

# THE MEANING OF REVOLUTION

By TON THAT THIEN

You may have noticed that I have claimed a number of things, but never have I dared claim to be a revolutionary. Whether or not I am one at heart is another matter. But I have always carefully left it to others to make the big claim, because I know that when the time comes to make the claim stick, they will have a big job on their hands, and a lot of people on their backs.

But one claim I will make: I am a student of revolutions, because I am a student of history, and what is the history of the last hundred and fifty years but a series of revolutions spreading out from France to Europe and from Europe to Asia, Africa and Latin America? And one cannot be a student of history and revolutions without spending a great deal of time and thought on the Vietnamese revolution itself.

We have heard much talk about revolution in the past twenty years or more. What is strange is that the word has not become stale, so to speak. There is always a quality of newness about it, just as the word fashion: fashions change, but the passion for fashion has remained as great as ever. Incidentally, since more and more Vietnamese women wear Western dresses, it is well to point out the mamas that skirts are getting shorter and shorter, and the dresses have less and less top: the double movement converges on one obvious thing (which I need not name...) The revolution in fashion has moved both from the bottom up and from the top down!

But what about the political and social revolution? I have often tried to define it, and perhaps you will allow me to put down on paper the results of my meditations about this big subject which scares and fascinates many at the same time.

Revolution is not just — nor essentially — the breaking of barriers, doing away with a group of men in power (or in money), wrecking, burning, punishing.

Revolution is also, and still more, the opening of a NEW PATH to enable our people to build a REINVIGORATED NATION, in which the NEW STANDARDS for national life must be integrity, competence, service, and achievements:

to fashion a NEW SOCIETY based on greater equality, justice and opportunity for all:

to seek a NEW LIFE free from fear, want, oppression and exploitation:

to replace the blind selfish enjoyment by a few of the fruit of the intelligence, labour, and sacrifices of the many by the ENLIGHTENED EXERTION AND COOPERATION of all for the benefit of all; in a word, to replace a Republic of Privileges by a REPUBLIC OF MERIT.

The Revolution just described is perhaps nothing new. It is but a REDISCOVERY and RE-IMPLEMENTATION — in a new technical setting — of those ideas and practices which our ancestors had already applied in the past to save the country from foreign absorption or domination, and push it along the path of independence and progress. Indeed, the basis of today's revolution could — and must — be traced back to the teachings of Confucius, Lao-Tse and Buddha, which had formed the web on which generation after generation of Vietnamese had weaved the pattern of two thousand years or more of their national history. This, we must never forget, because it is the root and the stump through which our nation gets its nourishment.

Viewed against the background of the development of mankind, our Revolution is but a stage in the march of man on the road to progress, towards ever greater liberation such as has been contemplated by the political and social philosophers of the West brooding on the meaning and implications of the Industrial Revolution. This progress is the sun towards which our national tree, firmly rooted in its past, will for ever strive to push its foliage and blossoms, like all the trees, big and small, in a forest.

In speaking of Revolution, we must therefore never forget the past striving of our ancestors, just as we must never shut our eyes on the future of mankind. If we forget our past, or shut our eyes on the future, we shall do so at our peril. We shall be like women wearing dresses which become shorter and shorter from the bottom up and barer and barer from the top down.



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determination of Sumatra,  
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have been sacrificed in the process.

For these reasons, a new road to freedom must be found for the peoples of Sumatra, Borneo, the Celebes, the Moluccas, New Guinea, Bali and Sunda: this new road cannot be other than the road to legitimate self-determination.

Self-determination has been the foundation stone of international order and political morality of our century. Yet, the rights of self-determination of the peoples of Sumatra, the Celebes, the Moluccas, New Guinea, Borneo, Bali and Sunda have not been restored to them. It is now time to do away with Javanese colonialism over these peoples; the sovereign rights of these peoples to govern themselves as they see fit must be returned to them. Colonialism has been roundly condemned in all other parts of the world, it must not and cannot be protected in the Indonesian archipelago, Javanese colonialism has been made possible by the acquiescence, tolera-

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