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Guerillas in the City: The Administrative Takeover of Hà Nội and DRV State-Making in the Urban Postwar Period (1954–1960)

For several days before the official takeover of Hà Nội, as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) government and army were preparing to make their grand entrance on October 10, 1954, heavy rain hindered the path of cadres and soldiers heading toward the capital for their new assignments.¹ But on October 9, one day before they were to move into Hà Nội, the rain stopped, replaced by pleasant breezes and light sunshine.² For those who had witnessed the Việt Minh takeover on August 19, 1945, October 1954 must have brought back memories of the autumn of nine years before. In August 1945, two months of heavy rain resulted in a breach in the Red River dike system north of Hà Nội just one day before the date chosen for the general uprising.³ In Hà Nội and its surrounding suburbs, the weather had been highly unpleasant with “heavy clouds and torpid humidity.” But on the morning of August 19, 1945, it was “auspiciously sunny and breezy.”⁴ At 11:00 a.m. as many as two hundred thousand people—workers, intellectuals, students, shopkeepers, peasants, and villagers from the suburbs—had gathered at the Opera House to support the Việt Minh—organized rally and participate in the march to occupy important administrative buildings in Hà Nội. While members of the Đại

Việt Party and the Vietnam Nationalist Party met to discuss their “somber” position and future, outside the atmosphere was euphoric, as thousands of people poured down onto the streets, “enjoying a new sense of freedom.”⁵

Nine years later, the DRV government called the takeover of the capital a “return,” though the nature of the government that “returned” in October 1954 was undoubtedly different from that of 1945–1946. During the years after the outbreak of the First Indochina War (1946–1954), Hồ Chí Minh’s government had hoped for another general insurrection like that of August 1945, but the city did not respond enthusiastically—control of Hà Nội and Hải Phòng was finally negotiated at the Geneva Conference (April–July 1954).⁶ Nonetheless, October 10, 1954, was a day of celebration for many who were present in the capital. The writer Nguyễn Huy Tưởng (1912–1960), who had arrived in Hà Nội the previous day, described the morning of the 10th:

Soldiers march, amid cheers. People are packed. Soldiers carry flowers on their shoulders, their physiques small. Uniforms. [People shout,] “Long live President Hồ,” and so on. The infantries are at the back [following] anti-aircraft divisions [and] artillery divisions. Resonating cheers. Houses still have their doors closed.⁷ Today there appear Hà Nội women, white trousers, *friser* hair. Hà Nội is elegant, *frivole*. An old woman [commented]: How soothingly smooth.⁸

Like the events of 1945, the communist takeover of Hà Nội in 1954 was observed closely and recorded extensively. For Hồ Chí Minh’s government, the demonstration on “liberation” day was a political message to all domestic and international observers that the DRV government was competent and confident, its army was professional but pure, and both were well-loved by the people. Unlike the takeovers of cities in the frontiers in 1949–1950 and in the Red River Delta earlier in 1954, there was no disorder, no looting, little confusion, absolutely no public executions, and a lot of joy.⁹

As the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) soldiers marched into the Old Quarter, a young musician with his guitar was waiting among the crowd at Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục Square to sing his welcoming songs. He had prepared for three months and had secretly taught the song to a few people who went on to teach other people, so that on October 10, a couple hundred people could sing along while the PAVN soldiers were

marching by. Not too far away, at the corner of Hàng Đào Street, a young, French-trained doctor who worked at the Yersin Hospital found a place among the crowd. He played his own music of celebration on his accordion, forgetting for a moment what the future of a functionary who had worked under the previous regime might look like. As the soldiers followed the route along Hoàn Kiếm Lake, they passed in front of the central post office. Inside the iconic building, a young engineering student was diligently learning from a senior French-trained engineer how to operate complicated machines—he had heard their names during his classes in the jungle but had never seen them nor had any idea how to make them work.¹⁰ All three young men would become DRV state employees and spend the rest of their lives in the capital: Nguyễn Văn, the musician, became a teacher; Nguyễn Hiếu, the doctor, continued to work at the hospital; and Phan Việt, the engineer, passed his days in the technical room at the post office.

Drawing from the stories of these three men, Vietnamese archival documents, and party documents, this article describes the DRV's administrative takeover of Hà Nội. After a brief literature review that situates this research in the larger scholarship on DRV state formation in the 1950s, the main findings are presented in two parts. The first part utilizes party and state documents and presents three general principles of the DRV leadership regarding urban administrative takeover: (1) prioritizing the return to order and normalcy over immediate social reforms, (2) maximum retainment of French-Associated State of Vietnam (ASV) bureaucratic and technical personnel, and (3) strategic "grafting" onto the pre-existing apparatus. The relative weakness of the DRV state apparatus at the moment of taking over the urban centers (which remained under French-ASV control throughout the First Indochina War) meant greater dependence on the pre-existing structure and personnel. The second part of this essay delves into the stories of Phan Việt, Nguyễn Văn, and Nguyễn Hiếu and delineates the transformations of the administration through direct technical and knowledge transfer and ideological reforms. It answers questions such as, Who were the DRV state employees? Where were they from? What kinds of trainings did they receive? How did they experience the different stages of the administrative transition in the capital? This article argues that the

establishment of the DRV administration in Hà Nội, like other state-making projects that took place throughout the northern territory during the 1950s, was a complicated process that required deliberation, adjustment, and coercion.

A Brief Literature Review

Discussing nationalism in revolutionary states, Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* that “even the most determinedly radical revolutionaries always, to some degree, inherit the state from the fallen regime.”¹¹ Citing the fact that, after the revolutions in Russia and in China, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) leadership continued to make policy from the Kremlin and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders were “congregating” in the Forbidden City, Anderson argues that revolutionaries rarely decline the chance to claim the “worn, warm seats” left behind by fallen leaders.¹² Comparing running a country to managing a large mansion with a complex electrical system, Anderson suggests that the pre-existing “wiring”—personnel, administrative documents, and public infrastructure—is available to any new master whose first task is to simply turn the switches on and return the abandoned mansion to its “old brilliant self again.”¹³

In August 1945, Hồ Chí Minh’s government took over the “worn, warm seats” previously occupied by the French, the Japanese, and the Trần Trọng Kim cabinet in Hà Nội, switching back on the “electrical wiring” of the “mansion” of the state. The communist-dominated Việt Minh eliminated its political competitors, purged from its ranks noncommunist members, and started building a centralized government, with Hà Nội directing a hierarchy of regional and local committees.¹⁴ But Hồ Chí Minh could not build an apparatus with communists alone. Various scholars have shown how Hồ Chí Minh’s government made use of and depended on pre-existing colonial institutions, elites, and personnel. David G. Marr asserts that in 1945, “administrative and technical systems remained largely intact—to be used by whichever leaders, political or military, domestic or foreign, happened to occupy the policy-making positions”; and indeed, the DRV’s structure of administrative committees and public administration offices was a continuation of the colonial system of “parallel hierarchies.”¹⁵

Tuong Vu notes the central role of colonial elites who had worked under Trần Trọng Kim in Hồ Chí Minh's government.¹⁶ And Christopher Goscha highlights how in 1945–1946 Hồ Chí Minh and his allies retained thousands of French-trained functionaries, transformed the *Journal officiel de l'Indochine* into the official gazette of the DRV (*Công báo Dân quốc Việt Nam*), and made good use of the colonial policing system.¹⁷

This article discusses the strategies employed by DRV state-makers to establish an administrative apparatus in Hà Nội (and by extension, to the larger territory that came under their control in 1954). But any meaningful discussion of state-making in the DRV after 1954 must consider the changes and continuities in the nature and functions of the DRV state since its emergence in 1945. The period of the First Indochina War proved crucial to various aspects of DRV state-making. Scholars such as Christopher Goscha, Tuong Vu, Christian Lentz, Ken MacLean, and Alec Holcombe have shown how in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Hồ Chí Minh's forces were not only waging battles against the French and Bảo Đại's ASV but were also importing and devising revolutionary methods to mobilize the population, asserting the legitimacy of the party and the DRV state, making territorial boundaries, constructing the Vietnamese geobody, and reorganizing the internal workings of the party and the state.¹⁸

An important topic within this complex picture of DRV state-building in the 1950s is the question of whether and to what extent the communist party influenced and controlled the DRV state. Philippe Papin and Alec Holcombe argue that the party was in control of the DRV state since 1945;¹⁹ David G. Marr pushes the turning point to the outbreak of the First Indochina War, arguing that the DRV state of 1945–1946 was influenced but not controlled by the communist party;²⁰ Christopher Goscha argues that the party did not have the strength and resources to start consolidating its power over the state until 1950;²¹ Ken MacLean, citing Đặng Phong and Melanie Beresford, argues that the “partification” of the state only started in 1955, a couple of years after the “partification” of the rural population through land reforms;²² while Tuong Vu argues that the state came fully under the party's control after the “reorganization” campaigns [*chỉnh đốn tổ chức*] that accompanied the land reforms (1953–1956).²³ To evaluate these competing timelines is beyond the scope

of this paper, but I would suggest that despite their differences, these scholars would all likely agree that compared to 1945, in 1954, the party had gained much more power over the DRV state apparatus. In fact, I argue, based on the timing and content of the party documents and state documents used in this study, that in 1954–1960, the party’s lines preceded and prefigured the state’s relevant policies and programs. Nevertheless, whether the state had, by 1954, become *totally* subordinated to the structures and leadership of the party or not remains an open question. Therefore, to avoid blurring the unresolved boundaries between the state and the party—which both Christian Lentz and Tuong Vu have warned against—unless clearly indicated in the primary sources, I use the term “DRV leadership” to indicate the authority that made national-level decisions and policies.²⁴

This paper picks up Christopher Goscha’s suggestion in his response to reviewers of *Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre 1945–1954* that throughout the First Indochina War, the strength of the DRV state was uneven.²⁵ Between 1950 and 1954, according to Goscha, the DRV state apparatus in areas under PAVN control in central and northern Vietnam was “transformed from top to bottom”—it became more organized, more effective, and more radical.²⁶ But in areas where the DRV had to compete with other Vietnamese states (the Catholic state in Phát Diệm and the French-backed ASV), the DRV state apparatus remained “skeletal.”²⁷ French and ASV forces held firm control over the Red River Delta, especially urban areas and their immediate suburbs, until the French defeat at Điện Biên Phủ.²⁸ It is probably not a coincidence that the works mentioned earlier on DRV state-making during the 1950s focus on the countryside and rural mobilization.

Hà Nội was an important center in the territory where the DRV state apparatus remained skeletal until the end of the war. Surprisingly not much has been done to challenge the state-sanctioned, standard Vietnamese narrative of the “liberation” of Hà Nội (or any other city), which promotes images of disciplined PAVN soldiers marching onto central streets while local inhabitants happily welcome them, after which order and productive life were rapidly reestablished following a long period of “enemy occupation.” This paper sees the takeover of Hà Nội in 1954 and the subsequent establishment of the DRV administration in Hà Nội as a process of state-

making. Much like boundary-making in the “ethnic minority” territories or mass mobilization in the rural North, the building of the DRV administration in the city was a contested process that shaped the state as much as the state shaped its urban subjects.²⁹

The DRV’s state-making processes in the 1950s were also strongly shaped by the DRV’s relations with the socialist bloc, most importantly the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Christopher Goscha and Qiang Zhai have emphasized that Sino-Soviet military, material, and technical aid was indispensable to the impressive growth of the DRV state and military apparatus throughout the First Indochina War, the DRV’s postwar reconstructions, and the subsequent DRV state-making projects in North Vietnam, which, as this article argues, includes the establishment and transformation of the DRV’s urban administration.³⁰

In the post-Geneva period, Qiang Zhai argues, Hà Nội primarily looked to Beijing for models of postwar reconstruction and development.³¹ The CCP, having itself taken over urban centers and consolidated its control over a fragmented, war-torn territory only five years earlier, seemed a natural source of inspiration for the DRV leadership.³² As the Sino-Soviet shift toward “peaceful co-existence” accelerated in 1953–1954, the DRV leadership adopted the Maoist idea of New Democracy and followed Beijing’s advice to “adhere to the cease-fire agreement as well as its appendices, to maintain independence and sovereignty, and to show consideration for the united front and the future reunification.”³³ The DRV’s strategies in the urban postwar years of 1954–1955—(1) prioritizing the return to order and normalcy over immediate social reforms, (2) maximum retainment of French-ASV bureaucratic and technical personnel, and (3) strategic “grafting” onto the pre-existing apparatus—show that DRV leadership adhered to these principles and advice.

