

# LIBERAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

**"WE WRITE FOR YOU TO READ."**



# XUẤT BẢN TỰ DO

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# ABOUT US

**Organization name:** Nhà xuất bản Tự Do (Vietnamese); Liberal Publishing House (English)

**Date of establishment:** February 14, 2019

**Headquartered in:** Vietnam

**Founders:** authors and editors who wish to remain anonymous

**Forms of publication:** books & reports

**Mission:** to promote freedom of information and liberal education in Vietnam

**Slogan:** “We write for you to read, (Vietnam).”

**Official website:** [www.nhaxuatbantudo.com](http://www.nhaxuatbantudo.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/nhaxuatbantudo](https://www.facebook.com/nhaxuatbantudo)

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/nhaxuatbantudo](https://www.twitter.com/nhaxuatbantudo)

**Email:** [nhaxuatbantudo@hushmail.com](mailto:nhaxuatbantudo@hushmail.com)

**Spokesperson:** Pham Doan Trang, author and journalist

## BACKGROUND: MEDIA CONTROL IN VIETNAM

Vietnam is a totalitarian regime where the ruling Communist Party maintains its monopoly in power. Human rights have always been restricted, with widespread police violations of the right to expression, the right to assembly, the rights to a fair trial, inter alia. Apart from that, academic freedom is one of the most seriously violated rights, though the violation may be less visible and less known to the public.

The education system is hyper-politicized, where Marxism-Leninism-Ho Chi Minh Thought dominate over other subjects. As a result, political apathy is rampant, whereas public awareness is the key to any peaceful political reform for democracy.

The media, including publishing houses, is state-owned and tightly controlled. There are more or less 60 publishing houses in Vietnam, all state-owned. According to the 2021 Law on Publication, “a publishing house can only be established under the aegis of particular state-controlled entities: provincial government agencies, political organizations (which means the Communist Party) and political-social organizations/central public service units, central political-social and professional organizations. The publishing houses can be operated either as a public service unit or a state-owned enterprise, but are necessarily directed by the mother organizations. This implies that no private entities or individuals can ever lawfully participate in the publishing industry”.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to legal constraints, the authorities employ extra judicial measures to control the right to freedom of publication, including harassment of authors and publishers, even readers, and confiscation of the published works. In most cases, the harassment mounts to violent persecution: “terrorizing and intimidating the authors and anyone involved in the publication

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<sup>1</sup> The 88 Project, “Incidents against Freedom of Publication in 2018-2019: How Vietnam Continues to Violate Its Constitutional and International Obligations”: <https://the88project.org/incidents-against-freedom-of-publication-in-2018-2019-how-vietnam-continues-to-violate-its-constitutional-and-international-obligations/>

process (even those participating in printing or delivering the materials...) until they give up their participation seems to be the more “appropriate” way in the view of Vietnamese authorities”.<sup>2</sup>

## LPH’S BRIEF HISTORY



Photo by Khanh An.

Liberal Publishing House (LPH) is a non-profit organization established February 14, 2019 by a group of domestic activists in Saigon, Vietnam. We are currently the only independent publishing house in the country. In the spirit of “liberal education and freedom of information”, LPH’s primary activities include publishing books free of government censorship, printing and distributing them through either sale or complimentary, public giveaways. Our work includes both hard and electronic copies.

We first began our work at the end of 2018 by helping author Pham Doan Trang distribute free copies of her works *Politics for the Common People* and *Learning Public Policy through the Issue of Special Economic Zones*. Afterward, we distributed Pham Thanh Nghien’s *Slices of Lives behind Bars* on January 28, 2019, immediately after the Loc Hung Garden land dispute in order to raise funds for the families affected.

We slowly expanded the distribution network to cover the entire country, as well as perfected the work of selecting, designing, and editing books. We self-funded our own equipment and machinery to carry out the entirety of our work.

After twelve months of operation, we own two print shops, with each producing approximately 100 books a day.

We’ve opened up an official website at [www.nhaxuatbantudo.com](http://www.nhaxuatbantudo.com), a Facebook fanpage at <http://facebook.com/nhaxuatbantudo>, a YouTube channel at <http://bit.ly/youtube-nhaxuatbantudo>, and a Twitter feed at <http://twitter.com/nhaxuatbantudo>. In order to reduce the toll of government oppression and more easily reach our readers, we also set up an e-book channel on our official website.

