

*Imperialists Divided: The Views of Tonkin's Colons before 1914**

by John F. LAFFEY**

Imperialist and anti-imperialist movements inevitably engendered their own stereotyped images, heroes and villains, slogans and clichés. Imperialists took pride in a purported unity of effort which extended from their metropolitan ranks to the colonies where brave military men, enlightened administrators, selfless missionaries, dynamic entrepreneurs and dedicated settlers either defended themselves against barbarous savages or endeavoured to civilize recalcitrant natives. Anti-imperialists, reversing the images, have exalted the heroic freedom fighters who led the struggles of the courageous and generous masses against rapacious colonialists. Such images, however radical their opposition, do not survive unless they contain some elements of truth. But these very elements of truth, along with opposed ideological convictions, have allowed too many historians to mistake rhetoric for reality and, consequently, to overlook the complexity of the imperial experience. One should be able to recognize, for example, that imperialism spawned an extraordinary amount of human suffering without falling back, in blame or praise, on the image, even within a single national context, of a unified imperialist community. The different groups which composed such a community certainly shared a common stake in the domination of other peoples, but they were fully capable of working at cross-purposes, of disparaging each other's motives, and, indeed, of hating each other intensely. Such at least appears to be the lesson to be derived from the case of the French colonization effort in Tonkin before 1914.

Reflecting on his experience as Governor General of Indochina, Paul Doumer boasted that he had refused to read the local press.¹ Whatever one's view of Doumer and the fiscal burden he bequeathed to the colony, that decision should arouse some sympathy. Though it may be natural for administrators, colonial and otherwise, to dislike journalistic criticism of their doings, the French newspapers of Indochina do not make for plea-

* A grant from The Canada Council allowed me to complete this article, and I wish to thank that body for the aid. Professor Dolores Gold of the Psychology Department at Concordia University kindly supplied me with several references at a time when I hoped to offer a more analytical interpretation of *colon* psychopathology: I trust she will forgive my subsequent conclusion that neither social psychology nor psychoanalysis has become scientific enough to be of much use to the historian. Professor Ella Laffey of McGill University took time, as always, from her own important work to provide criticism and encouragement. For a discussion of the economic dimensions of colonization in Tonkin see John F. LAFFEY, "Land, Labour and Law in Colonial Tonkin Before 1914," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, II, 2 (Winter, 1975): 223-63.

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¹ Paul DOUMER, *L'Indo-Chine française (Souvenirs)* (Paris: Vuibert et Nony, 1905), p. 119.

sant reading: they carried racist aspersions on the indigenous peoples, impractical suggestions designed to forward the interests of their readers, and castigations, justified or not, of metropolitan and colonial policies and personalities.² The *Avenir du Tonkin* carried these tendencies farthest. It spoke for Tonkin's *colons*. Owned and managed by men with personal stakes in colonial agricultural development, the *Avenir du Tonkin* drew upon the services of *colon* contributors and found its most attentive audience in the ranks of the *colons*. Ranging in tone from peevish querulousness to vitriolic hysteria, it reflected the enormous frustration engendered by the relative failure of the effort at agrarian colonization in Tonkin. No group, aside from that of the *colons*, escaped its shafts. Its depiction of the Vietnamese deserves separate treatment. This article will be concerned with its treatment of other segments of the imperialist community. Governors General, colonial bureaucrats and magistrates, metropolitan imperialists, all came under attack. The onslaught intensified whenever one of its targets dared to reply and whenever someone had the temerity to criticize the *colons* themselves. At one in a determination to retain and to exploit Tonkin, the French imperialist community fragmented when it came to the question of how best to accomplish these goals. A survey of the contents of the *Avenir du Tonkin*, remarkably consistent despite several changes in management, sheds light on the lines of fracture within that community, suggests that imperial failure, quite as much as imperial success, can breed vice, and poses questions about the pathology of a group willing to identify its members with the persecuted Christ.³ Unlike Christ, however, the *colons* never believed in turning the other cheek, and they were in a position to make life more difficult for their fellow imperialists.

The *Avenir du Tonkin* functioned as the protectorate's *Journal Officiel* until 1889, and in this early phase of its life carried items like the lyrics of a "Chant national composé par les mandarins et les hommes du peuple tonkinois en honneur de M. Parreau, Résident général en Annam et au Tonkin:"

Powerful country of France,
You produce intelligent men.
The Spirit of War is your strength.

² Some grasp of the temper of the Indochinese press can be obtained from the "Revue des journaux" section of the *Revue Indo-Chinoise*. In 1904 this journal changed to a more scholarly format and, while increasing in value as a source for the more profound French analyses of the societies of Indochina, lost value as a source for the more immediate and cruder expressions of colonial opinion.

³ For the Christ reference, see Henri LAUMONIER, "Non Sens," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 12 February 1905, p. 1. Unfortunately, the copy of the *Avenir du Tonkin* microfilmed at Paris' Bibliothèque Nationale has a gap between 11 April 1907 and 21 January 1910. Though it would be of interest to have *colon* reactions to events like the 1908 attempt at poisoning the Hanoi garrison, these events do not seem to have affected substantially attitudes already formed. The gap would have been a more serious obstacle to the argument presented here if the reformist policies growing out of the Russo-Japanese War had not withered in face of events like the 1908 incident. The gap, however, has affected the structure of the article in one fashion: a discussion of the attitudes of private metropolitan interests has been introduced between the treatments of political developments in France.

To a high degree, you possess the art of governing peoples.
 To our weak country, fallen into decadence,
 You give your powerful support in saving it from fatal ruin.⁴

But once the *Avenir du Tonkin* had ceased to perform official functions, praise for administrators vanished from its pages. Convinced that they possessed "the art of governing peoples," the *colons* denied the same "art" to the administration. Indeed, a hatred of bureaucracy soon took root among the *colons*. It sprang from troubles on the land: for a variety of reasons in each case, the plantations of Cochinchina flourished, while those of Tonkin stagnated.⁵ Hardly inclined towards self-criticism, Tonkin's *colons* blamed the administration for failing to aid their agricultural endeavours. Their attacks on the administration in this regard actually had scant justification: it distributed a sizeable amount of land to them, set up a labor code aimed at the control of rural proletarians, and ignored the innumerable *colon* violations of the decrees governing land, labor and fiscal policies. With the impact of the Russo-Japanese War, the administration did shift to a somewhat more rigorous line in its dealings with the *colons*, but even then it backed away from the idea of easing tensions with the Vietnamese through the repurchase of lands conceded to the *colons* and, on the whole, continued to dream of the development of a more healthy plantation economy dominated by French nationals. But the administration had to set some limits on the more exaggerated of *colon* claims. The continued tranquillity of an area where "pacification" rested on a fragile base required such a course of action. The political stake in effective control, as well as the centralizing tendencies embedded in the French bureaucratic tradition and the administrators' sense of belonging to a corporate body with rights and privileges of its own, dictated a refusal to entertain the *colons'* demand that they be regarded as the "intermediaries" between the colonial government and the indigenous peoples of Tonkin.⁶ The *colons* responded to this denial of their claims to a quasi-feudal status with vituperation directed against the Governors General, the lesser administrative personnel and specific bureaucratic policies.

Colon reaction to Governors General tended to move through a fixed cycle: inquisitive interest in a new appointee, a warm welcome for him, supplications, increasingly critical remarks, bitter attacks, and, after his departure, a nostalgia for the days of his rule as the same pattern unfolded with his successors. Looking back with regret to the once abused Jean-

⁴ "Chant national composé par les mandarins et les hommes du peuple tonkinois en l'honneur de M. Parreau, Résident général en Annam et au Tonkin," *ibid.*, 1 September 1888, p. 6.

⁵ In 1914 one hundred and forty-nine planters qualified as electors for the Chamber of Agriculture of Tonkin and Northern Annam. In the same year Europeans held 136,096 hectares of concession land in Tonkin, with very little of it in cultivation. "Liste des électeurs de la Chambre d'agriculture du Tonkin et du Nord Annam," *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine*, 13 April 1914, pp. 597-600; Henri BRENIER, *Essai d'atlas statistique de l'Indochine française. Indochine physique — Population — Administration — Finances — Agriculture — Commerce — Industriel*(Hanoi-Haiphong: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1914), p. 197.

⁶ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "L'Erreur Initiale," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 20 April 1905, p. 1.

