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Reflections on the Lao Revolution

MARTIN STUART-FOX

Revolutions tend to generate intense emotions, especially among participants and victims. It is therefore in some ways easier for an external observer to reflect dispassionately upon a recent revolution, than for someone more directly involved. Sympathy, born of understanding, may be felt and expressed both for those whose vision spurred the revolution and who are committed to it, and for those who opposed it, fled from it, or were destroyed by it. It is not my intention in what follows to condemn or praise: it is rather to assess the course of revolution in Laos, and the constraints both internal and external which have acted upon it. In doing so I shall be concerned not only with historical causation with its implication of inevitability but also with facts which may reveal alternatives open through freedom of choice. In other words, I shall look at the Lao revolution not simply to determine what occurred and why but also to suggest what might have occurred if people had decided otherwise, and why they did not.

The roots of any revolution lie buried deep in a country's historical past. It is not my intention here to disinter them. But it is necessary to go back to the period of coalition government in Laos which followed the ceasefire agreement of 1973, for two reasons: first to consider the intentions of the Pathet Lao in entering the coalition; second to assess the popular reaction to that decision. To take the second point first, by all accounts the spontaneous mass demonstration which greeted Souphanouvong when he arrived in Vientiane in April 1974 to take part in the Provisional Government of National Union was the most tumultuous Laos had ever witnessed.¹ This was an extraordinary statement of popular feeling, of respect for the man who in the eyes of the great majority of Lao in the Vientiane zone stood as the leader of the Patriotic Front (Neo Lao Hak Sat). Through Souphanouvong this respect extended to the movement he led, to its dedication and commitment, to its single-minded pursuit of its stated revolutionary aims to establish a genuine neutrality and to renovate

Lao society. It was a respect which owed much to Buddhist values: the renunciation of the revolutionary was akin to the renunciation of the ascetic; both eschewed material rewards, both took to the forest, both exercised self-discipline, both followed a strict moral code. Most Lao in the Mekong towns and surrounding villages were disgusted by the corruption and nepotism, the destruction of traditional culture and values, which had resulted from the unholy alliance between the United States and the great families of the political right in Laos. They were sick of civil war. They looked for a new beginning.

The Pathet Lao strategy by which they aimed to seize and retain the political initiative within an equally balanced coalition was masterly. By insisting upon the setting up of the National Political Consultative Council (NPCC) under the chairmanship of Souphanouvong, the Pathet Lao at one stroke bypassed the National Assembly and provided themselves with a base from which to issue the broad policy directives according to which the government proper should function. The eighteen point political programme which the NPCC promulgated obtained wide acceptance as a blueprint for the future of the country.² In retrospect, however, its very success was a major factor in later undermining public confidence in the Pathet Lao. The document was taken as PL policy, agreed to only reluctantly and under pressure by the political right. When its major provisions (retention of the monarchy, individual freedoms and rights, a mixed private-state economy, a neutral foreign policy) began to be discarded, the Pathet Lao were condemned at best for going back on their word, at worst for deliberate deception.

What changed everything, of course, were the events of 1975, the collapse of rightist regimes in Phnom Penh and Saigon. It seems clear that when the Pathet Lao worked out their coalition strategy they were thinking in terms of a process of political consolidation in the Vientiane zone which might take five years or more. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and the armed forces were both more than 60 per cent Lao Theung, tribal peoples of the mountain slopes.³ It would take time to redress the balance through the recruitment of Lao Loum, ethnic Lao of the Mekong valley who comprise around half the total population. The Pathet Lao needed to counter years of rightist propaganda in order to build a power base among the most culturally advanced and politically sophisticated group in the country.

The events of 1975 cut short this process. All at once there was a

new situation to be taken advantage of. Even though the seizure of political power by the revolutionary left in Laos was a slow and peaceful process in comparison to what occurred in south Vietnam and Kampuchea, it still happened too quickly to permit the party to lay adequate organizational or political groundwork which would have ensured more ready acceptance by most Lao. As time did not permit persuasion, the Party had no alternative but to resort to carefully orchestrated direct action.

