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Vietnam making inroads with Doi Moi and tourism



By David Trujillo

How has the Vietnam government confronted the issues of inflation, low productivity, economic mismanagement, the increased income gap and decreased foreign aid from other countries? The answer is Doi Moi.

The Vietnamese government under the current leadership introduced Doi Moi, a new policy of economic reforms. This set of economic reforms, initiated in 1986, in part opens up the country to foreign trade and investment. It legalized and encouraged private entrepreneurship in a range of enterprises; dismantles agricultural collectives and returns the land to families to farm; and deals with interest rates and currency. There is much more to Doi Moi as the major economic reform policy for Vietnam.

These decisions regarding reforms haven't been made overnight. In fact, the Vietnam government as early as 1980 recognized the difficult economic situation it faced. In response, the government introduced modest market-oriented reforms, mostly in agriculture. Vietnam has since become an agricultural powerhouse. Today it is the world's second largest exporter of rice, and one of the world's leading exporters of coffee, pepper, rubber, and other agricultural

commodities.

Following a period of strategic planning, today the Vietnamese government is moving forward under Doi Moi with a set of decisively free-market reforms with a "socialist orientation."

Vietnam Tourism

In addition to this important economic reform, Vietnam has moved forward with increased tourism under the direction of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism.

T H I S W E E K :

- **Vietnam making inroads with Doi Moi and tourism**
- **Janitors and farm workers: Two strikes remembered**
- **Mass movement for democracy is being born**
- **Revolución**
- **Aging face of the American labor force**

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One excellent example of this cultural activity in Vietnam's is the famous Water Puppetry show that our U.S. delegation had the opportunity to see while in Hanoi.

The women puppeteers are highly skilled and talented. They wear traditional white Ao Dai

Halong Bay is one of the world's most beautiful locations.

Vietnamese clothing while playing a folk music composition opening the Traditional Water Puppetry Show. A group of these eminent artists are part of the Thang Long Puppet Theatre.

The evening began with a woman playing a Dan Bau, a Vietnamese monochord, a traditional one-string musical instrument. It created a very soothing and relaxing sound that was used to introduce the Water Puppetry show. Water Puppetry dates back to the 11th century.

Other performers included singers telling the stories, and musicians playing traditional instruments: the four-string lute, drum cymbals, two sided drum known as trong con (the rice drum), flutes, and gongs. These are all used to help tell the stories acted out by the puppets surrounded by water.

This is just one type of cultural activity that the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) helps to promote. Our delegation understood that the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism is responsible for the state's management of culture, family, sports, and tourism and for the management of public

services in these fields under Vietnamese law.

Tourism is an important component of Vietnam's economy. Last year, nearly 8 million tourists visited the country. The country has diverse natural resources, beautiful landscapes, cultural historical relics, and domestic tourist markets. Vietnamese tourism is continuing to grow; recent areas of growth include hotels, restaurants and tourist sites. One area that MCST hopes to expand on is bringing the foreign film industry further into Vietnam. There have been a few movie companies filming in Vietnam, but the government hopes to attract more filming.

The U.S. delegation had the opportunity to visit Halong Bay in the Gulf of Tonkin. This is one of the world's most beautiful locations, covered with over 1,600 islands where limestone mountain towers seem to touch the soft blue sky and isolated beaches remain pristine as the ocean slowly washes up on the sand. This entire area is recognized as a world heritage area by UNESCO.



David Trujillo contributes to Peoplesworld.org

Janitors and farm workers: Two strikes remembered

By Rev. Jim Conn

I don't tear up very often. Tears probably were drummed out of me as a child. But standing there on the sidewalk a few weeks ago, I found myself with tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat. Before me, almost a thousand janitors wearing deep purple Service Employee International Union T-shirts lined up to march from a Beverly Hills park to the high-rise offices of Century City.

The day celebrated the time, 25 years ago, when the people who clean buildings walked off their jobs. In a campaign called Justice for Janitors, they had marched nonviolently between those tall buildings, only to find themselves facing a phalanx of Los Angeles Police Department officers, batons swinging. Dozens were hurt, but the TV footage made citywide news, and a tide turned.

Suddenly the unseen low-wage workers made the front page. Instead of being ignored, they found themselves lauded as heroes, and after continuous demonstrations over a 20-day strike, they had a union contract. They got a raise, had a

health plan for their families and gained protections on the job from harassment and wage theft. Most importantly, they gained a voice in how their work was done.

The day and the timing felt auspicious. It was March 31st, Cesar Chavez's birthday, a day noted by people across California and around the world for the groundbreaking work he did to bring recognition to people who labor in the fields pruning grape vines, weeding rows of vegetables, picking and packing fruit.