Louis de Lanessan (June 1891 — December 1894), the *colons* extended no sympathy to his successor, Armand Rousseau (March 1895 — December 1896): "We will rob nobody of illusions by remarking that a government does not exist in Indochina at the moment, though we have a Governor."⁷ Lanessan, at least in retrospect, possessed the merit of having roused bureaucratic ire by favoring the *colons*.⁸ But Rousseau looked better when compared with Paul Doumer (February 1897 — March 1902).⁹ Doumer, a pivotal figure in the colonial development of Indochina, constituted something of a special case. The *colons* recognized that his appointment lay in the desire of metropolitan political circles to rid France of him, and they feared that, given his political importance, any clash between Doumer and the Minister of Colonies would harm Indochina.¹⁰ But a new appointment always raised *colon* hopes, and in a passing moment of euphoria they decided: "We have had educators, financiers, diplomats, engineers, etc... we finally have an agriculturalist."¹¹ The honeymoon lasted about a year. The *colons* then discovered that they disliked Doumer's review of concession policy.¹² His program of indirect taxes and monopolies roused even more bitter complaints. This Governor General, moreover, had not bothered to disguise his distaste for the local press.¹³ The memory of his rule went a long way to blunt criticism of his successor, Paul Beau (October 1902 — February 1908), but eventually a *colon* did make the inevitable unfavorable comparison with Doumer.¹⁴

It still took the rule of Albert Sarraut (November 1911 — November 1913), seen by the *colons* as the representative of a totally misguided colonial reformist movement in France, to revive much real affection for Doumer.¹⁵ Sarraut's efforts to introduce some degree of reform in Indochina provoked an altogether remarkable threat from the *Avenir du Tonkin*:

...as is written in the republican catechism, when the law is transformed into an instrument of oppression, revolt becomes the most sacred of duties.

But, short of a general revolt, it will always be possible for a citizen ruined by governmental autocracy to introduce onto the scene citizen Browning, as the editors of *La Guerre Sociale* put it.¹⁶

Clumsy irony lay behind the threat, for its author was a royalist, little enamored of republican catechisms and certainly more given to reading *L'Action française* than *La Guerre Sociale*. In speaking of general revolt and assassination, even in crude jest, the *Avenir du Tonkin* had ventured into

⁷ "La Politique de M. de Lanessan," *ibid.*, 1 April 1893, p. 1; "Ostracisme," *ibid.*, 3 May 1893, p. 1; Paul DE VAREILLES, "Anarchie gouvernementale," *ibid.*, 10 June 1896, p. 1.

⁸ KIM, "Pas entêté du tout," *ibid.*, 27 June 1896, p. 1.

⁹ C.B., "Gouverneur Benoiton," *ibid.*, 7 May 1898, p. 1.

¹⁰ VIDEO, "Appréhensions," *ibid.*, 6 February 1897, p. 1.

¹¹ Jacques MORRAS, "Un horoscope," *ibid.*, 3 March 1897, pp. 1-2, p. 2.

¹² C.B., "Les Concessions agricoles," *ibid.*, 2 April 1898, p. 1; C.B., "La Commission des Concessions," *ibid.*, 6 April 1898, p. 1.

¹³ C.B., "Presse et Gouverneur," *ibid.*, 6 July 1898, p. 1.

¹⁴ C.B., "Lettres d'un Colon," *ibid.*, 6 December 1906, p. 2.

¹⁵ Henri LAUMONIER, "Vers le pouvoir absolu," *ibid.*, 10 October 1912, p. 1.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

treacherous waters, and, recognizing the dangers, began to repair its relations with Sarraut even before the Vietnamese assassination of two French officers in Hanoi in 1913 drove home the folly of thoughtless references to violence.¹⁷

Like the Governors General, the more minor administrative personnel came and went with some frequency. The *colons* complained of this endless circulation of administrators, but whereas they had to take into consideration the personalities and larger policies of the imperial proconsuls, they could content themselves with a static portrayal of the bureaucrats in their demonology.¹⁸ Seen from the *colon* perspective, the sins of the *fonctionnaires* were many. They distrusted the *colons* and interfered with the colonization effort.¹⁹ They put the interests of the natives ahead of those of the *colons*.²⁰ They dared to portray themselves as the friends of the natives and to paint the *colons* as the enemies of the Vietnamese. In France the administrators attacked the *colon* as "an exploiter of the native, never satisfied and ill-humoured, a wrecker."²² In Tonkin these "minor feudal magnates, vomited into our possessions by the Ecole Coloniale," tried to deny the *colon* the most elementary rights.²³

Such sentiments, all too obviously tied to the *colons'* private interests, threatened to be self-defeating when taken in and of themselves. *Colon* publicists, consequently, cast their nets farther afield. They

¹⁷ Henri LAUMÓNIER, "Principes de colonisation," *ibid.*, 8 January 1913, p. 1.

¹⁸ "Le Séjour Colonial," *ibid.*, 10 November 1900, p. 1. The bureaucrats subjected to *colon* attacks usually remained nameless, but the case of Host Van Vollenhoven, who served as Sarraut's Secretary General, constituted an exception. The *colons* attacked him on a variety of grounds: his non-French birth, his name which "smelled a little of cocoa," his youth, his education at the Ecole coloniale, his service as a Minister of Colonies' *chef de cabinet*, his symbolizing the intrusion of African specialists into the Indochinese administration, and his alleged status as "the protégé of M. Clémentel, of the *Temps* and of international banking." In pursuing the unsuccessful campaign against him, the *Avenir du Tonkin* sought, for reasons to be discussed below, to find common ground with the bureaucrats on the scene who might be expected to resent the new appointee. "Le nouveau secrétaire général de l'Indochine," *ibid.*, 3 July 1912, p. 2; Henri LAUMÓNIER, "Tous Héros," *ibid.*, 6 July 1912, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ch. RÉMERY, "À la Chambre d'Agriculture," *ibid.*, 5 August 1896, pp. 1-2; FLICK, "John Drunkard and Co, Planteurs au Tonkin," *ibid.*, 27 July 1898, p. 1; "Résidents et Colons," *ibid.*, 31 August 1899, p. 1; X.X.X., "Colons et Fonctionnaires (1^{er} article)," *ibid.* 17-18 July 1905, p. 1; X.X.X., "Colons et Fonctionnaires (2^e article)," *ibid.*, Henri MOB, "Dossiers Secrets," *ibid.*, 16 May 1906, p. 1; Louis BONNAFONT, "L'Administration en Indochine (II)," *ibid.*, 1 August 1912, p. 1.

²⁰ Louis BONNAFONT, "Lettre Ouvert à M. Clémentel, Ministre des Colonies," *ibid.*, 4 May 1905, p. 1.

²¹ Paul XEM, "Curieux Pays," *ibid.*, 19-20 March 1906, p. 1.

²² Henri LAUMÓNIER, "Courrier de Hanoi," *ibid.*, 23 February, 1907, p. 1.

²³ MATGIOI, "Aidons nous les uns les autres," *ibid.*, 8 March 1907, p. 1. Attacking the Ecole coloniale earlier, the *colons* had ranged themselves behind demands in Lyon and Marseille for the creation of provincially based colonial schools designed to serve the needs of different segments of the empire. The passage of time did not temper their hostility to the Parisian school; one of their publicists remarked in 1907: "One harvests as one sows, one has sown the Ecole Coloniale, one has harvested nullities." "Une École d'Administrateurs," *ibid.*, 22 December 1898, p. 1; MATGIOI, "Le Faisceau," *ibid.*, 19 January 1907, p. 1; "Enseignement pratique colonial," *ibid.*, 21-22 August 1911, p. 1.

charged the bureaucrats with simple incompetence: "It is well known today that the administrators, or residents, ignorant of native affairs and the Vietnamese language, are absolutely incapable of governing a province."²⁴ Victims of routine, an obsessive interest in minutiae and secure employment, the bureaucrats, in the *colons'* view, hardly led a real life, for such a life primarily involved combat.²⁵ The administrators, moreover, had an unfortunate tendency to multiply, and the *colons* feared that the French colonies would come to resemble those "South American Republics where there are as many officers as soldiers."²⁶ Pursuing this line of attack, one of their spokesmen outlined a primitive form of Parkinson's Law: "Once upon a time one said that everytime there is a function, there is a *fonctionnaire*; today one might say: everytime there is a function, there are ten *fonctionnaires*, and everytime there are *fonctionnaires* without functions, one creates functions."²⁷ Though such criticism was often justified, the picture of the average bureaucrat which emerged from it ended in caricature: he remained featureless, aside from his many vices, the most notable being his tendency to persecute hardworking and patriotic *colons* who knew much better than he how to handle the subject populations.