This statement needs some elaboration. At the beginning of 1975, the prospect for Laos was for a period of slow but steady correction of the distortions introduced into the Lao economy and society by two decades of American military and political intervention. With an anticipated reduction of U.S. aid, and under the mildly socialist programme of the coalition's "18 points", the artificially high urban standard of living would inevitably have been reduced. At the same time, the mass of the population could have been prepared for necessary further sacrifices through an appeal to Lao nationalism and the need for a national effort to restore the appalling ravages of war, and lay the basis for future economic development. This alone would have required patient explanation. So too would have abolition of the monarchy. As it was, neither was adequately explained. As a result the collapse of the urban economy was unfairly blamed on the Pathet Lao, instead of being related to the termination of the American war effort in Laos. Abolition of the monarchy was presented to the Lao people as a *fait accompli*.⁴

Even though there is no evidence to suggest that the decision to dispense with the pretence of coalition government was taken other than unanimously by the LPRP Politburo,⁵ some Pathet Lao leaders were aware of the danger involved. Souphanouvong is reported to have told a group of French teachers in Vientiane towards the end of 1975, "We have power now, but it has come five years too soon."⁶ This is a most revealing statement. Not only does it suggest that the Pathet Lao within the coalition were working on at least a five-year timetable, it also reveals that some members of the leadership were aware of their own lack of preparedness, and the effect the revolution might have on the Lao urban middle class.

Once the decision had been taken to abolish the monarchy and declare Laos to be a People's Democratic Republic, it was necessary for the Party to guard against any possible opposition to the move on

the part of the rightist army or police. Anyone who might have led a revolt had to be neutralized. The technique used was very simple. All ranking military and police officers, and civil servants who were suspected of being unsympathetic towards the Pathet Lao were invited to attend political re-education seminars in the Pathet Lao zone.⁷ That so many voluntarily accepted, admittedly at the urging of the highly respected Souvanna Phouma who was still Prime Minister then, may have surprised even the Pathet Lao. That they did so would appear to suggest that even many of those whose position and fortune were owed to the former regime were prepared to cooperate with the Pathet Lao, and had no intention of fleeing their country. No alternative explanation seems possible, unless one is to accuse them of naivety verging on stupidity in placing themselves in the hands of their political enemies.

During 1975 very many Lao do appear to have accepted at face value Pathet Lao calls for national reconciliation, because they wanted to believe in the possibility of a new, free, independent, and prosperous Laos. Those Lao citizens who had fled the country were mainly either ethnic Lao related to a few major rightist families or Hmong, Yao, and other minority groups either identified with the Americans or who had left north Vietnam in 1954.⁸ Not until 1976 did urban Lao, and the Chinese and Vietnamese business community begin leaving in larger numbers. Two reasons seem above all to have contributed to their decisions to go: the imposition of government controls which both limited individual freedoms and undermined the economy; and the atmosphere of fear and suspicion which had progressively built up.

Government controls introduced early in 1976 interfering with the market economy (what could be sold, by whom, and at what prices), and limitations on private commerce and individual freedom of movement, were decided upon partly for ideological reasons (as a first step in the socialist transformation of the Lao economy) and partly as a measure to consolidate the political and administrative power of the new regime.⁹ Concern over internal security prevented the Pathet Lao from bringing senior officials back from re-education camps near Viensai, for fear they would promote opposition to the Government.¹⁰ But by keeping so many in camps for so long without an adequate explanation of why they were there, and by occasionally arresting other former civil servants and banishing them without due process of law for unspecified periods of time, the authorities created unneces-

sary apprehension among many lower ranking civil servants and technicians who had worked for the former regime, or had had some contact with Americans. These were people whose skills Laos could ill afford to lose. That so many of them took the momentous decision to leave their country after 1976 must be seen as an indictment of the policies of the new regime.¹¹

Under no circumstances could Laos ever seal its border with Thailand. The Mekong has never been a barrier, but a means of communication. All the major centres of population, with the sole exception of Luang Prabang, are either directly across the river from Thailand, or within easy reach of Thai territory (Pakse). Any government in Laos should have been aware of this problem. The Vietnamese found it difficult to leave unless officially permitted to “escape” by boat. But any Lao not held in a re-education camp could cross to Thailand virtually any time. Instead of following the Vietnamese example and setting up such camps, the Lao would have done better to adopt an entirely different policy — one of expelling from the country, with much publicity, a number of senior officers and civil servants found to be corrupt or guilty of specified crimes, and of announcing in the name of national reconciliation an amnesty for everyone else prepared to cooperate with the new regime in building a new Laos. Regular political seminars could have continued the re-education process. In this way the regime might have harnessed the idealism and enthusiasm of many of those young officers who had fought against the Pathet Lao, though half-heartedly and often with much self-questioning, but who now wanted to work with them. Instead their enthusiasm was allowed to seep away in the hopeless frustration of re-education camps.