Within eighteen months of operation, we have distributed more than 25,000 copies of 18 titles to readers in- and outside Vietnam, titles which advocate the values of democracy, liberty, human rights, and truths which would otherwise be buried by the Vietnamese propaganda machine. These titles, which are all written by Vietnamese authors, include:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



1. *Politics for the Common People*, written by Pham Doan Trang;
2. *A Handbook for Families of Prisoners*, Pham Doan Trang;
3. *Slices of Lives behind Bars*, Pham Thanh Nghien;
4. *Learning Public Policy through the Issue of Special Economic Zones*, Trinh Huu Long, Pham Doan Trang, and Nguyen Anh Tuan;
5. *On Non-violent Resistance Techniques*, Pham Doan Trang;
6. *Predicting SEZ Effectiveness in Vietnam through Chinese and Korean Cases*, Nguyen Trang Nhung;
7. *Chronicle 1* and *Chronicle 2*, Dinh Quang Anh Thai;
8. *The Vietnam Thesis*, Tung Phong;
9. *Brother Ba Sam*, various authors;
10. *Darkness by Day*, Vu Thu Hien;
11. *Politics of a Police State*, Pham Doan Trang;
12. A collection of writings regarding Vietnam's proposed special economic zones, various authors;
13. *Fighting over Senh Field: A Report on the Dong Tam Village Attack*, The Dong Tam Task Force;
14. *Coerced on Camera: Televised Confessions in Vietnam*, Safeguard Defenders;
15. *On Social Revolutions*, An Nguyen;
16. *On Democratization*, Thanh Chuyen;
17. *Blueprint for Revolution*, Srdja Popovic;
18. *Fighting Impunity: How to Use Magnitsky Laws to Punish Human Rights Violators*, Pham Doan Trang



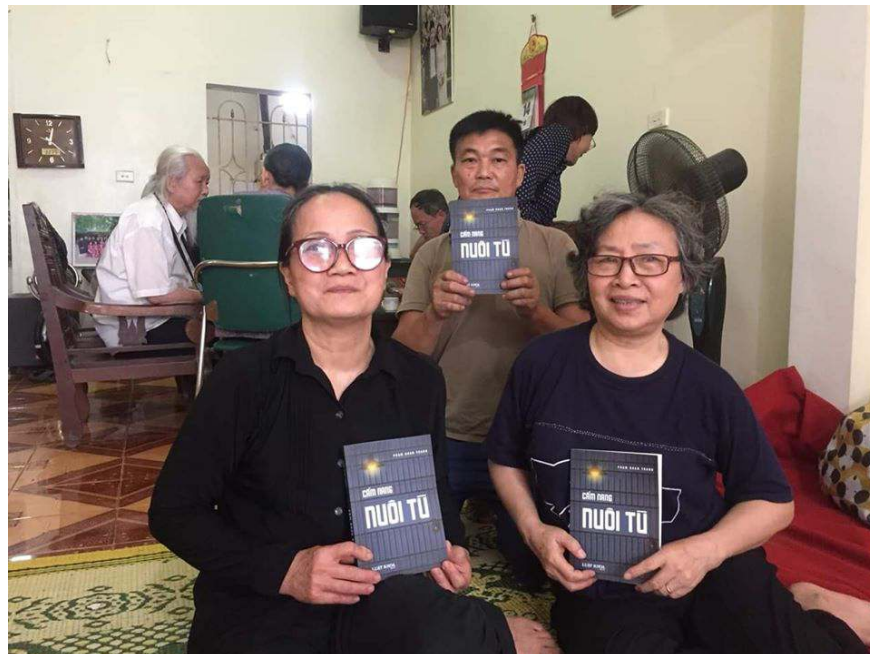
*Vu Thu Hien signing his book, Darkness by Day,  
at the author's conference in Paris on February 8, 2020.  
Photo by LPH.*