The *colons* made a better case in attacking specific administrative policies. Any policy which diverted attention away from agriculture roused their ire. Here they could pursue their own interests while making claims on behalf of the Vietnamese. Complaining in 1896 that no portion of a recent government loan had gone into agricultural development, they pointed to the current famine in Tonkin as evidence that the administration had done nothing for the mass of the native population.²⁸ The major loan secured by Doumer in 1898 did not impress them:

What matters the natives dead of famine? The ruined *colons*? The bureaucrats whose advancement has been delayed? The speculation on the piastre? Life costlier for all? The merchants and industrialists without business? The colonization of Tonkin stationary for two years? What matters any of this since M. Doumer has returned with the funds?²⁹

Doumer's railways should be reserved for the future, and money should be invested in irrigation and other works of immediate usefulness.³⁰ The administration's failure to provide adequately for irrigation continued to disturb them.³¹ In 1906 a *colon* spokesman flatly charged that nothing had been done for agriculture during the twenty years since the conquest.³²

²⁴ C.B., "Mandarins and Résidents," *ibid.*, 5 December 1896, p. 2.

²⁵ "Les Cahiers coloniaux," *ibid.*, 22 March 1900, p. 1; B., "La vie assurée," 2 April 1900, p. 1.

²⁶ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Les Favoris," *ibid.* 6 January 1906, p. 1.

²⁷ Henri MOB, "Nos Fonctionnaires," *ibid.*, 18 February 1906, p. 1.

²⁸ VIDEO, "Et l'Agriculture," *ibid.*, 14 March 1896, p. 1; VIDEO, "La Famine au Tonkin," *ibid.*, 22 April 1896, p. 1.

²⁹ M.N., "De la Colonisation (3^e article)," *ibid.*, 10 November 1898, p. 1.

³⁰ Paul DE VAREILLES, "Lacunes de l'emprunt," *ibid.*, 5-6 December 1898, p. 1.

³¹ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Irrigation," *ibid.*, 6 August 1905, p. 1.

³² VIATOR, "Ressaissons-nous," *ibid.*, 15 March 1906, p. 1.

The *colons* also bitterly attacked the tax burden imposed upon the Vietnamese. In 1896 the *Avenir du Tonkin* castigated the administration for not remitting taxes in famine-struck Bac Giang province and for compounding this mistake by arresting "the canton chiefs, the mayors and the notables of these unfortunate villages."³³ Doumer's regressive fiscal program infuriated the *colons*. They charged him with bleeding Tonkin white.³⁴ But the confirmation of their dire prophecies about the program brought some twisted comfort: the *colons*, while expressing regrets and concern, found a certain grim satisfaction when a clash between agents of the alcohol monopoly and villagers left three Vietnamese dead.³⁵ The onslaught on the taxes and monopolies hardly slackened with the passage of time.³⁶ Just as in the case of the administrative failure to do more for agriculture, the attacks upon the fiscal policies could be justified in objective terms. But here too self-interest entered the picture. The *colons* worried about the threat to security posed by the tax burden.³⁷ Moreover, they also found in this issue an opportunity to present themselves as the defenders of the Vietnamese, whom they often maligned in other contexts, against a blundering and rapacious bureaucracy.³⁸

This role fitted neatly into the *colon* self-image. At its most metaphorical the vision of self took the following form: "... living in the bush, in the midst of the natives, he resembles... one of the great and robust oaks of France, transplanted here, on a foreign soil, in the midst of a forest of bamboo; he dominates the scene, he sees what happens near and far, and, if he does not always have the freedom to say what he thinks, he is always free to think of what he sees."³⁹ From the *colon* perspective, here lay a major cause of the difficulties with the administrators:

By the very fact that he dominates the scene, he troubles some; one does not dare, however, to cut him down, and he always remains upright, proudly raised above the bamboo, braving squalls and tempests which still do not prevent him from seeing what goes on. He sees in particular the bamboo forest... bend under the rain of vexations and continual injustices, which destroys some bamboo. These are the natives succumbing under the enormous weight of badly collected and badly divided taxes, and of arbitrary corvées, without speaking of the multiple other charges.⁴⁰

But despite all the metaphorical strength, impotence could not be disavowed:

In their distress the natives appeal to the *colon*, who witnesses their suffering, who understands them, who wishes to succour them, appeal to him to vindicate their just claims and to render them justice. But he cannot do it. He has no influence with the powers that be and remains a simple spectator of the

³³ "Rigours incompréhensibles," *ibid.*, 2 May 1896, p. 1.

³⁴ SIMPLEX, "Et après la saignée blanc???", *ibid.*, 3 August 1898, p. 1.

³⁵ "Les monopoles de M. Doumer," *ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁶ Louis BONNAFONT, *ibid.*, 4 May 1905, p. 1; VIATOR, "Bilan," *ibid.*, 25-26 September 1905, p. 1; Paul XEM, "Encore l'Impôt," *ibid.*, 1 April 1906, p. 1.

³⁷ VIATOR, *ibid.*, 15 March 1906, p. 1.

³⁸ Henri LAUMONIER, "La Douane," *ibid.*, 29 October 1905, p. 1; VIATOR, *ibid.*, 15 March 1906, p. 1.

³⁹ RUSTICUS, "L'œil du colon," *ibid.*, 30 July 1905, p. 1. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

war waged on the yellows by the whites. The only right of the *colon* is summed up in a single word: to see, to see the misery and the discontent of the people growing daily while waiting to witness revolt. Then he will see many other things. He will see himself attacked by everybody simultaneously and accused of having exasperated the people by his inhuman deeds and of being the cause of the revolt. Such is the lot of the *colon*.⁴¹

The imagery, wooden in more than one respect, conveys something of *colon* frustration, but, more important, such a depiction of the *colon*'s condition was self-serving: it reinforced a heroic self-image while allowing the *colons* to indulge in an even greater self-deception.

A more objective analysis, of which the *colons* were incapable, might have suggested that the winds of imperialism had warped and stunted these French "oaks" and that, had the agricultural efforts been more successful, the sinking of their twisted roots into the soil of Tonkin would have drawn sustenance away from the bamboo forest just as effectively as the exactions of the bureaucrats. Nothing better indicates the basic thrust of *colon* attitudes than their views on colonial legal practices. They insisted on defining justice as the protection and extension of their own interests to the exclusion of all other interests. Their most immediate complaints centered on the difficulties involved in litigation with Vietnamese sharecroppers who defaulted on the advances made to them. The *colons* believed that the costs of such legal action nullified its effectiveness.⁴² One commentator estimated that costs in a case involving a claim of 160 francs against a defaulting sharecropper ran as high as 95.42 francs.⁴³ Another *colon* explained that, if the disputes between planters and sharecroppers were seldom that important in themselves, the sheer number of these conflicts posed serious problems: were a *colon* to seek legal redress in each case, he might have to travel one hundred to one hundred and fifty kilometres each time, only to discover often enough that appeal to the law could achieve little for him.⁴⁴ The *colons* charged, in brief, that the legal system did not answer to their economic needs.

They, however, did not leave the matter there. In their view, colonial legal structures and practices ranked with the neglect of agriculture and the tax program as gross errors made by misguided and incompetent fellow imperialists. As legal institutions and procedures changed in time, so too did *colon* criticism of their details. Yet the main lines of criticism remained constant. The *colons* had no wish to be judged by native mandarins, about whom they remained ambivalent.⁴⁵ At the same time they had scant respect for French magistrates and legal officials. The centralizing tendencies

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Syndicat des Planteurs du Tonkin," *ibid.*, 21 April 1901, pp. 3-4, p. 3.

⁴³ "La colonisation agricole et la justice au Tonkin," *La Quinzaine coloniale*, 25 July 1905, pp. 449-50.

⁴⁴ Eugène DUCHEMIN, "La colonisation agricole au Tonkin," *Revue Indo-Chinoise*, 24 November 1902, pp. 1095-1102, 1099-97.