That such an alternative course of action was not followed was principally due to the concern of the regime over the need to consolidate its power, and over what to do about the problem of security, in the light of its own internal weakness.¹² Cadres had been taught unquestioning obedience to party orders. Many were poorly educated and incapable of coping with new situations which required flexibility and compromise. But the need to increase party membership in the Lao Loum areas opened the way for opportunists and “bad elements” to enter LPRP ranks. Excesses committed by some of these new cadres quickly gave the party a bad name. Their power to have innocent people arrested for alleged crimes only added to

the atmosphere of suspicion and apprehension.¹³

But what could the authorities have done? They were fearful and with good reason, that both Thailand and the United States would attempt to destabilize the new regime through support for Lao exile resistance groups.¹⁴ They suspected the loyalty of the very population they had liberated. And they needed desperately to extend their control throughout the “newly liberated areas”. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that they chose the course they did: it was far safer, far more orthodox, than to chart a new “Lao revolution” built upon national reconciliation. After all, those who left could always be dismissed as irreconcilable class enemies of the newly emerging worker-peasant state. Only when the outflow became a flood which showed no sign of stopping, and when losses of trained personnel began seriously to affect economic performance, did the Party begin to show concern.

Over the five years from 1976 to 1980 economic reasons became increasingly important in deciding refugees to leave Laos. Many of those who have said that they left because they “did not like communism” meant that what they did not like about it was the way their living standards had declined.¹⁵ Here again, however, the new regime faced a virtually impossible task. As already pointed out, the economy of the Mekong towns in Laos was artificially generated through massive injections of American aid. When this was withdrawn, this urban economy could not help but collapse. Any government in Vientiane would have been faced with the same economic problem. This must have been recognized in Laos, as in south Vietnam, but instead of tailoring economic change to cushion as much as possible the shock of collapse, the clumsy policies of the new regime only exacerbated the nation’s economic difficulties. With the wisdom of hindsight, it is possible to see that if the policies outlined in the Party’s Seventh Resolution¹⁶ of December 1979 had been introduced four years earlier (and there are notable similarities between these economic policy guidelines and those enshrined in the coalition’s 18 points), it is unlikely that the Lao economy would have suffered as badly as it has, and unlikely that so many would have left the country for predominantly economic reasons.

The reversal of policy in the Seventh Resolution is something I shall return to below. Before it was decided, however, the Party embarked upon an ambitious programme of accelerated agricultural

cooperativization. This was announced in May 1978 in the wake of a similar decision taken in south Vietnam to suppress private enterprise and force the pace of collective farming.¹⁷ There may have been some rationale for this decision in south Vietnam, given the hold the Chinese community had on the private sector and the previous extent of landlordism in the Mekong Delta, but there was no possible justification, other than an ideological conviction of the superiority of the socialist mode of production, to warrant its introduction in Laos. Given the predominant pattern of small-scale individual landholdings in Laos, any move towards cooperativization would have had to be carefully prepared and gradually introduced in order to convince farmers of the benefits involved. This was never done. Not surprisingly, the result was widespread peasant opposition, even to the point of burning crops and leaving the country.¹⁸ In July 1979 the programme was abandoned, though the pretence that Laos still has 2,500 cooperatives is maintained by claiming that though land is privately owned and each farmer can do what he likes with his own crop (after payment of state taxes), labour is cooperative.¹⁹

The failure of the cooperativization programme forced a rethinking of Party policies. Security had suffered through the exploitation of popular opposition to the cooperatives by resistance groups, especially in southern Laos, while in the north Chinese hostility had introduced the threat of a new insurgency. The economy was still in desperate straits, and the flow of refugees continued unabated. In the light of some pointed advice by such bodies as the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, the Government concluded that a change of direction was essential — a conclusion helped by a similar decision taken by the Vietnamese.²⁰

