

technology and human resources carefully. Each programme was reviewed candidly and constructively. Shortcomings were discussed, and remedial steps were taken to accelerate progress in implementation and improve the quality and efficiency of projects.

● Chairman of the Council of Ministers Do Muoi talking with participants in the mid-term review.
Photo: DINH NGOC TRU (Vietnam Courier)

Text and photo
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Foreign opinion on Vietnam

A Scandinavian socialist in Vietnam

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I am Stein Tonnesson, a 36-year-old Socialist from the Scandinavian city of Oslo, capital of Norway. From 1969 to 1975, together with a whole generation of Scandinavian leftists, I wore a badge saying "SEIER FOR FNL" (Victory for the NLF). Now, in November 1989, I have come to Vietnam for the first time, in order to research the history of your great August 1945 Revolution.

For us on the Scandinavian left, the final victory of the Vietnamese anti-imperialist war in April 1975 was a great moment of joy. Socialist Vietnam enjoyed tremendous sympathy throughout the Nordic region.

Four years later, that sympathy had all but vanished. The Socialist countries in Asia were sending armies against each other. Thousands of refugees had taken to the sea. In our media, the name Vietnam and the nation of "boat people" became synonymous. On the left, we almost stopped talking about Vietnam, instead concentrating our solidarity work on the struggle of the peoples in Central America, Chile, South Africa and Palestine.

At the same time we started to see a lot of Vietnamese faces in the streets of our cities and in the corridors of our universities, although only in the departments of science and technology. Now there is a well-organized community of 7000 Vietnamese in Norway, around 5000 in Sweden and a similar number in Denmark. In economic terms they are doing well. Norway has now 300 highly qualified and hard-working

Vietnamese engineers, and many Vietnamese specialize in computing. But we rarely talk to them. They are generally anti-socialist, and the people in Scandinavia who sympathize the most with immigrants are often leftists.

The neutral Finnish and Swedish governments are able to withstand the pressure in 1979 from the US-organized policy of isolating Vietnam economically. They have maintained substantial aid programs and deserve moral and political credit for that. The Danish and Norwegian governments cut off all aid and reduced their contact with Vietnam to less than a minimum. That is a shame.

The "Đổi mới" policy, instated by the Vith Party Congress in 1986, the sweeping changes in your economic policy since then, the withdrawal of your forces from Cambodia in 1989, and the loosening up of restrictions on frank and direct discussions on all sorts of issues between your countrymen and foreign visitors, have opened up the possibility of rebuilding the contacts and sympathy lost. I sincerely hope that the Norwegian and

Danish governments will realize this.

One obstacle to comprehensive and lasting cooperation is the lack of knowledge in Scandinavia as to Vietnamese language, culture and customs. This obstacle could be overcome in an easy and most promising way: Reconciliation between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and our Vietnamese communities. They are longing to reestablish contacts with their homeland. They have technical skills and experience that you much need. Many of them master Vietnamese, English and one of the Scandinavian languages. They know your country's culture and habits. They would thus be invaluable assets to any aid program, joint venture or investment program.

I understand your reluctance. You need to avoid the return of individuals who indulge in clandestine activities with a view to overthrow your government. I also understand their reluctance. They rationalize their exile status with the image of a Vietnamese "police state". So far they have been reluctant to believe what they have heard about "Đổi

mới". Before going to Vietnam I was told that no Vietnamese citizen would dare to speak their mind to me.

Still your 65 million people need development now, and the Overseas Vietnamese can become a great advantage for your nation. All the foreign experts I have met in Hanoi tell me the same story: You have the organization. You have fairly accurate statistics and willingly provide information. You have people who want to learn and to work very hard. But you are in desperate need of capital, equipment and practical experience in implementing modern methods. Your own nationals abroad can form the necessary link. Time is ripe, not only for Denmark and Norway to join Sweden and Finland in providing assistance to Vietnam, but also for reconciliation with the refugees. Let's not leave it to the next generation.

Hanoi, November 1989