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

- From October 2018, before LPH was established, the founders of LPH helped author Pham Doan Trang distribute approximately 500 copies of *Politics for the Common People* and *Learning Public Policy through the Issue of Special Economic Zones*.
- January 28, 2019: the founders of LPH received 500 copies of Pham Thanh Nghien's *Slices of Lives behind Bars* to sell to raise funds for victims of the Loc Hung Garden land dispute, whose homes were confiscated and razed.
- February 14, 2019: LPH is established. Immediately after establishment, LPH created a fanpage to share books and interface with readers.
- March 2019: LPH organized a trip to central Vietnam to conduct interviews and gather materials for future books.
- May 2-7, 2019: LPH embarked on a cross-country trip, giving away 200 copies of *A Handbook for Families of Prisoners* to disaffected families in Duong Noi, and activists and parishes along the length of Vietnam; and 50 copies of *Brother Ba Sam* on the occasion of blogger Ba Sâm (real name: Nguyen Huu Vinh) being released from prison after completing a 5-year sentence.
- June 11, 2019: LPH gifted 35 copies of *A Handbook for Families of Prisoners* to activists and the families of prisoners of conscience.
- July 14, 2019: LPH gifted 1000 copies of Pham Doan Trang's *On Non-violent Resistance Techniques* to readers throughout the country.
- July 28, 2019: LPH organized a 24-hour unlimited giveaway of *Politics for the Common People*, ultimately gifting more than 400 copies.
- In June and July 2019, LPH arranged a trip to central Vietnam to interview fishermen on their condition three years after the Formosa environmental disaster to prepare materials for a book.
- September 10, 2019: LPH officially opened a distribution outlet overseas.
- September 11, 2019: LPH gifted books to German MP Martin Patzelt.
- September 13, 2019: LPH gave away 1000 copies of *A Handbook for Families of Prisoners* and 1000 copies of *On Non-violent Resistance Techniques* on the occasion of author Pham Doan Trang receiving the 2019 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Prize for Impact.
- September 21 and 24, 2019: LPH publicly debuted and introduced books in Lyon & Paris, France; September 13, 2019 debuted books in Warsaw, Poland.
- January 15, 2020: LPH released *Fighting over Senh Field* (usually referred to as the *Dong Tam Report*), a report on the violent government attack against Dong Tam village and killing of Le Dinh Kinh, the village's 84-year-old leader;
- February 8, 2020: LPH organized a conference for prominent exiled author Vu Thu Hien in Paris, France;
- February 13, 2020: LPH debuted and introduced the *Dong Tam Report* to activists in Hanoi;
- LPH has distributed more than 25,000 books to-date, to readers both in- and outside Vietnam. Though we have been chased after and hunted down wherever we go, LPH has been able to maintain both its on- and offline operations. Online operations include writing posts and producing videos for LPH's communication channels.



*Former prisoner of conscience, blogger Ba Sam, holding copies of Brother Ba Sam, first and second edition, in May 2019 after being released. Photo by Hoang Thanh.*



*Elderly activists and democracy supporters in Hanoi receiving their first copies of A Handbook for Families of Prisoners, May 14, 2019. Photo courtesy of FB Can Thi Theu.*

## **HARASSMENT AND ATTACKS BY VIETNAM'S SECURITY FORCES**

- LPH's first fanpage, established February 14, 2019, was knocked offline by cyberattacks after only three days.
- Afterwards, LPH had to use an old fanpage that had been previously set up for a past event and administered by members overseas.
- To this day, LPH's fanpage cannot purchase Facebook ads, even through the use of overseas accounts.
- March 18, 2019: members of LPH notice signs that security forces had discovered them and were preparing for their capture; all members had to quickly evacuate their place of residence, including one member who was already sick and showed signs of worsening. As a result, this member had to be secretly admitted to the ER and underwent emergency surgery the next day.
- May 5, 2019: a student, who is member of LPH, was recorded on a local-area camera picking up LPH books from a for-hire print shop. Afterwards, police tracked the student down to his/her school for questioning. To avoid arrest and harassment, the student submitted a leave-of-absence, which was hand-delivered to the school by another member of LPH. When this member arrived at the school, he/she discovered security officers loitering around, up to four of whom tailed him/her home. To minimize risk, LPH made arrangements for this group of members to go into hiding in a faraway province until the end of July, after which they returned to Saigon.
- From July 2 to August 1, 2019: three of LPH's accounts at three local banks were locked from withdrawals. Deposits could be made but withdrawals from ATMs were prohibited, as were online transfers.
- Around the beginning of August 2019: police found a way to block transport services from accepting LPH's books; at the same time, deliverymen were repeatedly entrapped and surrounded, though due to their previous experiences with police, they were able to escape.
- October 14, 2019: 30 books were confiscated from a transport service.
- From mid-October to mid-November 2019: LPH recorded tens (possibly more than a 100) occurrences in which book recipients were harassed by police and security forces. Some were "invited" down to the police station for questioning, others had their cell phones and books confiscated, their places of residence randomly searched, or had to sign pledges to no longer buy or read books distributed by LPH.
- From the beginning of October 2019: LPH lost complete contact with two collaborators from Phu Yen.
- October 15, 2019: a member and deliveryman was entrapped and arrested while delivering books. Police had previously arrested the buyer and used the person's phone to lure the deliveryman to the meeting spot.
- Near the end of October 2019: LPH had a shipment of nearly 50 books blocked from transport and confiscated.
- October 29, 2019: a Hanoi member of LPH had his identity revealed after local police called his workplace and confronted him about distributing books for LPH.
- January 3, 2020: police arrested reader Ho Sy Quyet and his wife Tran Ngoc Tram, after storming their residence.
- From August 2019 up to now: security forces have repeatedly tried to entrap and arrest LPH's deliverymen; fortunately, our staff members have been nimble in evading capture. In one of such cases, on December 26, 2019, the police set up post in front of author Vu



Thu Hien's family's house, right after LPH published his book *Darkness by Day*. The deliveryman was luckily able to escape.

