

Italian Journalist Finds Life Worsening in Vietnam

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

For most people in South Vietnam—particularly those in the cities—daily life is worse now than during the war, according to an Italian journalist who returned Wednesday from a three-week visit to the country.

"It is worse in terms of food, in terms of commodities, in terms of comfort, said Tiziano Terzani, the journalist who spent four years covering the war for *Der Spiegel*, the West German news magazine. "There are enormous economic problems," he said, quoting officials as saying that from three to four million of South Vietnam's 18 million people were unemployed.

Peace, of course, has brought a sense of relief, he said, but the transition from a bustling wartime economy fueled with

millions of American dollars to the austerity of the country's agrarian base as well as adaptation to the puritanical Communist ethics of North Vietnam has been wrenching for those in the South.

Mr. Terzani, who was one of a handful of Western journalists allowed into Vietnam to observe the recent election of members to the National Assembly this month, said a high-ranking clergyman in Da Nang told him: "I understand that we have to go this way. But what I need is more time. Give me two or three years to get used to this new way of life, not just a few months."

Mr. Terzani, author of a new book, "Giai Phong! The Fall and Liberation of Saigon," said the shift toward a Communist society was being pressed most gradually in Saigon, the area that the new rulers apparently

regard as the most decadent pocket of the country.

Traffic remains heavy in Saigon, he said, prostitutes are still working at one of the main hotels, and intellectuals hover over drinks at Givral, the noisy coffee house, just as they did in the old days.

But now there are queues at Government stores for rations of pork and rice, and middle-class men and women can be seen selling their television sets, chairs and tables, sewing machines and motorcycles, the 37-year-old journalist said.

Who are their customers, Mr. Terzani was asked.

"The bo doi (the soldiers from the North)," Mr. Terzani said. "In the past the North has been saving money. They have had nothing to buy. Now Saigon is being kept alive by the bo doi. They are the new Americans."

Mr. Terzani began his latest visit to Vietnam in Hanoi, traveled by bus down Route 1 to Saigon, then spent several days there and in the Mekong Delta. In the countryside, he said, he was accompanied by two official guides, who interpreted for him, but access to individual Vietnamese was limited. In Saigon, however, he said he moved freely on his own and talked with many old friends.

Mr. Terzani said he found no evidence—"not even rumors"—to substantiate reports that executions and beatings were being carried out in the re-education camps for former officials and military officers of the regime of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

But he said he had been told of camp deaths resulting from malaria and beriberi. "In Vietnam, today, they are suffering very much from lack of medicine," he added.

As for reports that some bands of soldiers from the Vietnamese Army are continuing their fight against the Communists, Mr. Terzani said that if there still was any resistance "it must be very, very small

and in remote areas, because the road [Route 1] was not guarded and the Communist soldiers were walking around without weapons."

Traveling from Hanoi to Saigon, Mr. Terzani said, he got the impression that the country was "a huge construction site," with people everywhere working on bridges, patching the road and the rail line and rebuilding houses.

He said the laborers for what is known as "socialist work," were recruited by party officials who moved through the villages with bullhorns.

Nothing happened if people didn't want to work, he said, "but it was better if they did." "Volunteering is a way to put yourself in the 'good books,' after re-education," he said.