⁸²

A former cadre of production unit No.15 argued,

In the time of Mr. Le Duan [the former Communist Party secretary of Vietnam], it was compulsory to carry out land readjustment. But after readjusting land, because they were poor, many people farmed unproductively. They refused to pay (in paddy) fees for irrigation, fuel, fertilizer and pesticides. It was trouble. The production unit was not able collect fees from people who had nothing. The better-off households were able to invest in their farming while the poor households just farmed. Farming like that paddy productivity went down rapidly. The number of households who were not able to pay debts was so numerous that I could not count them all. Some did not pay a thing for four successive seasons. Most debtors were land receivers who previously had not have land (*không có cục đất chọi chìm*). After receiving land they did not transform or level out the land. They did not know how to farm. So when grew rice on land that was soaked here but dry there, some of their rice died, some survived. The results of such farming were bad so they owed the production unit. Meanwhile, professional cultivators knew how to farm and had capital to invest. They leveled out land properly so their crops grew better.⁸³

A former cadre of Long Dien B commune observed that among debtors, the 'priority' families (*gia đình chính sách*), such as martyrs and wounded soldiers (*thương binh liệt sỹ*), ex-soldiers and local poor cadres, had the largest debts. Apart from farming unproductively, these households often took advantage of their positions to evade paying the production units.⁸⁴

In order to collect arrears and make peasants pay their debts, production unit cadres in Long Dien B threshed peasants' paddy, especially those who were in debt or had poor harvests. A leader of production unit No.15 recalled,

The production unit had to control produce. After harvesting and threshing paddy in the fields, each household had to pay [fees, taxes and funds] before carrying paddy home. If a production unit allowed individual households to harvest freely, they would refuse to pay their debts fully. It was common that households with

⁸² Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

⁸³ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

⁸⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 July 2005; the martyr and wounded soldier households included those who had family members killed or wounded on duty in the wars. In An Giang most of these were related to conflicts with Cambodia (1978-mid-1980) and China (late 1970).

low paddy productivity came to reap and hide paddy at night. So, during the harvest time, production unit cadres had to patrol the fields at night.⁸⁵

Similarly, a former leader of production unit No.10 asserted, 'our production unit had to be in charge of threshing and collecting paddy in the fields. If we allowed them to reap the harvest freely, they would not pay the required amount to the production unit'.⁸⁶

Villagers in Long Dien B recalled that apart from collecting fees in the fields, production unit cadres and commune police frequently searched debtor's houses and confiscated their paddy and/or belongings; they even arrested some or put them in custody. However, the results were insignificant. Many debtors refused to pay their debts, justifying their behavior by saying they had no means to pay.⁸⁷

An An Giang newspaper in July 1988 announced,

Over the past years, peasants have not had the right to manage and control their own land and produce. Their fate was determined by others [cadres]. The only right that they had was to labor ... It was common that local authorities came to search for peasants' paddy, confiscated their belongings and took back the land to reduce their debts. It was a daily phenomenon that peasants in debt were arrested and remained behind bars for so-called 'education'. Many peasants did not have enough food, how could they pay?⁸⁸

After *Doi Moi* started, villagers tended to refuse to fulfill other obligations, such as contributing to collective funds to production units. A former cadre of production unit No.16 recalled that in the late 1980s, the number of peasant households who refused to pay production unit's funds increased in Cho Moi district. Those households were fed up with unprofitable farming in production units and discontent with cadres' embezzlements and incompetence. In response to the situation, local authorities used harsh measures, such as guerilla soldiers to search for paddy and belongings in their homes. They even arrested debtors. However, these hard tactics did not result in significant changes. They dismayed

⁸⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

⁸⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 15 August 2005.

⁸⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, June to August 2005.

⁸⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Y kien: Lam chu' [Being a master], 29 July 1988: p.1.

peasants. He concluded, 'when peasants refused to contribute to funds, the only option was to dismantle the production units.'⁸⁹

Abandoning, transferring, mortgaging and disputing land

Instead of cultivating readjusted land, some poor peasants in An Giang transferred and mortgaged it to others because they did not farm or did not have enough capital.⁹⁰ A former chairman of Long Dien B commune's Peasant Association said that after a few seasons of farming, some peasants abandoned, transferred, and mortgaged their land in order to do non-farming work.⁹¹ A man in Long Dien B said it was common that land receivers transferred and sold land to others. There were some fields that had been transferred several times through different landholders.⁹²

Villagers and former cadres in Long Dien B argued that transferring land made those who had their land redistributed discontented with the land readjustment policy. Moreover, old landowners became more discontented when they saw that some of the local cadres took advantage of their positions and misappropriated their land for themselves and their relatives.⁹³ However, before the *Doi Moi* policy, few landowners expressed their views publicly.

In the spirit of *Doi Moi* and in response to the poor performance of agriculture, in early 1987 An Giang provincial leaders decided to allow households to farm fields in communes other than their own. This permitted peasants to move freely to reclaim abandoned land in the province.⁹⁴ The An Giang provincial People's Committee also issued decision

⁸⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 11 August 2005.

⁹⁰ Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11 Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Trien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CPTNTAG, 1994: p.35.

⁹¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 9 August 2005.

⁹² Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

⁹³ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

⁹⁴ Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11 Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Trien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CPTNTAG, 1994: p.43; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi can bo quan triet

No.93-UBND (19 February 1987) which stressed correcting the mistakes of previous land readjustments. It advocated retrieving land that had been previously appropriated 'irrationally and illegally' by local cadres and state organizations and giving it back to old landowners according to their farm capacity or those who were currently landless and land-short households.⁹⁵ These policies triggered a host of claims from households for their old land and led to widespread conflicts among peasants and local cadres in rural areas of An Giang.

According to an An Giang newspaper, with the first three months of 1987 authorities in An Giang had received 2,000 peasant's letters and met 5,000 people who submitted petitions.

Most letters complained about land, houses, belongings, agricultural and other machines being appropriated or transformed (*cải tạo*) in ways that violated people's mastery rights. Some letters accused local cadres of being bad and embezzling collective resources.⁹⁶

Moreover, An Giang newspaper in May 1987 reported that during the implementation of the provincial decision No.93,

a complicated problem emerged whereby many peasants claimed back their land. The problem took place not only in single-rice cropping areas, such as Thoi Son, Chau Thanh and Chau Phu district, but also in double-rice cropping areas ... Regardless of local authority's readjustment, some peasants took back their land by illegally sowing seeds on it or trying other ways.⁹⁷

For example, in 1985 the production unit cadres in Duc Binh ward, Long Xuyen town redistributed 28 *công* of surplus land of Mrs. Kiem to seven other households to make product contracts. But in April 1987, Mrs. Kiem brought seeds and planted them on these 28

nghi quyết nam 1987' [An Giang's conference on grasping thoroughly the provincial party committee's 1987 resolution], 22 December 1986.

⁹⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cần hiểu rõ và chấp hành tinh thần quyết định 93 của Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh' [The need to fully understand and abide by the provincial peoples' committee's directive No.93], 22 May 1987: p.6; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Y kiến: Không nên ngộ nhận giữa việc phân bổ chia cấp đất đai cho hợp lý và việc trả lại ruộng đất cho chủ cũ' [Don't mistake rational reallocation of land for the return of land to previous landowners], 29 May 1987: p.1.

⁹⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Phong van phó bình thu tỉnh ủy An Giang: Nhiệm kỳ tới sẽ có gang làm thế nào để góp phần vận dụng nghị quyết VI vào thực tế tỉnh nhà đất kết quả của thế hôn nua' [Interviewing An Giang's vice-chairman], 17 March 1987.

⁹⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Mỗi tuần một chuyện: Nhanh chóng giải quyết vấn đề ruộng đất hợp lý' [A story each week: Be quick to solve land disputes], 22 May 1987: p.3.

công, regardless of any previous arrangement. In the end, authorities had to force her to return the land to the seven new land users (*chủ mới*). Mrs. Kiem was not alone, 14 other landowners tried to take back their old land as well.⁹⁸

In order to tackle the problems of previous landowners (*chủ cũ*)' reclaiming their land, authorities issued several announcements which stressed 'the need to understand clearly and conform to the spirit of decision No.93' and accused old landowners of mistaking (*ngộ nhận*) the policy of 'reallocating land rationally as returning land to previous owners'.⁹⁹

Land disputes were widespread not only in An Giang but across the Southern Region. *Doi Moi* policies in late 1986 had likely created a new political atmosphere favorable to peasants to express their thoughts and concerns openly. Among these worries was land. In 1988, VCP leaders recognized the problem 'due to some shortcomings in previous land readjustments and in the context of a democratic atmosphere brought by *Doi Moi*, [peasants] now sent thousands of letters on land to the central authorities'.¹⁰⁰

According to researcher Huynh Thi Gam, by August 1988 the whole Southern Region reported 59,505 peasants' complaints about land. In many locations of the region peasants took back old land or fought each other, state enterprises, and military organizations. There were some physical clashes and incidents in which people were wounded and some were killed. For example, seven people died in An Giang and Cuu Long in 1988. Peasants also organized demonstrations.

Peasants gathered together, carrying national flags, slogans, pictures of former national chairman Ho Chi Minh. They marched through the government offices at

⁹⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Moi tuan mot chuyen: Hieu lam hoac co y?' [A story each week: Misunderstood or intended?], 29 May 1987: p.7.

⁹⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Can hieu ro va chap hanh tinh than quyet dinh 93 cua UBND tinh' [The need to fully understand and abide by the provincial peoples' committee's directive No.93], 22 May 1987: 22 May 1987; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Y kien: khong nen ngo nhan giua viec phan bo chia cap dat daai cho hop ly va viec tra lai ruong dat cho chu cu' [Don't mistake rational reallocation of land for the return of land to previous landowners], 29 May 1987: p.1.

¹⁰⁰ Ban Tuyen Huan Trung Uong, *Dang Tra Loi Nong Dan Mot So Van De Cap Bach Ve Ruong Dat* [The party's response to urgent land problems], TP. Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tuyen Huan, 1988: p.59.

all levels from the commune, district, and provincial to the central level demanding resolution of their land claims.¹⁰¹

In response to these disputes, VCP leaders issued directive No.47 CT/TW (31 August 1988) that recognized shortcomings of previous land readjustments. First, land readjustment, especially under directive No.19 (3 May 1983) had equalized (*cào bằng*) land holdings among households and interrupted cultivation (*xáo canh*) in rural areas which negatively affected agricultural production. Second, it distributed land to non-farming households such as small traders and other non-farming workers who did not know how to farm. Finally, local cadres and state agencies had taken advantage of the policy to use land inappropriately. Now peasants wanted their old land back.¹⁰²

In order to boost commodity production, the directive advocated the elimination of non-resident cultivator prohibition and the retrieval of land that was farmed poorly or illegally. Retrieved land was to be redistributed to productive landowners or to those who currently had insufficient land. However, the directive called for dealing with land disputes cautiously, case by case. It also stipulated that landlords, reactionaries, rich peasants and rural capitalists whose land had been confiscated under the policy of exploitation elimination did not have the right to reclaim their land.¹⁰³

To clarify and specify the central directive No.47, An Giang leaders issued directive No.303-QD-UB (4 October 1988). This provincial directive contained, however, a feature not mentioned in the central one. It encouraged old landowners and new users of land to negotiate with each other to determine who should own the land and to decide on the fee for any compensation. For example, if a new land user wanted to keep the land, he had to

¹⁰¹ Huynh Thi Gam, *Nhung Bien Doi Kinh Te Xa Hoi O Nong Thon DBSCL Tu 1975-1995* [Socio-economic change in the rural Mekong Delta from 1975-1995] (PhD thesis), TP. Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH&NV, 1998: p.89; According to Huynh Thi Gam, by the end of 1988, An Giang had 41,000 peasants' petition letters, Dong Thap had 20,000, Minh Hai had 18,000 and Cuu Long had 10,000.

¹⁰² DCSVN, 'Bo chinh tri ra chi thi giai quyet mot so van de cap bach ve ruong dat (so 47-CT/TW ngay 31-8-1988)' [Poliburo's directive No.47 on dealing with urgent land disputes], in *Dang Tra Loi Nong Dan Mot So Van De Cap Bach Ve Ruong Dat* [The party's response to urgent land problems], TP. Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tuyen Huan, 1988: p.9.