Taking into account the literature on the communist takeovers of cities in China, which began in the 1950s, we can see strong parallels between the Chinese and the Vietnamese experiences.³⁴ Scholars of China have generated a general outline of the urban transformations in China in 1949–1953: “a relatively swift military takeover in 1949, the party’s initially inclusive approach to urban social groups, tightening and repression after the outbreak of the Korean war, movements such as land reform and the Three-

and Five-Anti campaigns that consolidated party control in villages and cities, and finally the move toward socialist transformation in 1953.”³⁵ The administrative takeover of Hà Nội, part of a transition of North Vietnamese cities, followed the same steps within the same duration.

A final point that I would like to bring up in this literature review is, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s metaphor, on the “wiring” of the mansion of the state that existed before the arrival of DRV forces—the ASV administrative structure. Little is known about the organization and functions of the ASV civil administration in Hà Nội and the northern region. Walter R. Sharp contends, based on fieldwork in Indochina in 1952, that the ASV administrative system bore the imprint of the French bureaucratic models in both form and style of function—not surprising given the relations between France and the ASV state.³⁶ Sharp observed that even though control of public administration was officially transferred to the ASV in 1949, “a considerable number” of French ex-colonial officials were still employed as technical advisors or civil administrators in 1952. More systemic efforts to train a generation of Vietnamese capable of operating the administrative system independently (from French “assistance”) were initiated starting in 1952: a new National School of Public Administration—a program of advanced scientific training established with American aid to provide higher education to graduates of elementary-level schools of engineering, agriculture, and forestry—was inaugurated in Đà Lạt and a number of ASV civil servants were sent to France for internships with the French government or for advanced professional training at several well-known *écoles*.³⁷ Sharp suggests that continued French presence and international (American) assistance were needed to ensure the gradual improvement of the ASV’s administrative and technical competence.³⁸

Drawing from newly available French and Vietnamese archival documents, the most recent scholarship has called for a more rigorous examination of the agency and visions of the ASV state as a serious competitor against Hồ Chí Minh’s DRV. While Ninh Xuan Thao highlights the different phases in the ASV’s quest for independence from France, Christopher Goscha and Brett Reilly examine how ASV chiefs of state constructed internal and external sovereignty and advanced their vision of a noncommunist Vietnam.³⁹ Directly relevant to this research are Ninh

Xuan Thao's and Reilly's suggestions that after 1950 and definitely by 1953, the "wiring" of the ASV public administration in urban centers and southern provinces had been strengthened and had become increasingly Vietnamized.⁴⁰ The level of professional competence of Vietnamese administrators and functionaries in the ASV system remains unclear, yet existing evidence suggests that before the arrival of DRV forces in Hà Nội, there existed a fully functioning administration staffed by Vietnamese civil servants fully qualified to assume administrative and technical responsibilities. It was the ASV state whose "wiring" Hồ Chí Minh's government inherited in 1954. The appropriation of this "wiring" and its transformations between 1954 and 1960 is at the center of this article.

General Principles: Order and Continuity

The success of the border campaign in the latter half of 1950 encouraged Hồ Chí Minh's government and army to start preparing for a forcible takeover of Hà Nội. A number of archival documents recorded these preparations. Interestingly, documents prepared in late 1950 were also found in the dossier of the takeover of Hà Nội in 1954 for reference.⁴¹ A document titled "Plan for Retrieving the Enemy's Administrative Offices" suggested that two things must be done before the "capture" [*đánh chiếm*] of Hà Nội: (1) investigate the situation ("administrative and technical apparatus, personnel, important operations") and establish confidential contacts [*gây cơ sở*] in administrative offices, and (2) propose a plan for the capture of each administrative office. These assignments were drawn directly from experience in the border campaign—when French and ASV forces almost always successfully camouflaged their withdrawal from the cities, catching DRV forces by surprise and rendering them passive.⁴²

It was predicted that powerful military attacks from the PAVN would force the ASV government to abandon Hà Nội, but like during the border campaign, the administrative offices of the ASV government and a large number of troops would try to evacuate before the arrival of DRV forces. DRV officials knew that, to camouflage their departure, French and ASV officers and forces would not be able to destroy or evacuate large materials and machinery, and hence any last-minute sabotage would not bring grave damage to existing infrastructure. Loss of and damage to public property

could happen, however, “partly because of lack of discipline on the battlefield, partly because of greedy people with the intention of looting, partly because some functionaries may take advantage of the initial situation of disorder.” It was also predicted that high-ranking functionaries would flee, leaving only mid- and low-ranking officials behind. To the functionaries who would stay behind, the document stated:

- Our general policy is to re-employ the enemy’s functionaries, at first keeping intact the apparatus so that normal operations continue. Transferring and rearranging the system will be done gradually later.
- We will immediately punish only the dangerous ones about whom we possess clear evidence. Those not dangerous or suspicious, we will secretly investigate and show our attitude gradually later.
- We must pay particular attention to the issue of educating functionaries to gradually reform their thinking.⁴³

In 1950, when this document was drafted, it was assessed that only three DRV bureaus had the capacity to integrate functionaries of the ASV government into their system: the Municipal Administration, Public Security Services, and Communication Services. Other branches of the administrative system were either “very weak” or “not yet organized.”⁴⁴ For the latter offices, a takeover would mean placing DRV cadres in the highest position (of existing ASV offices)—a process which could be termed “grafting,” with a gradual “blood transfusion” when the conditions would allow:

In specialized offices whose apparatus has not been organized yet, such as finance, agriculture, and law . . . or had been organized but were still very weak, such as health and the post office, at first, we will only send a high-ranking cadre to lead and direct the enemy’s apparatus. Except functionaries guilty of grave crimes who must be punished according to the policies, we will keep intact the old apparatus: every functionary remains at his position and rank. Gradually, we will integrate our people into the system.⁴⁵

The DRV government planned to pay the equivalent of thirty-five kilos of rice per month to all functionaries from the Bảo Đại government, stressing that it was a temporary regulation and adjustments would be made later. This was the minimum basic salary for DRV functionaries from 1950 to 1955.⁴⁶

Despite their high hopes, the DRV leadership's plan to retake by force the cities in the Red River Delta was hampered in 1952 after they took over Hòa Bình—the transitional point between the northern mountains and the delta. The French decision to reinforce the Red River Delta and to launch a general offensive against the PAVN in the North in 1953, as well as Chinese advice against military engagement with French forces in the delta, shifted the focus of the DRV leadership away from the cities.⁴⁷ It was only after the victory at Điện Biên Phủ that the task of taking over urban areas returned to the attention of the DRV leadership. Party documents and other archival documents show that, in general, the principles outlined in late 1950—namely, the prioritization of order and normalcy over hasty reforms, the maximum retainment of French-ASV bureaucratic and technical personnel, and the strategic grafting onto the pre-existing administrative system—continued to be applied to the urban takeovers in 1954. The rest of this section discusses how the first two principles were applied and modified in preparation for the takeover of Hà Nội; the last principle of strategic grafting will be discussed in the next section.

On July 3, 1954, two days after the takeover of the first major city in the Red River Delta (Nam Định), the central DRV leadership distributed a confidential directive (“to be circulated only among zonal and provincial chiefs”) titled “Directive from the Secretariat [of the Party] on Protecting Newly Liberated Cities.”⁴⁸ As the terms to end the First Indochina War were still being negotiated in Geneva, the DRV leadership emphasized that cities must be “preserved” so that urban resources could be used as a source of supply for the resistance movement and to strengthen the economy of the DRV “free zone.” Therefore, the priorities while taking over a city were to “stabilize the people’s heart” and “stabilize, maintain, and develop” urban life and productive activities.⁴⁹ DRV zonal and provincial chiefs were directed to prepare for the establishment of Military and Administrative Committees [Ủy ban Quân chính] (UBQC) to supervise military and administrative operations during the first weeks or months of the takeover of important cities with more than thirty thousand inhabitants—Hà Nội, Hải Phòng, and Hải Dương.⁵⁰ A standard UBQC comprised regiment-level military chiefs, provincial-level administrative chiefs, and chairs and vice

chairs of provincial and municipal Resistance and Administrative Committee [Ủy ban Kháng chiến Hành chính] (UBKCHC).⁵¹

A month before the takeover of Hà Nội, in early September 1954—more than a month after the ratification of the Geneva Accords and after it became more certain that the DRV was to gain total control of the territory north of the seventeenth parallel by May 1955—the Politburo convened a meeting to discuss the “new situation, new responsibilities, and new policies” of the party.⁵² There were to be five great changes to the situation of the “people’s struggle,” the resolution of the meeting declared: (1) there would be a transition from war to peace, (2) North and the South would be temporarily separated, (3) DRV’s control would expand from the countryside to the cities, (4) the scattered leadership as a result of wartime would be concentrated and centralized, and (5) the relationships among Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia would change. On the task of governing the cities, the resolution echoed the secret directive of July 3, 1954, and stressed the importance of maintaining urban order and normalcy, but the rationale was no longer to make use of urban resources for the resistance movement (which had succeeded, at least in the North), nor to enrich the economy of the “free zone” (which was to be unified with the urban economy), but to create an ideal condition for subsequent “social reforms”:

The measures to be taken during the period after entering the city are to restore normal life, control prices, stabilize the market, maintain order, and, afterward, carry out necessary social reforms...with preparation, step-by-step, with prudence and steadfastness.⁵³

On September 17, ten days after the party announced the “new situation, new responsibilities, and new policies,” the DRV’s Government Council [Hội đồng Chính phủ]—Hồ Chí Minh, Vice President Phạm Văn Đồng, and sixteen ministers and high-ranking officials—convened to decide specific policies regarding the upcoming takeover and programs for the newly liberated urban areas. The council announced the establishment of the UBQC of Hà Nội (UBQCHN).⁵⁴ Different from the standard UBQC, which took over other municipal governments, the UBQCHN took over the apparatus of both the municipal (Hà Nội) and the ASV regional (northern territory [Bắc phần]) governments. Its responsibility was not only to ensure

a smooth transition of municipal power in Hà Nội but also to prepare for the installation of the DRV's central government there. The UBQCHN was the highest authority in Hà Nội until it was dismissed and transferred its command, on November 17, 1954, to the Administrative Committee [Ủy ban Hành chính] (UBHC) of Hà Nội.⁵⁵

The Government Council also announced the “Eight Policies of the Government of the DRV toward Cities Taken Over in 1954,” which provided the framework in which order and normalcy were to be restored and maintained in a city after takeover (see the Appendix).⁵⁶ Besides the five general articles on the protection of public infrastructure, lives and private property (for both Vietnamese and foreigners), and religious freedom, the three remaining policies addressed, in particular, three urban populations: workers in French and ASV-run enterprises and institutions, French-ASV bureaucrats and officials, and French-ASV military personnel.

