

Fifty years after reunification, Vietnam's struggle still inspires

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April 30, 2023 - people celebrate Victory Day in Quang Tri province, central Vietnam.

On April 30, 1975, the People's Army of Vietnam broke down the gate of the U.S. Embassy in what is now Ho Chi Minh City. Formerly Saigon, this city was the last stronghold of the U.S.-backed puppet government in the South.

April 30 marks not only the official defeat of U.S. imperialism in the country. It marks the defeat of *all* Western imperialism that occupied and terrorized the Vietnamese people for generations.

A long history of resistance

The liberation struggle in Vietnam dates back to the 1800s when French colonists sought to claim the country for themselves. The people of Vietnam wasted no time in organizing resistance to this foreign invader who not only disrespected and destroyed the land of the native population, but actively enslaved or erased the natives themselves.

This struggle was not won by weapons, or technology, or by having individual great leaders; it was won through a unified commitment by every man, woman, and child, and an unyielding dedication to see liberation through by any means necessary, for however long it took. Imperial Japan occupied Vietnam from 1940 to 1945. Immediately afterwards, the French attempted to regain control of their former colony, and this kicked off the First Indochina War, which ended after the glorious Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu and subsequent French withdrawal.

Following this withdrawal, the Vietnamese people were betrayed by the Western imperialist powers yet again. This time it was the U.S. who split the country in half and occupied the southern portion below the 17th parallel, installing a puppet government and immediately began attacking and burning the North. However, this

brutality was nothing new to the people of Vietnam, who have survived decades upon decades of bombing and massacres.

As Washington attempted to bomb the North off of the map, these very same bombs were then turned around and used as booby traps and ordinance that would claim the lives and limbs of plenty of U.S. ground forces. As more and more U.S. weapons and ammo were sent into the country to squash the resistance, the U.S. and ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) forces found themselves on the receiving end of the hot lead and weapons, which found their way into the hands of the Vietnamese guerrilla fighters.

'We won't fight another rich man's war'

That was a popular slogan of the anti-war movement because it was mostly the children of the working class who were thrown into the meat grinder to protect imperialist profits in Vietnam. Young men with rich parents, like Donald Trump, could often dodge the draft.

The working-class soldiers resisted, however, joining up with the Black power and other movements of the day. The war in Vietnam reflected race oppression back home. Some 300,000 Black people served in the war. In 1965, they comprised 31% of ground forces but only 12% of the U.S. population. Eighty thousand Latinx people served, along with 42,000 Native Peoples. None of these groups had full rights in the U.S., and yet Washington lied and said that they were being sent to fight for the rights of the Vietnamese people.

Inspired by the labor struggle, troops also organized on the basis of class, for example with the American Servicemen's Union (ASU), which brought together rank-and-file soldiers to resist their officers. In addition, countless soldiers deserted or went AWOL. And from 1969-1972, there were 900 documented incidents of U.S. troops killing their officers or sergeants, sometimes by throwing grenades into their

tents. This was called “fragging.” All this resistance shook Washington, and the capitalists profiting from the destruction to their cores.

The Vietnamese people overcame every obstacle

Washington not only sought to destroy the will of resistance but also the land that the people were fighting so hard to protect. But Agent Orange, Napalm, and Rolling Thunder bombing runs all failed to subdue the people or destroy their subterranean tunnels and defenses. Every claim of nearing victory against communism was shattered. The Tet Offensive, Easter Offensive, and Ho Chi Minh Offensives all washed away the idea of a weak or faltering North Vietnam.

The victory over the U.S. occupation was inevitable because the Vietnamese people kicked out everyone before them. And whether the imperialists like it or not, there is no such thing as “American exceptionalism,” especially when the will to fight is involved. The Vietnamese people overcame every obstacle blocking them from achieving reunification and self-determination. They dismantled the dividing line of the 17th Parallel and kicked out the exploiters.

After reunification, they had to overcome massive destruction just like their counterparts in Cambodia and Laos. Just like what the U.S. and Zionist forces are doing to Gaza today, towns and villages were flattened. Homes and infrastructure were destroyed. Agricultural lands were poisoned. Over 20 years, the U.S. had carried out more than a million bombing raids, dropping about 5 million tons of bombs. Tens of thousands of unexploded bombs are still found each year, with some exploding to maim and kill.

Socialism raises 40 million out of poverty

The U.S. put a crushing embargo on the country in an attempt to make the revolutionary government collapse. These sanctions were not lifted until 1994.

Isolated and struggling economically, the revolutionary government nevertheless persevered in building socialism, but had to make accommodations to the capitalist world market, especially after counterrevolution swept through the USSR and Eastern Europe, depriving Vietnam of trade and socialist aid. In the early 1990s, the majority of Vietnamese people lived in extreme poverty.

Despite implementing market reforms, the Communist Party of Vietnam has held on, maintaining state ownership of heavy industry and resources like oil, while continuing to expand the cooperative agricultural economy. Even with an increase in especially small and medium-sized private enterprises, Vietnam's socialist-oriented development continues. A 2018 IMF report estimates that Vietnam lifted 40 million people out of poverty, and of course attributed this success wholly to capitalist reforms. But this remarkable poverty reduction is not a capitalist goal; it is a socialist one. Because of that orientation, they continue to advance equity for women and ethnic minorities, while expanding access to housing, health care, and education. Vietnam's achievements are the result of its revolution.

Vietnamese struggle an inspiration to oppressed everywhere

Here in Baltimore, the oppressed population is not divided North/South, but instead East/West. This division of communities has allowed for the ruling class in the city to attack each side differently. Over East, Johns Hopkins buys up and gentrifies city blocks with the aim of clearing out longstanding Black communities to make way for an exploiting class to move in and reinforce the racist exploitation. Over West, communities left without aid or investment are terrorized by police occupation, corralling the people into smaller neighborhoods, all while limiting the movement and growth of the communities in the area.

Finally, the dividing line in Baltimore is not a DMZ lined with barbed wire between these two areas, but instead it is the center of the city where a majority of the

wealth and capital reside. Just like the Vietnamese who committed to struggle for generations, the oppressed people of Baltimore have committed to remain in this city against the wishes of the ruling capitalist class that would rather see them gone.

The story of the Vietnamese struggle for true freedom culminating in Reunification Day is a lesson to all oppressed people here in the U.S. and abroad that no matter how daunting things may seem or how long it takes, the unshakable drive of a people to achieve their goals can never be beaten.

Happy Reunification Day to our blood brothers in Vietnam and around the world, and long live international solidarity!

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