⁴⁵ P. THOMÉ, "Note sur les Rapports des Colons Agriculteurs avec l'Administration indigène," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 9 May 1896, p. 3; Jean D'ANNAM, "Justice provinciale," *ibid.*, 30 November 1905, p. 1; L. DES CHARMETTES, "Le peine de mort et les assesseurs indigènes," *ibid.*, February 17, 1906, p. 1.

of the magistrates disturbed them.⁴⁶ They also attacked the organization of the colonial judicial service, which often enough did send its magistrates scurrying from one end of the empire to the other. Prolonged residence in a single area, of course, would have better allowed the magistrates to become familiar with indigenous customs and language, but the *colons* transformed a valid point in an all too characteristic fashion: "When one brings to the bar a Frenchman, a Dahomean and a Vietnamese, all guilty of the same offense, he (the magistrate) must know how to distinguish the man from the savage, and the savage from the malevolent monkey."⁴⁷ Apparently incapable of making such distinctions, the magistrates committed what the *colons* could only regard as crime: "There seems to reign in the colonial magistrature, as presently composed, a tendency to favor the native against the Frenchman."⁴⁸ The case of a M. Testard confirmed their fears about the judicial service. Testard had attacked and wounded a Vietnamese who allegedly had cried. "All Frenchmen are pigs." During the course of this former soldier's second trial the prosecutor, a M. Lévy, dared to refer to Testard as "cowardly." Testard received a suspended sentence of twenty-four hours in prison, an excessive penalty in *colon* eyes, and, refusing to forgive Lévy's characterization of him, one of their publicists gratuitously dragged into the *Avenir du Tonkin* a rhapsody on how French soldiers treated Jews in Algeria.⁴⁹

French justice provoked other charges. Objectively, it may have made little sense to require Vietnamese participants in French judicial proceedings to swear the proper French oath, but *colon* ridicule of the requirement possessed distinct tones of its own: "After having subjected the natives to the justice of regular French tribunals, certainly one of the most stupidities committed here is administering to the Vietnamese, morally and physically degenerate people, the solemn oath of honest, free, educated generous men."⁵⁰ Continuing along the same lines, this critic posed a question: "Would it not be more rational to administer to monkeys the oaths of monkeys, and to Europeans their own oaths?"⁵¹ He concluded: "to administer our oath to the Vietnamese, who are absolutely incapable of comprehending grandeur and sanctity... is to serve strawberries in champagne to swine."⁵² The concern with distinctions between the colonizers and the colonized also emerged in the protest against Europeans, charged with or convicted of crimes, being taken publically through the streets of Hanoi, for this practice allegedly exposed all Europeans to Vietnamese ridicule.⁵³ Indeed, for the same reason, the *colons* wanted Vietnamese spectators excluded from judicial proceedings involving Europeans.⁵⁴ They

⁴⁶ VIDEO, "La Justice au Tonkin," *ibid.*, 21 March 1896, p. 1; VIDEO, "La Justice française et les Indigènes," *ibid.*, 11 April 1896, p. 1.

⁴⁷ M.N., "Magistrats Coloniaux," *ibid.*, 2 October 1897, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Paul DE VAREILLES, "Jury," *ibid.*, 23 September 1896, p. 1.

⁴⁹ MONES, "Tous Français," *ibid.*, 10 February 1897, pp. 2-3, p. 3.

⁵⁰ M.N., "Le Serment," *Ibid.*, 9 June 1897, p. 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ "Cour criminelle du Tonkin," *ibid.*, 31 March 1900, p. 1.

⁵⁴ B., "Joli Résultat," *ibid.*, 2 December 1900, p. 1.

would also have liked to remove native interpreters from cases pitting Europeans and Vietnamese against each other. Having defined interpretation as "grand and... noble" work, they decided that it required "knowledge and qualities hard to find in an Asiatic."⁵⁵ Momentarily forgetting their opposition to the multiplication of European personnel, they suggested the creation of "a corps of European interpreters" like that which existed in Algeria.⁵⁶

An insistence on repression runs through *colon* ruminations on the law. They wanted the French code to provide harsher punishments and regretted the inclination of the judiciary to dispense with the death penalty.⁵⁷ Hence, they greeted the wave of repression unleashed by Sarraut after the 1913 bombing incident with delight.⁵⁸ On the whole, however, the *colons* believed French law to be insufficiently rigorous. They welcomed, therefore, those occasions when their compatriots took the law into their own hands.⁵⁹ More significantly, dissatisfaction with French legal procedures led the *colons* to discover initially unsuspected virtues in traditional Vietnamese legal practice. Among its merits could be counted the principle of collective responsibility.⁶⁰ Traditional corporal punishments appealed to them even more: the *colons* argued that, not only did the Vietnamese understand such penalties better than prison, but that they actually preferred them, for prison sentences deprived their families of support.⁶¹ The latter point may have had some limited validity, but the *colons* chose to rest their case on the nature of Vietnamese character: "The Vietnamese, essentially a liar, lacking moral sense, has no concept of honor such as we understand it. A penal condemnation brings him no sense of shame. Only corporal punishment acts directly on the native's mind."⁶² Expressed in a variety of forms, the refrain remained the same: "The yellow's mentality is made in such a way that he only respects what he fears."⁶³

The climate of *colon* opinion, most clearly expressed in attitudes toward the law, brought them into the battle being waged in France between the proponents of Assimilation and the increasingly powerful advocates of Association.⁶⁴ Hardly sophisticated ideologues themselves, the *colons* appropriated the arguments of metropolitan theorists to justify positions they

⁵⁵ "Les interprètes près les tribunaux," *ibid.*, 18 August 1899, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, See also B., "Une Plaie," *ibid.*, 25 July 1900, p. 1.

⁵⁷ LISBETH G., "Justice et Sécurité," *ibid.*, 24 November 1899, p. 1; A.B., "Meurtre d'un Européen à Ninh-Binh," *ibid.*, 12 August 1900, p. 1; Paul XEM, "Répression en Indo-Chine," *ibid.*, 6-7 November 1905, p. 1; L. DES CHARMETTES, *ibid.*, 17 February 1906, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Pour la paix publique," *ibid.*, 19-20 May 1913, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Paul HISSEMANN, "Cambrioleurs et Assassins," *ibid.*, 11 July 1906, p. 1.

⁶⁰ LISBETH G., *ibid.*, 24 November 1899, p. 1.

⁶¹ E. DE RINXANAIS, "Opinions: La Justice en Indo-Chine," *ibid.*, 21-22 1906, p. 1; Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Peines corporelles," *ibid.*,

⁶² X., "Suppression des peines corporelles," *ibid.*, 24 November 1901, p. 1.

⁶³ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Justice et Fermeté," *ibid.*, 1 January 1905, p. 1.

⁶⁴ For a general treatment of these theories during this period, see Raymond F. BETTS, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

had already reached on their own. But they threw themselves into the struggle with gusto. The Assimilationists, of course, constituted the enemy. These misguided spirits continued to cling to the mistaken idea of racial equality.⁶⁵ From the defects of the legal system to the 1913 bombing incident, Assimilation could be blamed for much of what had gone wrong in Tonkin.⁶⁶ The theorists of Association, men like L. de Saussure and Gustave Le Bon, with their stress on racial differences, made far more sense to the *colons*.⁶⁷ Yet, as the *colons* learned, Association could be interpreted in more than one fashion. They would come to complain: "Les Combes et les Pelletan export jetsam to Indochina, the Vietnamese pays to maintain these people, and that is called Association."⁶⁸ But behind such a self-satisfying fusion of concern for the Vietnamese with political prejudice lurked a more fundamental question: "Will there be a policy of Association for the *colon* as there is for the Vietnamese?"⁶⁹

Etienne Clémentel, a member of the second and third Rouvier cabinets (January 1905 — March 1906), became the first Minister of Colonies to call publically for the implementation of Association. Either because it had become so accustomed to the contrary tendency or because of some more mundane error, the *Avenir du Tonkin* initially portrayed him as demanding Assimilation.⁷⁰ The correction of this mistake, however, did not make the *colons* any fonder of Clémentel. In general they disliked Ministers of Colonies: to take but two cases, they charged Trouillot, one of the several Colonial Ministers of the Méline ministry (April 1896 — June 1898), with managing to destroy the work of ten years in three months, and they dismissed Milliès-Lacroix, who became Minister of Colonies in the Clemenceau ministry (October 1906 — July 1909), because he had never given any thought to the colonies before assuming the ministry and, perhaps more significantly, for being "too much the perfect bourgeois to be a good colonial."⁷¹ But Clémentel especially enraged the *colons*. He arrived at his ministerial post as metropolitan criticism of the *colon* attitudes towards the Vietnamese mounted as a result of the sobering Russo-Japanese War, and, in response to such criticism, he dared to project a visit to Indochina in order to organize the defences of France's Far Eastern possession

⁶⁵ B., "De l'égalité des races," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 14 January 1900, p. 1.