¹⁰³ Ibid: 9-14.

compensate the cost of land reclaiming and transformation (*công khai phá và cải tạo ruộng đất*) to the old landowners (applicable only to middle peasant households). Otherwise, the old landowner had to compensate the new land user for the cost of rehabilitating and transforming the land and value of the crop on it.¹⁰⁴

Directive No.303 triggered the second wave of land disputes in An Giang. A popular rumor was that authorities would return land to old landowners. Excited with the news, many old landowners in Long Dien B rushed to claim their land. Some met new land users to negotiate the return of their land; some simply brought seeds to sow on their old land regardless of what the authorities said; some gathered to strike and demanded for resolution of their land claims at commune and district offices. All these actions caused what villagers in Long Dien B called 'great turmoil' (*đảo lộn*) in Cho Moi district and elsewhere in An Giang during the late 1980s.¹⁰⁵

According to directive No.303, the old landowners (*chủ cũ*) and new land users (*chủ mới*) should negotiate with each other to sort out their land disputes. However, poor households were in a weak position. A former vice-chairman of Long Dien B commune remembered,

At that time, I struggled to protect the poor and I failed. I argued that we should protect the poor or they would support the America! But it was likely that higher authorities (*lệnh trên*) wanted to return land to previous landholders

He also shared a story of how a better-off man whose family had two plowing machines responded to directive 303:

Hearing news of directive No.303, before anyone was about to work the fields, he and his brothers carried long knives and machines to plow his family's old land. They threatened to kill anyone who dared to block them. So, new land users did not dare to. Finally, the commune police had to arrest them. At the office, they argued that authorities had redistributed their land to others to do collective

¹⁰⁴ UBNDTAG (Ủy Ban Nhân Dân Tỉnh An Giang), 'Quyết định 303-QĐ/UB, ngày 04-10-1989' [An Giang peoples' committee directive No.303], in *An Giang newspaper*, 25 November 1988.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, June August 2005.

farming in production units. But now collective farming in production units did not really exist any more so the authorities had to return the land to them.¹⁰⁶

A Long Dien B resident, who had lost 6 hectares of land in Long Dien A commune due to the non-resident cultivator prohibition, and who later took it back, recalled,

Before the reunification, I had 6 hectares of land [located in Long Dien A]. After reunification, revolutionary authorities took all my land to redistribute to others. They took my land right out of my hands. The hamlet chief in Long Dien A appropriated much of my land. However, after Mr. Linh came to power, I had a chance to take it back. I also sent many letters to claim my land but authorities rejected all. So, I decided to break the law; my two brothers and I brought them machetes to the field to work; I said that if he [the hamlet chief] came to the field, we would kill him. I said that it was right for the authorities to take abandoned land but not right to steal land from people. Thanks to the party secretary of Long Dien A commune who asked the hamlet chief to return the land to me, I was able to get the land back.¹⁰⁷

A former cadre of production unit No.1 who knew about land conflicts after directive 303 had this to say,

Directive No.303 did not tell the new users of land to return land to the old landowners. It just mentioned that both needed to negotiate with each other in the spirit of mutual concession. But it seemed that the authorities favored the interests of the old landowners. I did not know what provincial leaders' opinions were but I knew that some district and commune cadres implicitly supported returning land to the old landowners [in order to boost commodity production]. As far as I remembered, at the meeting to deal with land dispute in 1988, Mr. Chau, a district leader said that people could not get rich with two and three *công* of land. With a few of *công* of land, people could not produce commodity paddy. So, people should return land to old landowners and find other businesses. Therefore, in land disputes, old landowners had the advantage over new land users; finally most new land users in Long Dien B decided to return land to old landowners.¹⁰⁸

As discussed in chapter 3 and 5, during land readjustments authorities in Long Dien B allowed landowners to 'lend' (*cho mượn*) much of their surplus land to their land-needy relatives. Moreover, Long Dien B villagers highly respected the rights of individual land ownership and values of justice and their religious morality. Therefore, new land users tended to return land to its old owners. A man who lost his land in *Đông lớn* later received 3 *công* of land from his relative. But after the directive 303, he reasoned, 'I felt emotional about my

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 August 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 9 August 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 17 August 2005.

relative (*tình cảm bà con*) so I decided to return the land. If I was not related to him, I would also return the land because a few *công* was not much but fighting over it would only give me a bad reputation (*mang tiếng*).¹⁰⁹ Similarly, a landless man who received a few *công* from an acquaintance decided to return it saying,

The land had to be returned to its owner. It was odd to take another person's land. Everyone did the same. If we were poor, we accepted that; we should not steal someone else's land (*giữ đất người khác*) to make a living.¹¹⁰

Some landowners in Long Dien B still complained they were not able to reclaim their land, especially land located in other communes, districts or provinces. Notably, peasants who had land in Dong Thap said they could not get back it Dong Thap's authorities favored their own. However, old landowners who had lost land in fields of Thoai Son and Chau Thanh districts of An Giang province were able to take back much of their land during the late 1980s-the early 1990s. In general, from 1988 to the early 1990s many upper-middle and middle peasants retrieved much of their previous land holdings. An upper-middle man who had previously lost 200 *công* of land in Thoai Son recalled, 'thanks to Mr. Linh, I could retrieve a half of my land and a plowing machine. I was very happy when I took it back. People should worship Mr. Linh!'¹¹¹

According to a report, within the three years of 1988-1990, An Giang had dealt with more than 30,000 peasant complaints on land, which reduced tensions in the rural areas.¹¹² However, the legacy of collectivization and land disputes in An Giang was not over yet. Until today land disputes are still hot issues in the rural areas of An Giang and elsewhere in the Southern Region.

Local cadres' practices

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 3 August 2005.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

¹¹¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 18 August 2005.

¹¹² UBNDTAG, *Địa Chi An Giang* [An Giang's monography], Long Xuyen, 2003: p.400.

Under product contracts, collectivization in An Giang was again accelerated. This required more local cadres and more effort to supervise them. Yet despite An Giang provincial leaders' many efforts to improve the quality of local cadres during the period 1981-1988, the problems were not eliminated and even seemed to worsen.

Local cadres' common malpractice was misappropriating land and embezzling state agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, fuel and so on). An Giang newspaper accounts canvassed numerous cases of local cadres who exploited their positions to misappropriate and embezzle agricultural inputs. For example, An Giang news account of 27 June 1982 said after receiving state fertilizer and fuel, a commune cadre in Chau Thanh district sold them on 'back market' for a quick profit rather than giving them to peasants according to B contracts. The commune cadre used his ill-gotten gains to upgrade his house and pigpen but reported to the higher authorities that peasants refused to pay input debts.¹¹³

An Giang newspaper in March 1983 reported,

Recently, some peasants complained that local cadres were stealing production unit inputs to sell on the back market for a quick profit or to raise [black] funds. Some cadres even misappropriated inputs worth of 15 tons of paddy ... This made agricultural production in An Giang difficult.¹¹⁴

In 1984, An Giang tried several local cadres for embezzling agricultural inputs, collective paddy and goods. In July 1984 Tran Van Ba, a Long Xuyen agricultural input station accountant, was put on trial for colluding with leaders of production units and production solidarity teams and misappropriating a large quantity of inputs to sell on the back market.¹¹⁵ In September, an accountant of Binh Long commune's food station was taken to court for making fake invoices and embezzling 3,027 kilograms of state paddy in order to sell

¹¹³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: Ong can bo xa T' [Mr. Commune cadre], 27 June 1982: p.4.

¹¹⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: Nen cham dut' [Stop it], 13 March 1983: p.4.

¹¹⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Toa an nhan dan tinh xet xu dau co va hoi lo' [The peoples' court trial speculated and bribed cadres], 12 July 1984: p.3.

it on the black market.¹¹⁶ Notably, in December An Giang provincial people's court tried 26 cadres who were staff of the provincial Department of Food. They were accused of increasing the price of cement which the Ministry of Food used to exchange for paddy with peasants. In addition, they created fake receipts for millions of VND, embezzled, took bribes and stole state inputs. In the end, the court sentenced one of them with death penalty; the head of the provincial Department of Food was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment and others were sentenced to many years' imprisonment.¹¹⁷

Despite An Giang authorities' continuous efforts to tackle cadres' misbehavior, the problems persisted. An Giang newspaper of 16 May 1986 reported that two thirds of provincial goods used to exchange for peasants' paddy fell in the hands of individual merchants, most of whom were local cadres' relatives.¹¹⁸ Local cadres unilaterally increased the prices of goods and agricultural inputs that peasants had to purchase from the state agencies. Secondly, the cadres sold considerable amount of these goods and inputs on the black market, thereby making quick profits. This contributed to the inflation in the province and the survival of black markets and individual merchants, which ironically VCP leaders were trying to control and eliminate.¹¹⁹

At lower local levels, production unit cadres played an intermediary role in economic transactions between the state and peasants, so they had more opportunities to capture resources between the state and peasants. It was common that villagers sent their letters to newspapers or state to accuse cadres of embezzling agricultural inputs and collective property. For example, in 1984 peasants in production unit No.12 in Kien Thanh commune

¹¹⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Huyen Chau Phu xet xu bon tham o luong thuc' [Chau Thanh district court trial food stealers], 27 September 1984.

¹¹⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Pham nhieu toi, 26 bi cao ra toa an nhan dan An Giang' [Committing many crimes, 26 defendants appear in court], 27 December 1984.

¹¹⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hang doi lua lua den tay ai' [Who benefits from goods exchanged for paddy?], 16 May 1986: p.3-4.

¹¹⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: Xe rao' [Fence breaking], 31 October 1982; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xa luan: Tang cuong quan ly thi truong va on dinh gia ca' [Strengthening control of markets and stabilizing prices], 22 May 1983: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hang doi lua lua den tay ai' [Who benefits from goods exchanged for paddy?], 16 May 1986: p.3-4.

(Cho Moi district) sent a letter accusing their production unit cadres of buying things without receipts. Production unit cadres also stole agricultural inputs and over-charged members for the costs of production (such as fuel, fertilizers, and collective funds).¹²⁰

Likewise, according to the An Giang newspaper in August 1984, peasants in a production unit were very surprised that the paddy fields of production unit cadres were more luxuriant and had higher productivity than those of ordinary peasants. All conditions were supposed to be the same. However, an inspection found that production unit cadres took scarce agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers, pesticides and fuels rather than redistributing them among households. Moreover, they sold some of these products on the black market. That's why, after a few years of being cadres, they all had renovated houses and had valuable belongings.¹²¹

Villagers in Long Dien B also complained that production unit cadres embezzled a considerable sum of agricultural inputs and collective funds. A man in production unit No.9 recalled,

The production unit cadres served people very poorly but embezzled very well. Their pockets were full from embezzlements. For example, when pumping water to peasant fields, it cost one container of fuel but they reported three. When raising funds to buy farm machines, instead of charging each production unit member 30 kilograms of paddy per one *công* of their land, they charged 34 kilograms. So, how much would they get for about 1000 *công* of land?¹²²

An old man in production unit No.12 complained,

After harvesting, we gave [to the production unit] more than a half of the produce, never less. But I wondered whether the paddy we turned over had reached the state agency because, at that time, production unit cadres embezzled too much.¹²³

¹²⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: De nghi giai quyét thoa dang' [The need to solve cadre problem satisfactorily], 28 August 1983: p.4.

¹²¹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: Chuyen cac ngai trong ban quan ly tap doan' [Production unit managerial cadre problem], 8 October 1984: p.4.

¹²² Interview, Long Dien B, 10 August 2005.

¹²³ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 August 2005; similarly, another man remarked, 'during that time, production unit's cadres embezzled too much; they embezzled fuel, fertilizers and so on. Because of this, the production units would soon collapse' (Interview, Long Dien B, 20 August 2005).

Villagers in Long Dien B asserted that from 1982-1987 inspections discovered many production unit cadres' embezzling agricultural inputs and collective paddy. Authorities put some in prison. For example, a former of production unit head was sentenced to a few months of prison [in 1986] for embezzling 75 *gĩa* of paddy according to him, but 16 tons of paddy, according to his successor.¹²⁴ A former storekeeper of production unit No.1 was also sentenced to one month imprisonment for embezzling paddy [in mid-1980s]. However, he asserted that he was illiterate but his accountant was well-educated and tricky, and that the accountant embezzled inputs alone but recorded on the paper that he had colluded with him to take 10 tons of paddy.¹²⁵

The inspections in Cho Moi during the second quarter of 1986 also showed violations in several managerial boards of production units. For example, in Binh Hoa commune, a storekeeper of production unit No.17 embezzled 3,235 kilograms of paddy; a storekeeper of production unit No.15 embezzled 6,051 kilograms; a leader of production unit No.7 misappropriated 6,244 kilograms of collective grains and so on.¹²⁶ A former cadre of Cho Moi Committee for Agricultural Transformation recalled,

Most production units were not low in quality; they were production units on paper and ghost units (*tập đoàn giấy, tập đoàn ma*). When inspecting, we discovered violations in many of them. Because the inspection was to strengthen production units, we did not take them to court (*ra pháp luật*). For example, in 1986 the provincial inspection in My Hoi Dong and My Luong communes uncovered many cases of cadre embezzlement but they were settled internally (*xử lý nội bộ*), not in public.¹²⁷

Similarly, a former accountant of inter-production unit No.3 who acted as a member of the district's Inspection Commission in 1986 recalled,

¹²⁴ Interviews, Long Dien B, 9 August 2005 and 11 August 2005.

¹²⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 28 June 2005.

¹²⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Huyen Cho Moi tien hanh kiem tra mot so tap doan nong nghiep' [Cho Moi district carried out investigations into some production units], 13 June 1986: p.1.

¹²⁷ Interview, Cho Moi, 17 June 2005.

I inspected only one inter-production unit and decided to quit. I could not continue because I feared losing people's friendship. Almost all managerial boards of production units here embezzled collective resources and funds!¹²⁸

In explaining why so many local cadres embezzled, a teacher of primary school in Long Dien B commented,

Production unit leaders were selected from revolutionary and pro-revolutionary families; most of them were less educated but were recruited because they accepted the positions [while high educated people were reluctant to take the positions]. Moreover, they had not been trained well. Therefore, they managed the units ambiguously and poorly. All cadres in production units and inter-production units embezzled collective resources.¹²⁹

An Giang newspaper accounts suggested improper cadres' behavior continued and even worsened. In November 1984, the provincial Department of Food found that peasants' debt was small compared to local cadres' debts. For example, four communes in Chau Phu district each owed 400 to 500 tons of paddy; most debtors were local cadres.¹³⁰ That was in November 1984. In May 1985, many locations of Chau Thanh district still had huge debts; some communes owed 600 tons of paddy each, according to a provincial Inspection Commission report. And most of the large debtors were cadres. For example, in A.H. commune, the chairman owed 80 tons of paddy; the chief and the storekeeper of the commune's Department of Agricultural Inputs owed 14 and 16 tons of paddy, respectively.¹³¹ In Binh Hoa commune 30 out of 36 production units were in debt, much of it due to cadres' theft. Fearing punishment, some production unit cadres ran away (*bỏ trốn*).

