

**February 19, 1959**  
**Record of Premier Zhou Enlai's Talk with  
Vietnamese Government Economic Mission**

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**Summary:**

Zhou Enlai and Le Thanh Nghi review Chinese economic aid to North Vietnam.

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Top Secret

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Record of Premier Zhou Enlai's Talk with Vietnamese Government Economic Mission  
(Premier has yet to review and approve)

Time: From 2:00 to 3:05 p.m., 19 February 1959

Place: Xihua Hall

Persons met: All members of the Vietnamese government economic mission in Beijing  
(list attached); Pham Binh, charge d'affaires ad interim, Embassy of Vietnam in China

Accompanying persons: Ye Jizhuang, Ji Pengfei, Li Qiang, Bai Xiangyin, Chen Suliang

Interpreter: Zhang Dewei

Recorder: Gang Zhuchun

Premier: Has everything been negotiated?

Le Thanh Nghi: Yes. Both sides have had a good discussion and prepared well. We can sign today.

Premier: Has there been any difficulty?

Le Thanh Nghi: In the negotiating process, we did run into some difficulties. It was mainly due to our lack of experience. With the help of the Chinese comrades, everything has been resolved.

Premier: That day I heard Chairman Ho Chi Minh. He reported in the National Assembly how much Vietnam's industry would grow in the next three years.

Le Thanh Nghi: Yes. In last year's National Assembly, he talked about some of the numbers for the Three-Year Plan, newly-established enterprises, and their production.

Premier: Were construction projects discussed in the report?

Le Thanh Nghi: Most of the projects discussed in China were mentioned in the report.

Premier: No projects were taken out in between. You even added some. Originally, you proposed 67 projects. Now there are 49, with another two added. What about the projects taken out?

Le Thanh Nghi: It's not a big problem. Some have increased, and some have decreased.

Premier: How much do you estimate that industry will grow in three years?

Le Thanh Nghi: It will grow by more than 50 percent.

Premier: By 1960?

Le Thanh Nghi: It will be 1960 relative to 1957.

Premier: Then, the projects we are negotiating are not for the period from 1959 to 1962.

Le Thanh Nghi: Right. When we were in Vietnam, we planned for the completion of most of the projects in 1960 and for a small portion of them in 1961.

Premier: Whether or not you are affected by our Great Leap Forward, everything will take a year or two to complete.

Le Thanh Nghi: Right! We have been somewhat affected. However, we also calculate it this way: what takes one year for China takes a year and a half or two years for us.

Premier: Yes. It is a different situation here. You have some comrades who have been to Shanghai and toured there. Shanghai has some factories that can be built in a year, but the comrades we introduced did not clearly explain the situation to you. Speaking of steel pipes, for example, Shanghai has some established foundations. There are many machinery factories capable of producing equipment, and there are technicians as well. Therefore, it is indeed somewhat easier to build a steel-pipe factory, which is possible in a year. In the Pudong district of Shanghai, the construction of some of the new factories in Yangshupu is relatively quick. The cold-drawn steel pipe factory that you visited last year is built in an alley. Because of this factory's facilities, Shanghai's steel mills can themselves all manufacture, and there are technicians and workers. So, they can indeed do it very quickly. Without such conditions, it would take at least two or three years. If there were no steel, it would not necessarily be done in three years. Vietnam is lacking in its base and cannot make steel. If you want to make steel, you have to engage in prospecting, mine the ore, and transport the ore. You also have to mine the coal, wash the coal, and make the coke. It is also necessary to have a machine factory to manufacture the equipment. Only then can you make iron and steel. If you want to make cold-drawn pipes, this is something for three years later. Therefore, without such a base, one cannot imagine it happening very quickly. The people whom we introduced only spoke quickly, without speaking of the conditions. Let us take light industry, for another example. There is a sugar mill, for example. The equipment is simple, but it requires raw material, sugar cane, then there are such issues as production and transportation. Therefore, it is not that simple. It takes more than a year. With simple industries, at times it can go a little faster, but the base must have heavy industry. China thus can leap forward. First, historically there have been some bases of heavy industry. Second, the First Five-Year Plan's construction laid the foundation for heavy industry. In this regard, the Soviet Union has been a great help to us in this regard. Without this base, there would be today no Great Leap Forward. Therefore, when you are engaged in industry, you must do something in several basic industries. The steel joint venture negotiated this time with annual production of 100,000 tons will be able to produce steel in 1961. It will be able to produce pig iron in 1960. In this way you will have a bit of a base in steel. In addition, I hear that the Soviet Union has helped you build a mid-sized machinery repair factory, but what is its annual production capacity?

Le Thanh Nghi: It is a mid-sized factory that mainly produces some tools. Its production capacity can also be increased and it can produce some other goods.

Premier: Are they machine tools?

Le Thanh Nghi: It can produce both [illegible] and planers.

Premier: How many tons can it produce in a year?

Le Thanh Nghi: Three thousand tons.

Premier: That is not small in scale. It will be better when you have steel yourselves. Is it a machinery factory?

Le Thanh Nghi: In addition to this one, there are several small machinery factories.

Premier: Do you have a train repair factory?

Le Thanh Nghi: Yes.

Premier: How about a ship repair plant?

Le Thanh Nghi: As it turns out, we do have one, but it is small and can only repair small motorboats. In these negotiations, one of the projects was a shipyard.

Premier: Do you have an engine repair factory?

Le Thanh Nghi: We do, but not large ones. We have learned a great deal in visiting China. The Chinese comrades have proposed to us to build some factories. In our plans are some subjectivist things, mainly our insufficiently assessing our domestic situation and the complexity of economic construction.