- May 8, 2020: shipper Phung Thuy was detained while he was delivering books for LPH. He was taken to the southern office of the Ministry of Public Security for questioning and brutally tortured until midnight. He escaped at 3 AM the next day and has gone into hiding since then.
- Since LPH's establishment, state-run newspapers, websites, blogs, and forums regularly publish articles attacking, smearing, and threatening us.



*A security officer questioning one of LPH's readers in central Vietnam after conducting a house search on November 13, 2019. Photo secretly taken by the interrogated reader who asked to remain anonymous.*

## When I say books are life...

By Pham Doan Trang<sup>3</sup>

October 19, 2019

When I say “every book that reaches your hand is printed in the blood, sweat, and tears of many people”, I’m not misspeaking.

When police attacked Tin Nguyen’s live show “Memories of Saigon”, assaulting Nguyen Tin, organizer Nguyen Dai... and me, sitting in the audience, all three of us were sent to the hospital. Nearly all the money that everyone donated to cover our medical fees instead went to printing books (*Politics for the Common People*, 2nd Edition, 2018). Books are life.

When my friend grabbed me and whisked me away from police after an unexpected raid at the beginning of this year, she had to go to the ER because of a ruptured stomach. Friends, relatives, and acquaintances raised more than ten million VND (~500 USD), but she didn’t use it. Instead, she gave it to me, which I put towards printing books. Books are life.

When a shipper I only recently met was ensnared by police and forcibly brought down to the station for interrogation, they beat him until he was vomiting blood. He refused to give up any information. They beat him so badly, his police forms were sprayed and splattered with specks of blood. Books are life.

As I am writing these lines, my fingers still ache in pain. But it is not nearly as painful as the feelings of helplessness, the sadness I feel for those who have spilled blood for books, for readers who’ve been called down to the police station and threatened and terrorized for simply reading. Even more painful is the fact that there are those who do not read anything but are always ready to chase down those who distribute books, beating and criminalizing them; there are those who, in their entire lives, have never read a single book but assert without fail “these criminals are making things up; police would never try to arrest those who are simply producing books.”

In totalitarian countries, books are life indeed, my friends.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pham.doan.trang/posts/10157957944358322>

## TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF ATTACK

1. From the beginning of October 2019 until now, LPH has lost complete touch with two collaborators in Phu Yen. From the information we've gathered from readers and several other sources, there's a high possibility that these two have been detained or otherwise completely isolated from the outside world. During their interrogations, many readers report being asked by police about these two individuals and "the book-manufacturing network in Phu Yen". Police would say they needed more information to supplement and improve their case file. To this day, we still have no way to reach these two individuals and their families. We are at a loss on their condition and how to support them.
2. On November 15, 2019, a member of LPH was ensnared and taken into custody as he was delivering books. He had the entirety of his 30 books confiscated; his phone was illegally broken into without his consent; and he was interrogated and brutally tortured while he was being illegally held. The questions police asked him revolved around LPH's publications: "Who was your point of contact to produce books?", "Where are the books printed?", and "How are the books transported and distributed?".

He was illegally held in custody for 12 hours, from 10 AM to 10 PM, and was required to continue coming to the police station for "work". In order to maintain his safety, he had to go into hiding, after which police began constantly harassing his family, threatening his wife and child, and recently, even began sending his wife summons to come to the police station for "work", despite the fact that she has nothing to do with LPH's work. Security forces have also set up three cameras in front of their house that point directly into their residence.

Because this person carried a great deal of responsibility over the printing press, and because security forces scoured his phone, there was a high chance that police would discover locations and individuals of importance to LPH, including the location of the printing press. As such, we had to completely shift all of the printing equipment to another city, even though the location was not nearly as convenient for the provision of materials and equipment or transport. Other members of LPH also had to shift locations to follow the printing press or otherwise maintain their safety.

3. The wife of a reader was detained as she received books on behalf of her husband and was illegally held from 3 PM to 9:30 PM that day. In the nearly seven hours she was in custody, police confiscated her phone, interrogated her, and forced her to sign a pledge to never read or buy books from LPH again. These books, according to police, were "reactionary" and used to oppose the Vietnamese government.
4. On October 29, 2019, a Hanoi member of LPH who served as both representative and distributor for northern Vietnam had his identity discovered. Initially, local police called his workplace and said that he was implicated in the distribution of LPH's books. For safety, he took the initiative to separate from his family and change his place of work. On November 5, police arrived at his new workplace and demanded to check the IDs of everyone in the office. Fortunately, he was not in the office at the time and escaped capture. The very next day, he left Hanoi and went into hiding in another province. On the night of November 19, security officials began loitering around his house, setting up monitoring

equipment and guard posts. On the morning of November 20, even though they knew he wasn't home, police broke in, thoroughly searching his home and confiscating his laptop, cell phone, ID, residence card, and money which belonged to his family members. They did all this without a single warrant. At the same time, police detained and beat his brother-in-law, holding him in custody from noon to 11 PM even though had nothing to do with LPH and knew nothing. Security forces still constantly harass the family by phone to this day.