The choice to address these three groups was not random. Soon after the victory at Điện Biên Phủ and the commencement of the Geneva Conference, the DRV leadership had started planning for their return to Hà Nội. They understood that the administration of Hà Nội would not be as simple as earlier takeovers. DRV agents in Hà Nội who had been sending monthly reports to the central government in Việt Bắc started paying more attention to gauging the urban population's expectations of a future change of regime. The April–May 1954 report assessed that members of the working class were concerned about rising costs of living and negative impacts on their employment. At the same time, tenants and landlords expected that once the DRV returned to Hà Nội, rents would decrease, thus aiding the weak and weakening the rich. Civil servants feared for their future employment. The report zeroed in on the groups that might be the most resistant to a successful takeover: “the biggest fears are of those who deserted our army or collaborated with the army. They are afraid that once we come back we will persecute them. Some among the civil servants worry the same thing...[S]ome capitalists and high-ranking civil servants are afraid of unwanted entanglements when we counterstrike, so they have planned to sell their houses to buy gold or have thought of stockpiling dry provisions, such as rice and salt.”⁵⁷ The “Eight Policies,” publicized on the eve of the takeover of Hà Nội, undoubtedly aimed to demonstrate to these concerned

groups that there was no reason to fear the coming regime change; the document ends with a positive message: “We wish for the people to live and work in peace and wholeheartedly support and comply with [the demands of] the government.”

It is important to note that another version of the “Eight Policies” was announced in July 1954 in the party’s newspaper *Nhân dân* under the title “Policies toward Newly Liberated Cities,” and served as official guidelines in the takeovers between July and August 1954.⁵⁸ Compared to the previous version, the September 1954 version was changed substantially in its wording, as well as in the content of certain policies. First, there is a marked change in the way the announcement identified the official bodies involved in the transition process. The term “the government” [Chính Phủ] in the old version, an indicator of the policy enforcer, became “the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam” [Chính phủ nước Việt Nam dân chủ cộng hòa] in the new version. This specification could have several meanings. Before the takeover, the use of “the government” was meant to assert the unique authority of the DRV government as the only valid, recognized government of Vietnam. This authority was reinforced by calling the other government “the colonial and puppet regime” [*chính quyền thực dân và bù nhìn*] or “the enemy, collaborationist regime” [*chính quyền địch, nguy*], as was the case in pre-1954 public documents, including the previous version of the “Eight Policies.” Approaching Hà Nội and acutely aware of possible panic among those connected to the French-ASV government, the DRV authority understood that a softer, more sensitive, more formal and orderly approach was needed. In the September 1954 version of the “Eight Policies,” which was publicized in DRV newspapers and disseminated among the DRV rank and file in charge of the takeover of Hà Nội, politically charged phrases such as “colonial and puppet regime” in Article 3, “enemy, collaborationist regime” in Article 5, and “remnants of the enemy and collaborators” [*tàn tích địch nguy*] in Article 6 were replaced by “the French–Bảo Đại regime” and “officers and soldiers in the French–Bảo Đại army.” A change in tone, recognizing that a formal transfer of control from the ASV to the DRV was taking place, could go a long way in assuaging the fears of anxious populations in important cities. It is worth remarking here that internal documents of the DRV government were nonetheless still

employing the same charged terms when mentioning the French-ASV government.

Second, certain important content related to the post-takeover management of pre-takeover French-ASV personnel was either modified or erased altogether. Article 3 in the old version promises that all employees in French and ASV-run enterprises and institutions (state-owned factories, transportation providers, logistic facilities, commercial services, etc.), according to their wishes and merits, would be considered for continued employment with the DRV state after the transition. This promise was withdrawn in the new version. Nonetheless, for more than a year after the administrative change, the DRV leadership openly promoted the general line to “rely on the workers and focus on production” and made efforts to attract and retain workers with technical knowledge and skills to run the newly nationalized factories.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the new version of Article 5, which deals with French-ASV bureaucrats, officials, and civil servants (including gendarmes and neighborhood chiefs), declares that all those retained by the DRV state would continue to be paid their pre-takeover salary. This was a remarkable and consequential promise because the salary of a retained French-ASV state employee could be more than ten times the salary of a “free zone” DRV state employee of the same rank. Changes in Article 6 were most remarkable. The original article was written in a rather threatening tone and French-ASV militaries present in the newly “liberated zones” were addressed as “remnants of the enemy-collaborationist regime”:

In order to ensure security in the city and reestablish social order, all remnants of the enemy-collaborationist regime still hiding must present themselves to the Military and Administrative Committee (of the town’s Resistance Committee). Those who present themselves and turn in all weapons will not be prosecuted. Those who intentionally hide themselves and their weapons and are not willing to present themselves will be persecuted [*trùng trị*].

Reviewers of the original version must have recognized the panic Article 6 would have caused among the myriad families whose sons had been drafted, by voluntary cooperation or by force, by the ASV. In the new version, the article therefore adopted a much softer tone; threats were

replaced by promises that the DRV government would assist cooperative individuals in returning to their native places, or, for those who would want to “work with the government,” the government would consider them for employment. Compared to the vague language regarding the futures of the workers (the targets of Article 3), the DRV government made an effort to appease former French-ASV bureaucrats and military personnel (the targets of Articles 5 and 6) by promising them specific benefits if they complied with and contributed to the new government’s plans and vision.

This section has argued that the two principles outlined in 1950 of prioritizing order and normalcy and retaining the pre-existing administrative apparatus continued to inform the DRV’s approach to urban takeovers in 1954. In 1954, the DRV’s call for the preservation of order and the “Eight Policies” were formulated and applied with a view to postwar reconstruction.⁶⁰ The next section focuses on the DRV leadership’s application of the principle of strategic grafting onto the pre-existing system of governance, which, as the rest of this paper will show, gave them time to adjust to and familiarize themselves with the urban situation and allowed them to monitor suspicious individuals and organizations, while also building capacity for subsequent bureaucratic reforms.

General Principles: Grafting

Christopher Goscha argues that by 1954 the DRV government had developed an organized apparatus and possessed a strong pool of functionaries.⁶¹ But as he later clarifies in response to reviewers, the strength of the DRV apparatus remained uneven throughout the northern territory.⁶² Indeed, governmental exchanges recorded in the archives show that there existed both a lack of qualified personnel and a lack of understanding of the urban condition (from unfamiliarity with the city’s map to lack of expertise in technology and finance). This dearth of skill and knowledge was so serious that the DRV apparatus needed reorganization and had to depend on the pool of ASV civil servants to achieve what they considered the most important task in urban governance—the maintenance of order and normalcy. In 1954, returning to the “warm, worn” seat of power in the former colonial capital when peace was restored, the DRV state that had matured

in the countryside and through “totalizing” efforts during wartime seemed rather disoriented.

On August 24, 1954, almost a month before the first team of DRV officials entered Hà Nội to begin administering the state offices and factories, the UBKCHC of Hà Nội (the UBQC was not yet established) sent an emergency dispatch to the Prime Minister’s Office and ten different ministries to ask for more specialized cadres to assist their understaffed research team in planning the takeover of “nearly one hundred offices belonging to the enemy’s central government, northern territory government, and municipal government.”⁶³ Whether the research and planning were done effectively is questionable. Thanh Chương (or Chung), a member of the UBQCHN, commented in a report sent to the central government still in Việt Bắc that the UBQCHN lacked understanding of the situation of the “enemy-collaborator’s” [*địch nguy*] apparatus. Thanh Chương pointed out that there were many offices for which only names were known, “but their function, the number of departments, the number of organs and officials, and the number and identity of their workers, past and present, were not clear.” He pointed to the example of the finance sector, where two cadres were assigned to take over every department, regardless of size or importance, commenting, “this shows that [our] understanding of the enemy-puppet’s finance offices is also weak.”⁶⁴

On September 18, a team of six DRV cadres, two from the Prime Minister’s Office, three from the Ministry of Home Affairs, and one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entered Hà Nội to establish contact with City Hall, the High Commissioner’s Office, the Offices of the Palace, and the Northern Vietnam Chief Minister’s Office. Five days later, on September 23, seven more, including Nguyễn Văn Chi—director of the Department of Personnel and Organization of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the team’s supervisor—arrived in the city.⁶⁵ In a handwritten report on the activities of this team of thirteen cadres, dated September 26, Nguyễn Văn Chi wrote that he had lost contact with the six who had arrived before him so he could not tell how they were doing with their assignments. (Ending the sentence with ellipses, perhaps Nguyễn Văn Chi could not explain how they had forgotten to make a plan for communication after entering the city.) Nguyễn Văn Chi and the others were working on three tasks: researching the

situation of the offices to be administered, adjusting the general transition plan and preparing the necessary documents and tools (flags, photos, banners, etc.), and studying the relevant policies and regulations. He asked the headquarters to send them a typewriter to write their reports and 200,000 đồng (on top of the 200,000 đồng already received before entering the city), with a promise that he would later send budget plan and a report on their spending.⁶⁶ A day later, Nguyễn Văn Chi wrote an informal letter addressing “the Old Mister” [*Cụ*] and “Brothers” [*các Anh*]*—*most likely Hồ Chí Minh and other members of the Politburo*—*and commented on how to organize the governing system in a changed situation:

The apparatus of ministries and committees must be reconsidered. The apparatus in peacetime [must be] centralized and sophisticated.

We should make use of experiences from prior adjustments of the system and our existing network of confidants, and refer to the experiences and documents of the adversary, so that we can prearrange the apparatus and correctly assist the leadership.⁶⁷

Nguyễn Văn Chi was suggesting that in order for the DRV apparatus to be effective in peacetime, it should be designed based not only on the DRV’s network and experiences but also on the existing French-ASV system.

Nguyễn Văn Chi’s suggestion seems to have been borne more out of necessity than simple practicality. In the same report by Thanh Chương cited earlier, which pointed out the lack of understanding of the existing governmental apparatus, Thanh Chương also highlighted the shortage of DRV cadres. Communications between the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Central Bureau of Commerce in mid-September regarding the allocation of new clothes to cadres “returning to the city” revealed that there would be around 3,700 DRV cadres participating in the takeover of Hà Nội in early October.⁶⁸ With this number of cadres to be assigned to different offices and bureaus, Thanh Chương reported that while the UBQC had prepared “rather well” to fill the positions of director and vice director, there were not enough qualified cadres to fill the positions of chief of department.

Between October 2 and October 5, 246 cadres, divided into two administrative teams, entered the city to negotiate and prepare for the official

transition of power on October 10. Among these cadres, there were four French-Vietnamese interpreters, twenty-one catering staff, twelve guards, and twelve drivers, leaving 197 cadres whose assignment was overseeing the ASV administrative offices.⁶⁹ Even if all 246 cadres were considered, taking into account the UBKCHC's report that there were nearly one hundred offices to administer, on average each office was staffed by 2.5 cadres. There were cases where one DRV cadre was in charge of overseeing multiple offices, Thanh Chương recounted, "such as comrade Bắc in Department of Propaganda who took over the puppet government's Ministry of Information, Bureau of Information, and Bureau of Information of Northern Vietnam; comrade Cấn in Department of Health also took over several offices by himself."⁷⁰ At the moment of the administrative change in the fall of 1954, these one hundred offices were staffed by about twelve thousand ASV bureaucrats—this is only the number of ASV state employees who presented themselves in order to keep their jobs, excluding those who had already left Hà Nội or did not want to report themselves.⁷¹ A total of 4,132 DRV cadres had arrived in the capital by October 11, 1954—these included both administrative cadres and "order" staff, such as public security agents and guards—a still rather small number to dominate the existing administrative structure in Hà Nội.⁷²

While the DRV's pool of administrative and technical cadres could not be built overnight, the urgent tasks of maintaining normalcy and reviving industrial and commercial activities in newly taken over cities could not wait. The solution, as Thanh Chương's report suggested, was to apply the principle of grafting that was envisioned in late 1950. The principle became official when the Government Council released a guiding resolution in early November, a month after the DRV entered Hà Nội, which stated that the existing apparatus should be preserved and maintained while DRV cadres took time to study the system, investigate "retained" personnel [*công chức lưu dụng*], and gain professional knowledge. The resolution suggested in more details the approach toward three types of institutions:

- In factories and enterprises (such as electricity, water, railroad, public services, etc.) [we] should maintain the old apparatus and not change the positions and ranks of functionaries and staff. Our cadres should only offer guidance and leadership so the institutions work [accordingly], and at the

same time they should investigate the situation and gain professional knowledge.