⁶⁶ E. DE RINXANAIS, *ibid.* 21-22 May 1906, p. 1; Albert DE POUVOURVILLE, "Les Dangers de l'Enseignement Français en Asie (suite et fin)," *ibid.*, 27 August 1913, pp. 2-3, p. 2.

⁶⁷ G.M., "Psychologie et Assimilation," *ibid.*, 15-16 May 1899, pp. 1-2; B., "L'Esprit d'Association," *ibid.*, 15 September 1900, p. 1; B., "Les Civilisateurs," *ibid.*, 1 November 1900, p. 1; G., "Assimilation à outrance," *ibid.*, 17-18 December 1900. The *colons* had much less use for another theorist of Association, Jules Harmand. He had served in Tonkin, and the dislike was mutual. VIATOR, "Bas, les Masques," *ibid.*, 12 November 1905, p. 1; Jules HARMAND, *Domination et colonisation* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1919), pp. 103-04, 123-25, 131-32, 139, 141-42.

⁶⁸ L. BONNAFONT, "Les mots vides," *ibid.*, 20 October 1905, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Paul XEM, "Curieux Pays (II)," 24 March 1906, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Alf. Meynard, "Politique nouvelle," *ibid.*, 15-16 May 1905, p. 1.

⁷¹ "Une Ministre de 3 mois," *ibid.*, 3 November 1898, p. 1; MATGIOI, "La Politique Coloniale du Nouveau Ministre," *ibid.*, 1 December 1906, p. 1; MATGIOI, "La Marche à la Justice," *ibid.*, 8 February 1907, p. 1.

and to settle "the differences which exist between the *colons* and the natives."⁷² The *colons* hardly considered a Minister of Colonies to be a fit judge of their affairs. Their invective, consequently, reached new depths: they painted "Ngûyen van Kêlémentêlê" as the "partisan of association and the victim of disassociation."⁷³ They offered their own explanation of the source of his delusions: "On account of resting amourosly on a small neo-cohinchinese breast, M. Clementel has thought to divine the aspirations of the Vietnamese soul."⁷⁴ The latter effort disturbed the *colons* more than the former. For them, the real problem with Clémentel's policy lay in his interpretation of Association: "Under the coloring of Association, we raise the Yellows, we lower the Whites."⁷⁵

The *colons* received another shock when Georges Clemenceau, who had opposed Jules Ferry's acquisition of Tonkin years before, came to power in 1906. The *Avenir du Tonkin* published an impressive catalogue of his anti-imperialist activities — a call for the abandonment of Corsica in 1871, an attack upon French rights in Egypt in 1877, opposition to the intervention in Tunisia in 1881, the blocking of French cooperation with the British in the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882, the obstruction of action in regard to Madagascar in 1885 and, of course, his role in bringing Ferry down in 1885 — before it posed the question of on whose behalf he worked.⁷⁶ Having managed to suggest that he acted as a British agent, the *colon* journal did not overlook his entanglement in the Panama scandal.⁷⁷ But Clemenceau resembled William Gladstone in at least one important respect: willing to denounce colonial acquisitions when out of power, neither statesman showed himself inclined to renounce them when holding office. By 1906 Clemenceau could not be ranked among the active anti-imperialists, a group upon which the *colons* expended remarkably little venom. The Clemenceau ministry appeared to the *colons* to pose a more subtle threat than aggressive anti-imperialism. They expected it to pursue an African course: "...it is good taste in M. Clemenceau's entourage to play at being the African and to forget Tonkin."⁷⁸ Having little use for Clemenceau's Minister of Colonies, Milliès-Lacroix, the *colons* found what comfort they could in the notion that France would have its real Colonial Minister in Stephen Pichon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁹

Politicians, the "*barnums politiques*," could create real problems for the *colons*.⁸⁰ But colonial affairs seldom occupied the center of the Third

⁷² Henri LAUMÔNIER, *ibid.*, 20 April 1905, p. 1.

⁷³ Paul XEM, "Curieux Pays!," *ibid.*, 19-20 March 1906, p. 1; EDGI, "Un factum," *ibid.*, 19-20 February 1906, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Hola! Doucement donc!," *ibid.*, 24 November 1905, p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ The author mistakenly put the bombardment of Alexandria in 1883. Jean D'ANNAM, "Les mots fétiches (III), Le Bloc," *ibid.*, 27 December 1906, p.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ MATGIOI, *ibid.*, 8 February 1907, p. 1. The appearance of Onésime RECLUS' *Lâchons l'Asie, Prenons l'Afrique* (Paris: Librairie universelle, 1904) had increased *colon* sensitivity to the dangers of an African orientation within the imperialist movement.

⁷⁹ MATGIOI, *Avenir du Tonkin*, 8 February 1907, p. 1.

⁸⁰ LE PLÉBEIEN, "Politique d'association par irrigation," *ibid.*, 25 March 1906, p. 1.

Republic's political stage. In order to wield some influence in France, the *colons* had to work with and through the metropolitan business communities possessed of a stake in empire and the colonial lobbies patronized by these communities.⁸¹ On occasion the *colons* mobilized the support of these metropolitan groups, but more often, at best, the contradictions within the imperialist movement made relations difficult and, at worst, *colon* views and activities alienated the more powerful of the metropolitan imperialists. Like other French colonials, Tonkin's *colons* suffered from and protested against the neo-mercantilist orientation of the mother-country's tariff policy.⁸² In their opposition to the tariff structure they were at one with such metropolitan free traders as the Lyonnais Ulysse Pila, the man sometimes described as the real "viceroy" of Indochina, but at the same time they attacked his Magasins généraux de Haiphong as monopolistic and accused the Pila family of manipulating Haiphong's Chamber of Commerce on behalf of its own interests.⁸³ Possible conflicts of interest led to other ambivalent reactions: the *colons*, for instance, attacked French banks for investing in Siberia at a time when Upper Tonkin stood ready for development, but they also feared large scale investment in Tonkinse agriculture.⁸⁴

Essentially little men caught up in a larger, menacing economic world, the *colons* struggled to survive and to prosper in that world. Far more successful in surviving than in prospering, they nursed all the rancours felt by men, engaged in an active life thousands of miles from France, for the colonial *rentier* comfortably ensconced in metropolitan cities like Paris, Marseille and Lyon. The issue of the awarding of decorations and ranks in the Legion of Honor to metropolitan imperialists became a veritable obsession with the *colons*: in their perspective, the parasites bathed in glory while the true heroes went unrewarded.⁸⁵ The government often provided these honors in connection with the Colonial Expositions held in France, undertakings which the *colons* considered excessively expensive and total-

⁸¹ For a discussion of the importance of the business communities, see John F. LAFFEY, "Municipal Imperialism in Nineteenth Century France," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 1 (June, 1974), 81-114.

⁸² Ch. COURRET, "Tyrannie rouennaise," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 18 October 1890, p. 1.

⁸³ "Les Magasins généraux," *ibid.*, 25 August 1888, p. 1; Ch. COURRET, "Simple truc," *ibid.*, 21 March 1891, p. 1. Despite such criticism, Pila did intervene with Governors General on behalf of agrarian development. See John F. LAFFEY, "Les racines de l'impérialisme français en Extrême-Orient," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XVI (April-June, 1969): 282-99, p. 293; and John F. LAFFEY, "Municipal Imperialism in France: The Lyon Chamber of Commerce, 1900-1914," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 119, (February, 1975): 8-23, p. 20. For the description of Pila as "viceroy," see Joseph BUTTINGER, *Vietnam, A Dragon Embattled*, 1 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 546.