Premier: Naturally, one cannot say that you do not have subjectivism. We, too, have subjectivism. Both our countries are young in respect to industry. Last year China leapt forward. This year, we must again leap forward. There are still many issues for which we are seeking a solution and studying. Your ability to grow 50 percent over three years is no small thing, with a pattern of a possible 15 percent growth per year. In your first-stage construction, you must build some bases in heavy industry. In addition, you must master technology. In the past there was little industry in Vietnam. This area has been somewhat lacking. To engage in industry first of all requires political confidence. The Soviet Union succeeded in engaging in industry. China has been engaged in it. Korea, too, has been engaged in it. Vietnam, too, can engage in it. You must learn from the eldest sibling, the Soviet Union. The Vietnamese people's enthusiasm is great. Once you have confidence, you must also master technology. Engaging in industry is highly complicated and technical. Also, as agriculture will be mechanized in the future, you certainly must master technology. The training of Vietnam's technical workers is in training classes at the factory or at secondary and other technical schools.

Le Thanh Nghi: We have a relatively large number of ways to train workers, both in school and at the factory. There is an industrial college, which is a five-year system. Each sector has established some technical schools. Some workers have some training in technical school; some train on the job at the factory. In addition, we also send some cadres to learn from specialists in China and in the Soviet Union. As there are not many cadres, there are also not many persons to study with the specialists. In addition, we also send some cadres to the Soviet Union and China for study and apprenticeship abroad.

Premier: Do your students also participate in some labor?

Le Thanh Nghi: They also do that. We started last year. The students participate in some integrated labor, production, and study.

Premier: With secondary and other technical schools, you can accelerate the mastery of technology.

Le Thanh Nghi: We have only just begun learning from China's experience.

Premier: Well, you have to resolve it yourself on the basis of Vietnam's situation. Are there now demobilized persons transferring to industry?

Le Thanh Nghi: There are. Some of them are transferred to industry, some to basic construction, and others to agriculture.

Premier: In agriculture, are they going to the northwest to open up wasteland?

Le Thanh Nghi: Some of them go to open up wasteland. Others return to the countryside.

Premier: When did you start to open up wasteland?

Le Thanh Nghi: Some have gone to open up wasteland. Others have gone to farms and factories.

Premier: The comrades who have come from the south have no family here. Is there something we can do?

Le Thanh Nghi: It is very difficult now, and there is no good solution for it. There have been individuals who have made it here, coming through the blockade line. In general, they still are unable to come.

Premier: Can they come by sea?

Le Thanh Nghi: It would be very difficult. The blockade is formidable.

Premier: Have there been any who have come by fishing boat?

Le Thanh Nghi: They have not made it through. Near the line of demarcation, some have made it through, but south Vietnam's control is very tight. In our negotiations this time, we resolved many very important issues. First, we signed with China a long-term trade agreement. In addition, China is providing not a little industrial equipment, 49 projects plus 2 projects for a total of 51, among which not a few, such as steelworks and a shipyard, are part of the basis for the construction of heavy industry. In light industry, there are factories for textiles, paper, and gunnysacks. This provides a basis for Vietnam to build socialist industry. This assistance of the Chinese comrades to our country, when our country is actively completing the Three-Year Plan and socialist revolution, is highly significant. This assistance will be of great benefit to our completing the tasks of the Three-Year Plan and socialist revolution. We feel that, in the process of negotiating, the Chinese comrades helped us a great deal. In particular, the Communist Party of China's Central Committee helped us a great deal. The Comrade Premier's direct instructions and help, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Trade's minister and comrades and the State Planning Commission's comrades, helped us a great deal. Because of this, these negotiations have reached consensus on both sides.

Premier: We are only just making the leap forward, our economic power is still not great, and we still cannot offer a great deal of help. In five or ten years, we will have grown stronger, and at that time we will be capable of giving more help. In turn, we hope that the Vietnamese comrades can very quickly master technology and develop their own industry.

Le Thanh Nghi: Now the agreement can be signed, and henceforth there will be construction and production. We feel that in these areas there remain not a few difficulties. As the Comrade Premier has said, we are still young and have little experience. We also hope that China gives us even more help and sends some more specialists to guide us.

Premier: We must certainly do what is stipulated in the agreement. We hope that the Vietnamese comrades, too, will do their best to overcome difficulties.

Le Thanh Nghi: As the Comrade Premier has said, we ourselves must first of all have confidence. We are confident in regard to the construction of industry, will certainly overcome difficulties, and achieve our construction with China's assistance. We believe that, with the hard work of our country's people and the help of the Chinese comrades, we can quickly build.

Premier: The main thing, still, is to rely on yourselves.

Le Thanh Nghi: Taking advantage of this meeting with the Comrade Premier, as the representative of the Vietnamese Party and Government, I express our gratitude to the Chinese Party and Government, particularly to the Comrade Premier. China's assistance to us at this time is of particularly great significance. The Ministry of Foreign Trade's minister and comrades and the State Planning Commission's comrades, too, have given us a great deal of help, and I would like at this time to express our thanks to them.

Premier: You are very polite! We will sign it at seven o'clock this evening.

Vietnamese Government Economic Delegation Name List:

Delegation Leader: Le Thanh Nghi, director, Office of Industry, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) Office of the Prime Minister, and Minister of Industry

Deputy Delegation Leader: Ly Ban, vice minister, Ministry of Foreign Trade

Delegation Members:

Hoang Trinh, director, Planning Bureau, Ministry of Industry

Trinh Tam Tinh, director, Supply Bureau, Ministry of Construction

Member: Dang Thanh Van, commercial counselor, Embassy of Vietnam in China

Nguyen Ngoc Vien, director, Supply Bureau, Ministry of Industry

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