In many ways the Seventh Resolution of the Central Committee of the LPRP was a remarkable document. After proclaiming the triumphs of the Lao revolution, it went on to admit a surprising number of failings in everything from national defence to the distribution of goods to remote mountain areas. Both inefficiency and corruption were freely acknowledged to be undermining the efforts of the state to improve living standards. Economic management was poor, and political consolidation wanting. In particular, cadres lacked both discipline and the determination to improve themselves. Some had abused their positions through illegal detention of innocent people, confiscation of property, and refusal to accept the

people's right to "collective mastery" over their own affairs.²¹

A change in economic policy was necessary, it was concluded — one which took into account the transitional stage of the Lao economy in its development from small-scale private production to socialism. Five sectors of the economy had to be recognized (the subsistence, cooperative, private capitalist, mixed state-private, and the state sector). Since each had a role to play in the present stage of development of the Lao economy, each required encouragement. This, together with a veiled reference to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), provided the rationale for a new emphasis upon private production and commerce which effectively reversed the policies in force from 1976 to 1978. New conditions were laid down for joint private-state enterprises where management would be left in private hands. Small-scale private industry and handicraft were to be actively encouraged, as were private transport and communication facilities. In both cases the state was called upon to promote private interests. Profitability was to be the key factor in determining the efficiency of state enterprises. Internal trade was to be freed of all restrictions, and the market permitted to determine prices. Regulations on import and export of goods were eased. Reforms were introduced into finance and banking to facilitate the circulation and use of funds.

Will the new policies work? Perhaps, but there is still a lot going against them. Food and consumer goods are again available in the markets, but at high prices which government servants on miserably low salaries simply cannot afford. The cost of living is so high in Vientiane that everyone must have some additional source of income just to survive. Party members have special shops where basic commodities can be purchased at subsidized prices, but virtually everyone must grow as much of their own food as they can, produce handicrafts, or work on the side in some way.²² It is a situation which encourages petty corruption.

Other problems have also arisen. Deteriorating relations with Thailand linked to the overall polarization of positions on Kampuchea led to closure of the border, thereby forcing up prices in Laos.²³ Appeals for refugees with useful skills to return home have not had their desired effect. Few accept the Government at its word. The fear is that any relaxation of economic restrictions and political liberalization is only a temporary measure likely to be rescinded once conditions improve, and party ideologues decide the country

should take another step towards socialism.²⁴

But the authorities do appear to be persevering with the new line. The statement of production targets for the country's first five year plan to run from 1981 to 1985, specifically refers to the Seventh Resolution as providing the basis for economic policy over the period covered.²⁵ And there are other signs that a more liberal and flexible political line is to be followed. In order to overcome the debilitating shortage of top and middle level managers in government enterprises and departments, the authorities have decided to bring selected former officers and civil servants back from re-education camps.²⁶ It remains to be seen, of course, whether five years of physical labour and political discussion is sufficient to convince these men to work for the new regime. Already some flown back to Vientiane have crossed to Thailand. Others have remained, and been given positions of authority. The Government has even provided a budget to fly at state expense any families already overseas back to join husbands or fathers.²⁷

But what latitude will such men have for decision-making? Will they be permitted to voice any criticism? How genuine, after all that has happened in the last five years, are the Government's latest moves towards national conciliation? It is too soon yet to tell, but there are some encouraging signs — and some less encouraging. After ignoring the ideas and opinions of anyone with education who was not a party member, the LPRP has at last opened up channels of communication with those few, mostly French-educated intellectuals who did not fight with the Pathet Lao but who have been sufficiently sympathetic to its aims to have stayed on to work with the regime. These men and women would probably describe themselves as socialists and nationalists. Above all they are patriots determined to preserve the best of their nation's culture in building a new Laos. And there lies a problem — for given the climate of international relations on mainland Southeast Asia, and the "special relationship" between Laos and Vietnam, there is little room for any discussion of party policies which could conceivably be construed as in any way critical of Vietnam.²⁸ Nothing, of course, can be said in favour of China, but care must also be exercised if Lao nationalism is not to take on, in Vietnamese eyes, disturbing anti-Vietnamese overtones. It is noticeable that while Vietnamese nationalism is promoted through paroxysms of ethnic hatred whipped up against the Chinese, in Laos nationalism is played down. The talk is

all of proletarian internationalism and Indochinese solidarity.