⁸⁴ Louis RAYMOND, "Un Espoir," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 7 March 1896, p. 1; M.N., "De la colonisation (4^e article), *ibid.*, 14-15 November 1898, p. 1; Paul DE VAREILLES, "Compagnie de colonisation," *ibid.*, 9 December 1898, p. 1.

⁸⁵ B., "À propos de décorations et de rubans," *ibid.*, 15 June 1900, p. 1; CAS-SANDRE, "L'Exposition Coloniale de Marseille," *ibid.*, 2 March 1905, p. 1; Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Satisfactions morales," *ibid.*, 24-25 February 1913, p. 1; Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Expositions," *ibid.*, 2 March 1913, p. 1.

ly useless.⁸⁶ The Marseille Exposition of 1906 especially infuriated them. Here one of the most sacred of *colon* taboos had been violated: "The saddest part is that the metropolitans' habitual frivolity has produced a deplorable effect on the natives sent there. Never have French women given proof of such indecency..."⁸⁷ But neither sexual fear, a common accompaniment of racism, nor the thwarted mania for decorations prevented the *colons* from grasping some of the real dynamics of French imperialism, and hence they occasionally sounded like social radicals. The *Avenir du Tonkin*, reflecting upon Victor Augagneur's move from the mayoralty of Lyon to the Governor Generalship of Madagascar, charged with more than a little truth: "...it is not a man, it is a city that one names Governor General, it is Lyon that, through the influence of its great industry, has bent the interests of policy in favor of the interest of its capitalists."⁸⁸

Up to a point the major metropolitan imperialist organizations, bodies tied to groups like the Lyonnais capitalists, tolerated the *colons*. These organizations, after all, had a stake in maintaining that all went well or at least could go well within the empire. Both the *Comité de l'Asie française* and the *Union Coloniale* devoted attention to instances of *colon* success in Tonkin.⁸⁹ But both organizations also proved willing to discuss the need for the colonial government to repurchase the concessions and to distribute the lands regained to the Vietnamese.⁹⁰ These metropolitan organizations, moreover, felt much less constraint than the administrators when they came to the consideration of the faults of the *colons*. The Russo-Japanese War convinced them of the need to bring the *colons* under firmer control.

Arguing that "reason and sentiment, interest and justice" dictated a greater solicitude for the needs of the peoples of the empire as "the more efficacious and the surer way of gaining their sympathies and, consequently, their fidelity", Charles Depincé warned in the pages of the *Union coloniale's Quinzaine coloniale* that the administrators' efforts to achieve such results could be "paralyzed, even thwarted" by the attitudes of the *colons* towards the natives.⁹¹ He singled out Tonkin as the area of the empire where expressions of "mistrust and hate" for the natives assumed the most constant and violent character.⁹² Henri Laumônier, at once a *colon* and the most racist of Tonkin journalists, replied to Depincé: "Annamitophobes!

⁸⁶ CASSANDRE, *ibid.*, 2 March 1905, p. 1; LAUMÔNIER, *ibid.*, March 2, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Courrier de Hanoi," *ibid.* 21 February 1907, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Alf. MEYNARD, "Courrier de Hanoi," *ibid.*, 21 October 1905, p. 1. For Lyonnais imperialism during this period, see LAFFEY, *Proceedings*. It would be interesting to explore the question of whether the note of social radicalism was later incorporated into an imperial fascism. The *colons* could be seen as occupying a status very roughly comparable to that of the Central European *Mittelstand*.

⁸⁹ "La mise en valeur d'une concession au Tonkin," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française* (June 1901), pp. 110-11; "Colonisation — La colonisation européenne," *La Quinzaine coloniale*, 10 December 1907, p. 1083.

⁹⁰ "Le rachat des concessions au Tonkin," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française*, 25 September 1904, p. 438; "Les concessions au Tonkin," *La Quinzaine coloniale*, 10 January 1905, pp. 4-5.

⁹¹ Ch. DEPINCÉ, "Annamitophobie," *ibid.*, 25 November 1904, pp. 697-700, p. 697.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 698.

and why? Because we refuse to play the role of victims, refuse to allow ourselves to be pillaged and assassinated."⁹³ Shortly thereafter the *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française* carried an announcement of its "astonishment" and "regret" that an article entitled "La loi de Lynch" had appeared in a Tonkinese journal.⁹⁴ The *Bulletin* went on to charge that "the state of mind of our confrère seems to us singularly inopportune and unconscious of the nature of the task we have to perform in Indochina."⁹⁵ Laumônier, in reply, pointed out that the cry for lynch law had come after the murder of one *colon* and the acquittal of Vietnamese charged with the murder of another and that its espousal by a single journalist hardly meant that Tonkin's press had committed itself to massacre.⁹⁶ Returning to his polemic against the *Quinzaine coloniale*, he now argued that its "best collaborators are here in... the government bureaus."⁹⁷ Laumônier, in short, brought together the *colon* hatreds for metropolitan imperialist and colonial bureaucrats.

Political sagacity did not distinguish the *colons*. When they drew up a detailed list of complaints and demands in 1906, the *Union Coloniale* flatly rejected two of their most important claims. The *Quinzaine coloniale* dismissed the demand for the creation of representative bodies structured along the lines of the Algerian Financial Delegations with the observation that the size of the French minority in Indochina did not warrant such a course of action.⁹⁸ It also rejected the demand for the introduction of land legislation modelled on the Australian Torrens Act, a move which would have pulverized Vietnamese property patterns, with a more telling observation: such legislation would "transform this people of small property holders... into an agricultural proletariat inclined to be swayed by all the promptings of misery and social revolt."⁹⁹ Yet the following year Joseph Chailley, the secretary of the *Union Coloniale* who had expressed his reservations about the *colons* on several occasions, lent their claims some limited support.¹⁰⁰ The *colons* erred in tending to lump all their metropolitan imperialist critics together, for such backing, whatever its limitations, underscored the extent to which the imperialist establishment still contented itself with calls for the removal of "abuses" and refused to think in terms of structural reform within the empire.

⁹³ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Annamitophobie," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 19 January 1905, p. 1.

⁹⁴ "La loi de Lynch au Tonkin," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française*, (February, 1905), p. 79.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Défi accepté," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 29 March 1905, p. 1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* The ellipsis appears in the article.

⁹⁸ "Les vœux des planteurs du Tonkin," *La Quinzaine coloniale*, 10 February 1907, pp. 81-84, p. 82.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83. For the Torrens Act, see Sir Stephen H. Roberts, *History of Australian Land Settlement, 1788-1920* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), pp. 229-30.

¹⁰⁰ J. CHAILLEY, "La colonisation agricole européenne," *La Quinzaine coloniale*, 25 November 1907, p. 1026. For his earlier critical remarks, see Joseph CHAILLEY-BERT, "La Colonisation du Tonkin," *ibid.*, 10 July 1899, pp. 393-96; and Joseph CHAILLEY-BERT, "L'Agriculture aux colonies," *ibid.*, 10 March 1904, pp. 145-48.

Harsher critics of the situation in Indochina emerged outside the ranks of the imperialist organizations. But most of them, even when calling for radical change, remained firmly committed to imperialism. Captain Fernand Bernard charged in 1901 that there existed no greater danger to French Indochina than the land concession system: "colonization understood in this fashion adds nothing to the wealth of the country, it only increases the misery of the Vietnamese."¹⁰¹ Eleven years later J. Morel, a colonial administrator who had served in Tonkin, published an academic thesis which revealed the transgressions of the *colons* in all their nakedness. Morel, scarcely an anti-imperialist, worried about the land concession becoming "a foyer of anti-French agitation."¹⁰² Both authors infuriated the *colons*, but Morel drove them to a greater frenzy.¹⁰³ Not only did his detailed facts and figures cut much closer to the bone, but his thesis, giving rise to dispute even in the Chamber of Deputies, appeared at a time of great difficulty for the *colons*.¹⁰⁴

During the years immediately before the outbreak of World War I the *colons* confronted challenges which seemed to dwarf those brought about by the Russo-Japanese War when the repurchase of the concessions had been considered, the metropolitan imperialist organizations had been antagonized, and a Minister of Colonies had even considered a visit to Indochina. They now had to worry about whether the acquisition of Morocco would lead to the neglect of Indochina.¹⁰⁵ They also found themselves to be the target of novelists. Paul Adam's *La Force* and Emile Fabre's *Les Sauterelles* produced the inevitable furious reaction: "How do writers... like Paul Adam and Fabre... produce these fantasies in colonial matters? The doctors of a future neurological congress will have to enlighten us on this point of mental pathology."¹⁰⁶ However important such works may have been in influencing metropolitan opinion, they expressed rather than created sentiments which menaced the *colons*. Seen in this light, perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Les Sauterelles* lay in its translation into Vietnamese by a French army officer whom the *colons* promptly described as "a valiant warrior who during his sojourn here did not leave the offices of the Conseil de Guerre in Hanoi."¹⁰⁷ The real threats to the *colons* emerged from two overlapping movements: the concern of military men with strengthening the French army through the introduction of more colonial units and the forceful expression on the metropolitan political stage, in the Chamber of Deputies, of colonial reformist views which, outstripping the caution of the im-

¹⁰¹ Capitaine Fernand BERNARD, *L'Indo-Chine. Erreurs et dangers — un programme* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1901), p. 141.