Commune and district cadres in Chau Thanh also had large debts. For example, Mr. Duong Van Minh, a district irrigation agent, owed 4 tons of paddy; Mr. Vo Van Rang, a district inspection agent, owed 806 kilograms. Such officials, according to a 1987 report,

¹²⁸ Interview, Cho Moi, 3 August 2005.

¹²⁹ Interview, Long Dien B, 15 August 2005.

¹³⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho: No khong chiu tra' [Outstanding debt], 16 November 1984: p.4.

¹³¹ Cited from *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho' [Big and small account], 24 May 1985.

'took advantage of their positions and the weakness of loose management to collude and steal state agricultural inputs. Some cadres owed 50-70 tons, even more'.¹³²

Similar to Chau Thanh district was Thoai Son. From 1983 to the winter-spring of 1986-1987 that district had 21,500 tons of paddy debt, of which input (B contracts) debt was 15,000 tons and unpaid taxes were 6,500 tons. According to a manager of the district's Food Company, the debts of production unit, commune, and district cadres accounted for 70 percent of the total; ordinary peasants' debt was only 30 percent. Moreover, despite commune and district cadres' families owing large debts, production unit cadres did not dare collect because they 'feared higher officials' (*tâm lý sợ cấp trên*).¹³³

Phu Tan district experienced similar circumstances. From the winter-spring of 1986-1987 to June 1987 the total debt of 20 party members and 50 production unit cadres reached thousands of tons of paddy. Some owed 40-50 tons of paddy each.¹³⁴ In Hoa Lac commune (Phu Tan), 24 out of 27 commune party cell members owed more than one ton of paddy each.¹³⁵

Local cadres' debts were large and common in many locations of An Giang. A provincial newspaper in July 1987 said commune, hamlet and production unit cadres in the province owing about 70 percent of total B contract debt.¹³⁶

In the late 1987, provincial leaders decided to revise the policy on agricultural inputs. Local cadres' poor management and embezzlement hindered delivery of inputs, making them 'inadequate, incorrect and late'. These caused difficulties for production and peasants' livelihoods. From the winter-spring of 1987-1988 onwards, An Giang decided to end the

¹³² *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tai sao Chau Thanh chua giai quyet duoc tinh trang no tram trong' [Why haven't Chau Thanh district authorities eliminated their huge debt?], 31 May 1985: p.3.

¹³³ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tinh hình thanh lý nợ hợp đồng trong sản xuất nông nghiệp ở Thoai Son' [Debt in Thoai Son district], 4 September 1987.

¹³⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cai hợp đồng B' [Giving up B contracts], 28 August 1987: p.7.

¹³⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xung quanh chuyện đầu tư cho sản xuất nông nghiệp' [The problem of agricultural investment], 17 July 1987: p.2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

delivery of state agricultural inputs to peasants through production units. Instead, state inputs would be sold to peasants directly in exchange for cash or paddy.¹³⁷

Cadres in many locations of An Giang also misappropriated (*chiếm dụng*) peasants' land, accounts of which emerged after Doi Moi, especially after the provincial peoples' committee issued decision No.93 (19 February 1987). In May 1987, a newspaper pointed out,

Over the past years, the readjustment of provincial land was irrational. Some cadres have taken advantage of their position to gain good land for themselves and their families. Others did not cultivate the land but took considerable portion of it. Many state organizations at district and provincial levels took advantage of their collective status to misappropriate land.¹³⁸

In July 1988, the An Giang newspaper listed the names of several cadres who had used the prohibition against non-resident cultivators to take land for themselves. For example, Mr. Cao Hong Dinh, Tan Lap commune police chief whose family already had 2 hectares of land took 6 more; Ba Huong, the commune's Department of Agriculture head appropriated over 10 hectares; Mr. Tu Dung, the vice-commune chairman took over 12 hectares. Some peasants whose fields had been usurped 'lost their temper' (*loạn trí*) and occasionally went to commune offices shouting, demanding their land back.¹³⁹

Several government offices and mass organizations took land for illicit purposes. In Dinh My commune of Thoai Son district, for instance, such organizations took over 160 hectares. They tried to justify this by calling the areas "self-sufficient land" (*đất tự túc*) of benefit to the entire organization. Although annoyed, villagers initially tolerated this behavior. But it turned out certain officials ended up using the land as their own. For example, the commune's Communist Party secretary took 6 hectares; the vice-Communist Party secretary, 12 hectares; the commune's vice-chairman, 12 hectares; and the chief of

¹³⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Nguoi nong dan dang can phuong thic dau tu hop ly phat trien san xuat nong nghiep' [Peasants are demanding appropriate methods of agricultural investment], 23 October 1987: p.2.

¹³⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Y kien: Khong nen ngo nhan giua viec phan bo chia cap dat dai cho hop ly va viec tra lai ruong dat cho chu cu' [Don't mistake rational reallocation of land for the return of land to previous landowners], 29 May 1987: p.1.

¹³⁹ *An Giang newspapers*, 'Noi oan trai cua ba con nong dan xa Tan Lap' [The grievances of peasants in Tan Lap], 1 July 1988: p.3, 6 and 8 July 1988: p.2.

commune police, 6 hectares. Some cadres shifted a vast 167 hectares, which they classified as ‘*đất hờ*’ land (unclaimed land). Mr. Cop, a cadre of the commune Department of Agricultural Tax took (*bao chiếm*) 26 hectares and hid them by using seven different land holders’ names. Mr. Le Van Dung, the chief of the commune Department of Agricultural Tax appropriated 14 hectares and hid them under four different names. Mr. Tan, the chief of communal police stole 31 hectares. Mr. Ut Hen, the commune vice-chairman took 31 hectares, using the names of different landholders.¹⁴⁰

Land misuse in Phu Tan district was also severe. In 1982, district authorities prohibited non-residents from farming there. Taking advantage of the situation, many local cadres took fields for themselves. For example, Mr. Tran Van Phat, the leader of production unit No.17 in Long Phu commune, took more than 2.7 hectares; Mr. Nguyen Van Hao, the leader of production unit No 15, took 5.4 hectares; Mr. To Van Ba, the chairman of Long Phu commune Father Front, took 1 hectare; Mr. Ut Binh, the former commune chairman, appropriated 5 hectares; Mr. Chau Ngoc Chao, the commune chairman appropriated 5 hectares; Mr. Nguyen Van Thai, the commune’s Communist Party secretary appropriated 4.5 hectares. By August 1988 hamlet and production unit cadres had taken 78 hectares that non-residents used to farm.¹⁴¹

In Cho Moi cadres also misused land. A man in Long Dien B admitted that local cadres misappropriated land anywhere. It was common that cadres had more land than ordinary people.¹⁴² Compared to land appropriation elsewhere, one man said it was less severe in Cho Moi.¹⁴³ However, in some communes of Cho Moi, according to An Giang newspaper accounts, land appropriation was bad as elsewhere. For example, in Tan My

¹⁴⁰ *An Giang newspapers*, ‘*Những người bao chiếm đất*’ [Land misusers], 5 August 1988: p.2 and 19 August 1988: p.2.

¹⁴¹ *An Giang newspaper*, ‘*Phu Long: Cán bộ xã còn bao chiếm đất*’ [Cadres in Long Phu still misappropriate land], 9 December 1988.

¹⁴² Interview, Long Dien B, 29 August 2005.

¹⁴³ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 July 2005.

commune in Cho Moi district, many cadres took peasant land and hid it under other names. Some even resold it to make a quick profit. Cadres delayed or in the worst cases, avoided implementing state policy on returning land to old landowners. So, nearly two years after the issue of decision No.93 (19 February 1987), commune authorities had not settled any peasants' land claims.¹⁴⁴

An Giang villagers often accused cadres of monopolizing farming services to production units and over-charging for the cost of these services. As discussed in earlier in this chapter, households in most production units in An Giang did almost all phases of farm-work.¹⁴⁵ But production unit cadres controlled certain farming resources and services, such as irrigation and equipment for plowing, raking and threshing. Often cadres and the specialized teams responsible for providing or using these resources were inefficient or unfair. A man in Long Dien B recalled how irrigation was done in his fields.

Production unit, my goodness! Production unit members had to compete with each other to have their land watered. We had to draw lots to determine who was served first. If we were first, we had to spend days and nights guarding the water. Within two days, if we hadn't finished watering, we had to give the water to others and waited for another turn.¹⁴⁶

Another lady added, 'the production unit teams irrigated for some people and not for others. When irrigating fields, some places got too much water, others nothing'.¹⁴⁷ A man in production No.9 in Long Dien B remembered problems getting his fields plowed.

We contributed paddy to the production unit to buy plowing and threshing machines but we still had to pay for plowing and threshing. They were not free of charge. Moreover, the guys controlling the machinery served their relatives first rather than the rest of us. In order to have our land plowed, we had to entreat (*năn nĩ*) them five or ten times and always carry cash to pay them right away. Otherwise, they would not plow our land.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Dat: Tieng keu tu phia nong dan' [Land problem: a cry from peasants], 18 November 1988.

¹⁴⁵ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Chuyen to nho ong tap doan truong' [Mr. Production unit leader], 13 June 1982: p.4.

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 2 August 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 August 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

A newspaper in April 1983 reported that in a certain district only a few collective plowing machines operated even in the peak of land preparation. Moreover, their plowing capacity was extremely low. The reason, according to the article, was that operators of the collective machines were waiting for 'special fuel' [bribes] from peasants, which was 'necessary for machines to run fast'.¹⁴⁹

In July 1986 a newspaper reported that peasants in one inter-production unit criticized cadres for poor plowing services. 'When plowing, equipment operators just plowed around the plot, leaving the centre untouched' and 'often the tractors ran like a race horse (*chạy như ngựa đua*) and raked like a mouse scratching the land (*xới như chuột cào*)'. As a result, fields were poorly prepared. Moreover, the inter-production unit cadres often rented out tractors to other places instead of fulfilling their obligations to members of the inter-production unit.¹⁵⁰

A former cadre of Long Dien B commune complained about the performance of disease prevention teams (*đội bảo vệ thực vật*):

During that time [of product units], peasants complained a lot about these teams because they performed very poorly. They called the crop protection team '*đội bảo vệ thực vật*' the duck meat protection team '*đội bảo vệ thịt vịt*' because only by giving the teams duck meat did they work well. Otherwise, they worked badly. Finally, we let peasants receive pesticides and spray their own crops.¹⁵¹

One of the most annoying things for villagers in Long Dien B was that production unit cadres monopolized the service of threshing peasants' paddy. A man recalled, 'the production unit took over threshing our paddy without allowing others [other production units or individuals] to do the job, regardless of whether it was raining or not. They also over-charged us'.¹⁵² Similarly, another man recalled how his inter-production unit threshed:

The inter-production unit [including 4 production units] had four threshing machines so each production unit had one machine. How could they thresh people's paddy in time? They did not allow people to hire outside threshing

¹⁴⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Le Lang' [Village customs], 24 April 1983: p.4.

¹⁵⁰ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tu phê bình và phê bình: Ý kiến từ một cuộc họp' [Criticism and self-criticism at a meeting], 4 July 1986: p.3.

¹⁵¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 29 August 2005.

¹⁵² Interview, Long Dien B, 27 July 2005.

services. When it rained, people's paddy got wet and rotted. Seeing their paddy going to ruin, some people got so angry that they lay down on the road where cadres passed their threshing machines and shouted, "Thresh my paddy or kill me!"¹⁵³

In Hoa Binh Thanh commune (Chau Thanh district) a leader of production unit No.18 only allowed his son in law to thresh for members despite 6-7 other threshing machines being available. The leader alone determined the price of the service, at one *già* of paddy and one liter of fuel for one *công* of paddy, while the price in other production units was half of *già* of paddy.¹⁵⁴

In short, from 1982- the late 1980s, local cadres' malpractice contributed to the derailment of national and provincial agrarian policies. By capturing much of the state and collective resources and serving farming poorly, local cadres exacerbated the poor performance of collective organizations, and of agriculture as a whole (see the next section).

A former soldier in the commune summarized the views of many villagers when he said,

Production unit cadres were irresponsible irrigating, plowing and threshing. They were only good at drinking wine (*nhậu nhẹt*) and stealing (*ăn chẹt*) people's money. They did not allow [free] competition but prohibited machines of other production units from entering peasant fields. They wanted to make a good profit so they monopolized these. In the rainy season, when the paddy was not threshed in time, it became black and rotten.¹⁵⁵

While VCP leaders aimed to eliminate earlier exploiting classes, rural cadres had become a new class of exploiters in many areas. In the words of an An Giang newspaper report,

Twelve years after the country's reunification, peasants should have escaped poverty and backwardness. However, having just escaped from the darkness of landlordism, peasants were exploited by some "new landlords" (*địa chủ mới*) masked in the name of production units.¹⁵⁶

The following cartoons depict other misdemeanors by cadres in An Giang during the period of product contracts.