This brings us to the relationship between Laos and Vietnam. This has been variously interpreted as consisting of anything from Vietnamese colonialism pure and simple (Vietnamese advisers at the shoulder of each member of the Politburo, attached to every ministry, making every decision of any importance) to a sort of international partnership in which Lao leaders have freely taken similar policy decisions to the Vietnamese because they espouse a similar ideology, and see the world in similar terms. The truth of the matter would seem to lie somewhere between the two.

In the fields of defence and foreign policy, Lao freedom of action would now appear to be limited. But this was not always so. After 1975 Laos kept up diplomatic relations with the United States. President Souphanouvong paid a state visit to Phnom Penh in December 1977 barely two weeks before Pol Pot recalled his embassy staff from Hanoi. Laos and Kampuchea continued to maintain full diplomatic relations. Laos also tried hard to retain a measure of neutrality in the face of growing hostility between China and Vietnam. Not until a full two weeks after China invaded Vietnam were the Lao reluctantly pressured into an overtly anti-Chinese position.²⁹ Vientiane also took the initiative in mending relations with Bangkok during the Prime Ministership of Kriangsak Chamanand. With the polarization of opinion over Kampuchea, however, Laos has increasingly been forced to fall into line with the Vietnamese-Soviet position against China, ASEAN, and the United States.³⁰ With 60,000 or so Vietnamese troops in the country forming Laos's first line of defence, and faced with the hostility of both Thailand and China, there seems little else the Vientiane authorities can now do.

Are the Lao free to make internal decisions even if they must conform to Vietnamese foreign policy? This seems to depend on the importance of the decision. In looking at the sequence of events in southern Vietnam and Laos during the years 1975–80, one is struck by the way that major decisions in Laos followed similar decisions in Vietnam. This is true especially of the decision first to launch, then to suspend, the drive towards agricultural cooperativization. But in addition the policies enforced in Laos in 1976 mirrored those applied in southern Vietnam, and the decision to relax economic controls taken in December 1979 in Laos again followed Vietnamese thinking. The Lao may have gone further than the Vietnamese, but only with

Vietnamese acquiescence.³¹ It seems clear, therefore, that major internal policy decisions are only taken with Vietnamese agreement. The first Lao five-year plan was worked out by Soviet and Vietnamese experts in coordination with the Vietnamese five-year plan. So closely integrated are the two economies becoming that it is difficult to imagine this being otherwise. Lesser decisions, however, appear to be taken by the Lao themselves — unless of a technical nature where the advice of Vietnamese technicians is required. That by no means all decisions are made by the Vietnamese seems clear from the fact that it often takes a considerable length of time for decisions to be made at all. The lack of middle level cadres, and their reticence to take decisions, means that often quite minor matters have to be referred to the vice-ministerial level.

How can the Lao authorities abide a situation where they appear to be subservient to the Vietnamese? The answer is, I think, that they don't see things that way. Over years of common struggle they learnt to see their own revolution as intimately linked with that of Vietnam, not in an entirely dependent sense, but as each being vital for the other.³² Where would the Vietnamese have been without the Ho Chi Minh trail? The Lao leaders came to see the Vietnamese as close personal friends prepared to make real sacrifices for the sake of the Lao revolution. For years they have discussed every action, every decision with Vietnamese leaders, so that it has come to seem only natural to consult them. It is not a matter therefore of the Vietnamese instructing the Lao what to do: it is rather a case of the Lao and Vietnamese together coming to a conclusion as to what would be best for the Lao Party, for Laos, and for Indochina as a whole (including Vietnam!).

This does not mean, however, that there are no differences between the Lao and Vietnamese on occasions, or between some members of the Politburo or Central Committee and others. Despite the solidarity that has been a feature of the top leadership of the LPRP over more than thirty years, enough is known about differences between members of the Politburo to suggest, if not factions (probably too strong a term), then at least supporters of alternative approaches to the same goal of building socialism in Laos.³³ It must be admitted that this is in part speculative. Alliances may shift. Positions are not rigidly held to the exclusion of compromise. As a result there have been no purges from the top rungs of power, no defections which would

provide an insight into the differences I am suggesting exist. In fact, considering the pressures to which the Lao have been subject over the years, and that, as Ton That Thien has remarked, the Vietnamese “have a strong penchant for the absolute, and reasonableness and readiness to accept compromises are not among their national traits”,³⁴ the cohesion of the Lao leadership is extraordinary.

