



VIETNAM

■ HO HO HO: The last laugh's on Ho Chi Minh

Another little dragon

HELL KNOWS NO SCORN LIKE A defeated superpower, as Vietnam knows very well. But, 20 years after trying to bomb the country back into the Stone Age, Washington now seems poised to call a halt to the war it continued to wage via economic embargoes and the IMF.

Economic analysts expect Vietnam to boom once the embargo is lifted; *New Statesman* reports that "no less an authority than Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew tells everyone who listens that Vietnam is the next giant to emerge in Asia".

The snag is that the country remains, officially, communist and committed to "building socialism". The constitution clearly declares that market mechanisms shall remain "under the management of the state" and follow "a socialist orientation".

The state also seems in no mood to indulge dissent. Earlier this year, eight intellectuals were sent to prison for forming a discussion group, the "Freedom Forum".

Free market theorists argue that the rise of a new middle class will soon spawn demands for political and civic freedoms. But *New Statesman* says the opposite may happen in Vietnam's case. "Everywhere in Saigon you can see party cadres, dressed neatly in grey slacks and pressed grey shirts. Each carries a portable phone and a paging device. Introduce yourself, and in return you get a card, which presents the bearer as a representative of a Japanese or Korean company.

"In fact, to get anything done in Vietnam, money has to cross hands and a party functionary somewhere gets a

rake-off. The middle-ranking party officials are the new class, not in the sense of a bureaucracy that appropriates to itself a handsome slice of a socialist state, but in the older meaning of becoming bourgeois by acting as profit-hungry agents of foreign capitalism."

The labour code seems impressively progressive, allowing workers to join trade unions and putting a ceiling on working hours. But these rights are being trampled underfoot in the race for a quick buck. There are reports of workers launching wildcat strikes to protest abuse by foreign employers.

The bad news is that the Vietnamese Confederation of Labour, in the mould of its counterparts in yesteryear's "existing socialist" countries, acts as overseer not defender of workers.

Whether party rank and file will resist the new colonisation by capital remains to be seen, especially when foreign investment seems to be the only exit from grinding, albeit war- and embargo-induced, poverty.

As the country courts foreign capital, the Vietnamese Communist Party will probably retain a central role, reminds *New Statesman*. "The indispensable condition for the economic success of the 'little dragons' has been an authoritarian state suppressing all opposition to capitalist accumulation.

"Having liberated the country from foreign armies, Ho Chi Minh's party will now police the transformation of Vietnam into a capitalist market economy under communist rule. The fusion of communist authoritarianism and market capitalism was begun by Deng Xiao Peing in China and is now being applied in Vietnam with a ruthlessness and speed that will again surprise the world."

— WIP correspondent

BOTSWANA

The eagle has landed

THE CONTROVERSIAL \$1-BILLION military airbase nearing completion at Molepole, 110 kilometres north of Gaborone (see *WIP* 85), will not cost Botswana a cent.

According to government sources, agreements reached with the US about five years ago ensure that US lease payments will cover running costs.

France, which provided loan finance for the project, is also understood to have contributed to funding. Payments by the US will help cover a large proportion of the building costs over an extended period.

However, both the US administration and Botswana government are coy about the extent of their collaboration, with Botswana especially intent on preserving its image of neutrality.

US involvement in Botswana has grown in the wake of the worsening security situation in Zaire where the large US airbase at Kamina is no longer considered secure. Botswana's central location and political stability have added to its appeal as a replacement.

— Africa Analysis