I remembered my own small role in that effort asking people to boycott grapes or certain brands of wine and produce. And so 25 years ago, the mostly Latino janitors stood up for justice among the skyscrapers that signify wealth and power. And they won.

Standing on a curb in one of the wealthiest cities in the world, looking on as a group of working people prepared for yet another march, my heart moved and my eyes filled with tears. I was watching how justice gets made.

Justice then and now and the fight for our voices to be heard in a world plagued with wealth and power.

Mass movement for democracy is being born



By Larry Rubin

Determined to start building a mass movement for democracy, this week people came to Washington from every state in the union and every walk of life.

They staged sit-ins, held teach-ins, gathered in rallies and marched to the Capitol. Some had marched here from Philadelphia at the beginning of the week.

They're angry that our democratic system is being undermined by voter suppression laws and the legalized ability of billionaires to control American politics.

But, as Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food and Water Watch, said "... a mass movement can build the political power necessary for taking back our democracy and ousting the plutocrats who've stolen it."

Saturday, some of the nation's leading experts on voter suppression laws and the effects of money in politics participated in "teach-ins."

Ari Berman, author of *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, pointed out that, "in the 22 presidential debates, not once has the erosion of voting rights been discussed.

"Yet," Berman continued, "there have been some 180 new voting restrictions adopted by 41 states in the past two or three years. These include ending early voting, disenfranchising ex-felons, and requir-

ing sometimes hard-to-get IDs.

"The whole purpose of these restrictions is to make voters older and whiter, to stop the fastest growing demographic groups from voting."

Derek Cressman, author of *When Money Talks*, concluded a teach-in by urging the crowd not to be afraid of being arrested to fight for democracy. "It's not scary," he said, "it can be fun."

Throughout the week, some 650 people were arrested for sitting on the steps of the Capitol building and in the rotunda to dramatize their demand that Congress pass four bills that would create a public campaign financing system, put in place strong voting rights protections and overturn the Supreme Court's decision in the *Citizens United* case that allows corporations to spend unlimited sums in elections.

Union leaders and heads of Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening organizations have pledged to participate.

"This is just the beginning," adds Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen. "We're going to reach out to working people. We're going to say: 'you're right to be angry about low wages, no job security and poor healthcare. But many of you are looking in the wrong places for solutions.'

"Join our movement to take back the government. This is our country ... our time."

Many of you are looking in the wrong places for solutions.

Worked to death: The aging face of the American labor force

By Donald Donato

In the dirty old Boston of my boyhood, to see an older man walking down the street early in the morning probably meant he was on his way to the bakery, or to the café to gossip with his buddies. If it was a Thursday or Friday, he might buy some fruit at Haymarket and make his way back home in time for lunch. A generation of largely immigrant workers aged at home with the help of their children, were able to retire with Social Security, and many could count on union-bargained pensions. Today, only the wealthy can afford to live in the once-working class neighborhoods of Boston's pricey housing market, and if there are seniors in the streets early in the morning, they're likely going to a full-time job just like their younger neighbors.

Despite the fact that a tidal wave of older adults over 65 is already crashing down on lawmakers in state legislatures and Capitol Hill, many leaders are choosing to hide their heads in the proverbial sand rather than plan to meet the needs of low income older adults over the long term. While the low-wage-no-benefits economy continues to flush the super-rich with even more of the world's wealth, health care spending for the average senior citizen has skyrocketed. Still, out of the fires of this immense challenge, working people have a unique opportunity to combine the strength of older adults, labor, and smart political leadership, to advocate for both radical changes and real politics. A system which pushes frail, older people back to work to pay for profiteering health care is a system the American working class can no longer afford.

Revolución

Fidel Castro Ruz

Es sentido del momento
histórico;
es cambiar todo
lo que debe ser cambiado;
es igualdad y libertad plenas;
es ser tratado y tratar a los demás
como seres humanos;
es emanciparnos por
nosotros mismos
y con nuestros propios esfuerzos;
es desafiar poderosas
fuerzas dominantes
dentro y fuera
del ámbito social y nacional;
es defender valores en los que se cree
al precio de cualquier sacrificio;
es modestia, desinterés,
altruismo, solidaridad y heroísmo;
es luchar con audacia,
inteligencia y realismo;
es no mentir jamás
ni violar principios éticos;
es convicción profunda
de que no existe fuerza en el mundo
capaz de aplastar
la fuerza de la verdad y las ideas.
Revolución es unidad,
es independencia,
es luchar por nuestros sueños
de justicia
para Cuba y para el mundo,
que es la base de nuestro patriotismo,
nuestro socialismo
y nuestro internacionalismo.

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