¹⁵³ Interview, Long Dien B, 16 August 2005.

¹⁵⁴ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Tap doan truong trang tron uc ep tap doan vien' [A production unit leader obviously bullied members], 17 April 1987: p.8.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 27 August 2005.

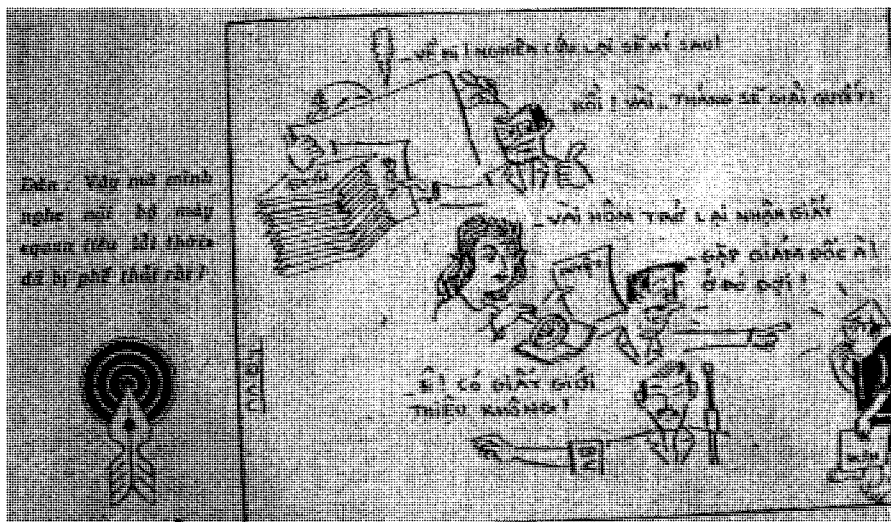
¹⁵⁶ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Nhung dieu nghe thay tu thuc te' [Some cadre problems], 4 March 1988: p.3.

Figure 6-1 Internal funds



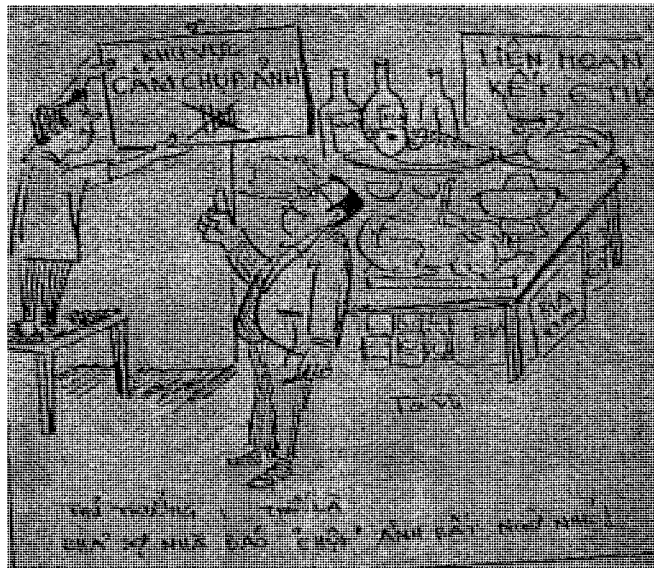
Behind the accountant of a production unit were several types of 'internal funds' (*quỹ nội bộ*) only used by cadres themselves (drawn by Nguyen Ngo in *An Giang newspaper*, 21 August 1983: p.4)

Figure 6-2 Red tape



A peasant who submits his petition to the boss in a state office must go through several gates. The first gatekeeper asks, 'do you have permission papers?' The second person says, 'do you want to meet the boss? Wait here'. After considering the form, the secretary replies, 'Approved, come and pick up the results in a few days'. But the cadre behind the secretary says, 'Finished, come and pick up the result in a few months'. Being flooded with piles of petition letters, the boss shouts, 'Go back home! I will sign later after studying it'. Finally, the peasant wondered, 'But we are told that red tape has been eliminated!' (Drawn by T.Q.Vu in *An Giang newspaper*, 2 October 1987: p.7)

Figure 6-3 Prohibiting the use of cameras



While preparing a lavish party, the boss orders a staff member to post a big sign prohibiting the use of cameras so that, the boss says, 'We need not fear being photographed by journalists!' (Drawn by T.Q. Vu in *An Giang newspaper*, 2 September 1988: p.7)

Figure 6-4 Heart problem



After examining a cadre who has benefited from the bureaucratic red tape system and embezzlement, the doctor said, 'You have a heart problem!' The cadre pondered, 'probably I have had this problem since the appearance of N.V.L.'¹⁵⁷ (Drawn by Van Thanh in *An Giang newspaper*, 4 September 1987).

¹⁵⁷ N.V.L. is the abbreviation of the name of the Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh who initiated the *Doi Moi* policy and cracked down on corruption. N.V.L. was often interpreted as 'Nói và Làm' (speaking and doing).

Agriculture and collective organization performance and a return to household farming

QN-DN in the Central Coast

In the first few years of product contracts, staple food production in QN-DN increased from 460,000 tons in 1980 to 500,000 in 1981 and 525,000 in 1982.¹⁵⁸ However, from 1983 to 1985 staple food production stagnated and it decreased to 510,000 tons in 1983.¹⁵⁹ It increased slightly in 1984 (522,000 tons) and in 1985 (540,000 tons), but it fell short of expected targets: 535,000 tons and 545,000 tons respectively.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, from 1981 to 1985, the annual growth rate of the food yield in QN-DN was only about 1.4 percent.

In Thang Binh district food production stagnated from 1983-1985. To demonstrate, in 1983 700 hectares of paddy in the district yielded no crop (*mất trắng*). As a result, the district's staple food production reached only 68,646 tons, well short of the target (73,000 tons).¹⁶¹ In 1984 staple food production again fell to 62,000 tons.¹⁶²

Despite a slight increase in QN-DN staple food production from 1981-1985, collective members' income from the collective sector had deteriorated because many of households could not produce more than the quota and the value of their collective work-days was low.¹⁶³ For example, Binh Lanh collective (Thang Binh district) staple food production increased slightly from 2,300 tons in 1982 to 2,400 in 1983 and 2,600 in 1984, but the value

¹⁵⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Dien bien san luong lua ca tinh qua cac nam' [Paddy production over the past years], 14 September 1983.

¹⁵⁹ Pham Duc Nam (the chairman of Provincial people's committee), 'Ket qua nam 1983 va phuong huong phan dau nam 1984 tren mat tran san xuat nong nghiep cua tinh nha' [The results of agricultural production in 1983 and plans for 1984], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 15 October 1983.

¹⁶⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Quan triet nghi quyet hoi nghi lan thu 7 Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang: Ban chap hanh Dang bo tinh quy dinh phuong huong nhien vu nam 1985' [Provincial party committee's plans for 1985], 2 February 1985: p.1; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Tong ket san xuat nong nghiep nam 1985, chuan bi cho vu dong-xuan toi' [Summing up of agricultural production in 1985], 21 September 1985.

¹⁶¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Vu dong xuan 1983-1984 Thang Binh cung co hop tac xa voi tap trung chi dao lua co san luong cao' [Thang Binh will solidify collective and extend high-yielding rice in the winter-spring of 1983-1984], 9 November 1983.

¹⁶² Phan Thanh Toan (Thang Binh district's party secretary), 'Ky Niem 10 chien thang: Phong trao toan dan lam thuy loi, day manh san xuat nong nghiep va kinh te trong ca huyen' [Celebrating the 10th liberation anniversary], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 26 March 1985: p.3.

¹⁶³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong nhung vuong mac va cach giai quyet' [The product contract: problems and solutions], 8 November 1984.

of a work-day decreased from 2 kilograms in 1982 to 1.3 kilograms in 1983 and about 1.4 kilograms in 1984. Similarly, in Duy An collective No.1 (Duyen Xuyen district) staple production increased 20 percent during 1982-1984, but the value of work-day decreased from 2.7 kilograms in 1982 to 2.2 in 1984.¹⁶⁴

According to QN-DN newspaper accounts, one reason for the decreased work-day value from 1981-1985 was an increase in state's staple food procurement from the collective sector and unfair terms of trade between agricultural inputs and agricultural output which disfavored the latter.¹⁶⁵ For example, in QN-DN state food procurement increased from 61,227 tons in 1980 to 110,000 in 1984 and to 120,877 in 1985, which accounted for about 22 percent of total yield.¹⁶⁶ Another report showed that collective staple food obligations had increased 2.41 times from 1980-1984.¹⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the price of paddy was low but the prices of agricultural inputs and other industrial goods had been higher from 1982-1985. So, many households could not farm profitably and 'were afraid to invest and expand their production'.¹⁶⁸

Collective organizations also suffered losses. According to the Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy (the Provincial Party Committee's Agriculture Department), the economic efficiency of collective activities from 1982-1984 was so low that many of them could not even cover their costs. (For example, in 1984 twenty-four out of forty collectives in Thang Binh district suffered losses). In order to reduce these, collectives in QN-DN increased the quotas and

¹⁶⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong nhung vuong mac va cach giai quyét' [The product contract: problems and solutions], 8 November 1984.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Quan triet nghi quyét hoi nghi lan thu 7 Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang: Ban chap hanh Dang bo tinh quy dinh phuong huong nhiem vu nam 1985' [Provincial party committee's plans for 1985], 2 February 1985; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nam nam phat trien san xuat nong nghiep' [Five years of agricultural production], 1 February 1986.

¹⁶⁷ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhan tong ket 3 nam khoan san pham trong nong nghiep o tinh ta' [Summing up three years of the product contract system], 9 July 1985; Ban Kinh Te Tinh Uy, 'Toc do khoi phuc kinh te va phat trien xa hoi cua tinh gan 10 nam giai phong' [QN-DN's economic performance over the past ten years], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 16 February 1985.

¹⁶⁸ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Nhan tong ket 3 nam khoan san pham trong nong nghiep' [Summing up three years of the product contract system], 9 July 1985; the price ratio of urea fertilizer to paddy in 1983-1984 was about 1:2 (see *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Khoan san pham cuoi cung den nguoi lao dong nhung vuon mac va cach giai quyét' [The product contract: problems and solutions], 8 November 1984).

agricultural input prices sold to peasants. Moreover, they reduced household investment and lowered the value of a collective work-day. That is the reason why collectives in the province paid their members low rates for a work-day, less than one kilogram.¹⁶⁹

In November 1984, an investigation into eight collectives in different areas in QN-DN found that members in Binh Nguyen collectives in Thang Binh district suffered on average a loss of 200 kilograms of paddy per hectare. Those of Dai Phuoc collective in Dai Loc district lost 400 kilograms per hectare. Members in Tam Nghia collective in Tam Ky district lost 123 kilograms per hectare. Similarly, Tam Thai collective No.1 in Tam Ky district, 123 kilograms; Dai Hiep collective No.2 in Dai Loc district, 148 kilograms; Binh Lanh collective in Thang Binh district, 210 kilograms. Only in Dai Phuoc collective No.1 in Dai Loc district did collective members show an average profit of 54 kilograms of paddy per hectare.¹⁷⁰

After *Doi Moi* officially began in 1986, the performance of agriculture and collective farming in QN-DN had gone down alarmingly. QN-DN staple food production fell from 540,000 tons in 1985 to 463,000 tons in 1987.¹⁷¹ For paddy and corn, in particular, production dropped between 1985 and 1988 (see table 6-1).

QN-DN newspaper accounts noted several reasons for the decrease in collective farming's performance and peasants' living conditions from 1986-1987. First, unfavorable weather affected crop yields. Second was the negative effect of central government 'price-wage-currency' reforms in September 1985. In particular, from late 1985 on, prices across-the-board in QN-DN increased sharply. The price of agricultural inputs increased faster than that of agricultural produce leading to agricultural produce being sold at below cost.¹⁷² Third,

¹⁶⁹ Ban Nong Nghiep Tinh Uy QN-DN, 'Nhưng van de can giai quyét de phat trien dong luc cua co che khoan moi trong nong nghiep' [Some ideas to facilitate the incentives for the product contract], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 24 November 1984.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'So ket san xuat nong nghiep nam 1987 huan bi vu san xuat dong xuan toi' [Preliminary summing up of 1987 agricultural production], 17 September 1987.

¹⁷² Tinh Uy Quang Nam, 'Nghị quyết của tỉnh ủy tiếp tục củng cố và tăng cường quan hệ sản xuất, hoàn thiện cơ chế khoán sản phẩm' [Provincial party committee's resolution on continuing to solidify production relations and perfect the product contract], 9 July 1987; According to Nguyen Khac Vien, the policies of exchanging

the quantity, quality, and variety of agricultural inputs were inadequate. In the two prices-system (state and free market's prices), state farm-serving-enterprises often sold agriculture inputs in the free markets to make a quick profit at the expense of collectives. Meanwhile, collective organizations still lacked economic autonomy.¹⁷³ Finally, cadres embezzled, stole collective resources and 'prolonged work and inflating work-points' for non-farming activities.¹⁷⁴

Table 6-1 Grain production (including paddy and corn) in QN-DN (1976-1988)

| Year | Gain production (tons) |
|------|------------------------|
| 1976 | 154,386 |
| 1977 | 181,687 |
| 1978 | 235,387 |
| 1979 | 282,441 |
| 1980 | 285,426 |
| 1981 | 293,504 |
| 1982 | 330,760 |
| 1983 | 328,166 |
| 1984 | 332,863 |
| 1985 | 358,195 |
| 1986 | 287,362 |
| 1987 | 307,344 |
| 1988 | 299,774 |

(Source: Cuc Thong Ke Quang Nam, *Quang Nam 30 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien* [Quang Nam's socio-economic development over the past thirty years], Tam Ky, 2005: p.95.)