5. The arrest of reader Ho Sy Quyet and his wife on January 3, 2020 is particularly serious as well. Police stormed into their residence and restrained both individuals as they thoroughly searched the house without a warrant. Afterwards, they escorted the two down to the police station, interrogating them and confiscating many of their belongings and family forms, including the birth certificate of their three-year-old son. Total property confiscated totaled nearly 4300 USD.

Above are examples that we know about; there could very easily be many other readers who have been harassed by Vietnamese security forces but have not contacted us.



6. On May 8, 2020, security officers of the Ministry of Public Security made a trap to detain the shipper named Phung Thuy when he was on his way to supply books of LPH to a buyer in Ho Chi Minh City. Security officers took Mr. Thuy to a representative office of the ministry located in Nguyen Van Cu street, District 1 in HCM City where a group of police officers beat him repeatedly from 9.00 AM to early hours of the next day. The interrogators used all their professional skills to beat him in his breast, belly, feet, and critical points on his body. At 3 AM May 9 Thuy had to call his family to bring the medicines for him. When his daughter arrived at the police station, Thuy took this chance, running out of the interrogation room to grab the motorbike of his daughter and drive away. Three days later, he vomited blood (pictured) but was unable to go to hospital for fear of being caught by the police. His daughter has continuously been subjected to police harassment since then.

## Arrested for... reading and sharing books

By **Pham Doan Trang**<sup>4</sup>

January 3, 2020

At approximately 2 PM this afternoon (January 3, 2020), Ho Sy Quyet (also known as Quyet Ho) and his wife were sitting in their residence in the EcoPark neighborhood when they suddenly heard the doorbell ring. Quyet had only barely opened the door when more than ten police officers—most of whom were plainclothes—poured in like locusts.

These “uninvited guests” freely rummaged through Quyet’s house, confiscating his computer, video camera, cell phone, and the couple’s bank card, as well as a number of Liberal Publishing House’s books. They then arrested Quyet and his wife Tram and took them down to the Van Giang district police station (Hung Yen province), separating them for interrogation. The interrogation revolved around Quyet and Tram’s relationship to Liberal Publishing House (LPH), why they had LPH’s books, how they bought them, and who they contacted, etc.

In the evening, police “temporarily released” Tram, possibly because the couple had a 3-year-old child, Tom, at home. Tram asked when her husband would be released, only for police to respond: “Depends on his attitude and level of cooperation.”

This isn’t the first time police have arrested and investigated LPH’s readers, much less the first time these thieves have stolen their victims’ phones, computers, and books. Ever since they started their campaign against LPH and its publications at the beginning of October 2019, more than 100 readers across Vietnam have been taken into custody, interrogated, and had their property stolen.

Only a few days ago, police in Ho Chi Minh City suddenly showed up at a reader’s residence and demanded to search the premises (without a court order), forcing the owner to prove that he “wasn’t a member of LPH.”

With this kind of treatment, police have shown that they are ready to disregard everything: the law, human rights, morality, even a conscience...

Ho Sy Quyet was born in 1988 in Nghe An province. He currently lives with his small family in Hanoi. He is fond of reading and has made videos introducing a few of LPH’s books.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158186665073322&set=a.302988698321&type=3&theater>



## The Competence of the “World’s Best” Investigation Team

By Pham Doan Trang<sup>5</sup>

May 12, 2020

Last night, the health of a book shipper for Liberal Publishing House (LPH) deteriorated to critical condition.

As previously reported, on May 8th, the Ministry of Public Security (Southern Office) entrapped and arrested a shipper hired to deliver books for LPH: Phung Thuy (b.1964, resident of Saigon).

The investigators took Thuy to 235 Nguyen Van Cu (District 1, HCMC) and tortured him from nine in the morning to the middle of the night, with strikes and blows that left no marks. At approximately 3:00 AM, when his daughter came to bring him medicine, Thuy took the opportunity to escape. Police chased after him, but Thuy was able to evade recapture. His daughter, however, was left behind in the hands of police.

Yesterday, May 11th, three days after he was tortured, Thuy started experiencing chest pains, difficulty breathing, nausea, and from 3:00 in the afternoon, began vomiting blood. His body trembles (because of the pain), his stomach is distended, and any kind of contact causes him to jerk away in anguish; the pain is so severe, he has trouble breathing or speaking.