From talking to many people, both in Laos and in other parts of the world, it seems to me that one can best define the alternative approaches mentioned above as, on the one hand, a rather unbending insistence on applying Vietnamese models and solutions to Lao problems (which amounts to an eagerness to accept Vietnamese advice); and on the other, a preference for a more flexible approach taking into account Lao conditions and Lao cultural values.

Of the members of the Politburo it seems clear that Kaysone Phomvihane, Nouhak Phoumsavan, Sisomphone Lovamsay and Khamtay Siphandone favour the application of Vietnamese models, while Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit usually urge a more flexible approach to the solution of problems that is more characteristic of traditional Lao methods of obtaining political ends. Phoune Sipaseuth stands somewhere between the two groups in so far as this rather intangible matter of political style is concerned, favouring now one approach, now the other. Some care should be exercised in labelling these groups as “hard-liners” versus “moderates”, or “pro-Vietnamese” versus “Lao nationalist”, but the difference between them is still important. Whereas from 1975 to 1979 Vietnamese models were systematically applied to Lao conditions, there is some reason to believe that the Seventh Resolution marks a switch to a readiness to work out Lao solutions to Lao problems. It is not simply that economic policy has been liberalized; there are other signs too. The Party is more ready to listen to those who are not members; there is a move towards national reconciliation with the return of inmates of re-education camps; religion is being more freely practised.³⁵ Of course as I said before these changes can only have been made with Vietnamese approval, but the fact that they are taking place at least provides the possibility for testing an alternative approach and assessing its effectiveness. The success of such policies can only strengthen the hand of those in the Party who would like to see them continue. Perhaps, in the long run, the experiment now apparently underway offers the best chance for creating in Laos a form of socialism which is characteristi-

cally Lao, and not simply a pale copy of the Vietnamese paradigm.

Whether or not it proves possible for the Lao to pursue their experiment depends not simply upon internal economic factors, however, but upon international pressures and interference in Laos' internal affairs. Armed resistance against the Lao Government has continued since 1975 with "on again-off again" support from the Thai.³⁶ But the threat of Chinese involvement in the training and equipping of insurgent forces must now be considered more than likely, as part of China's overall strategy of attrition against Vietnam.³⁷

This brings us to the problem of mountain tribes, and ethnic division in the Lao population. Ethnic solidarity has been one of the regime's priorities, to draw together the "multinational Lao people" in a common national identity. In the long term, whether the Government succeeds in generating a sense of national identity must be a determining factor for the stability, peace, and security of the nation. Ethnic divisions have been exploited in the past, and are being so again, in order to undermine the central government.³⁸

What then can we foresee for the future of the Lao revolution? The "three revolutions" — in modes of production, science and technology, and culture and ideology — will undoubtedly be pursued, though perhaps at a pace more in keeping with the Lao character, and Lao conditions, particularly the underdeveloped state of the Lao economy. Great care is likely to be taken before any future attempt is made to cooperativize agriculture: increased production is more important at present than doctrinaire advances towards socialism. In industry, however, Soviet bloc aid will go to set up state enterprises, leading to an increasingly strong state sector of the economy. The scientific and technological revolution in Laos, said to be the "key" in building socialism, is almost entirely dependent upon foreign aid. Most aid comes from Vietnam and the Soviet Union, with smaller amounts from Sweden and international agencies. The economic dependency of Laos must remain a central problem for some years to come.

But for Laos, given the "special relationship" with Vietnam, increasing integration of the Lao economy with that of Vietnam, and the extent of Vietnamese influence in such areas as the training of Lao cadres, communications, and the media, perhaps the most important revolution is the ideological and cultural one. The Government is