- In cultural and educational institutions, such as hospitals and schools, if it is determined that change is not necessary, [we] should maintain the positions and ranks of functionaries, even the positions of chief. If [we] see a need to change, but not an urgent need, it is best to first wait. It will create some obstacles in our work, but it is politically advantageous. Meanwhile, our cadres could always be added to different organs for reinforcement and investigation.

- Regarding functionaries whose jobs have a nature of repression, such as in public security, prisons, and important organs such as intelligence, propaganda, and so on, the general rule is that they need to be changed, sent to other types of work, and be replaced by our cadres. [We] still need to carefully investigate each job and each person to organize and use them fairly, at the same time not creating negative political effects in areas that the opponent's army still occupies.⁷³

In general, if an institution did not pose immediate political or security threats, members of the existing apparatus were to be retained to ensure smooth operations, while DRV cadres were to assume general leadership, supervise the situation and retained personnel, and learn as much as they could about how the system operated. On paper, the steps seem clear and straightforward, but in practice, many DRV cadres who grafted onto the existing apparatus found their tasks overwhelming and confusing. Despite the backing from these official policies and their “halo of a resistance-war person [*người kháng chiến*],”⁷⁴ many DRV cadres were ill-prepared to assume leadership or provide guidance to those whose technical expertise was superior. The importance of the grafting strategy in maintaining order and normal functioning in the city and the difficulties that DRV cadres faced in carrying out their assignments are well demonstrated in the following cases on the takeover of the power plants of Hà Nội and the former Department of Labor of Northern Vietnam.

The first test for the new master in the old mansion—to use Benedict Anderson’s metaphor—was to turn on the electricity switchboard. This was literal in the case of the DRV. A symbol of colonial modernity, the two power plants in Hà Nội had been lighting up the capital for more than sixty

years and had supplied electricity for not only Hà Nội but also Hà Đông, Hải Dương, and Hải Phòng. In 1954, eight DRV cadres—two electrical engineers, one who “specialized in electricity,” two mobilization cadres, and three from the Ministry of Labor—were assigned to run the power plants, but they “knew nothing about the condition of the plants, [and] had no plan.”⁷⁵ The normal functions of the plants were assured through the period of the transfer of power (October 8–10) by 743 existing employees (both workers and functionaries), including five French technical experts. After the transition, administrative and financial transactions posed a grave problem for these cadres: “Financial works were done directly by the French [staff]. Looking [into the process] would take a lot of time and would require competence, but our cadres had little experience, were technically weak, and knew nothing about finance.”⁷⁶ This lack of competence led to a lack of confidence. The UBQCHN commented: “our cadres are still weak in policy comprehension and political stance; they took over a factory but still have not correctly identified their positions as leaders.” The report listed an example: The cadres did not know how to order the French experts to work. Furthermore, “their work is sloppy, their manner defensive, and they don’t know how to properly use the existing instruments in the factory.”⁷⁷ On December 21, 1954, Hồ Chí Minh visited the power plant in the city center. He made sure to raise the confidence of his cadres: “This factory now belongs to the people, to the government, to you. You are the master, so you must tend to the factory and make it grow.”⁷⁸

The transition was easier in the factories, where a large number of workers assured the newcomers, to some extent, of their support. At the former Department of Labor of the Northern Territory of Vietnam—a government institution in charge of workers’ affairs—a team of thirteen DRV cadres took over an office previously staffed by twenty-seven employees.⁷⁹ Fifteen employees had stayed behind, hoping to continue their work under the new government.⁸⁰ The department was renamed Labor Zone of Hà Nội, though its organization and functions remained the same. The DRV team considered the takeover well-prepared and “rather neat,” but soon encountered difficulties: “our leadership still meets some difficulties and confusion in assigning work to [other employees] because assignments in the field of labor relate very much to economic and financial policies, which

employees have not been taught.”⁸¹ But the retained employees were not the only ones who lacked understanding of DRV policies related to their fields: Until August 1955, there was no official document with labor regulations, nor economic and financial policies related to labor. In other words, even the DRV cadres were not aware of these policies.⁸² In fact, “lack of understanding of the policies” (either on the part of policy implementers or those subjected to the policies) was often cited in official DRV documents as the chief reason for unsatisfactory results, hiding more systematic problems.

A look at the relations between the “old” (DRV, “free zone”-originated) employees and “new” (retained French-ASV) employees in this department can explain the reasons behind this complaint of “difficulties” and “confusion.” On October 12, the Department of Labor of the UBQCHN reported that among the fifteen employees of the previous regime who remained, ten held important technical responsibilities: one chief of the inspection bureau, one chief of the technical bureau, one accountant, and seven inspectors. The other five employees included two drivers, one typist, one telephone operator, and one errand runner.⁸³ Ten days after the takeover, the new leaders of the department commented on the attitude of the old employees: “In general they were given assignments, so they feel positive. There is some development in their thoughts: [they think] that they are all adept, and all want to receive a worthy position.”⁸⁴ On October 30, 1954, a little more than two weeks after their first report, there were remarkable changes in the way the department listed the existing personnel: the chief of the technical bureau and the three inspectors disappeared from the list. In their places were a janitor, a secretary of correspondence, and two functionaries in charge of labor unions.⁸⁵ There are two possible explanations for the changes in the second report: there was negligence on the part of the takeover cadres during the first days, or the chief and inspectors were demoted or fired. In August 1955, the new leaders of the department of labor were still uneasy with certain retained employees. They reported, “the majority have progressed,” but “a few of them are restless at work, arrogant with their outdated knowledge.”⁸⁶

Like their comrades who took over Hà Nội’s power plants, cadres who gained control over the Department of Labor, though more in number and

seemingly better trained for their assignments, also likely lacked confidence initially. Reporting at the end of October 1954, the leadership of the department pointed out existing problems among their cadres:

- They are anxious, worried, lost, confused with new assignments, and unfamiliar with the city, so each time they go out to do a task, they only want to go in pairs...
- Meeting with [ASV] functionaries and seeing them dressing luxuriously and elegantly, they develop the thought that they must order new clothes right away to appear serious.⁸⁷

Tensions from differences in professional competence, familiarity with the urban setting, and lifestyle all contributed to the “difficulties” and “confusion” that DRV cadres felt in relation to the employees of the previous regime.

In the following official guidelines, to boost the confidence of the DRV cadres at the Department of Labor, DRV cadres were required to follow the retained employees “closely to investigate their political profiles” in order to gauge their competence and “assist them in ideological matters.”⁸⁸ Each cadre who was not in the position of department or bureau chief was assigned to accompany at least one retained employee in their daily tasks, to “talk to them to find out their concerns/dissatisfactions [*thắc mắc*],” and to report these concerns/dissatisfactions to higher-level chiefs so that the chiefs could “make them talk and give them explanations.”⁸⁹ Accompanying the retained employees could have also served as a way to tap into the experiences and networks that DRV cadres lacked as newcomers in the field.

Four months after the takeover of Hà Nội, in February 1955, the Government Council lamented that the DRV apparatus had not gained the capacity needed to carry out the “onerous tasks” brought about by the “new situation” and that cadres were “lacking in quantity, weak in quality.”⁹⁰ Grafting worked during the transition of power, but it would not be beneficial for the DRV state in the long term if they continued to depend on the retained experts and bureaucrats—who were politically unreliable because of their class backgrounds and links to the former regime—for the maintenance of order and the revival/development of socioeconomic

activities.⁹¹ To move forward, the DRV state needed to lessen its dependence on the retained French-ASV employees and learn to operate the system by themselves.

The DRV state's first step to strengthening their governance capacity was to rapidly increase the number of DRV cadre-functionaries. After the takeover of Hà Nội, all DRV ministries were expanded, and by September 1955, four new ministries were established: the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Water Resources and Construction, and the Ministry of Social Welfare. By the end of 1955, the number of offices and departments under DRV ministries rose from 58 to 121 units "to undertake new assignments."⁹² The number of personnel in the administration rocketed: the total number of cadres and regular staff doubled from 1954 to 1955; in the first nine months of 1956, there were, on average, 1,100 cadres added to the administration each month, totaling 135,000 by September 1956.⁹³ The biggest increase in personnel was in the central apparatus: from over 5,300 in 1954, the number increased ninefold, to over 48,300, at the end of 1955.⁹⁴ Remarkably, in June 1955, in a resolution by the party's secretariat, the party was still calling for efforts to "overcome the lack of cadres."⁹⁵ The resolution set a motto regarding recruitment: "Weak cadres are better than no cadre" [*thà yếu còn hơn thiếu*] and "Lacking is better than rushing" [*thà thiếu còn hơn ẩu*].⁹⁶ Looking at the spike in the number of DRV personnel at the end of 1955 and in later years, it seems that the first motto was preferred and more widely applied.

Though the new ministries and the added personnel were to cater to the new responsibilities of the government after the takeover of industrial and commercial centers previously not under DRV control, the rapid expansion also served to reduce the importance of the former French-ASV state employees that the DRV government (still) depended on. In 1954, it would have been impossible for the 5,000 cadres in the central DRV government to "integrate" the 16,899 former ASV functionaries, out of which 11,569 were in Hà Nội, into their system. Their first effort in retelling the story of the administrative transition was in early November 1954, when the Government Council announced that functionaries who had worked for the French-ASV government and were retained/reemployed by the DRV government would be referred to as "new functionaries" [*công chức mới*] "to

distinguish them from old functionaries [*công chức cũ*]" who had been working in the DRV government since before 1954.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, it was these new functionaries who had a larger presence and importance to the life of the new centers of the DRV. At the end of 1955, with more than 90,000 cadres-functionaries in the national system, including more than 48,300 employed in the central apparatus, integration of the French-ASV system into the DRV structure seemed more plausible.⁹⁸

The problem of quantity was thus rapidly resolved, but there remained the problem of quality. The last half of this article presents the two main strategies that the DRV leadership employed to solve the problem of quality—namely, direct technical and knowledge transfer and ideological reforms. But the story will be told from the bottom up, through the eyes of the three young men from the introduction of this article: Phan Việt, Nguyễn Hiếu, and Nguyễn Văn. In describing the application of each strategy and their effects on each individual's life, these last sections will reveal the complex world of human relations among DRV state employees during the first years after the takeover.

The World of DRV State Employees: The Stories of Phan Việt and Nguyễn Hiếu

Phan Việt was born and grew up in the city of Thái Nguyên, a medium-sized city about seventy-five kilometers north of Hà Nội. He attended a *franco-indigène* school for six years, went to high school in the DRV zone for three years, and earned a baccalaureate degree. In 1953 he was admitted to the DRV's jungle-based College of Transportation and Public Works and was trained in telecommunications. In early 1954, in preparation for Điện Biên Phủ, his cohort was ordered to skip the last six months of technical education to go through political training:

Ideological work was very important for the [DRV leadership]. Even though they were materialistic, they cared a lot about ideals. They wanted to resolve all our ideological problems: how to hate the enemy, how to not be afraid of the Americans, how to love our class, how to serve the party. They gave us ample time to study. After that we went back to our school and prepared to go to work.