In explaining the low performance of collective farming under the product contract system, villagers in Hien Loc and Than Yen gave several reasons. One was a decrease in the state investment in collective farming, according to a man in Hien Loc. This meant that households did not have adequate chemical fertilizers and pesticides.¹⁷⁵ A lady in the village added other reasons:

Under product contracts, a farm laborer managed too much land, about 5 to 7 *sào* of land while chemical fertilizers and manure were inadequate. So, results had to

banknotes, readjusting prices and wages in 1985 caused the country's hyper-inflation, overall prices increased 200 percent in 1985, 550 percent in 1986 and 400 percent in 1987 (see Nguyen Khac Vien, *15 nam ay 1975-1990* [Vietnam's economy from 1975-1990], NXB TP. Ho Chi Minh, 1990: p.96).

¹⁷³ Ibid; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'So ket san xuat nong nghiep nam 1987 chuan bi san xuat vu dong xuan toi' [Preliminary summing up of 1987 agricultural production], 17 September 1987.

¹⁷⁴ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoan thien co che khoan san pham trong nong nghiep' [Perfecting the product contract system], 1 March 1988: p.1.

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Hien Loc, 14 October 2005.

be bad. At that time, paddy yields were about 20-30 *ang* per *sào* (about 2-3 tons per hectare). It was now [in 2005] 60-70 *ang* (7-7 tons per hectare).¹⁷⁶

By looking at the weakness of collective management, an old man argued,

At that time, many people joined specialized teams and other industries so there was a lack of people in animal husbandry [to get manure] to fertilize land. Inadequate care of fields led to low paddy productivity. For example, a household with 5 workers: three people worked for non-farming work, two stayed at home and worked for cultivation. As a result, the two were not able to take care of farming.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, due to a lack of ownership rights, another villager argued, 'land was exploited too much. People did not leave the land to rest so the paddy productivity had gone down. Besides, the rice seeds were bad. They came from a stock that people had planted again and again.'¹⁷⁸

Returning to household farming

In response to peasants' resistance and the poor performance of collective farming, from late 1986 to 1987 some collectives in QN-DN began to experiment with new farm arrangements. For example, when a large number of households returned their contracted land, the managerial board of Binh Tu collective No.1 in Thang Binh district decided to implement 'package contracts' (*khoán gọn*) to peasants in the winter-spring of 1986-1987. Under this arrangement, the work-points system was eliminated, and the board announced in advance the cost of inputs, taxes, and other fees. After paying these items, peasants were allowed to keep the rest. When adopting these new contracts, the board faced criticism from higher authorities about derailing and destroying socialist production relations. However, the new contracts resulted in peasants who had returned land asking for it back.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Interview, Hien Loc, 15 October 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Interview, Hien Loc, 21 October 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Hien Loc, 19 October 2005.

¹⁷⁹ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Su that ve cach khoan moi o Binh Tu 1' [The true story about new contract method in Binh Tu collective No.1], 23 June 1988; *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Chuyen dong ruong cuoi nam' [Collective farming at the end of the year], 31 December 1987.

Similarly, in Dien Nam collective No.2 in Dien Ban district, after falling 117 tons below its paddy production quota and 30 percent of peasant households returning their land, leaders searched for a better farming arrangement in the winter-spring of 1986-1987. To encourage peasants to retain their contracted land, the board decided to reward each household by lending it 1.3 *sào* of land for its own use if it continued farming on its contracted land. Moreover, the collective cadres decided to implement contract No.100 for only two farming seasons per year and use 'straight contracts' (*khoán thẳng*) for the third season. Under the straight contracts, peasants knew in advance what they would have to pay the collective. The remainder of their harvest belonged to them, which made them 'enthusiastic' (*phấn khởi*).¹⁸⁰

Besides these two, other collectives, such as Hoa Son collective in Hoa Vang district and Dien Phuoc collective No.1 in Dien Ban district brought in new farming arrangements. A former chairman of Binh Lanh collective admitted that his collective in mid the 1980s had made 'package contracts' to peasants on infertile land which they returned or refused to farm according to product contracts.¹⁸¹ The names of the new arrangements were different from one collective to another, including: '*khoán hộ*' (household contracts), '*khoán gọn*' (package contracts), '*khoán hợp đồng*' (agreement contracts) and so on.¹⁸²

In general, collectives experimenting with new farm arrangements showed improved results which came to the attention of provincial authority. In June 1987, QN-DN provincial leaders held 'a conference on solidifying and strengthening production relations in agriculture'.¹⁸³ Provincial leaders authorized new farming arrangements by releasing directive No.03 (22 June 1987) stressing 'solidifying and strengthening production relations

¹⁸⁰ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'HTX Dien Nam 2 khoan moi dong luc moi' [New farming arrangements created new incentives in Dien Nam collective No.2], 24 December 1987.

¹⁸¹ Interview, Binh Lanh, 24 October 2004.

¹⁸² *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Quan mot nam cai tien cong tac khoan san pham trong san xuat nong nghiep' [An evaluation after one year of improving the product contract system], 30 August 1988.

¹⁸³ *QN-DN newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi cung co va tang cuong quan he xa xuat trong nong nghiep' [An conference on solidifying agricultural production relations], 11 June 1987.

and perfecting the product contract in agriculture'. The directive called for increasing the economic autonomy of collectives and advocated new farm arrangements in them called 'agreement contract according to price unit' (*khoán hợp đồng theo đơn giá*). Under these new contracts, collectives had to inform collective members of their obligations and benefits up front and eliminate their widespread subsidies. Besides, the terms of the new contract, collective members were allowed and encouraged to buy means of production such as draft animals and small farm machines.¹⁸⁴ Since the new contracts had spread to many collectives in QN-DN; by the winter-spring of 1987, 34 in the province had officially adopted the new contracts.¹⁸⁵

Kerkvliet's study on northern Vietnam also showed that farming arrangements other than product contracts had prevailed in many collectives in 1986 and 1987. Some northern provinces, such as Ha Son Binh and Vinh Phu, approved new farming arrangements in 1987.¹⁸⁶

An Giang in the Mekong Delta

Like their counterparts in QN-DN, in the first few seasons of product contracts, farming performance of many production units in An Giang improved. An Giang's staple food production grew from 691,561 tons in 1981 to 835,000 in 1982.¹⁸⁷ However, from 1983-1985, when An Giang authorities tried 'socialist agricultural transformation', the province's staple food production stagnated, then declined. The table 6-2 below shows that paddy production and cultivated area increased in the early 1980s but then dropped considerably in

¹⁸⁴ Tỉnh Ủy QN-DN, 'Nghị quyết của tỉnh ủy số 03/NQ-TU (22 June 1987)' [Provincial party committee's resolution No.03], in *QN-DN newspaper*, 9 July 1987.

¹⁸⁵ *QN-DN newspaper*. 'Chuyên đông ruộng cuối năm' [Collective farming at the end of year]. 31 December 1987.

¹⁸⁶ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.224.

¹⁸⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Con số niềm tin' [The figures and faith], 20 March 1983: p.2.

1983 and 1984. Due to a large amount of abandoned land and the flood, An Giang's paddy production fell from 820,952 tons in 1982 to 792,486 in 1983 and 725,392 in 1984.¹⁸⁸

Table 6-2 Cultivated area of crops and paddy production in An Giang 1975-1988

| Year | Cultivated area of annual crops (<i>hectares</i>) | Cultivated area of paddy (<i>hectares</i>) | Paddy productivity (<i>tons/hectare</i>) | Annual production of paddy (<i>tons</i>) |
|------|--|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 236,594 | 217,629 | 2.157 | 469,426 |
| 1976 | 255,743 | 220,670 | 2.249 | 496,287 |
| 1977 | 278,559 | 241,593 | 1.972 | 476,421 |
| 1978 | 275,980 | 233,513 | 1.555 | 363,113 |
| 1979 | 263,389 | 231,568 | 2.271 | 525,891 |
| 1980 | 329,321 | 292,374 | 2.524 | 737,952 |
| 1981 | 335,092 | 296,016 | 2.336 | 691,493 |
| 1982 | 324,064 | 283,772 | 2.893 | 820,952 |
| 1983 | 325,303 | 278,652 | 2.844 | 792,486 |
| 1984 | 308,153 | 257,963 | 2.812 | 725,392 |
| 1985 | 300,705 | 263,214 | 3.451 | 908,352 |
| 1986 | 312,389 | 258,805 | 3.277 | 848,104 |
| 1987 | 317,139 | 261,090 | 3.389 | 884,834 |
| 1988 | 324,148 | 262,930 | 3.729 | 980,466 |

(Source: Cuc Thong Ke An Giang, *Nien Giang Thong ke tinh An Giang* [An Giang year book], Long Xuyen, 2000: p.61-75)

According to An Giang Department of Agriculture, the province's staple food production increased to 923,000 tons in 1985. However, it still fell short of target. The increase in food production in 1985 resulted mainly from an increase in the number of crops per year and the extensive adoption of high-yielding rice. In particular, An Giang expanded the area of two-rice crop-per-year land with high-yielding rice from 34,000 hectares in 1976 to 180,000 in 1985.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, despite cultivated areas of An Giang decreasing more than 20,000 hectares from 1982 to 1985, better paddy productivity increased production from 820,952 tons in 1982 to 908,352 in 1985. So, the average growth rate of paddy production in

¹⁸⁸ Cuc Thong Ke An Giang, *Nien Giang Thong Ke tinh An Giang* [An Giang year book], Long Xuyen, 2000: p.61-75; An Giang's staple food yield in 1984 reached about 755,732 tons and met only 84 percent of the target (*An Giang newspaper*, 'Nganh nong nghiep tong ket cong tac nam 1984: Vuot qua kho khan, toan tinh gioe trong 300,842 ha' [Summing up 1984 agricultural production], 21 February 1985: p.1.

¹⁸⁹ Nguyen Vu (the manager of An Giang's Department of Agriculture), 'Tiep tuc dua nhup do phat trien nong nghiep len nhanh hon' [Continuing to speed up agricultural production], in *An Giang newspaper*, 24 October 1986.

An Giang from 1982-1985 was about 3.5 percent.¹⁹⁰ In assessing agricultural conditions, a 1986 report of An Giang Party Executive Committee revealed widespread problem.

In general, agricultural production developed slowly and unevenly. Investment in agriculture did not meet requirements; the price of agricultural produce was still fixed low (*gò ép*) and was not attractive [by peasants]. Due to agrarian policy shortcomings, some cultivated land was used inefficiently or abandoned. Furthermore, the number of new agricultural machines could not compensate for the damage and loss of old machines.¹⁹¹

Similar to QN-DN, despite food production in An Giang increasing slightly from 1982-1985 (staple food per person increased from 515 kilograms per year in 1982 to 530 kilograms in 1985), peasants' living conditions did not improve.¹⁹² There were at least three reasons for this. First, the terms of trade between agricultural produce and industrial products (including agricultural inputs) had deteriorated at the expense of the latter. For example, in 1975, one kilogram of paddy was worth one kilogram of urea or 1.5 liter of fuel. In 1985 four kilograms of paddy could buy only one kilogram of urea or one liter of fuel. Second, state's food procurement increased considerably from 1982-1985. During the period 1983-1985 alone An Giang authorities took 851,000 tons of grain (nearly the annual output), 30,000 tons of beans and sesame, 18,400 tons of pork and 21,200 tons of fish. Food procurement from 1982-1985 increased 28.1 percent compared to the previous three years of 1980-1982.¹⁹³ Finally, local cadres' embezzlement, theft and poor management (discussed above) and high payments to the production units negatively affected peasants' income.

Since An Giang completing collectivization in 1985, agricultural production in An Giang did not improve. In assessing the economic performance in 1986, provincial resolution No.1/NQ-TU (29 November 1986) revealed,

¹⁹⁰ Cuc Thong Ke An Giang, *Nien Giang Thong Ke tinh An Giang*, Long Xuyen, 2000: p.61-75.

¹⁹¹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Bao cao chinh tri cua ban chap hanh Dang bo tinh An Giang' [The political report of Provincial party executive committee], 24 October 1986.

¹⁹² Cuc Thong Ke An Giang, *Tinh Hinh Kinh Te Xa Hoi Tinh An Giang 1983-1985* [An Giang's socio-economic situation from 1983-1985, Long Xuyen, 1986: p.7.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*: p.10.