Currently, he’s in a very precarious situation. As he described it, there were times when the investigators would stick two fingers deep into his side and keep it there for a very long time; other times they would press on his abdomen so forcefully, he could feel his stomach being crushed underneath. It’s been said that this is a form of slow torture and could kill someone after a period of time.

It’s important to note that the police force’s security cameras recorded the entire interrogation but only filmed the top portion of his body. The abdominal strikes and blows, as well the trampling of Thuy’s toes... those happened outside the camera frame. Drawing experience from their beating of Vu Huy Hoang – another of LPH’s hired book shippers, who suffered a horribly bloody nose and two black eyes (October 15th, 2019) -- police this time left no visible marks on Phung Thuy, spilling not a single drop of blood.

Thuy’s daughter is still being held by police; her condition remains unknown.

I want to ask these investigators, part of the world’s best police force: just how exactly are you comrades beating people? It’s not recorded on camera. No marks are left on the suspect’s body, but three days later, he vomits up a whole basin of blood, his life hanging in the balance. Skillful indeed.

\* \* \*

This event reminds me of my own experience. On April 26th, 2015, during the last march organized by For a Green Hanoi (known today as Green Trees), many people were beaten by police and civil defense. I returned home and saw that my two feet were bruised purple – the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pham.doan.trang/posts/10158621235998322>

kind of deep purple you see in pictures of victims beaten to death in police stations. There wasn't any pain. After three days, I began feeling fluid in my knees (it would turn out to be part of another disease); the pain slowly increased over a period of one-two months, each day more painful than the last... until I was forced to undergo surgery. I still walk with a limp; it never went back to normal.

The raid on singer Nguyen Tin's live show "Saigon Memories" on the night of August 15th, 2018 was the same. Unlike Nguyen Tin who was beaten until he was covered in bruises, security forces and city police assaulted engineer Nguyen Dang Cao Dai but left no marks. The next day, his forehead began swelling rapidly. More than a year later, he had to go to the emergency room; some kind of trauma to his liver had caused it to deteriorate in function (even though he exercised regularly and refrained from drinking, partying, and smoking).

On my part, I left the police station the night of the raid and did not start experiencing dizziness and nausea until the next afternoon. I ended up having to go to the emergency room for a mild concussion. Moreover, the skin on my right hand was torn open and bloody, my left hand slightly sprained. But after a few weeks, both hands began to ache chronically, especially my left hand, which developed tendonitis— a catastrophe for anyone who plays an instrument.

I think back to Duong Thi Tan (blogger Dieu Cay's former wife) and her gnarled, contorted hands. At the time, I felt terrible for her, but I was also afraid for my own hands. Hers were nearly crippled from the times police twisted, crushed, and mangled them when they hung her up in the air...

Again, I want to ask these investigators, part of the world's best police force: just how exactly are you comrades beating people, that causes them a lifetime of suffering? Skillful indeed.

That is, after all, the competence you comrades need to "fight", isn't it? No wonder we have thousands of cases of injustice, hundreds of instances of forced confessions, and countless wrong death penalties imposed. Don't you forget—Ho Duy Hai, Le Van Manh, Nguyen Van Chuong.... are all still waiting to die.

# WHAT OTHERS WRITE ABOUT US

## **Vietnam: stop intimidation and harassment of independent publishing house**

**Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch<sup>6</sup>**

November 27, 2019

Vietnamese authorities must immediately end the escalating crackdown on an independent publishing house, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said today. As part of the crackdown, dozens of people have been harassed and intimidated by police across the country, and at least one person has reported torture and other ill-treatment in detention. The crackdown sends a disturbing message to people who want to freely exercise their right to freedom of expression and access information and ideas and is yet another sign of the authorities' intolerance of peaceful dissent.

Since early October, police have harassed and intimidated dozens of people connected to the Liberal Publishing House -- a local independent publisher that has produced books on public policy and political thought in Viet Nam -- in what appears to be a targeted campaign. The harassment has taken place in at least three major cities, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, in addition to the provinces of Binh Duong, Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Phu Yen. The individuals who have been targeted are believed to have either bought or read books printed by the publisher, or to have worked for the publishing house.

According to information received by Amnesty International, individuals in those locations have been summoned to local police stations where they have been interrogated about books they bought from the publishing house. After questioning, most were pressured to sign statements promising that they would not buy books from the Liberal Publishing House again.

In one case, police detained and allegedly tortured a man in custody on October 15 in Ho Chi Minh City, allegedly to force him to confess to working for the publisher. Police detained him for more than 12 hours, during which time he was repeatedly beaten until his nose bled. Since being released he has gone into hiding, fearful of re-arrest.