Their work was to build a communication line from Thái Nguyên to Lạng Sơn and to China. In August, he and his cohort were ordered to stop building the line and become members of the takeover team of the Post Office of Hà Nội. They were also allowed to graduate early after passing a “very casual” exam. At nineteen years old, Phan Việt was one of the 246 DRV cadres who entered the city on October 2–5, 1954, to prepare for the official takeover.⁹⁹ During the transition period, Phan Việt first worked as the secretary to the head of the DRV takeover team at the Post Office of Hà Nội, then became an employee there.

The first year after Phan Việt’s arrival in Hà Nội, there were fewer DRV cadres at the Post Office of Hà Nội than former French-ASV employees.¹⁰⁰ DRV cadres were not only the minority in number but also lacked technical competency. For the first couple of years, though the number of DRV cadres at the post office increased, those who, like Phan Việt, could read and speak French and had received some formal training at a relevant professional school remained in the minority. Many cadres who came to the post office after him had no professional background; some were even illiterate. Phan Việt entered into frequent contact with former French-ASV employees at the post office, of whom he had mixed impressions and perceptions. His education in the DRV zone led him to harbor hostility toward those who had served the “enemy” regime:

[W]hen I was in the jungle, I was trained to always hate, then [when I arrived in the city] I was always on guard, I despised [the retained employees].¹⁰¹

Phan Việt and other new arrivals in the city saw themselves as “victors” while “the others”—the retained employees—were the “defeated.” Interactions between the two groups in the workplace seemed “normal” and “polite,” but Phan Việt remarked that each side harbored their own feelings and agendas:

The retained employees always behaved very modestly because they had an inferior complex [as] they were defeated and became retained employees. So they never exhibited any anger or dissatisfaction. But the victors, in their mind there was always a bit of contempt, of disdain toward [the retained employees]. [The victors] appreciated [the retained employees] only because [the retained employees] had technical competence, when [the victors]

succeeded in stealing [*ăn cắp*] their technical knowledge, when [the victors] had mastered the profession, [the victors] discarded [the retained employees].¹⁰²

While Phan Việt did not register DRV cadres' open hostility toward the retained employees, accounts of discrimination and hostility in the Post Office of Hà Nội as well as other departments were recorded. On October 12, for example, it was documented that

[s]taff in catering (in the post office and the Labor Union) do not want to serve functionaries and workers we have reemployed [*thu dụng*]. For example, two catering staff members (in the post office) reported concerns/dissatisfactions [*thắc mắc*] and did not want to serve a post office inspector and a manager. Another catering staff (in the Labor Union) became ashamed and then cried because they had to serve food to several drivers that were retained.¹⁰³

DRV cadres and officials were also discontented by the policy that allowed the retained employees to be paid the same salary as before the takeover (Article 5, "Eight Policies of the Government of the DRV toward Cities Taken Over in 1954"). Statistics for Hà Nội are not available but statistics for the third biggest city in the North, Nam Định, show a shocking difference in the salaries of the two groups. The main salary (without allowances) of a DRV state employee from the "free zone" was the equivalent of between 37 kilos and 46 kilos of rice per month. Even if they received a 50 percent cost-of-living allowance (which was unlikely because Nam Định was considered less expensive than Hà Nội), the maximum sum that a cadre could receive was 69 kilos of rice.

Former French-ASV state employees in Nam Định were divided into three groups for assessment of income: (1) contract-based monthly salary; (2) permanent contract salary (for example, for a head of a governmental department); and (3) daily salary (twenty-six days per month, without an allowance). A former French-ASV state employee receiving a contract-based monthly salary, without wife or children, received a minimum salary of 48,100 đồng, equivalent to 150 kilos of rice per month (320 đồng/kilo). A head of a governmental department, receiving a permanent contract salary, married with six children, received 342,834 đồng (1,068 kilos of rice) per

month. Employees receiving a daily salary earned the lowest rate, with the equivalent monthly salary between 58 kilos (untrained, female manual laborers) and 212 kilos (trained workers).¹⁰⁴ A DRV state employee in Hà Nội exclaimed mockingly after finding out the difference in income between “free zone” cadres and officials and a certain “reemployed functionary” in the same department: “His talent must be twenty-seven times greater than ours.”¹⁰⁵

Retained employees continued to be paid a much higher salary than DRV “free zone” cadres until 1959. Compared to the 1950s plan of paying retained employees the minimum salary on the DRV scale, this was a remarkable change of plan. The promise to maintain the same high level of salary for former French-ASV state employees was one of the important changes in the latter version of the “Eight Policies.” The downsides of this policy are clear: strain to the DRV state budget and discontent and dissatisfaction among the DRV-trained cadres and officials. So why did the DRV leadership publicly promulgate and carry out the policy for four years after the takeover? For one, it helped create a positive image of a state that took national reconciliation seriously. Furthermore, the DRV state needed as many former French-ASV employees to stay in the North as possible for two important strategic reasons: First, the knowledge and technical expertise of these former French-ASV employees would be essential to rapid reconstruction and solidification of the public administration. Second, it served the more general goal of preventing the outflow of human resources and capital from the North when the border remained open.¹⁰⁶ For those outside of the administration who possessed skills and capital, this was a positive message that a state that took public administration seriously would also invest in industrial and economic development.

Returning to Phan Việt’s story, the technical expertise of the retained employees was essential at the post office. On a personal level, Phan Việt found the retained employees at the post office “properly trained,” their integrity and morality “wonderful.” For months after the takeover, Phan Việt and other DRV cadres followed the retained employees around in their workplace, observing and learning from them. His education in the DRV zone proved highly inadequate, and it was in Hà Nội and with the retained employees that he really learned his vocation.

Without the retained employees, we would not have had a vocation. Faraway in Việt Bắc, you tell me, what kind of vocation could we have had? All the most modern technologies, when we were in the jungle, we had no idea. After entering [Hà Nội], there were telephones, telecommunication centers, everything, compared to the standard of those days, compared to what we had had in the jungle, those were very advanced. Without those people, how could we have learned the profession?¹⁰⁷

Technology and knowledge transfer, which Phan Việt described earlier as “stealing the profession,” began the day of the takeover and proceeded in a cascade model: First, former French-ASV employees were assigned a number of DRV cadres to train in one technical function. Then, those DRV cadres trained other cadres in the same technique before moving to another department to learn other functions. As Phan Việt explained, “while we learned from them [*người ta*; former ASV employees], we also had our people [*người của mình*] ready so that we could train our people later on.”¹⁰⁸

While DRV cadres were familiarizing themselves with the city and building professional competence, a program to rehabilitate former French-ASV functionaries and experts, most of whom were considered “petit bourgeois” [*tiểu tư sản*] by the communist state, was being prepared.¹⁰⁹ In November 1954, the Ministry of Home Affairs proposed a three-step plan to “reconcile,” “educate,” and “reform” retained functionaries and experts. In the first step, retained employees were to be made to feel that they were heard and cared for; relations between DRV cadres and retained employees were to be encouraged. In the second step, these employees were to be eased into some forms of profession-related collective activities at the workplace. In the third step, “when the time [was] appropriate,” the retained employees were to go through “in-depth study sessions” with higher political content.¹¹⁰ Throughout the period, DRV cadres were instructed to maintain vigilance because “reactionaries” and “agents of the imperialists” might camouflage themselves as devoted retained employees to sabotage the DRV government from the inside.¹¹¹

Nguyễn Hiếu, a doctor, became a “reemployed functionary” after the communist takeover. He was born in 1928 in Hà Nội as the only son in a well-off family where both parents were doctors. At the time of the

August Revolution in 1945, Nguyễn Hiếu had just finished high school. He studied for a year at the *École Pratique d'Industrie* in Hà Nội—as a school to train future industrial workers, it was a hot spot of revolutionary activities. There he was “awakened” and became a Việt Minh sympathizer. Nguyễn Hiếu participated in the battle of Hà Nội in 1946, then moved to the DRV zone with other Việt Minh fighters. He was captured and sent to Hỏa Lò Prison in Hà Nội but received preferential treatment because he spoke French and could play the accordion to amuse the French staff. When he was released, he and his mother decided that he would attend the University of Medicine. After finishing his medical degree, he became a doctor at Yersin Hospital (renamed Phủ Doãn Hospital in 1954). He had a peaceful life as a state employee.

In 1954, Nguyễn Hiếu became a retained employee. He was aware of the official gaze on him: “Before I was a follower of revolution. When I came back to Hà Nội, I became a collaborator.” During the three hundred days of free movement across the seventeenth parallel (July 21, 1954–May 13, 1955), his extended family and many of his friends left Hà Nội to go south. He had also prepared for his family go to Sài Gòn, but at the last minute, his mother did not want to go for fear of losing the two villas that she had worked her whole life to earn. Not wanting to leave his mother by herself, Nguyễn Hiếu and his wife decided to stay in Hà Nội.

Before the end of the three-hundred-day period, everything went as normal for those who chose to stay: the retained state employees received the same level of salary as under the previous regime, demonstrations of extravagance—living in a villa, dressing in expensive Western clothes, going to work on a Vespa—did not pose a problem.¹¹² A few months after the takeover of Hà Nội, Nguyễn Hiếu, like other former ASV state employees, was sent to a special school to be reeducated. This reeducation lasted one year. During the first six months, they received ideological training. Courses were taught by high-level party leaders. The last six months of reeducation took place after the end of three-hundred-day period of free movement. Nguyễn Hiếu was sent to the countryside as a land-reform cadre during the fifth land-reform campaign (December 25, 1955–July 30, 1956), a peak of the communist party’s use of coercion and terror.¹¹³

I was sent to Phú Lý. It was horrifying. Land reform was horrifying. For a while I was still not aware, still did not see clearly, but afterward when I had to go more deeply into land reform, I was horrified. I started questioning why it was carried out like that, why they killed people in such an unreasonable way. Those classified as “landlords” were called as such, but they had only a few acres of rice fields. What kind of landlord would not have some meat to eat, not have any servants? Their only sin was that they had some acres of land and didn’t have anyone to help out; they had to pay some people to work. Those who paid someone to work the rice fields were considered landlords. They were dragged out for public denunciation....

There were so many deaths. After land reform, there were many reflections. Then a lot of people started to understand. But you know, our regime is a proletarian regime. The dictatorship of the proletariat is very dangerous, there is no limit to it. You could live or you could die at any moment.¹¹⁴

Alec Holcombe, in his study of land reform in North Vietnam as a tool of mass mobilization, argues that land reform was “a type of terrifying ‘shock’ treatment aimed at the rural society in general.”¹¹⁵ Yet it is clear that the urban population, especially those exposed to land reform as a “thought reform” treatment like Nguyễn Hiếu, underwent enormous shock as well. Nguyễn Hiếu learned, as others in North Vietnam realized, that he had no choice but to submit to the agenda of the party and the state.

