

French rule had started many years earlier. The greatest leader of the people of Vietnam was Ho Chi Minh. He had been engaged in organizing communist and the nationalist movement in Vietnam since soon after the end of First World War. The Vietnamese people under Ho Chi Minh's leadership resisted the Japanese occupation and organized a people's army called the Viet Minh. By the time the Second World War ended, the Viet Minh controlled a large part of Vietnam. In August 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed with Ho Chi Minh as President. However, the British troops as well as the troops of Chiang Kai-shek arrived in Vietnam on the pretext of completing the surrender of Japanese troops there. In October 1945, the French troops also arrived with the aim of restoring French rule. In 1946, the French army started fighting against the Viet Minh. They set up a government with Bao Dai, who headed the puppet government under French rule earlier, as the ruler. The war between the Viet Minh and France continued eight years. In 1954, the French forces suffered a severe blow at the hands of the Viet Minh at the fortress of Dien Bien Phu. The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu has become famous because a people's army without any sophisticated weapons had defeated the army of a powerful imperialist country. The debacle at Dien Bien Phu compelled the French government to start negotiations with the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In July 1954, an international conference was held at Geneva. It was agreed to partition Vietnam temporarily into North Vietnam and South Vietnam and to hold elections all over Vietnam within two years to unify the country under a single government. Cambodia and Laos, the other two countries of Indo-China, were made independent.

With the partition of Vietnam, another phase in the freedom movement in Vietnam began. The government that was established in South Vietnam, with the support of the United States, refused to abide by the decisions of the Geneva conference with regard to the holding of elections and the unification of Vietnam. It came to be increasingly regarded as being under the control of the United States which was opposed to the unification of

## **The Struggle in Vietnam**

One of the most heroic battles for freedom was fought by the people of Vietnam, a country along with Laos and Cambodia comprised Indo-China which had been under French colonial rule. After the French government surrendered to Germany many parts of Indo-China were occupied by Japan. The movement for the freedom of Indo-China from

Vietnam under the leadership of the communist party. In the early 1960s, uprisings broke out in South Vietnam against the government there. This was followed by the massive military intervention of the United States in Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of American troops were sent there with some of the most advanced weaponry to suppress the popular uprising. The war continued for a number of years. The South Vietnamese people led by the National Liberation Front carried on guerilla warfare. They had the support of North Vietnam. The American troops carried the war into North Vietnam. Incalculable damage was done to Vietnam as a result of the heavy bombings by American forces. The American troops also used weapons of bacteriological warfare. Vast areas of Vietnam were devastated and hundreds of thousands of people killed. The American forces also suffered heavy casualties.

The United States was almost completely isolated in the world over the war in Vietnam. Besides the opposition to this war by scores of governments, there was a worldwide movement of protest against the U.S. government and of solidarity with the people of Vietnam. The only movement of this kind had emerged in the 1930s in support of the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War and against Germany and Italy who were actively helping the fascists in Spain. The opposition to the war grew in the United States itself on an unprecedented scale. Thousands of Americans refused to be drafted in the U.S. army and many American soldiers deserted. No other single issue had united millions of people all over the world as the war in Vietnam. However, the U.S. government continued the war even though it was clear that she could not win it.

Early in 1975, the war took a decisive turn. The armies of North Vietnam and of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam swept across the country routing the American supported troops of the government of South Vietnam. In January 1973, the American troops had begun to withdraw from Vietnam. During the war in Vietnam, 58,000 of them had lost their lives. By 30 April 1975, all the American troops had withdrawn and the capital

of South Vietnam, Saigon, was liberated. North and South Vietnam were formally united as one country in 1976. The city of Saigon was renamed Ho Chi-Minh City after the great leader of the Vietnamese people who had died a few years earlier in 1969.

The emergence of Vietnam as a united and independent nation is an historic event in the history of the world. A small country had succeeded in winning her independence and unification in the face of the armed opposition of the greatest power in the world. The help given to Vietnam by the socialist countries, the political support extended to her by a large number of Asian and African countries, and the solidarity expressed by the peoples in all parts of the world had helped in bringing victory to the people of Vietnam.

The war in Vietnam had also spread to Cambodia. In 1970, the government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown and a puppet government was installed there. The troops of the USA and South Vietnam had carried the war to Cambodia on the ground that the Vietnamese were receiving their supplies from bases in Cambodia. By the time the United States withdrew from the war in 1975, a party which called itself Khmer Rouge had taken control of Cambodia under the leadership of Pol Pot. The government of Pol Pot established a regime of terror in Cambodia and started following a policy of genocide against its own people. The estimates of people murdered by the Khmer Rouge vary from one million to three million. In 1979, Pol Pot's government was overthrown with the help of Vietnamese troops. However, the war in Cambodia continued as the Khmer Rouge still had some areas under its control inside the country. It also operated from across the border with Thailand. In the meantime, three groups, including the Khmer Rouge and the group led by Norodom Sihanouk, came together in opposition to the government in Cambodia which was supported by Vietnam.

Peace was restored in Cambodia recently. The United Nations brought the various warring factions together and an agreement was signed under the auspices of the United Nations. The

Vietnamese troops were withdrawn from Cambodia. In 1993, elections were held and a coalition government was formed. The Khmer Rouge, however, remained outside the government and its troops continued their armed attacks in some parts of the country.