placing considerable emphasis upon education, and improved standards of adult literacy and more widely available primary education represent two of the regime's major achievements. If the Lao revolution is not to be subordinated to that of Vietnam, it has to produce a Lao socialist man. This is the challenge that faces the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. On its outcome depends the future of Laos as a viable and independent state.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Norman Peagam, "Laos' Princes of Peace", *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), 8 Apr. 1974, pp. 14–16. Also *New York Times*, 4 Apr. 1974.
2. For text see *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 5, no. 2 (1975): 251–55. For a discussion of the 18 points as PL policy see MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, "Laos 1979: Coalition Government Shoots the Rapids", *Asian Survey* 15, no. 2 (1975): 174–83. Opposition to the Government since the founding of the LPDR has often called for a return to the 18 point programme. See John Everingham, "Rebels with a Sacred Mission", *FEER*, 23 Apr. 1976, pp. 22–23.
3. Joseph J. Zasloff, *The Pathet Lao: Leadership and Organization* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1973), p. 29. Jacqui Chagnon and Roger Rumpf put the figure at 80%, but this seems to be based upon a misreading of Zasloff (p. 95). See their paper on "Dignity, National Identity and Unity", *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 73 (June 1980), p. 3.
4. The extent of destruction caused by the war should not be underestimated. Some 700,000 refugees were displaced, and material damage in the "liberated zone" was appalling. See Jacques Decornoy, "Life in the Pathet Lao Liberated Zone", in *Laos: War and Revolution*, ed. Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 411–23. Also John Everingham, "Let Them Eat Bombs", *Washington Monthly* 4, no. 7 (1972): 10–16.
5. LPRP Secretary-General Kaysone Phomvihane is understood to have paid a secret visit to the "Vientiane Zone" in the first half of 1975 to assess for himself "the feelings of the people".
6. Information given to the author during a research visit to Laos in December 1980.
7. Various seminars had been held for different groups for some months by then, most for a few days only. Numbers held in re-education camps have never been officially released. Estimates vary from 10,000 to 40,000, with a figure in the lower range more likely. See Amnesty International, *Political Prisoners in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos*, Report ASA 26/02/80, Mar. 1980.
8. Bernard J. van-es-Beeck has discussed the composition of Lao refugees in a forthcoming paper entitled "Refugees from Laos, 1975–1979".
9. For a survey of reactions to these policies, see John Everingham, "A Struggle in Microcosm", *FEER*, 9 Apr. 1976, pp. 26–32. Also Nayan Chanda, "Vientiane and Its Economic Hurdles", *FEER*, 21 Oct. 1977, p. 51.

10. So great was concern over the Viengsai re-education camps, and the fate of their inmates, that the authorities announced that "seminars" there would be terminated. Agence France Presse, 18 Dec. 1975, quoting an editorial in *Sieng Pasason*, 18 Dec. 1975 (Foreign Broadcasts Information Service [FBIS], 19 Dec. 1975).
11. Those who fled in 1975 or early 1976 more often did so because they were opposed to socialism for one reason or another. Those who left in 1977 or later were prepared to accept even radical social change, including abolition of the monarchy, and installation of a People's Democracy. This they proved by staying as long as they did.
12. Concern over security was repeatedly stressed during the latter part of 1975 and 1976. See, e.g., the "Document for Public Study" released by the Pathet Lao in October 1975, translated by the Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), Translations on South and East Asia (TSEA), no. 592. Also Vientiane Radio, 20 Jan. 1976 (FBIS, 22 Jan. 1976).
13. This was openly admitted by the Lao authorities. See Radio Vientiane, 26 Feb. 1976 and 4 May 1976 (FBIS, 27 Feb. 1976 and 11 May 1976). See also *Sieng Pasason* editorial, 5 June 1976 (JPRS, TSEA, no. 658, 20 Aug. 1976).
14. For some of these early resistance groups, none of which amounted to anything, see Agence France Presse despatches of 2 Feb. 1976, 27 Apr. 1976, and 29 May 1976 (FBIS, 3 Feb. 1976, 30 Apr. 1976, and 3 June 1976).
15. By the end of 1980 salaries for government officials ranged from 150 to 370 kip per month (plus a small allowance for each child). These have a value of US\$7.50 to US\$18.50 at the black market exchange rate of around 20 kip to the dollar. While a subsidized rice ration could be purchased for 3 kip a kg, meat on the open market was about 50 kip a kg.
16. See Kaysone Phomvihane, speech to the Supreme People's Assembly, 26 Dec. 1979, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 27 Dec. 1979 (FBIS, 18 Jan. 1980 and supplement 8 Feb. 1980).
17. See Ton That Thien, "Vietnam, 1975–1980: Reflections on Revolution", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 2 (1980): 88.
18. For a detailed discussion of these events, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Initial Failure of Agricultural Cooperativization in Laos", *Asia Quarterly*, no. 4 (1980).
19. See Philippe Devillers, "Consolidation politique et réforme économique au Laos", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Dec. 1980, p. 7.
20. At the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Sept./Oct. 1979). See Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam: Beleaguered Outpost of Socialism", *Current History* 79, no. 461 (Dec. 1980): 168–69.
21. See, in particular, Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech to the Supreme People's Assembly, 26 Dec. 1979 (FBIS, 18 Jan. 1980, pp. 14–15, 19–20, 24–25, and 27).
22. Those not in government employ, small traders or peasants selling their produce (or living outside the money economy altogether), are better off. This includes the vast majority of the Lao population. It is the effect present policies are having on cadres and civil servants which bears watching. The Government may yet have to reintroduce some controls and restore subsidies to their earlier, higher levels —

