

Hungarian Embassy to North Vietnam, Report, 29 April 1961. [Summary]

The report notes that the 2nd session of the National Assembly of the DRV was opened on 12 April 1961. Having listened to the government's reports about the economic situation and other issues on the first day, the deputies began to discuss them on the 13th of April. According to the original schedule, the session should have lasted until the 17th of April, but the debate was so intense that it finished only on the 19th of April. Most government reports were accepted by the National Assembly without much comment, but the report of Pham Van Dong provoked sharp reactions. It was the deputies from the countryside who criticized it particularly harshly. They criticized the policies of the local authorities (high compulsory deliveries, harsh penalties against peasants selling their products at free-market prices, etc.) and said that the report of the government hadn't reflected the real situation and had kept silent about the problems. Certain deputies said that the government laid the main emphasis on industrialization and cared only with the urban population, neglecting agriculture and the rural population. There were actually serious problems with food supply in the DRV, the author of the report noted. These problems were more serious in the countryside than in the cities. Though the food rations of those working in factories and on construction sites had been reduced to a considerable extent, they regularly received their rations. At present the daily ration of a [urban] worker was 400 grams of rice. However, it frequently occurred that meat and fat was unavailable for weeks, not even for those doing heavy physical work. There was no official provision for the rural population. [Note: another report written on 10 November 1960 stated that for those peasant families who had completely run out of rice, the government provided 2 kilograms of rice per capita per month.] The first harvest in 1960 was bad because of the springtime drought. In the autumn, the food requisitions were carried out rather harshly. Only the reduced rations of the producers were left for the peasants, and the landless population wasn't given any rice. In the countryside, there was no rice at all in certain settlement, or it was available only on the black market where people often pay twenty times more for it than the official price. In 1960, the large-scale collectivization drive wasn't cautious enough. In most villages only draft animals were collectivized, but the household plots left for the co-op members covered only a few square meters and thus they were unsuitable for raising pigs and other small animals. Cooperativized peasants slaughtered their animals. As a consequence, the meat supply experienced an extremely serious decline. The food shortages led to the reappearance of the black market, and the public security organs attempted to suppress the latter with very harsh measures. In late 1960 and early 1961 a great number of arrests and jailings took place in the countryside, in reaction to that agricultural producers attempted to sell their products at prices well above the official price. The party noticed the problem in time and stopped the excessive actions of the public security organs. In March 1961 the regime made a resolution which prohibited the arrest and imprisonment of producers who sold their products at higher prices (instead, other sanctions were required),

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and ordered the release of all the people hitherto arrested for this reason. At the same time, it ordered harsh measures against speculators who bought and then resold food. Due to the rural food shortages, the peasants began to migrate to the towns in substantial numbers, which created a great burden for the urban authorities in terms of food and accommodation. All these problems were pointed out by the deputies. The government did not hinder them in voicing the grievances of their electoral districts. All the ministers were present at the session. Ho Chi Minh also participated in the debate and he made several speeches. After the deputies' speeches, all the ministers involved replied to each of them in detail, explaining their actions. The ministers themselves revealed the mistakes they had made, then they discussed with the deputies how to correct them. Vietnamese and foreign journalists were present only on the first and the last day of the session, and the public was not informed about the debate.

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