The provincial socio-economic situation was more difficult and complicated than in 1985 due to price-wage-currency adjustments. Some targets were not met; food production fell compared to 1985; more than 10,000 hectares of land were abandoned; farm machines were seriously damaged and lost ... economic and social evils, violations of laborers' mastery rights and oppression of the masses become widespread. Especially, at the local level, managerial boards of production units committed many serious wrongdoings.¹⁹⁴

In retrospect, a chairman of An Giang province admitted,

From 1980 to 1986 due to the consequences of socialist agricultural transformation, forced collectivization and bureaucratic red tape, the food production [in An Giang] stagnated, increasing only slightly from 741, 000 tons in 1980 to 855,000 tons in 1986. In general, over 10 years after reunification, despite party organization and people concentrating on staple food production, it increased only 400,000 tons. So, the average annual increase in the staple food production was about 40,000 tons ... Besides, during that time, more than 30,000 hectares of land was abandoned.¹⁹⁵

A former cadre of An Giang Committee for Agricultural Transformation listed three reasons for the poor performance of agriculture in mid-1980s. First, the prices of food procurement were low which discouraged peasants from increasing their production. Second, the state's supply of inputs was inadequate and late so peasants often 'sowed seeds only' (*sạ chay*) without fertilizers, irrigation and other inputs. Finally, because of these things and others, peasants were not interested in farming (*không thiết tha với ruộng đất*).¹⁹⁶

The performance of production units continued to deteriorate in late the 1980s along with peasants' living conditions. An Giang newspaper (August 1987) reported that 50 percent of the peasant households had to rely on buying paddy on credit and could only pay for it after the harvest. The article listed three reasons for the fall in peasants' living conditions. First, much of what peasants produced was extracted by state agencies, while agricultural inputs (such as, fuel, fertilizers, pesticides) were late, inadequate and not always what they needed. For example, even months after planting paddy, peasants had not yet received

¹⁹⁴ Cited from Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11 Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Trien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Trien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CTPTNTAG, 1994: p.40.

¹⁹⁵ Nguyen Minh Nhi, 'An Giang: Lich su thao go, do pha va chu dong hoi nhap kinh te the gioi' [An Giang dealt with economic difficulties and integrated into the world economy], Long Xuyen, August 2004: p.1.

¹⁹⁶ Interview, Long Xuyen, 27 June 2005.

agricultural inputs. Second, paddy productivity was severely reduced due to insufficient supply of agricultural inputs and irrigation. However, peasants were still required to pay for these provisions and to contribute to collective funds. In addition, they had to pay local cadres' and party members' debts. Finally, paddy prices were set much lower than those in the free markets and the prices of state's goods sold to peasants were relatively high. Also, agricultural tax was disadvantageous for peasants.¹⁹⁷

An investigation into peasants' earnings in August 1987 showed that production unit members received an average 2 *gia* of paddy (40 kilograms) per hectare. Peasants complained that they had costs that were irrational. They had to pay input cost (B contract), quota, transport cost for inputs, support for invalid and martyr families, irrigation, threshing paddy, ink and papers and so on.¹⁹⁸ The table 6-3 shows that due to the cost burden, what remained for each member at the end of a harvest was only 30.2 kilograms of paddy (see table 6-3).¹⁹⁹

Villagers in Long Dien B knew that in the time of production units farming had poor results and generated low incomes. A former landless man in the village recalled,

In the past [before 1975] a wage earner could get 2-3 kilograms of paddy per day but farming under the production unit, we got less than one kilograms of paddy per day. Before reunification, it was easy to make a living but after reunification [until decollectivization] we worked hard but did not have any surplus; our lives were difficult. The state forced us to accept land but we did not feel happy because farming did not give us good earnings.²⁰⁰

Similarly, a former production unit leader in the commune commented,

After collectivization, all households here became poor; no one was able to get rich. Before reunification, people in the Southern Region lived in a market economy so they had comfortable lives. When implementing land readjustment, some households who traded and engaged in non-farming work also accepted land because they feared going to New

¹⁹⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Gia ca thu mua, chinh sach thue nong nghiep anh huong den doi son cua nong dan' [Procurement prices and agricultural taxes affect peasants' living standards], 28 August 1987: p.3.

¹⁹⁸ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Moi tuan mot chuyen: Chuyen o tap doan san xuat' [A story each week: production unit story], 28 August 1987: p.7.

¹⁹⁹ *An Giang newspaper*, 28 August 1987: p.7.

²⁰⁰ Interview, Long Dien B, 3 August 2005.

Economic Zones ... The state saw the failure of collectivization and changed their policy because they saw that 9-10 years after reunification, living-conditions of people had been set back (*đi thụt lùi*).²⁰¹

Table 6-3 *The result and distribution in a production unit in An Giang in the summer-autumn 1987*

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. total number of households | 115 |
| 2. total number of people | 856 |
| 3. total number of workers | 459 |
| 4. the area of land (hectares) | 49.4 |
| 5. the output of paddy (kilograms) | 123,500 |
| 6. the expenditures | (kilograms of paddy) |
| Land preparation | 9,580 |
| Irrigation | 2,559 |
| Urea | 33,509 |
| Fuel | 2,500 |
| Lubricating oil | 400 |
| Pesticide | 6,420 |
| Paddy seeds | 14,820 |
| Fee for pumping water | 8,860 |
| NPK fertilizer | 8,401 |
| Diesel | 4,762 |
| Threshing paddy | 1,880 |
| The managerial fees | 617 |
| The fee for indirect labor | 517 |
| Others | 2,785 |
| 7. total expenditure (kilograms of paddy) | 97,610 |
| 8. the remaining for production unit's members (kilograms of paddy) | 25,890 |
| 9. the paddy income per công of land (0.1 hectare) (kilograms of paddy) | 52.4 |
| 10. the income per person (kilograms of paddy) | 30.2 |

(Source: *An Giang newspaper*, 28 August 1987: p.7)

In explaining the poor performance of agriculture, villagers in Long Dien B gave several reasons:

Low paddy productivity was because the state supplied inputs inadequately and not what we expected. The inputs were delivered to us little by little (*nhỏ giọt*).²⁰²

²⁰¹ Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

²⁰² Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

Land had not been leveled out properly [which made difficult to grow high-yielding rice). The supply of fertilizers and pesticides was inadequate in amount and in type. The irrigation system was bad and the supply of water insufficient.²⁰³

Farming in production units was never good because the production unit cadres did things at odds with us. Cadres used collective machines inefficiently and improperly. They prolonged work and often broke it mid-way through cultivation, so people sowed seeds late. Individual machines worked better but the production unit cadres did not allow them. As you know, after production units were dismantled, we farmed productively.²⁰⁴

At that time, local cadres controlled peasants' fate but they performed badly. For example, the water-pump stopped working half way through cultivation. Farming like this, peasants went hungry. I observed several production units but found none working well. Some were labeled 'advanced' by the commune authorities because their cadres drank with commune cadres.²⁰⁵

In Long Dien B, land was divided among households while in the big fields [e.g. Chau Thanh district, Thoai Son district] much land was abandoned. Some state farm enterprises appropriated land in big fields but farmed unproductively. The management of grain at that time was bad. State agencies bought peasants' grain and piled it up in fields not bothering to cover it. So, when it rained, the grain rotted. Households store grain much better than state organizations.²⁰⁶

The return to household farming

After An Giang province completed socialist agricultural transformation, agricultural production faced even more difficulties. Paradoxically some agrarian policies in An Giang resulted in different outcomes from what VCP's and provincial leaders expected because of local cadres' and peasant's practices. For example, land readjustment benefited local cadres though it aimed at distributing land to the landless and land-poor households. The non-resident cultivator prohibition and collectivization led to similar consequences. As a result, a large amount of land was abandoned and appropriated illegally by local cadres; a large number of farm machines after collectivizing were damaged; and more importantly, the food production deteriorated alarmingly.

²⁰³ Interview, Long Dien B, 7 August 2005.

²⁰⁴ Interview, Long Dien B, 12 August 2005.

²⁰⁵ Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

²⁰⁶ Interview, Long Dien B, 5 August 2005.

In the late 1986 An Giang provincial leaders started to acknowledge the shortcomings of previous agrarian policies. In order to utilize abandoned land and boost agricultural production, provincial leaders eliminated the non-resident cultivator prohibition and granted more land to households who had more farming capacity.²⁰⁷ In February 1987 the provincial leaders issued decision No.93- NQUB (19 February 1987) aimed at correcting the shortcomings of previous land readjustments (discussed earlier in the chapter). In order to protect agricultural machines from further damage, the provincial leaders discontinued collectivizing peasant's machines and urged collective organizations to return them to previous owners (peasants).²⁰⁸ These policies were mainly aimed at improving agricultural performance but they triggered off peasants' reclaiming their land and machines.

Despite land conflicts disrupting agricultural production in rural areas, in 1987 production recovered thanks to corrective measures.²⁰⁹ Inspired by the positive effects of recent measures and finding that most production units in the province were, in fact, problematic, in early 1988 An Giang provincial leaders started to question the direction of collective organizations. In January 1988, Vo Quang Liem, the vice-secretary of An Giang Party Committee, admitted,

Collective organizations are now unsuitable because they are inefficient in terms of production and their managerial bodies are bulky and unnecessary. Collective organizations manage poorly and commit numerous wrongdoings which hinder agricultural production and negatively affect the living-conditions of peasants.

He also argued that given current production conditions in which farming required a lot of manual work, it was necessary to take households as basic units. Authorities should grant long-term land-use for households and reduce staff on managerial boards to only one or two

²⁰⁷ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Hoi nghi can bo quan triet nghi quyet nam 1987 cua Tinh Uy' [An Giang's conference on grasping thoroughly the provincial party committee's 1987 resolution], 22 December 1986.

²⁰⁸ In collectivizing peasants' farm machines, production units paid machine owners in installments the remaining value of machines. However, production units often delayed or evaded these payments; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Cung co va doi moi viec cai tao may nong nghiep, xay xat' [Improving and renovating the management of agricultural machines], 22 December 1986: p.2

²⁰⁹ Vo Tong Xuan and Chu Huu Quy, *De Tai KX 08-11 Tong Ket Khoa Hoc Phat Tien Tong Hop Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Qua 7 Nam Xay Dung Va Phat Tien An Giang* [Summing up An Giang's socio-economic development over the past 7 years], CTPTNTAG, 1994: p.47.

cadres. Peasants should be allowed to select freely the best farming services around them.²¹⁰

The provincial resolution of March 1988 called for redefining the objective of agricultural transformation again. It argued that the main objective of agricultural transformation was to facilitate production. However, over the past years, An Giang authorities had 'misunderstood the objective of agricultural transformation' and 'coerced peasants into joining collective organizations even though it was supposed to be voluntary'. As a result, 'production stagnated; living conditions of peasants were difficult. A new class of oppressors and exploiters had appeared'. They were local cadres, mainly cadres of collective organizations.²¹¹

It is worth noting that the debate about the shift in agrarian policy in An Giang took place before the VCP leaders released resolution No.10 (5 April 1988) which officially endorsed the reallocation of land to peasant households to use for 15 years and fixing the quota for 5 years.²¹²

National policy shift and the return to household farming

Under product contracts, especially the later stages, the deterioration in the agricultural production and performance of collective organizations occurred in almost all provinces of Vietnam. According to a VCP report, product contracts only slightly boosted agricultural production in the period 1981-1985 but since 1986, contracts lost their positive effect and food production stagnated (see table 6-4 below).²¹³

²¹⁰ Vo Quang Liem (the vice secretary of An Giang's party committee), 'Van de cung co, nang chat cac tap doan san xuat' [Solidifying and upgrading production units], in *An Giang newspaper*, 15 January 1988: p.1; *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xac dinh lai muc dich cai tao nong nghiep' [Redefining the objectives of agricultural transformation], 4 March 1988: p.1.

²¹¹ *An Giang newspaper*, 'Xac dinh lai muc dich cai tao nong nghiep' [Redefining the objectives of agricultural transformation], 4 March 1988: p.1.

²¹² Ban Tuyen Huan Trung Uong, *Dang Tra Loi Nong Dan Mot So Van De Cap Bach Ve Ruong Dat* [The party's response to urgent land problems], TP. Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tuyen Huan, 1988: p.99-100.

²¹³ BNN, BCHTW, DCSVN, 'Du thao: tong ket 3 nam thuc hien nghi quyet 10 cua Bo chinh tri ve doi moi quan ly kinh te nong nghiep' [A draft summing up the three-year implementing the resolution No.10], Hanoi, 10 December 1990: p.1.

Table 6-4 Vietnam's staple food production from 1981-1987

| Year | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Staple food production (millions of tons, paddy equivalent) | 15,0 | 16,8 | 16,9 | 17,8 | 18,2 | 18,3 | 17,5 |

(Source: BNN, BCHTW, DCSVN, *Du Thao: tong ket 3 nam thuc hien nghi quyet 10 cua Bo chinh tri ve goi moi quan ly kinh te nong nghiep* [A draft summing up the three-year implementing the resolution No.10], 1990: p.2)

According to researcher Nguyen Sinh Cuc, a decrease of 0.8 million tons of food in 1987 compared to 1986 accompanied by a population increase of 1.5 million caused a sharp decrease in staple food per capita from 300.8 kilograms per year in 1986 to 280 in 1987, the lowest figure since 1981. In collective organizations, peasants' income accounted for about 20 percent of the quota. In 21 provinces of Vietnam (from Binh Tri Thien province northward), 39.7 percent of rural people suffered severe hunger between harvests (*nạn đói giáp hạt*).²¹⁴

Faced with falling living conditions like their counterparts in QN-DN and An Giang, peasants elsewhere in Vietnam were fed up with collective farming. Even in 'good' collectives, peasants began to return contracted land. As a result, some land in widespread locations was abandoned and peasants' debts increased over time. In response to the situation, some collectives tried to experiment with 'package contracts'; and some local authorities authorized these experiments.²¹⁵ Despite 'package contracts' or 'household contracts' being criticized by party officials and analysts, they gradually gained authorities and party leaders' approval. According to Ben Kerkvliet, by September 1987 farming arrangements other than product contracts prevailed in more than 70 percent of the collectives in Vietnam. Finally in April 1988 the party's Political Bureau released resolution

²¹⁴ Nguyen Sinh Cuc, *Thuc Trang Nong Nghiep, Nong Thon Va Nong Dan Dan Vietnam 1976-1990* [Vietnam's agriculture from 1976-1990], Hanoi, NXB Thong Ke, 1991: p.47.