Nonetheless, the DRV leadership did not trust people “stained” with a “petit-bourgeois” background, especially those who had worked under the French and the ASV. The DRV moved rapidly to build their own pool of experts with proper political training. After the suppression of the Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm movement, the party moved to tighten its ideological trainings at universities, introducing Marxist-Leninist teachings into the core curriculum.¹¹⁶ With Sino-Soviet aid, the DRV’s higher education training capacity rapidly expanded. In the 1955–1956 school year, there were 40 university instructors at four universities with 1,837 students. By the 1959–1960 school year, there were 917 instructors at nine universities with 12,997 students.¹¹⁷ Higher education infrastructure and personnel could finally “assure the realization of goals in higher education”: “a comprehensive education [of] ideology, technical profession, and physical strength; an education that includes productive labor, [in which] theory

goes hand in hand with practice, the school is inseparable from society; an education that confirms the leadership of the party in the schooling system, an education that serves political goals [and] eradicates the simple profession-centered mindset.”¹¹⁸

When the DRV could ensure a stream of technically and politically qualified personnel, many retained employees like Nguyễn Hiếu were demoted; some with exceptional expertise were moved to be instructors at vocational schools, while many others were forced into early retirement.¹¹⁹ In the post office where Phan Việt worked, many former French-ASV employees were forced out of office to retire early and were replaced by DRV-trained personnel.¹²⁰ Between 1959 and 1960, the DRV government “encouraged” the retained employees to write a petition letter to volunteer to give up their old salaries and integrate themselves into the same salary system as other DRV state employees.¹²¹ Nguyễn Hiếu lost his high salary, was demoted from an internist doctor to an X-ray machine operator, and spent the rest of his career in the X-ray room.¹²² In 1958, one of his mother’s villas was appropriated by the state under the housing policy that allowed municipal authorities to “manage the renting and usage of private houses” belonging to the wealthy and nonworker populations;¹²³ the other villa was sold slowly, piecemeal, to feed his family during the Second Indochina War, which had further reduced state subsidies and forced urban residents to evacuate to the countryside.¹²⁴

“They’re Only Revolutionaries by the Sword Lake”: The Story of Nguyễn Văn

Not every DRV cadre or regular staff in Hà Nội after October 1954 was a new arrival. Some had been active as underground agents, and a number of local Việt Minh enthusiasts in Hà Nội were offered positions in the new government. Nguyễn Văn was one of the underground agents who became a DRV state employee after the takeover in 1954. Nguyễn Văn was born in the Old Quarter of Hà Nội in 1925 to a Catholic family. His father was a state employee in the pre-1954 government, so Nguyễn Văn had an easy childhood, but his father passed away suddenly when Nguyễn Văn was thirteen. Still, his father left him enough money, and together with a salary from tutoring in Hà Nội, he managed to finish his baccalaureate in the

franco-indigène system, learn music from the Conservatoire de Paris through a correspondence course, and buy a villa in the city center (where he still lives today). He was an active Việt Minh sympathizer since before 1945 and participated in the movement as a volunteer liaison and propaganda distributor.¹²⁵

During a brief period after the outbreak of war in 1946, Nguyễn Văn joined the revolutionary government in the DRV zone: he first performed for the PAVN troops in Thanh Hóa Province, then attended the College of Public Administration in Ninh Bình for a few months before dropping out to teach music at the School of Revolutionary Literature and Arts in Zone 3 in Nam Định Province. He was captured by French troops and sent back to Hà Nội in the early 1950s. From then on, Nguyễn Văn acted as a DRV agent in the city. He established contacts with other DRV agents in Hà Nội and operated a “resistance cell” with two other members whom Nguyễn Văn knew only by their pseudonyms Sinh and Thanh. Their assignments were often to spread propaganda flyers and booklets on occasions with political significance (such as August 19, September 2, and Hồ Chí Minh’s birthday on May 19) or when the PAVN achieved a military victory. Later, in preparation for the takeover of Hà Nội in October 1954, he was assigned to approach and persuade workers and state employees to stay and continue to work with the DRV government.¹²⁶

As the takeover of Hà Nội approached, Nguyễn Văn took part in the preparation of local artists to welcome the DRV troops to Hà Nội. A resistance-cell member asked Nguyễn Văn to compose a song to celebrate the occasion, and the song was taught to other DRV sympathizers in a cascade model:

I taught the song to others. I taught groups of four or five local resistance students. The local resistance force comprised students and youths in the city whose hearts were with the resistance....

After I had taught four or five people, each of them would be responsible for teaching the songs to 4 or 5 others. Then the day that we organized the welcoming celebration—we had known the arrival time of the army in advance—stronger guys carried flags from here to Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục Square. That day I brought a guitar.¹²⁷

On the morning of October 10, there were (according to Nguyễn Văn's estimation) two hundred people gathered around Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục Square singing his song and waving flags to welcome the DRV forces into the city.

Nguyễn Văn felt he was on the side of the “victors” during this brief period of joy. But he also noticed that a lot of his friends and wealthy professionals (doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats) who lived in his neighborhood disappeared within a year of the takeover. Nguyễn Văn stopped going to church. He started working as a state employee, first as a music teacher at Chu Văn An High School, and then as an instructor at the Hà Nội Teacher Training College, training music teachers for schools around Hà Nội. But Nguyễn Văn felt that political indoctrination was prioritized in the curriculum—students “only learned about the party, the party only.” Musicians like him were obliged to “compose in praise of the party, in praise of Uncle Hồ”; those who refused to do so “would not be able to raise their heads.”¹²⁸

In 1955–1956, Nguyễn Văn and all DRV cadres and underground agents who stayed in Hà Nội during the war of 1946–1954 were sent on a reeducation trip to the countryside in Hà Nam to observe how land reform was being carried out.¹²⁹ What he witnessed scarred him for life and revealed to him “the cruelty and injustice of the communist party.”¹³⁰ Before the trip, Nguyễn Văn had been invited to join the training sessions for prospective party members, but after witnessing the violence of land reform, he decided not to join the party, though he continued to teach at Hà Nội's Teacher Training College and learned to conform to the demands of the state for survival.¹³¹

The fourth and fifth land-reform campaigns, which people like Nguyễn Văn and Nguyễn Hiếu witnessed, were accompanied by a “reorganization” campaign, an active purge within the ranks of the communist party from the provincial to the village levels with the goal of creating a loyal bureaucracy overwhelmed by “reds” over “experts.”¹³² This campaign had an impact in the city after the takeover, when DRV cadres who came from the former “free zone” mocked Nguyễn Văn and others who acted as Việt Minh agents in the city as “revolutionaries by the Lake” [*cách mạng Bờ Hồ*]¹³³—those who had an easy life in the city while “real” revolutionaries suffered in the free zones and the jungles.

Nguyễn Văn was furious but did not dare openly challenging his “free zone” comrades:

Were they the only ones who made the revolution? They did not know that if the Japanese had caught me trafficking and selling documents, propaganda, newspapers, or songs to earn money for the activities of the Hoàng Diệu Youth, they would have put my arm against the lamppost, taken out their swords, and cut off my hand. Was that not dangerous? Was that not scary? But there were those who thought of themselves as more heroic, looked at others with contempt, and said things like “They are only revolutionaries by the Sword Lake.”¹³³

Tensions among the “victors” only intensified as time passed. Phan Việt, the engineer at the post office, was affected by rising hostility against the “tạch tạch sè” [short for *tiểu tư sản*; petty bourgeois] because he could read and write, could speak French, and read books in his free time.¹³⁴ It was not the only period during which Phan Việt felt dissatisfied with the way things were, but he had learned that speaking up would only put himself in danger: “we had to adapt to the environment to survive, and...even if we had different opinions, we would rather stay silent, we did not dare oppose. That was only survival instinct.”¹³⁵

Conclusion

This article has argued that the administrative takeover of Hà Nội was a complicated process that demonstrates the unevenness of the DRV’s administrative and technical capacity in 1954. Though I support the argument that the DRV administrative and military apparatuses matured throughout the First Indochina War, the military victory at Điện Biên Phủ did not mean that the authority of the DRV state and the communist party was automatically established in the areas where French-ASV influence remained until the war’s end.

Expanding to the cities in 1954 and controlling the entire territory north of the seventeenth parallel from 1955 presented many opportunities but also challenges to DRV state-making. First, they had to render the urban centers “legible” as they legitimized and institutionalized their authority over these newly acquired territories and populations.¹³⁶ Second, the takeover of urban centers in the latter half of the 1950s did not mean that the

state-making process in rural areas and mountainous frontiers already underway could be put on pause—the DRV’s forms of rule required continual legitimating and institutionalizing.¹³⁷ It was not in war that the DRV state and party evolved the most, it was in dealing with the aftermath of war and in deciding what to pursue in peace.

I have shown in this article that the main urban takeover strategy employed by the DRV leadership in 1954 was to make maximum use of the pre-existing French-ASV structure—a strategy that let them gain both the time and technology to transform from a guerilla, rural-based state to a centralized, urban-based one. Through the stories of Phan Việt, Nguyễn Hiếu, and Nguyễn Văn, I have shown the diversity, collaboration, and tensions within the DRV administration, among not only the DRV state employees and the retained French-ASV state employees, but also among the DRV cadres themselves whose revolutionary credentials were compared and hierarchized as soon as the war ended.

I have suggested that many policies changed after the closure of the port of Hải Phòng, as the territory north of the seventeenth parallel came under the control of Hồ Chí Minh’s government. Balazs Szalontai, studying reports from Hungarian diplomats in 1955 and 1956, suggests that the “moderate” policies announced in the autumn of 1954 were replaced by “ultra-leftist repressive measures” in 1955–1956 because the DRV’s evaluation of the prospect of national unification changed around mid-1955.¹³⁸ I offer an alternative way to see this total change in state policies: party and state leaders understood that overtly “red” policies during the period of free movement would lead to more departures from the North of people who held technical expertise and wealth crucial to postwar reconstruction. Thus, the policies of this period were moderate to help limit as much as possible the outflow of human and capital resources from the North. I suggest that the primary reasons for the “ultra-leftist repressive measures” put into place after the three hundred days of free movement were not to mobilize the population for war with the South. Instead, the policies were meant to build the foundation for the “socialist” stage of revolution according to Lenin’s two-stage strategy.¹³⁹ DRV policies shifted direction again in the latter half of 1956 after Khrushchev delivered his secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. But the shift was ephemeral and the DRV

party-state soon returned to the previous track of building an authoritarian socialist state and society—a process that Alec Holcombe has aptly termed “re-Stalinization.”¹⁴⁰

This article opened with the youthful Phan Việt, Nguyễn Hiếu, and Nguyễn Văn about to start their careers as DRV state employees, and it concludes with where they ended their careers. Phan Việt, the engineer, became a party member and was chosen for further training in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in the 1960s. He had a long, successful career before retiring in Hà Nội in the late 1990s.¹⁴¹ Nguyễn Văn, the musician, had a more difficult time. Nguyễn Văn never joined the party, though he continued to teach at the Hà Nội Teacher Training College until his retirement. In the late 1950s, he started composing “non-verbal” music—classical music—as a way of expressing what he could not openly convey.¹⁴² In 1995, his artistic career was recognized when he received an award for classical music from the Vietnamese Musician Association.¹⁴³ Nguyễn Hiếu never recovered the villa appropriated by the state in the 1960s. Worse, his children were barred from going to university because their personal biographies were tainted by the bourgeois origin of their parents and grandparents. He also retired in Hà Nội in the 1990s and is living in a tiny house next to one of his old villas, which has become part of a large public hospital.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the administrative takeover of Hà Nội as a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) state-making project in the immediate postwar period (1954–1960). This administrative takeover happened in two stages. First, the DRV “grafted” onto the existing structure to ensure that public administration continued to function. Later, the system was slowly transformed as Associated State of Vietnam (ASV) state employees were sidelined and replaced by the DRV’s own personnel. This article argues that the establishment of the DRV administration in Hà Nội, like other state-making projects that took place throughout the northern territory during the 1950s, was a complicated process that required deliberation, adjustment, and coercion.

KEYWORDS: *North Vietnam, Hà Nội, communist takeover, state employees, oral history, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), Associated State of Vietnam (ASV)*

Appendix

Eight Policies of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam toward Cities Newly Liberated in 1954

(Passed by the Government Council on September 17, 1954)

1. Protection of life and property of all people in the city

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam Government is determined to protect life and property of all people in the city. The people, please maintain order. Please continue your life and work in peace.

Those who breach order, damage public goods, steal and rob, or violate others’ life and property will be severely punished.

2. Protection of industry and commerce

All private factories, stores, banks, storehouses are protected, no one can violate [these properties].

Private production and commercial activities continue as usual.