In addition, on October 23-24, a man in Phu Yen province received two letters from the police summoning him to the local station for questioning about his receipt of "banned" books. After interrogating the man, police searched his house and confiscated books printed by the Liberal Publishing House. In early November, a man who occasionally works with the Liberal Publishing House went into hiding, fearing arrest, after police instructed his regular employer to inform them when he next came to the office.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have recently received further reports of house searches and book confiscations.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4114762019ENGLISH.pdf>

This crackdown has further exacerbated the prevailing climate of fear in Viet Nam, where the authorities severely restrict the right to freedom of expression, and where people face arrest and imprisonment simply for voicing their opinions.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call on the Vietnamese authorities to immediately stop this campaign of intimidation and harassment and allow the Liberal Publishing House and those associated with it to exercise their right to freedom of expression. The authorities should further initiate a prompt, impartial, thorough independent and effective investigation into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by the Ho Chi Minh City police. Suspected perpetrators should be brought to justice and the victims provided with reparation. Individuals who report police abuse -- and their families -- should be protected from reprisals.

## **Background**

The Liberal Publishing House, which was established on 14 February 2019, publishes a range of non-fiction books written by Vietnamese authors on topics such as political science, public policy and other social issues, such as *Politics of a Police State*, *Non-Violent Resistance*, *Politics for the Common People*, *Life Behind Iron Bars*, and *A Handbook for Families of Prisoners*. Many of these books are considered sensitive by the government and their publication is effectively banned. The Vietnamese authorities generally censor publications that are perceived to conflict with government policy.

The Liberal Publishing House has been targeted in the past. Since the publishing house began operations, the police have launched several sting operations to try to arrest people working for it. The publishing house has also been subjected to online harassment. In February, its Facebook page was subjected to a cyber-troop attack which led to the closure of the account. In July, three different banks informed the publishing house that its bank accounts would be closed. No justification was given. Police forced shipping companies to provide names and addresses of buyers. Those who refuse to comply face frequent intimidation, harassment and intrusive surveillance. In November, the publishing house's newly launched website (<https://nhaxuatbantudo.com/>) was targeted by multiple cyberattacks.

Both Viet Nam's Constitution and international human rights law guarantee the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to receive and impart information and ideas. This includes accessing and reading information contained in books such as those printed by the Liberal Publishing House. Freely accessing such information and ideas is also an important aspect of the right to education.

So far in 2019, at least 16 individuals have been arrested solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and some have already been tried and sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

## Again with slandering democracy and human rights

By Lê Vĩnh Bình – Police Academy of Politics<sup>7</sup>

December 18, 2019



Screenshot of the article published on the official website of the Police's Academy of Politics.

*Recently, two international NGOs--Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI)--resorted to misrepresentation and fabrication when they made a statement slandering Vietnam, accusing it of “cracking down on an independent publishing house” and democracy & human rights activists. So where’s the truth?*

### Schemes to distort and slander Vietnam

In the statement, HRW and AI slander the Vietnamese authorities, calling on them “to immediately stop this campaign of intimidation and harassment and allow the Liberal Publishing House and those associated with it to exercise their right to freedom of expression.”

In their so-called joint statement, these two organizations falsely state: “Since early October, police have harassed and intimidated dozens of people connected to the Liberal Publishing House -- a local independent publisher that has produced books on public policy and political thought in Viet Nam. [...] The harassment has taken place in at least three major cities, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, in addition to the provinces of Binh Duong, Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Phu Yen.”

HRW and AI say that “the individuals who have been targeted are believed to have either bought or read books printed by the publisher, or to have worked for the publishing house.” These two organizations further slander the authorities, demanding they “initiate a prompt, impartial, thorough independent and effective investigation” into these allegations.

The publishing house that these two organizations refer to, Liberal Publishing House (LPH), has secretly printed and illicitly published many books by a certain leading individual, Pham Doan Trang, under the guise of “civil society”: “Politics for the Common People”, “A Handbook for Families of Prisoners”, “On Non-violent Resistance Techniques”... all of which are propaganda that disparage police and distort the political regime, the Party, the State, and the state of democracy and human rights in Vietnam.

In legal documents in both Vietnam and internationally, the concept of “rights” includes “rights and obligations”. Among them are freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of information, which are all fundamental rights recognized in the International Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and instituted in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

<sup>7</sup> <http://hvctcand.edu.vn/chong-dien-bien-hoa-binh/lai-gio-tro-vu-cau-dan-chu-nhan-quyen-1175>



(1966). These documents clearly define the rights and obligations of those who choose to exercise freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

It follows then that people have freedom of speech and freedom to use whatever means to acquire information, be it the press, the internet, or social media pages, so long as all materials are in accordance with the law. Those exercising their rights have an obligation to do so in accordance with the law and must accept that there are limits to these rights.