²¹⁵ BNN, BCHTW, DCSVN, 'Du thao: tong ket 3 nam thuc hien nghi quyet 10 cua Bo chinh tri ve goi moi quan ly kinh te nong nghiep' [A draft summing up the three-year implementing the resolution No.10], Hanoi, 10 December 1990: p.1.

No.10 stressing 'the renovation of agricultural economic management' which implicitly endorsed previous practices and marked the beginning of decollectivization in Vietnam.²¹⁶

Resolution No.10 was aimed at unleashing the production capacity of agriculture and shifting agriculture to commodity production, by giving collective organizations and peasant households more autonomy in production. In order to encourage peasant households to increase production, land was allocated to them to use for a long-term (15 years) and the quota was fixed for 5 years.²¹⁷

VCP leaders did not intend to dismantle collective organizations. However, in the context of a market-oriented economy, after implementing resolution No.10, peasants gradually became independent of collective organizations and those organizations gradually lost their purpose and were dismantled or changed to farming-service-organizations in the early 1990s. Peasant households finally became the basic production unit in rural areas of Vietnam.

Conclusion

Peasants' and local cadres' everyday practices played an important role in derailing and changing VCP's agrarian policy. In order to save collective organizations and improve their performance, in 1981 VCP leaders released directive No.100. The hope was to reduce peasants' and local cadres' problems and to strengthen collective organizations. Even though product contracts immediately improved the performance of collectives and boosted agricultural production, they did not solve the long-term struggle between peasants and local cadres over land, labor and other resources.

²¹⁶ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005: p.224, 227.

²¹⁷ BCT, DCSVN, 'Nghị quyết của Bộ chính trị Trung ương Đảng về đổi mới quản lý kinh tế nông nghiệp', in *Dang Tra Loi Nong Dan Ve Ruong Dat* [The party's response to urgent land problems], TP Ho Chi Minh, NXB Tuyen Huan, 1988: p.81-123.

Although there were many campaigns to correct cadres' problems both in QN-DN and An Giang, performance did not improve. Local cadres often took advantage of their positions to steal state, collective and peasant resources. Land readjustment, the non-resident cultivator prohibition and collectivization in An Giang all were aimed at eliminating the old exploitative class, but in reality the policies created a new social exploitative class, namely local cadres.

During the product contract, collective farming (or subsistence farming) essentially replaced the commercial farming and diverse rural economy of An Giang. That is why villagers in An Giang displayed behavior comparable to their counterparts in QN-DN. Villagers in both places tried their best to minimize systemic disadvantages and maximize advantages in order to enhance their survival and livelihoods. For example, while QN-DN villagers tried their best to enlarge their household economies by capturing collective resources, land and labor, An Giang villagers tried their best to ensure their livelihoods by doing wage-work and using collective resources for their daily needs. Both of them tried to avoid paying debts and fulfilling obligations; they returned land and abandoned it when they saw that collective farming was unprofitable. All of these behaviors had a huge adverse effect on the survival of collective organizations.

The combined effect of the peasants' and local cadres' practices significantly contributed to the poor performance of collective farming and agriculture. The output of staple food decreased alarmingly after mid-1985. In response to the fall in staple food production, local cadres and authorities in QN-DN, An Giang and elsewhere tried to experiment with new farming arrangements other than product contracts. When Vietnam faced a food crisis in the late 1980s, VCP's leaders finally endorsed local arrangements that marked the beginning of decollectivization and a return to household farming in Vietnam.

Chapter 7 CONCLUSION

After military victory in April 1975, the government in Hanoi tried to expand and impose the north's socialist institutions on the south, along with rehabilitating the war-torn economy. In the agricultural sector, VCP leaders called for replacing individual land tenure and household farming with state and collective ownership and large-scale farming.

The agrarian reform in southern Vietnam after 1975 was class II reform, to use Elias Tuma's term, aimed at eliminating private tenure and promoting public tenure and collective farming. Like that which occurred in the north and in other socialist countries, post-1975 agrarian reform consisted of two key components: land reform and collectivization; the former was an essential step to prepare for the latter. However, instead of using radical and sometimes violent approaches to land reform as happened in northern Vietnam and China in the 1950s, VCP leaders advocated a moderate approach in the south. One reason was that party leaders realized previous land redistributions had largely resolved tenancy problems in the south. In addition, they were aware of the costs of the radical approach in the north.

Unlike Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu governments' land reforms in the late 1950s and the early 1970s, which were more consistent with private land tenure systems, post-1975 land reform was a temporary measure and just part of the larger socialist transformation of agriculture. VCP leaders believed that collectivizing the south's agriculture was the only way to modernize it, eliminate exploitation, support industrialization and improve the living standards of peasants. In this regard, VCP leaders did not seem to recognize the existing shortcomings and disappointments of collective farming in the north. What propelled VCP leaders, apparently, was a commitment to building socialism.

VCP leaders planned to complete the socialist transformation of agriculture in southern Vietnam by 1980. However, the project encountered difficulties, which varied from

region to region. In QN-DN in the Central Coast consolidation of political power was swift thanks to a considerable number of ex-revolutionaries and southerners returning from the north. Officials in An Giang province in the Mekong Delta, however, had great difficulty controlling society and establishing local governments. A major reason was the lack of local ex-revolutionaries. Authorities had to recruit a large number of new local cadres who had no experience with VCP's policies and collectivization. The implementation of post-war economic restoration measures, land reform and collectivization was fast in QN-DN but slow in An Giang. From 1975-1978 authorities in QN-DN were able to accomplish most preparatory measures for collectivization such as land readjustment, irrigation, field transformation, simple collective organizations and pilot collectives. And QN-DN authorities met the central government's target to collectivize farming in the province by 1980. By contrast, authorities in An Giang and elsewhere in the Mekong Delta encountered major difficulties. Many transformation policies such as land readjustment, interim collective organizations and pilot collectives failed to reach the central government's targets and expectations. Collectivization in the region accounted for less than 10 percent of land and peasant households in 1980. Only in the mid-1980s was collectivization deemed accomplished, thanks in part to policy modifications to accommodate villagers' concerns.

There were two major reasons for the differences in outcomes of national policies between these two places. First, local cadres in QN-DN had more experience with VCP's policies and northern collectivization and were more loyal to VCP's socialist transformation of agriculture than their counterparts in An Giang. For instance, provincial authorities in QN-DN carried out collectivization more aggressively. They used stronger coercive measures, similar to those used in the north in early 1960s, to force villagers into collectives. They collectivized all land, draft animals and other peasant means of production simultaneously, tightly restricted private farming and handicapped non-members. They even used strictly

'preemptive' measures to prevent peasants from slaughtering animals or restrict villagers' mobility before joining collectives. In contrast, local cadres in An Giang had weaker commitment to the socialist transformation of agriculture. In order to secure their positions, many had to comply with national policies but did so unenthusiastically. However, in order to prove their political credentials and loyalty, some non-ex-revolutionary cadres carried out official policies strictly and were heavy-handed toward non-compliant villagers at least in the first few years. But in general, faced with strong peasant resistance, many local cadres were reluctant to force policy compliance; often they modified policies to accommodate peasants' concerns. Some resorted to specific parts of national policies, such as the 'positive and firm principle' of collectivization, to delay or let the process drift. For example, in order to ease peasant resistance, local cadres in Long Dien B, Cho Moi, An Giang allowed landowners to share their surplus land with their relatives rather than intended beneficiaries.

Second, agricultural transformation policies encountered weaker peasant resistance in QN-DN than in An Giang. There were significant social and economic differences between two places in terms of the consequences of wars, the natural conditions and the impacts of previous agrarian reforms. The consequences of war in QN-DN had been so severe that most villagers were rendered poor. The war had flattened the rural communities' structure and left the society relatively homogeneous. Villagers' main concerns were to do with subsistence and survival. They were living in extremely difficult conditions within corporate communities and had few outside opportunities.¹ Their behaviors were safety-first and inclined to secure their subsistence and survival. Given the extremely difficult conditions in QN-DN, most poor and powerless villagers had to comply with post-1975 agrarian policies to avoid any political, social and economic disadvantages imposed by powerful authorities. Thus, authorities in QN-DN were able to complete collectivization within a year, even faster

¹ James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976.

than collectivization in the north in the early 1960s. In contrast to Quang Truong who attributed swift collectivization in the Central Coast to peasants' preference for collective farming as a means of coping with their difficult lives, I found that many villagers in Thanh Yen and Hien Loc villages initially disliked and did not trust such farming but they decided to join collectives to avoid disadvantages.² In addition, I found that some post-1975 agrarian policies seemed to fit well with local culture and practice. For instance, land redistribution and labor exchange teams fitted well with QN-DN rural communities in which reciprocity and mutual assistance during the hard times were still popular. That is one important reason why post-1975 land redistribution was swift. It was not only QN-DN authorities who drove land redistribution. Rather, villagers with large tracts of land gave sizeable amounts to their relatives and neighbors. Implementing other agrarian policies went smoothly too. For example, even though the building of dams took over villagers' fields and destroyed their houses and trees, it faced no resistance. Furthermore, the removal of tombs, which touched on a sensitive aspect of peasant culture, also encountered little obstruction. Another factor contributing to the fast completion of agricultural transformation was familiarity with the Vietminh and NLF's ideology, making QN-DN villagers more inclined to comply with post-1975 agrarian policies than their counterparts in An Giang. Moreover, ending the war and their post-1975 policies to recover land and agriculture helped increase the legitimacy of QN-DN authorities.

In An Giang, the devastation caused by war was less than that in QN-DN. An Giang peasant households were better-off, lived in more stratified and socially and economically diverse communities. Previous agrarian reforms had significantly boosted commercial agriculture there. Market relations and individual land tenure had been well established. The main concern of An Giang peasants was profitability. Thus, An Giang peasants were closer to

² Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987.

the political economy situation discussed in Popkin's work.³ Living in such conditions, An Giang villagers were able to resist or evade agrarian projects which were unattractive or unprofitable to them. Moreover, many post-1975 agricultural transformation policies in An Giang did not fit well with local institutions so they encountered major difficulties. Production solidarity teams failed to encourage peasants to undertake labor exchange because many peasants were not familiar with that system and preferred to hire labor. The non-resident cultivator prohibition and 'cultivation close to residential areas' that were aimed at restricting peasants' mobility and controlling rural society were controversial among villagers who had previously enjoyed more or less freedom. Land reform was not well received, not only among land-rich households but also some poor peasants. Some poor peasants refused to accept redistributed land because they considered it weird to take other peoples' property. The adoption of high-yield rice faced strong peasant resistance because they preferred to cultivate traditional rice to high-yield rice. More importantly, collective farming faced great trouble because villagers considered it unproductive and inferior to individual farming. Some villagers resisted it strongly by confronting officials in charge, destroying machines and crops, abandoning land, and simply refusing to join collective farming. Many others resisted quietly by evading collective work as much as possible. Failing to impose a full northern model of collectivization on the Southern Region, VCP leaders finally had to scale-back their expectations, reduce the size and socialist character of collective organization and consider production units as basic forms of collectivization to fit local conditions.

During 1981-1985, VCP leaders pressured local authorities in the Southern Region to complete socialist transformation. Under central pressure, An Giang authorities and those elsewhere in the region carried out agricultural transformation hastily, especially from 1984-1985. Many collective organizations were quickly established by 'just signing names'; land

³ Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979.

redistribution ended up dividing land to households according to land per capita in the commune. Although VCP leaders in the mid-1980s announced the completion of socialist agricultural transformation in the Southern Region, many collective organizations there fell short of expectations.

From 1978-1988, collectives were sites of constant struggle between peasants, local cadres and state agencies over land, production and distribution. Despite successfully putting villagers in collective structures, VCP leaders were unable to direct peasants and local cadres to behave and act according to what they expected. Collective farming faced major difficulties not only in the Mekong Delta but also in the Central Coast. During the work-points system (1978-1981), villagers in the Central Coast went through the motions but optimized their points rather than the quality of production and ended up doing collective work carelessly and deceitfully. Many tried to plunder collective resources. Few took care of collective property and worked as enthusiastically as authorities wanted. Meanwhile, the better-off villagers in An Giang tried their best to evade collective farming. To avoid political disadvantage, some joined production units but did not seriously undertake collective work. Some 'kept one foot within and another outside the production units' to make a living. Some only sent their children or auxiliary laborers to do collective work while they, as main laborers, worked for themselves. Many did collective work carelessly and sluggishly and did not care much about collective property. Although QN-DN and An Giang peasants' behaviors were quite different, their main objectives were to minimize the disadvantages of the system and maximize the benefits to themselves. However, the aggregate of these individual actions significantly contributed to the poor performance of collective farming.

Other key actors contributing to the poor performance of collective farming were local cadres. Despite being loyal to VCP's agrarian policies, some QN-DN local cadres took advantage of their position for personal gain at the expense of the collective and the state.