3. Takeover and management of state-owned enterprises and administrative offices of the French–Bảo Đại regime

All state-owned enterprises (factories, transportation companies, commercial offices, etc.), administrative offices, treasuries formerly belonging to the French–Bảo Đại regime are now taken over and managed by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

If there exist private properties in state-owned enterprises and treasuries, after thorough investigation, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam will recognize the legal titles of ownership.

All those who work in state-owned enterprises, administrative offices, and treasuries are allowed to continue to work and are responsible for preserving machines, materials, and files and documents until the Government of the DRV assigns persons to take over.

Those who contribute to maintaining enterprises, administrative offices, and treasuries will be credited and rewarded. Those who sabotage them will be punished.

4. Protection of schools, hospitals, cultural and educational institutions, and so on

Schools, hospitals, cultural and education institutions, stadiums, theaters, cinemas, and other public infrastructures will be protected and allowed to continue their activities.

All those who are working in these places are allowed to continue to work.

5. Civil servants in administrative offices of the French–Bảo Đại regime will be recruited according to merit

All civil servants in the administrative offices of the French–Bảo Đại regime, including gendarmes and former functionaries in civil districts, are to be recruited according to merit; those kept in office will receive the same salary as before.

Everyone must respect and practice the orders of the Government of the DRV, must preserve their office's properties and documents until the government assigns persons to take over.

Those who intentionally damage [or] steal public goods or resist the orders of the Government of the DRV will be severely punished.

6. Soldiers and officers in the French–Bảo Đại army who remained in newly liberated zones, after presenting themselves to the authorities, will be helped to return to their native places or be recruited according to their capacities.

To maintain the security and order in the city and stabilize the society, all soldiers and officers in the French–Bảo Đại army who remain in newly liberated zones must present themselves to the local Military-Administrative Committee and turn in all of their weapons. Those who present themselves, depending on the capacity [of the government], might be helped to return to live and work in their native places. Those who want to work for the government will be considered and recruited.

7. Protection of life and property of foreigners

The lives and property of all foreigners (including the French) are protected.

Within the limits of the DRV's laws, foreigners are allowed to live and work freely.

All foreigners must respect the orders of the municipal Military-Administrative Committee and the laws of the DRV.

8. Exercise of liberal democracy, protection of religious freedom

The Government of the DRV guarantees liberal democratic rights for all Vietnamese citizens.

The government also guarantees religious freedom for religious practitioners; it is forbidden to violate churches, temples, pagodas, shrines, and religious properties or to violate the safety of religious followers.

All citizens of the DRV, including religious practitioners and followers, must abide by the law of the government and must fulfill their civil responsibilities.

All people have the responsibility to follow these eight policies, to contribute to the maintenance of order in the city, and to prevent and resist all sabotaging actions.

Those who make remarkable contributions to the maintenance of order will be rewarded. Those who carry out sabotaging acts will be strictly punished.

Cadres, employees of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the Vietnamese people's military must maintain strict discipline and correct attitudes, must buy and sell fairly, and must not violate even the smallest property of the people.

We wish the people to live and work in peace and wholeheartedly support and comply with [the demands of] the government.

(This version replaces the previous version)

Notes

1. Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký Nguyễn Huy Tường Tập 3: Nghệ sỹ và công dân* [The Diaries of Nguyễn Huy Tường, Vol. 3: Artist and Citizen], ed. Nguyễn Huy Thắng (Hà Nội: Kim Đồng, 2016), 9–10; Phan Quang, *Từ nguồn Thạch Hãn đến Bờ hồ Gươm: Bút ký* [From the Source of the Thạch Hãn River to the Sword Lake: Notes] (HCMC: Trẻ, 2016), 417.
2. Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*, 9–10; Phan Quang, *Từ nguồn Thạch Hãn*, 420.
3. David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 384, 393.
4. *Ibid.*, 395.
5. *Ibid.*, 401.
6. Christopher Goscha, “Colonial Hà Nội and Saigon at War: Social Dynamics of the Việt Minh’s ‘Underground City,’ 1945–1954,” *War in History* 20, no. 2 (2013): 222–250.

The Geneva Conference produced a collection of ten documents often referred to as the Geneva Accords: three military agreements, six unilateral declarations, and the Final Declaration (which was not signed by the United States or the State of Vietnam). The major provisions included (1) a ceasefire along the seventeenth parallel; (2)

- a period of three hundred days (until May 1955) during which each side must withdraw their troops from the adversary's territory and accord civilians the freedom to move from one zone to another; and (3) a disputed provision (since it was included only in the Final Declaration) that a general election to reunify the country was to be held by July 1956.
7. This might be interpreted as a sign that the local population in Hà Nội was still in doubt about the new government. But a more logical explanation would be that everybody went out to welcome the troops and cadres and thus closed their doors to prevent theft and burglary.
 8. Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*, 11. Nguyễn Huy Tường (1912–1960) was a famous writer and playwright and held important positions in the DRV cultural apparatus. All translations of Vietnamese sources are my own.
 9. Uyen Nguyen, “Reassessing the Communist Takeovers of Urban Areas in North Vietnam during the First Indochina War” (unpublished manuscript, August 2020).
 10. Nguyễn Văn, interview by author, March 18, 2019, Hà Nội; Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by author, May 22, 2019, Hà Nội; Phan Việt, interview by author, January 24, 2019, Hà Nội. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the rights and privacy of interviewees.
 11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 159.
 12. *Ibid.*, 160.
 13. *Ibid.*, 160.
 14. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*; David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
 15. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 351–352; David G. Marr, “A Brief History of Local Government in Vietnam,” in Benedict J. Kerckvliet and David G. Marr, eds., *Beyond Hà Nội: Local Government in Vietnam* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 35–43.
 16. Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path to State Formation in Vietnam: Opportunities, Conundrums, and Legacies,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 267–297.
 17. Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre, 1945–1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

18. Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path”; Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*; Christian C. Lentz, “Making the Northwest Vietnamese,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6, no. 2 (2011): 68–105; Christian C. Lentz, *Contested Territory: Dien Bien Phu and the Making of Northwest Vietnam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); Ken MacLean, *The Government of Mistrust: Illegibility and Bureaucratic Power in Socialist Vietnam* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Alec Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945–1960* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2020).
19. Philippe Papin, review of *Vietnam: Un État né de la Guerre 1945–1954*, Christopher Goscha, *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* 14, no. 1 (2012): 24–32; Alec Holcombe, “The Role of the Communist Party in the Vietnamese Revolution: A Review of David Marr’s *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)*,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 298–364.
20. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*.
21. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*.
22. MacLean, *Government of Mistrust*, 32, 53, 224n53.
23. Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path,” 281–282.
24. Christian Lentz, “Mobilizing the Frontier: Dien Bien Phu and the Making of Vietnam (1945–1955)” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2011), 152n16; Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path,” 280–281.
25. Christopher Goscha, author’s response to review of *Vietnam: Un État né de la Guerre 1945–1954*, Christopher Goscha, *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* 14, no. 1 (2012): 48.
26. *Ibid.*; Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, chapter 1.
27. Goscha, author’s response, 49.
28. See map 5 in Christopher Goscha, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945–1954): An International and Interdisciplinary Approach* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012).
29. Lentz, *Contested Territory*; Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*.
30. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
31. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 74.
32. In fact, in late September 1949—before Mao Zedong declared the creation of the PRC—a document titled “Chinese Experiences in

- Liberating Cities in China” was circulated during a conference held by the DRV leadership to review the takeover of Bắc Kạn (August 1949). “Nghị quyết của Hội nghị ‘Rút kinh nghiệm Bắc Kạn’ (21-23/9/49),” BNV 3606, TTTLQG-III.
33. *Ibid.*, 54, 70; Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 277.
 34. In chronological order: Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Dorothy J. Solinger, *Regional Government and Political Integration in Southwest China, 1949–1954: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949–1952* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980); James Z. Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949–1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004); Yomi Braester, “‘A Big Dying Vat’: The Villifying of Shanghai during the Good Eighth Company Campaign,” *Modern China* 31, no. 4 (2005): 411–447; Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao’s China: Negotiating the Divide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
 35. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, “The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China: An Introduction,” in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7. Brown and Pickowicz’s edited volume *Dilemma of Victory* has offered accounts that challenge and complicate this general outline. This account remains nonetheless informative and relevant to our understanding of the DRV’s general approach to cities in the 1950s.
 36. Walter R. Sharp, “Some Observations on Public Administration in Indochina,” *Public Administration Review* 14, no. 1 (1954): 45.
 37. *Ibid.*, 48–49. The national administration school [École Nationale d’Administration] was established in Đà Lạt in late 1952 and early 1953. Eric T. Jennings has argued that the establishment of the

- national officers' training school in 1950 and the national administration school in 1952 signaled the growing importance of Đà Lạt—Bảo Đại's "unofficial capital" between 1949 and 1955. Eric T. Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 241–243.
38. Sharp, "Some Observations," 51.
 39. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*; Brett Reilly, "The Sovereign States of Vietnam, 1945–1955," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 103–139; Brett Reilly, "The Origins of the Vietnamese Civil War and the State of Vietnam" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018); Ninh Xuan Thao, "L'État du Viet-Nam dans ses rapports avec la France, 1949–1955: Une autre voie pour l'indépendance du Viet-Nam" (PhD dissertation, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2019).
 40. Ninh Xuan Thao, "L'État du Viet-Nam;" Reilly, "Sovereign States of Vietnam," 104, 115.
 41. "Hồ sơ về công tác tiếp quản TP Hà Nội và chủ trương chính sách của Đảng đối với nhân dân Hà Nội trong và sau tiếp quản năm 1954," BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 42. Uyen Nguyen, "Reassessing the Communist Takeovers."
 43. "Kế hoạch thu hồi công sở của địch," BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Ibid.
 46. Hồ Chí Minh, "Sắc lệnh của Chủ tịch nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa số 81-SL ngày 22 tháng 5 năm 1950"; Phủ Thủ Tướng, Nghị định số 650-TTg (30 Dec 1955).
 47. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, chapter 10; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 43–44.
 48. "Chi thị của Ban Bí thư ngày 3 tháng 7 năm 1954 về việc bảo hộ các thành phố mới giải phóng," *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [The Complete Collection of Party Documents] (VKDĐT), vol. 15 (1954), 144–152.
 49. Ibid., 145.
 50. In 1954, there were four cities of this size in North Vietnam: Hà Nội, Hải Phòng, Nam Định, and Hải Dương, but by the time this directive was adopted, on July 3, 1954, Nam Định had already been taken over.

51. “Chi thị của Ban Bí thư ngày 3 tháng 7 năm 1954 về việc bảo hộ các thành phố mới giải phóng,” VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 151.
52. “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về tình hình mới, nhiệm vụ mới, chính sách mới của Đảng,” VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 283–315.
53. *Ibid.*, 292.
54. The members of the UBQCHN were Major-General Vương Thừa Vũ (chair), Dr. Trần Duy Hưng (vice-chair), and three committee members [*ủy viên*—Lê Trung Toàn (first political commissar [*Chính ủy*] of the Regiment of the Capital [Trung đoàn Thủ đô]), Lê Quốc Thân (Director of the Interzone III’s Department of Public Security), and Trần Minh Việt.
55. The UBHC of Hà Nội comprised Trần Duy Hưng (chair), Trần Danh Tuyên (vice chair), Trần Văn Lai (head of literature-culture [*văn xā*]), Lê Quốc Thân (head of internal affairs [*nội chính*]), Hà Kế Tấn (head of municipal defense and security [*bảo vệ thành phố*]), and Khuất Duy Tiến (head of economics [*kinh tế*]).
56. “Tám chính sách của CP nước VNDCCH đối với các TP mới giải phóng năm 1954,” BNV 3690, TTLTQG-III.
57. “Báo cáo tình hình Hà Nội tháng 4 và tháng 5,” PTT 531, TTLTQG-III.
58. “Chính sách đối với các thành thị mới giải phóng,” *Nhân Dân* no. 206 (July 19, 1954): 1; “Chính sách đối với thành thị mới giải phóng,” BNV 3660, TTLTQG-III.
59. Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist State: North Vietnam’s State-Labor Relations, 1945–1970,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005), 336.
60. Conveniently, after the ratification of the Geneva Accords, policies such as the call to preserve order and the “Eight Policies” also helped to portray the DRV government as abiding by the provisions of the Geneva Accords. Article 14 in the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam (or the Geneva Accords) demanded that signatories “refrain from any reprisals or discrimination against persons or organizations on account of their activities during the hostilities and to guarantee their democratic liberties”; and Article 15 stipulated that signatories “shall permit no destruction or sabotage of any public property and no injury to the life and property of the civil population.