¹⁰² J. MOREL, *Les concessions de terres au Tonkin* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1912), p. 219.

¹⁰³ UN BROSSARD, "Contre les colons, encore," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 21 March 1912, p. 1; Henri LAUMÔNIER, "L'Administration et les Colons," *ibid.*, 8 June 1912, p. 1; "Chambre d'Agriculture du Tonkin et Nord Annam," *ibid.*, 9 June 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ M. PARIS, 1^{re} séance du 17 décembre, Chambre des Députés, 10^e Législature, Session extraordinaire de 1912, *Journal Officiel*, 18 December 1912, pp. 3239-3274, p. 3248; M. VIOLLETTE, *ibid.*,

¹⁰⁵ Jean AJALBERT, "Tout au Maroc," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 1 May 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Louis BONNAFONT, "La folie coloniale," *ibid.*, 26 February 1913, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "On liquide," *ibid.*, 20 November 1912, p. 1.

perialist lobbies, had been growing in strength since the turn of the century.

As the international situation in Europe became more threatening, military men became interested in "the France of one hundred millions" as a reservoir of man-power. They recognized that changes would have to take place in the empire if they were to secure substantial numbers of loyal colonial troops. Generals Famin and Pennequin, both of whom had served in Tonkin, turned their attention to the situation in Indochina. Their views immediately alienated the *colons*. The *Avenir du Tonkin* accused Famin of having "fallen... into fashionable eccentricity by doing his part in the humanitarian concert."¹⁰⁸ The general had made the utopian mistake of wanting the French to make the Vietnamese love them.¹⁰⁹ Two years later, with the old primitive rebel De Tham stirring once again in the uplands, *colons* and others met in Hanoi to found a *Ligue des intérêts français*. This "assembly of 1100 citizens" protested against many of the new developments, among them:

II. ...the views of General Pennequin, including the most serious: "*De Tham is a hero worthy of all our admiration, as he has that of the whole Vietnamese people,*" a view which constitutes a justification of assassination, theft and piracy.

III. ...the project of General Pennequin relative to the creation of a Vietnamese army which will assure the ruin of French domination in Indochina.¹¹⁰

A *colon* spokesman did not hesitate to dip into the past in order to discredit the general: understanding the aboriginal peoples better than the Vietnamese, Colonel Pennequin had gained his Tonkinese victories in the mountains rather than in the delta region where in May, 1892 the bands of Doê Ngu allegedly played with him like a child.¹¹¹ The *colon* reaction to the idea of a larger Vietnamese force staffed in some part by Vietnamese officers rested upon two perceptions. Although they admitted the superiority of the Tonkinese *tirailleur* in time of war, they discounted the dangers of war and hence preferred the militiaman to the *tirailleur*: "While the militiaman... remains submissive, defers to all the authorities and keeps his salutary fear of our code, the *tirailleur*, because of this *déracinement*... which makes an individual of him, an individual very proud of but very burdened by this unexpected individuality, is an easy prey for all the smart talkers and all the fomenters of discords."¹¹² The *colon* position on Vietnamese officers had a more telling logic of its own: "...either these Vietnamese will be worthy of being French officers... and then their first and most noble concern will be to throw us into the sea. Or these people will content themselves with their pay, the honors of

¹⁰⁸ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "La Justice dans la Fermeté," *ibid.*, 25 February 1910, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ "Procès-Verbal," *ibid.*, 5 July 1912, p. 6. Emphasis in original.

¹¹¹ MAT-GIOI, "Lettre de Mat-Gioi," *ibid.*, 6 September 1913, p. 1.

¹¹² Albert DE POUVOURVILLE, "Les Méconnus," *ibid.*, 20 September 1913, p. 2.

their position, the joy of wearing a showy uniform... and I do not want them as officers of the French army."¹¹³

Had they not been paralleled by increasing metropolitan interest in Indochina, the wishes of the military men would have still roused *colon* ire but also would have produced less real concern. In 1909, 1910 and 1911 Adolphe Messimy and Maurice Viollette presented colonial budget reports to the Chamber of Deputies which described conditions in Indochina in scorching terms. With interest in the colony already awakened by the Vietnamese attempt in 1908 at poisoning the Hanoi garrison, heated debate took place in the Palais Bourbon, with the *Avenir du Tonkin* being singled out for some special parliamentary attention.¹¹⁴ Viollette, a radical colonial reformer and not an anti-imperialist, came to carry the burden of the attack on Indochinese conditions in the Chamber of Deputies.¹¹⁵ Having earlier accused "the judeo-masonic Republic" of lacking interest in the colonies, the *colons* now had to cope with colonial affairs attracting too much political attention in France.¹¹⁶ Their hostile reactions to this development took a variety of complementary and contradictory forms.

The *colons* attempted to repair relations with the bureaucrats. This course of action entailed forgetting their previous complaints, many of which were now repeated by parliamentarians who, on the whole, treated the administrators more roughly than the *colons*. The hierarchy of *colon* hatreds eased an incomplete transition in attitudes. A revenue agent had been killed, and during the course of the judicial investigation the president of Saigon's criminal court exploded at a witness from that service: "By your abuse of powers, by your exactions, by your countless misdeeds, you have made the populations hate you, and if some of you have perished, do not be astonished. It is written in the scriptures: 'He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword.'"¹¹⁷ The *colons* had nurtured similar sentiments for years, but they also had always disliked magistrates more than administrative agents. They now swept to the defense of these agents. The new Ligue des intérêts français sought to bring together the *fonctionnaires* with the *colons*. If the second and third points of its program were directed against the plans of the military men, the first and fourth points were designed to appeal to the bureaucrats:

¹¹³ "La Conférence de M. Monpezat," *Supplement de l'Avenir du Tonkin*, 5 July 1912, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Francis de Pressensé, Séance du 2 avril 1909, Chambre des Députés, 9^e Législature, Session ordinaire de 1909, *Journal Officiel*, 3 April 1909, p. 985; M. Lagrossillière, Séance du 16 décembre, Chambre des Députés, 10^e Législature — Session extraordinaire de 1912, *ibid.*, 17 December 1912, p. 3209; Maurice Viollette, 1^{re} séance du 19 décembre, Chambre des Députés, 10^e Législature — Session extraordinaire, *ibid.*, 20 December 1912, p. 3302.

¹¹⁵ Maurice Viollette, 1^{re} séance du 3 avril, Chambre des Députés, 10^e Législature — Session ordinaire de 1911, *ibid.*, 4 April 1911, 1686-89; Maurice Viollette, *ibid.*, December 20, 1912, 3296-3302, 3305-3306.

¹¹⁶ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Courrier de Hanoi," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 8 December 1906, p. 1; LE PASSANT, "À quoi servent les colonies," *ibid.*, 7 June 1911, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in *Supplement*, 5 July 1912, p. 4.

The assembly of 1100 citizens...

I. Protests against the injurious and unjust words pronounced by councillor Nacquart, president of the Criminal Court of Saigon, and addressed to the revenue corps of Indochina, words which constitute an encouragement of crime.

IV. Protests against the nomination of M. Van Vollenhoven [for the Secretary Generalship], a nomination which constitutes a scandalous promotion, an act of astonishing favoritism, an act which gives Indochina an ambitious administrator, completely ignorant of the country, who affirms a real scorn for the public opinion of Indochina, for its needs, and also for the competence of administrators who have made their careers in Indochina and possess claims which M. Vollenhoven lacks, notably that of belonging to families who were French in ages when one fought for France.¹¹⁸

Laumônier, however, remained skeptical of the new organization's potential: he pointed out the timidity of private individuals and the unwillingness of bureaucrats to run the risk of "governmental thunderbolts."¹¹⁹ Undoubtedly, he had some right on his side when he considered the probable reactions of the bureaucrats, but at the same time old enmities could not be easily buried.