They managed collectives poorly and embezzled a considerable amount of agricultural input and produce. Some assigned tasks and gave work-points to members at their own discretion and prolonged work and inflated work-points to favor their own villagers and relatives at the expense of the collective. Some were prejudiced, bureaucratic, autocratic and patriarchal toward members; their behavior contradicted authorities' dictum 'collective is home and members are masters'. Meanwhile, local cadres in An Giang were unenthusiastic about collective farming. There were numerous cases of local cadres who managed production units slackly and stole collective input, cash, peasants' work-points, misappropriating peasant land and belongings and bullying the masses. Although authorities in both places put great efforts into correcting and cracking down on such 'bad behavior', such behavior became more prevalent.

In response to the deteriorating performance of collective farming and the steady fall in the country's food production, VCP leaders began to introduce a new farming arrangement, the product contract, aimed at reducing local bad practices and motivating villagers to work enthusiastically and responsibly. The product contract helped improve the performance of collective farming in two places for a few years only. It failed to solve the long-term struggle between peasants and local cadres about land, labor and other resources. During the product contract time (1981-1988), QN-DN villagers tried their best to enlarge their own economies by encroaching upon collective resources such as land, labor and agricultural inputs at the expense of the collective economy. Despite authorities expecting them to put collective and state interests first, villagers put as number one their own interests. So when failing to produce more than the quota or facing subsistence shortages, many refused to or delayed paying their debts to collectives and fulfilling state obligations. At the later stages of the product contract system, many in QN-DN decided to accept less contracted land or even abandoned collective land to make a living elsewhere. This happened when they

saw it as less profitable compared to outside opportunities or were disappointed with collective farming. Such behaviors had huge impact on the performance of collective farming there. By contrast, collectivization during the product contract system in An Giang meant the peasantization of the rural population. Some landowners who lost their land during land redistribution were disappointed and gave up farming or just did enough to subsist. Many land recipients farmed poorly because they did not know how to farm, lacked incentives or had inadequate capital while production units did not provide enough; many put a considerable amount of their time and effort into working for wages to supplement their livelihoods. Some sold state agricultural inputs to meet their daily needs rather than investing in contracted fields. Like their counterparts in QN-DN, at the later stages of the product contract system, many An Giang villagers owed or refused to pay production units. Some decided to abandon, transfer or even sell their redistributed land to others.

VCP leaders believed that the product contract reduced the number of problems associated with cadres by increasing their responsibility managing certain phases of collective farming. However, despite authorities in QN-DN and An Giang having numerous campaigns during 1981-1988 aimed at improving the quality of local cadres, correcting and cracking down on their bad behavior, the cadre problem did not disappear but increased over time. QN-DN local cadres tended to shift their responsibility onto villagers by using 'blank contracts' in which villagers did most phases of farming. They often failed to fulfill their duties, such as spraying pesticides or watering fields on time. They also embezzled scarce collective resources over which they had control such as agricultural inputs and collective property. Since the mid-1980s when Vietnam accepted the market economy and had multi-economic sectors, cadres tended to relax their management of collectives and make use of market opportunities. For instance, cadres sold scarce fertilizers on the free market for their personal gain to a such degree that many collectives in Thang Binh, Quang Nam did not have

enough for their members in 1987. Meanwhile, An Giang local cadres were guilty of numerous malpractices from 1981 to the late 1980s. Many exploited their positions to steal collective agricultural inputs and funds. Due to widespread misappropriation and embezzlement, by July 1987 local cadres' debt accounted for 70 percent of the total. In addition, they misappropriated a considerable amount of peasants' land which was supposed to be distributed to the landless and land-poor. Most production units in An Giang did not operate according to the product contract system. Rather, they divided land among households to farm individually but controlled household production, distribution and marketing. Production unit cadres monopolized farming services and served members poorly but over-charged them for the cost of these services.

In general, widespread peasant and local officials' practices at odds with VCP leader requirements contributed to the poor performance of collective farming and the eventual derailment of many national agrarian policies. Collective farming was aimed at eliminating exploitation but created a new class of exploiters, collective and production unit cadres, in rural areas. Land redistribution was supposed to benefit the landless and poor-poor but failed to do so. Rather it benefited many local cadres and their relatives. The non-resident cultivator prohibition enabled collectivization but in turn significantly hindered peasants' production capacity and commercial agriculture in An Giang.

Staple food production in QN-DN, An Giang and elsewhere in Vietnam declined alarmingly from 1985-1987. The living conditions of villagers deteriorated over time. Fed up with collective farming, many villagers decided to quit, abandon or return land to collectives. In response, some local authorities in QN-DN had to try new farming arrangements rather than product contract. Authorities in An Giang also recognized that most production units were inadequate and collective farming failed to improve peasants' living conditions. In order to increase food production, they tried to correct the shortcomings of socialist transformation

by allowing peasants to farm outside their villages and return some land to productive landowners. These practices happened before national leaders launched a major change in their agrarian policy in 1988.

In general, the poor performance of collective farming and the deteriorating living conditions were not confined to QN-DN and An Giang but occurred in most parts of Vietnam during 1985-1987. Villagers were hungry in many locations. Villagers accepted less contracted land and even abandoned land. Their debts increased over time. In response, many locations tried new farming arrangements to deal with their local problems. By September 1987, more than 70 percent of collectives in Vietnam used different farming arrangements other than the product contract. Realizing that they were not able to reverse the situation, in April 1988, VCP leaders released resolution No.10 that actually endorsed local practices and arrangements. The resolution marked a new era in Vietnam's agricultural development, the return to household farming.

In summary, central to the failure of and change in national post-1975 agrarian policies in southern Vietnam were widespread peasants and local officials' practices which were often at odds with what VCP leaders expected them to do. Peasants tried their best to pursue their own household economic activities, often at the expense of collective farming. Local cadres often took advantage of their positions to benefit themselves rather than the collectives and the state. Despite the authorities' numerous campaigns to correct and crack down on such 'bad behavior' and even attempts to modify national policies to accommodate local concerns, these problems did not disappear but in fact increased. The ultimate consequences were the inefficiency of collective farming, severe food shortages, and an economic crisis which made the government accept and eventually endorse new farm arrangements that villagers and local cadres had initiated to deal with their own local problems.

Linking my findings to the broad literature of agrarian reform, peasant politics and state-society relations, I have four main assessments. First, my findings on post-1975 agrarian reform reinforce Elias Tuma's proposition that though the objectives of agrarian reform varied, the primary ones are political regardless of who initiates them. The primary objective of the Vietnamese Communist Party's post-1975 reform was to transform the country's political economy to build socialism. Moreover, VCP leaders had a number of other reasons for collectivization similar to Peter Nolan's findings in his study of political economy of collective farms.

Second, the moral and political economy of peasants are not necessarily contradictory and can be complementary for a better understanding of peasant politics and for explaining their behavior and responses to the same national policies in different regions of a country. In southern Vietnam's case, these two theories provide insights to explain different outcomes of national policies between the Central Coast and the Mekong Delta, which previous scholars on southern Vietnam's agrarian reform such as, Quang Truong, Ngo Vinh Long, Huynh Thi Gam do not explain adequately.⁴ During the course of collective farming, especially during the work-point system, the moral and political economy theories still provide insights into different forms and degrees of behavior that villagers in QN-DN and An Giang took and how they responded. However, they do not explain what caused the poor performance of collective farming from 1978-1988 nor do they explain the failure and collapse of collective farming in An Giang, QN-DN and elsewhere in Vietnam in the mid and late 1980s. In this regard, the theories of everyday peasant politics and local cadre politics provide a better explanation.

⁴ Quang Truong, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study 1955-1985* (PhD dissertation), Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987; Ngo Vinh Long, 'Some Aspects of Cooperation in the Mekong Delta', in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (David Marr and Christine White, eds), Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988; Huynh Thi Gam, *Nhung bien doi kinh te xa hoi o nong thon Dong Bang Song Cuu Long tu nam 1975 den nam 1995 [socio-economic changes in the Mekong Delta's rural areas from 1975 to 1995]* (PhD thesis), Ho Chi Minh, Dai Hoc KHXH & NV, 1998.

Third, the three main actors in Joel Migdal's model including strongmen (leaders of social organizations), local leaders and implementers responsible for affecting national policies do not fully match the Southern Vietnam case.⁵ From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, the kind of strongmen to which Migdal refers, such as landlords, religious leaders and other village elites who were able to exercise social control had largely been wiped out. In QN-DN, due to the legacy of severe wars, the traditional strongmen's social and economic bases had been destroyed or weakened. After the war, under the Communist government, the traditional strongmen, except for those who were recruited into state apparatus, had lost their status and social control. In An Giang, before 1975 these strongmen had influence over national policies. However, the end of the war, the establishment of the VCP government, agrarian reforms and so on had reduced former strongmen to weak and 'ordinary' men. Despite the fact that some rich and upper-middle peasants and religious leaders strongly resisted land redistribution and collectivization, they did so individually rather than being able to mobilize their clients to against the state policies. Thus, unlike the powerful and autonomous strongmen in Joel Migdal's model, former strongmen in rural areas of QN-DN and An Giang played minor roles in influencing state policies. It is likely that the autonomous strongmen politics model is limited to fragmented and web-like societies where there are numerous social organizations that effectively exercise social control.

However, the two other actors in Migdal's model, local leaders and local implementers, who I group together as 'local cadres' significantly influenced national policies. For example, the stronger commitment of QN-DN local cadres to VCP's socialist transformation than their An Giang counterparts was one reason for better outcomes for collectivization in QN-DN than in An Giang. During collective farming, widespread local

⁵ Joel Migdal, *State in Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

cadres' malpractices damaged the performance of collective farming and contribution to the derailment of national policies in An Giang and QN-DN from 1975-1988.

Finally, my findings on collective farming in QN-DN and An Giang of Southern Vietnam have reinforced Ben Kerkvliet's proposition about the power of everyday politics.⁶ Despite differences in the form and the degree to which peasants took their everyday practices had a huge impact on the performance of collective farming and contributed to failure of and change in national agrarian policies. Moreover, it is likely that in normal political conditions, when peasants are vulnerable or relatively powerless, villagers typically suppress and hide their disagreement with and opposition to prevailing conditions and expresses their ideas through everyday resistance or everyday politics. But in abnormal political conditions more favorable to them, they often 'express openly and act directly to realize ideas that they held but dared not so boldly during normal political conditions'.⁷ In the Southern Vietnam case, during 1975 to the mid-1980s, villagers seldom expressed their views publicly. Despite many not liking collective farming or their land being redistributed, most of them did not dare resist openly. Many tended to comply with the authorities while trying their best to maximize the advantage and minimize the disadvantages of the system. However, in the mid-1980s VCP leaders launched *Doi Moi* policies and tried to correct the shortcomings of previous policies. Taking advantage of the new situation, many villagers in the Southern Region rushed to claim back their land which had been redistributed to other villagers. Some also dared to march and demonstrate demanding their land, actions never ventured previously.

One might have expected religious factors to be significant in understanding the course of collectivization in southern Vietnam. Followers of the Hoa Hao religion, who were prominent in many parts of An Giang province, might have been obstacles for VCP agrarian

⁶ Ben Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2005.

⁷ Ben Kerkvliet, 'Claiming the Land: Take-overs by Villagers in the Philippines with Comparisons to Indonesia, Peru, Portugal, and Russia', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 20 (April 1993), pp.459-93: p.485.

policies. However, I found that the policies encountered major difficulties in the Southern Region regardless of religion. VCP plans faced even more problems in NLF influenced areas such as Tan Hoi commune (Cai Lay, Tien Giang province) and some places in Dong Thap provinces. In Long Dien B, Cho Moi in An Giang, land readjustment and collective farming confronted the same kind of resistance in areas with Hoa Hao population as those in which the majority were the Catholic. When interviewing villagers there, I found that Hoa Hao and non-Hoa Hao followers had similar views and experiences of post-1975 agrarian reforms and similar justifications for their behaviors. I hardly found any villager who justified their resistance to collective farming because of their religion. Cho Moi district was a Hoa Hao stronghold but also the first district which completed collectivization in An Giang. In general, collective farming had troubles regardless of whether the populations were Hoa Hao or not. In QN-DN, villagers in many locations were not particularly religious but collective farming also ran into troubles too. It is likely that religion is not an important factor in understanding the course of collectivization in An Giang and QN-DN.

One might wonder whether struggles between villagers and state agencies over land and other agrarian issues are over since the reestablishment of household farming. It seems such struggles are not over. The legacy of land redistribution and collectivization in the Southern Region includes lingering disputes over land. For example, despite authorities in An Giang dealing with more than 30,000 peasant complaints in 1988-1990, a large number of land conflicts had not yet been solved. Unable to settle persistent and widespread land disputes, in the early 1990s An Giang authorities decided to stop dealing with those matters. This decision angered many villagers who had not yet claimed their land back. Meanwhile, new land conflicts have emerged since the reestablishment of household farming, especially since the late 1990s as Vietnam's urbanization and industrialization intensified. State agencies have often taken over villagers' fields without proper compensation. Local cadres

across regions of Vietnam continue to abuse their power to misappropriate villagers' land for their personal benefit. These phenomena have exacerbated rural land conflicts.

In recent years, hundreds of villagers, from different regions of Vietnam, disillusioned with local government, have gathered in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to demand that the central government resolve their land disputes. Some of these land disputes have their origins in the post-1975 land redistribution. Some resulted from the new process of urbanization. Villagers' demonstrations have become a hot issue in Vietnam today. In other words, land will likely be a source of rural conflict and political discontent in Vietnam in the coming years.

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