- They shall permit no interference in local civil administration.” https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/KH-LA-VN_540720_GenevaAgreements.pdf (accessed October 20, 2021).
61. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un état*.
 62. Goscha, author’s response, 49.
 63. UBKCHCHN, No. 04-VP/HC-HN, “V/v cử cán bộ nghiên cứu kế hoạch tiếp quản Hà Nội”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III; Nguyễn Văn Chi, “Báo cáo của Đoàn tiếp quản của Thủ tướng phủ, Bộ Nội vụ, và Bộ Ngoại giao (26/09/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 64. Thanh Chương, “Báo cáo tổng quát về việc chuẩn bị bộ máy và cán bộ tiếp quản,” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 65. “Kế hoạch tiếp quản các cơ quan của chính quyền Pháp và Bảo Đại thuộc Thủ tướng Phủ, Bộ Ngoại giao, Bộ Nội vụ (1954),” BNV 3691, TTLTQG-III.
 66. “Báo cáo của Đoàn tiếp quản của Thủ tướng phủ, Bộ Nội vụ, và Bộ Ngoại giao (26/09/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 67. Nguyễn Văn Chi to unspecified recipients, September 27, 1954, in BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 68. The Ministry of Finance asked the Central Bureau of Commerce to provide “21,000 meters of khaki fabric in cement color, 10,000 meters of demi-fil fabric in white, 3,700 pairs of canvas shoes, 3,700 pairs of socks” for cadres entering Hà Nội. Ministry of Finance, “V/v trang phục cho cán bộ tiếp thu Hà Nội (17/09/54),” BNV 806, TTLTQG-III.
 69. Thanh Chương, “Tình hình của đoàn cán bộ tiếp quản vào trước (9/10/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 70. Thanh Chương, “Báo cáo tổng quát về việc chuẩn bị bộ máy và cán bộ tiếp quản,” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
 71. Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương III: Bộ Nội vụ trong giai đoạn của cuộc kháng chiến chống thực dân Pháp (từ cuối năm 1950 đến cuối năm 1954),” in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ* [History of the Ministry of Home Affairs] (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2005), <https://www.moha.gov.vn/DATA/Uploads/image/admin/vanban/chuongIII.pdf> (accessed August 29, 2020).
 72. Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ Hà Nội, “Báo cáo công tác tổ chức từ khi chuẩn bị tiếp quản cho đến khi vào tiếp quản (11/10/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

73. “Quyết nghị của Hội nghị HĐCP về chính sách cụ thể đối với công chức mới (Phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ ngày 3-4 tháng 11 năm 1954),” PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.
74. Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*, 77.
75. UBQCHN-Ban Tiếp quản Nhà máy Điện Hà Nội, “Báo cáo về tình hình nhà máy điện Hà Nội,” BLD 60, TTLTQG-III.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. “Bài nói chuyện của chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh với cán bộ, công nhân Nhà máy điện Yên Phụ và Nhà máy đèn Bờ Hồ” [President Hồ Chí Minh’s Talk with Cadres and Workers at the Power Plants at Yên Phụ and Bờ Hồ], official website of Vietnam Electricity, <https://www.evn.com.vn/d6/news/Bai-noi-chuyen-cua-Chu-tich-Ho-Chi-Minh-voi-can-bo-cong-nhan-Nha-may-Dien-Yen-Phu-va-Nha-may-Den-Bo-Ho-6-12-13840.aspx> (accessed August 31, 2020).
79. These thirteen DRV cadres took the following positions in the department: one director, one vice director, one chief of bureau of legislation [*pháp chế*], two alimentary staff, one typist, and seven inspectors and researchers. These are inferred from “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
80. UBQCHN-Ngành Lao động, “Báo cáo sơ kết công tác tiếp thu của Ngành Lao động (15/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III; UBQCHN-Sở Lao động, “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
81. Ibid. UBQCHN-Sở Lao động, “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
82. Bộ Lao động, “Báo cáo Tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị Tổng kết 18/8/55),” BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.
83. UBQCHN-Ngành Lao động, “Báo cáo công việc của cơ quan lao động ngày 12 tháng 10 năm 1954,” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
84. Ibid.
85. “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
86. Bộ Lao động, “Báo cáo Tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị Tổng kết 18/8/55),” BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.

87. “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
88. “Tổng kết kinh nghiệm tiếp quản các thành phố mới giải phóng ở Liên khu 3, Tả Ngạn, Hà Nội,” BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.
89. “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54),” BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.
- George Boudarel and Kim Ngoc Bao Ninh, and more recently, Ken MacLean and Christian Lentz, have written about the term *thắc mắc* and its various meanings. The content of this primary document makes me lean toward translating the term as “concerns/dissatisfactions” when referring to official policies. Georges Boudarel, *Cent fleurs écloses dans la nuit du Vietnam: Communisme et dissidence, 1954–1956* (Paris: Editions Jacques Bertoin, 1991); Kim Ngoc Bao Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945–1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); MacLean, *Government of Mistrust*; Lentz, *Contested Territory*.
90. “Chương trình công tác nội chính 1955,” PTT 101, TTLTQG-III.
91. “Quyết nghị của Hội nghị HĐCP về chính sách cụ thể về lưu dụng, sử dụng, lương bổng, và công tác chính trị đối với công chức mới (3-4/11/1954),” PTT 99, TTLTQG-III: “The majority of retained employees are mid-level and low-level intellectuals and belong to the petit-bourgeois class. Under the old regime, they were also abused and exploited, but in general they did not become enlightened and remained influenced by [enemy] propagandas and lies. Additionally, because they served an anti-national, anti-people regime, their conscience, perception, and attitude were erroneous and distorted. Some of them belong to the feudal class, bourgeois class, [and] high-level intellectual class, [and] were favored and corrupted by the old regime. Some belong to the petit-bourgeois class but were corrupted and persuaded to do anti-national, anti-people things.”
92. “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III.
93. The number continued to rise until put under control in 1959. See Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương IV,” in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ*.
94. “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III; Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương IV,” in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ*.
95. “Nghị quyết của Ban Bí thư số 17-NQ/TW Ngày 3 tháng 6 năm 1955 ‘Về công tác tổ chức năm 1955,’” VKDĐT, vol. 16 (1955), 320.

96. Ibid., 321.
97. “Quyết nghị của Hội nghị HĐCP về chính sách cụ thể đối với công chức mới (Phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ ngày 3-4 tháng 11 năm 1954),” PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.
98. Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương IV,” in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ*.
99. Thanh Chương, “Tình hình của đoàn cán bộ tiếp quản vào trước (9/10/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
100. Phan Việt, interview by author, March 6, 2019, Hà Nội.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid.
103. “Tình hình tư tưởng cán bộ tiếp quản và công chức lưu dụng (11-12/10/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
104. “Báo cáo tình hình công nhân viên và lương bổng, các khoản phụ cấp của công nhân viên Ty Công chính Thành phố Nam-Định,” BLD 60, TTLTQG-III.
105. “Tình hình cán bộ tiếp quản và về thủ đô (24/10/54),” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.
106. See note 7.
107. Phan Việt, interview by author, March 6, 2019, Hà Nội.
108. Ibid.
109. “Quy định về vấn đề thử dùng công chức mới ở TP Hà Nội,” PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by author, May 22, 2019, Hà Nội.
113. Alec Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945–1960* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2020), 299.
114. Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by author, May 22, 2019, Hà Nội.
115. Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 306.
116. Ngô Văn Hà, *Giáo dục đại học ở miền Bắc thời kỳ 1954–1975* [Higher Education in North Vietnam during the 1954–1975 Period] (Hà Nội: Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2010), 56–57. On the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm movement, see Peter Zinoman, “Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm and Vietnamese ‘Reform Communism’ in the 1950s: A Revisionist Interpretation,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2011), 60–100; Peter Zinoman, “Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm on Trial: The Prosecution of

- Nguyễn Hữu Đăng and Thụy An,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 1–28.
117. Ngô Văn Hà, *Giáo dục đại học ở miền Bắc*, 61.
118. *Ibid.*, 58, 61.
119. Phan Việt, interview by author, March 6, 2019, Hà Nội.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Vũ Ngọc Tiến, “Điều tra đời sống cư dân đô thị Bắc Việt Nam giai đoạn 1954–1960” [Inquiries into the Living Condition of Urban Residents in North Vietnam during the 1954–1960 Period], *talawas*, July 11, 2005. Vũ Ngọc Tiến did not provide a reason for why the government wanted a petition letter from the retained employees. My educated guess is that this saved the government from the bad reputation of backtracking on their promises and helped preserve a facade of democratic rule. In any case, not obtaining a signed “petition” would not have impeded the state from decreasing the salary of the retained employees. In another instance, Nguyễn Hiếu recounts that the government also tried to persuade him to write a petition letter with the content that he voluntarily “gifted” one of his family’s villas to the municipal authority—most likely to save the government from future disputes. Nguyễn Hiếu refused; then one day, the government “just took the house.” Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by author, May 22, 2019, Hà Nội.
122. Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by author, May 22, 2019, Hà Nội.
123. Nguyễn Thanh Bình, “Hải Phòng’s Urban Change, 1955–1986,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 1 (2013): 143.
124. Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by author, May 22, 2019, Hà Nội.
125. Nguyễn Văn, interview by author, March 18, 2019, Hà Nội.
126. *Ibid.*
127. *Ibid.*
128. *Ibid.*
129. It is important to remark here that DRV “free zone” cadres and staff had to serve as land reform cadres or to observe a land reform trial since the beginning of the land reform (1953). Hà Nội–based cadres seem to have been assigned to do so during the fourth and fifth waves of land reform—after the three-hundred-day period of free movement ended. I discuss this point further in the conclusion.

130. Ibid.
131. Nguyễn Văn, interview by author, March 18, 2019, Hà Nội.
132. Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path,” 283; Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, chapter 1.
133. Ibid.
134. Phan Việt, interview by author, January 24, 2019, Hà Nội.
135. Ibid.
136. In *Government of Mistrust*, Ken MacLean draws on James Scott’s discussion of “legibility” and argues that overcoming “illegibility”—“those processes that disrupt legibility and thus the ability of the state ‘to see,’ that is, to possess enough information to govern people, places, and things from afar”—was and remains a chronic issue in DRV state-making. In reestablishing sufficient legibility, the state has needed to apply different modes of documentation that are necessary but have also generated mistrust and doubts. MacLean, *Government of Mistrust*, 8.
137. MacLean, *Government of Mistrust*; Lentz, “Making the Northwest Vietnam;” Lentz, *Contested Territory*.
138. Balazs Szalontai, “Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955–56,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 398–400.
139. Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 11; William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 344.
140. Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, chapter 14.
141. Phan Việt, interview by author, January 24, 2019, Hà Nội.
142. Nguyễn Văn, interview by author, March 18, 2019, Hà Nội.
143. Ibid.