Conspiracy provided a satisfying explanation of the attacks upon the *colons*. In one variation they saw themselves as the sacrificial offerings in a plot arranged by the bureaucrats in an attempt to shift responsibility for Indochina's problems from their own shoulders, where it belonged, to those of the *colons*.¹²⁰ In another version they suggested that a division of imperial spoils had taken place in which Eugène Etienne, the noted imperialist politician, received Africa and "the patrons of Viollette who is only a valet" received Madagascar and Indochina.¹²¹ Following this line of thought and again striking a note of social radicalism, the chief spokesman for the *Avenir du Tonkin* posed some pertinent questions: "A group like the international consortium of the Yunnan construction company, enterprises like Chièze et Menard, have caused, through the ferocious rapacity of those who benefit from them, many deaths, while impoverishing the colony by carrying millions away from it. Why then do our parliamentarians, so ardent in the struggle against humble and defenseless *colons*, remains mute when it is a question of fighting these devastating "sharks?" Are there State pardons for the great pirates of finance?"¹²²

A new note of defensiveness appeared. The *colons* denied that they were slave masters out of the pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.¹²³ But they also unconsciously repeated an argument used by Southern plantation owners in the quarrel with Northern abolitionists: "The *colons* of Tonkin... have at all times treated their native auxiliaries with humanity, because they know perfectly well that the cooperation of these workers is

¹¹⁸ "Procès-Verbal," *Avenir du Tonkin*, 5 July 1912, p. 6. See also n. 18.

¹¹⁹ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Et Maintenant?," *ibid.*, 7 July 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Nos Erreurs de colonisation," *ibid.*, 10 April 1912, p. 1.

¹²¹ LE PASSANT, *ibid.*, 7 June 1911, p. 1.

¹²² Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Variations sur un air colon," *ibid.*, 30 November 1912,

¹²³ *Ibid.*

indispensable to them."¹²⁴ Carefully excluding any of their number from the catalogue, they admitted that nasty incidents did take place: "Because a soldier, after drinking, will beat an unfortunate rickshaw coolie, because a French woman, already unstrung by the heat, will box the ear of an insolent boy, because a police agent, exasperated by a vagabond's silence, will thrash him, a small group of metropolitans launches anathemas against us."¹²⁵ In the *colon* view, the metropolitan critics, especially Viollette, generalized much too quickly from such scattered instances of colonial misbehavior.¹²⁶ Unfortunately, from the *colon* perspective, the ill-informed criticisms made in the Chamber of Deputies reached Tonkin where some Vietnamese interpreted them as an "encouragement to sedition."¹²⁷

Confronted with this danger and scarcely inclined by temperament to defensiveness, the *colons*, directing most of their venom against Viollette, "the Hébert of the Third," counter-attacked.¹²⁸ The onslaught on Viollette eventually slackened. Whatever subsequent recriminations over ultimate responsibilities, significant manifestations of unrest from below have a marvelous way of leading quarreling groups within a ruling strata to compose their differences. The Hanoi bombing incident of April 1913 paved the way for a truce. Governor General Sarraut, hitherto denounced as Viollette's man, won *colon* support for the ruthlessness of his response to the incident.¹²⁹ Viollette proclaimed in the *Annales Coloniales*: "No, no policy of weakness."¹³⁰ Impressed by this stand, Viollette's most severe *colon* critic acknowledged they shared a common concern with the condition of the Vietnamese and appealed to the parliamentarian not to judge all colonials in terms of "some brutes," isolated exceptions whose existence confirmed the general rule of the sterling qualities of the French of Indochina.¹³¹ Differences, of course, remained. Viollette still came in for *colon* criticism.¹³² Metropolitan journalists, either having taken the temperature of the *colon* press or remembering Laumônier's untoward reference to "citizen Browning," charged their colonial confrères with responsibility for the bombing incident.¹³³ But the crisis had ended. The *colons* returned to their more usual complaints: "The government of the Republic has created a Colonial Office, several Colonial Expositions and a special Colonial School where function numerous *fonctionnaires* who

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "L'Anathème de M. Viollette," *ibid.*, 18 October 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁶ J. AJALBERT, "Le Rapport de M. Viollette (II)," *ibid.*, 12 January 1913, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "La Débauche," *ibid.*, 14 September 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁸ Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Et Nous," *ibid.*, 10 January 1913, p. 1; Henri LAUMÔNIER, "La Maladie de M. Viollette," *ibid.*, 25 January 1913, p. 1; Jean AJALBERT, "Le Rapport de M. Viollette," *ibid.*, 26 January 1913, p. 1.

¹²⁹ "Reponse de M. De Monpezat à un article de M. Viollette," *ibid.*, 22 November 1912, pp. 3-4, p. 3; SPECTATOR, "Comment M. Sarraut rentre en France," *ibid.*, 28 September 1913, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Henri LAUMÔNIER, "Nous sommes d'accord," *ibid.*, 18 June 1913, p. 1.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Jean AJALBERT, "La Racaille française," *ibid.*, 17 May 1913, p. 1.

¹³³ Albert LAMBLLOT, "On cherche les coupables," *ibid.*, 4 October 1913, p. 1.

cultivate *fonctionnarisme*. The government of the Republic calls that 'colonizing'." ¹³⁴

Like other imperialists, Tonkin's *colons* were insatiable. However much they longed for them, the ribbons and crosses of the Legion of Honor would not have satisfied the *colons*. More government concern with irrigation would have been appreciated, but it would not have tempered criticism of other facets of colonial policy. Perhaps the granting of feudal powers and prerogatives over the land and the indigenous populations would have quieted them, at least until the inevitable explosion which would have led them in turn to more hysterical attacks on the offending populations and the government which had allowed them to get out of hand. In any event, although the colonial government did a remarkable amount for the *colons*, it could not pursue a course of action which would interfere with its own powers and its need to extract the revenues necessary to meet the charges on its loans. Faced with this check and the relative failure of their agrarian undertakings, the frustrated *colons* gave free rein to vilification of their fellow imperialists, in Indochina and in France, and to racist ravings. Their hysteria reached fever pitch during and immediately after the Russo-Japanese War, when the metropolitan imperialists lost patience with them and the government authorities showed signs of taking a firmer line, and, even more important, during the years immediately before the outbreak of World War I when radical imperial reformers subjected *colon* attitudes and activities to critical scrutiny in the Chamber of Deputies. Yet on both occasions, in giving more vehement vent to outrage and hatred, the *colons* only expressed sentiments constantly nurtured in more normal times.

Little, if anything, can be said in extenuation of *colon* attitudes. Yet, the consideration of their views of fellow imperialists calls for some shading. However self-interested *colon* motives were, their criticisms of the bureaucracy were not wholly mistaken. Compared to the crude and grasping *colons*, the apparently more moderate and certainly more cultivated metropolitan imperialists who supported organizations like the Union Coloniale and the Comité de l'Asie française reaped far more of the profits flowing from the exploitation of Tonkin without being subjected, as the *colons* bitterly noted, to any sweeping criticism from the imperial reformers. The *colons* thrived on self-delusion — hypocrisy alone does not wholly explain their declarations of sympathy for the indigenous peoples suffering under the harsh burden of taxes, monopolies and corvées and their brutal treatment of the same peoples in their discussions of the workings of the legal system — but they were not necessarily any more prone to self-delusion than the Viollettes and the Sarrauts who wished the subject populations well, worked for reform, and met popular resistance with repression. Finally, although the *colons* provided their fellow imperialists with ample reason to dislike them, they were never abandoned. Whatever the

¹³⁴ LOUIS BONNAFONT; "La colonisation et les mandarins," *ibid.*, 29-30 September 1913, p. 1.

fissures within the imperialist bloc, its component groups continued to constitute a community whose members shared a common stake in domination and exploitation, a basic solidarity of interest in empire.

The search for the historical roots of the Taiping Revolution which...

The Taiping revolutionary movement began with the founding and...

The Taiping revolutionaries were in a period of a hundred years...

1. ...