moves which could also be forced on the authorities in the event of conspicuous consumption on the part of those profiting from the new measures.

23. For the effect of closure of the Thai border on Lao inflation see *Bangkok Post*, 26 Nov. 1980; also Nayan Chanda, "Big Brother on the Border", *FEER*, 1 Aug. 1980, pp. 21–23.
24. It is believed that as many as 6,000 to 8,000 refugees may have returned to Laos since 1975. See *Bangkok Post*, 25 Nov. 1980. Most of these have been farmers and small traders.
25. *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, Bulletin Quotidien, 29 Nov. 1980, p. 5.
26. The author interviewed one such returnee in Vientiane in December 1980, one of a group of twenty integrated into various ministries in positions of responsibility.
27. Information given to the author by a government spokesman in Vientiane, Dec. 1980.
28. Already a number of "purges" have been carried out. Other party members have fled to Thailand or China. See John McBeth, "Laos: The Government under Guard", *FEER*, 24 Aug. 1979, pp. 10–11; Nayan Chanda, "Seeking a Different Freedom", *FEER*, 14 Dec. 1979, p. 23. Even senior LPRP cadres are sent for courses of ideological study in Vietnam.
29. For a discussion of these events, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos: The Vietnamese Connection", in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Heinemann for Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980), pp. 181–209.
30. This is evident from any number of recent statements, e.g., the speech of Lao Foreign Minister, Phoune Sipaseuth, to the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations, at New Delhi in February 1981. *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, Bulletin Quotidien, 17 Feb. 1981, pp. 10–14, and 18 Feb. 1981, pp. 7–13.
31. But cf. Nayan Chanda.
32. Kaysone expressed this well in an article in the Vietnamese army magazine *Hoc Tap* in November 1975 (JPRP, TSEA, no. 609, 21 Jan. 1976, p. 30), where he stated that each resolution was indispensable to the success of the other.
33. For an early examination of these differences, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Lao Revolution: Leadership and Policy Differences", *Australian Outlook* 31 (1977): 279–88.
34. Ton That Tien, "Vietnam, 1975–1980", p. 103.
35. At least this is true in Vientiane where the author accompanied monks, some of them young novices, on their dawn round to receive the offerings (steamed glutinous rice) of the faithful.
36. It is perhaps no coincidence that Thai-Lao relations over the last five years have changed character in accordance with changes of government in Bangkok. Prior to the military coup of October 1976, relations were improving. They deteriorated rapidly during the government of Thanin Kraivixian, improved under Kriangsak Chamanand, and have reached a new nadir with Prem Tinsulamond. During the time in power of Thanin and Prem guerrilla activity has increased. For the Lao, who claim their policy towards Thailand has not changed, the joint communique signed during the exchange of visits between Kaysone and Kriangsak in 1979 form a proper basis for Thai-Lao relations.
37. China's policy towards Laos has been discussed in Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in

China's Anti-Vietnam Strategy'', *Asia Pacific Community*, no. 11 (Winter, 1981).

38. There have been many reports on Chinese activity among the northern minorities in Laos, and a succession of Lao government accusations. See, e.g., Nayan Chanda, "A New Threat from the Mountain Tribes", *FEER*, 1 Sept. 1978, pp. 8–11. For the Lao case against China, see Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech to the Supreme People's Assembly, 26 Dec. 1979 (FBIS Supplement, 8 Feb. 1980, p. 1).