***Political Economy in Vietnam.* By Kathleen Gough**. Berkeley, California, USA: Folklore Institute, 1990. 474 pp.

This book is possibly one of the most comprehensive on Vietnam to be published in recent years. It covers Vietnam's history — from its origins in 3000 BC to 1975 — its society, economy, politics and foreign relations, including the most recent developments in its relations with the non-communist countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Gough's data and analysis on economic problems, such as industrialization programmes, agriculture, energy and unemployment, are impressive. Her comparative study of various constitutions of Vietnam — 1946, 1959 and 1980 — gives a good insight into political developments in that country.

An anthropologist and a feminist, Gough also pays sufficient attention to social issues, such as problems in health care and women's rights and roles. In all, the Vietnamese spirit and soul have been well presented, showing the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the "imperialists", which included China, France and the United States, and how at present the Vietnamese are attempting to reconstruct their country. The author's compilation of materials, from her five years of research, and documentation are exceptional.

In a way, the book reads like a document of facts, using everyday language and avoiding academic jargon. The style is, of course, in line with what Gough indicates in her preface: "This book is intended chiefly for students and general readers rather than academic specialists". The author was probably thinking about the first-time reader who needs a firm grounding in the general facts about Vietnam. Ironically, however, it is this very general reader — who might uncritically depend only on this source of reading material — for whom this book is not appropriate, since it is to a large extent one-sided. This one-sidedness is reflected not only in her passionate interest in Vietnam but also by the fact that much of the study is based on material obtained from Vietnamese officials and Vietnamese government papers.

Clearly, Gough went to Vietnam in the 1980s with her fixed mind-set about "good old Vietnam" — the Vietnam she used to defend during the 1970s. She takes government statements at face value and does not put in context whatever she came across. If there is such a distinction between advocacy and scholarship, Dr Gough does not do well in the latter respect. Having been a "fighter" for the Vietnamese cause against the United States since the Vietnam War in the 1970s, the author is very sympathetic towards the Vietnamese, and fails to differentiate between serious scholarship and personal feelings. In a way, much of her writing reads like Vietnamese propaganda. To a large extent, one gets the impression that the book does

well in promoting the Vietnamese socialist cause and exonerating whatever the Vietnamese communist regime might have done to its people, such as its political prisoners. To be objective in presentation is vital in writing about Vietnam. For example, a balanced presentation should include views from those considered "enemies" of Vietnam because, rightly or wrongly, developments in Vietnam have always been a response to other countries in the region. Vietnam's strategic interests are, of course, beyond the Vietnamese border and its invasion of Cambodia was not, as Gough claimed, only a retaliation of the Khmer Rouge's incursions into Vietnam. The invasion was part of the larger historical and strategic interests of Vietnam as a power on mainland Southeast Asia. But unless one takes the view from the other side of the Vietnamese border, one tends to promote one cause at the expense of a more objective coverage and analysis.

So, while this book cannot be treated as serious scholarship, it is also of questionable quality for educating people in the United States and Canada, where the author resides, and where she has constantly encountered public ignorance about the situation in Vietnam during the 1970s. If the Americans and Canadians have been ignorant about the situation in the Indochinese country, the book, if used as educational material, will only plunge them into further misunderstanding.

The book seems to represent the "last batch" — having been published in 1990 — of the kind that has been written by Marxist social scientists, whose scholarly validity has been adversely affected by the end of the cold war and the recent collapse of the Soviet Union. While Gough still indulges herself in Vietnamese socialism, the Vietnamese leaders themselves have already questioned many of their socialist principles, and they are now embarking on a new path which might divert the country from that set by Vietnam's old-guards, with whom the author seems to identify closely.

In conclusion, whatever the case, Dr Gough should be praised for the enormous task of completing the book. She might be a staunch defender of the "old Vietnam" (and she might be disappointed with the emerging new Vietnam, given her past image of that country), but she is intellectually sincere and straightforward in her views.

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