The exercise of these rights must be tied to special obligations and responsibilities and must be subjected to certain limits in order to preserve the rights or dignity of others; or to protect national security, public order, health, or social morality.

According to regulations in Article 6, Section 2 of the 2012 Publishing Law, the government shall manage publishing activities nationwide. The Ministry of Information and Communication is responsible before the Government for the national management of publishing activities. The ministries and ministerial-level agencies shall coordinate with the Ministry of Information and Communication to manage publishing activities within its authority.

It follows then that the publishing, printing, and release of materials that conduct propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and disrupt national unity; that instigate violence...; that slander or insult the reputation of organizations and the honor or dignity of individuals, are strictly prohibited.

The following are also strictly prohibited: publishing without registration, confirmation, or license; illicit and counterfeit printing, illegal re-printing of publications; distributing publications without legitimate origin or submission of copyright deposit; publishing, printing, and distributing publications which have been suspended from distribution, recalled, confiscated, banned from circulation, destroyed, or illegally imported (Article 10, 2012 Publishing Law).

As such, LPH has violated all of the above regulations of Vietnamese law. LPH is essentially a tool, an organization of activists under the guise of “civil society”.

More dangerously, this organization receives and distributes materials that distort and misrepresent the state of democracy and human rights in Vietnam. It strives to propagate and promote the Western capitalist form of democracy; propagates misrepresentations and distributes materials that oppose the Party and the State, as well as carries out activities that protect, nurture, advocate, and instigate those who oppose the state or want to overthrow the people’s government by non-violent means.

LPH is led by Pham Doan Trang; it was previously represented in the past by Nam Khanh.

It is clear LPH’s activities are unauthorized and violate Vietnamese law. These international organizations have long held deviant views and lack sympathy for Vietnam, and the statements above demonstrate that they continue to intentionally smear and slander the situation in Vietnam.

## **Anti-state conspiracies and schemes**

The illicitly-published materials and illegal activities of LPH reach overseas as well. Reactionary organizations and political opportunists applaud these “black” products as “enlightening” “bedside reading” for young people yearning to be free. In actuality, they are propaganda that distort and slander the concepts of “freedom”, “democracy”, and “human rights”, teaching readers methods to overthrow the political regime, the Vietnamese Communist Party, and the socialist State.

Over time, after these books were secretly printed and illegally published, they were advertised and announced on LPH’s website and social media page. Buyers who were interested bought these books online, transferring money through a public accounting system and then receiving the books through the post office, or through a private shipper paid illicitly to bypass the authorities.

It’s not unusual for a publishing house like this to operate; besides the money they make from selling books, NGOs and overseas reactionaries have provided plenty of funds for them to function.

Through financial support from “Luat Khoa” Magazine (a “magazine” of those civil society groups) and “Dap Loi Song Nui” Radio (an overseas reactionary radio station), LPH has organized many free giveaways of tens of thousands of copies of “A Handbook for Families of Prisoners”, “On Non-violent Resistance Techniques”... overseas, as well as in many cities and provinces of Vietnam.

More dangerously, in the last few days, “Luat Khoa” Magazine and Pham Doan Trang have even begun distributing electronic copies of these reactionary books and materials online over their web and Facebook pages.

“Politics for the Common People” creates a distorted awareness of democracy and human rights in Vietnam, smearing the political regime, the Party, and the State, with the goal of reducing trust and instigating destructive and reactionary activities.

“On Non-violent Resistance Techniques” contains directions, methods, and ways to “fight” non-violently and without casualties, to rally and gather illegal protestors to oppose the leadership role of the Party and its management of the State.

“A Handbook for Families of Prisoners” propagates smears against the police and gives readers guidance on what can be done inside and outside prison; instructions on how to deal with the authorities; ways to take advantage of social media; as well as methods to advocate globally and “internationalize” the issues of “democracy” and “human rights” in Vietnam...

These are materials printed and distributed illegally; they contain reactionary content opposing the people’s regime and are extremely dangerous. The Vietnamese people and the authorities must stay alert to stop and destroy them in time.

# URGENT ACTION

## INDEPENDENT BOOK SELLERS TORTURED BY POLICE

Two members of the Liberal Publishing House - a local independent publisher that sells books considered sensitive by the government – have been detained and tortured by police in Ho Chi Minh City. Since early October 2019, police have harassed, and intimidated dozens of people connected to the Liberal Publishing House in what appears to be a targeted campaign. The individuals who have been targeted are believed to have either bought or read books printed by the publisher, or to have worked for the publishing house.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc**  
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Dear Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the crackdown against members and patrons of the **Liberal Publishing House (Nhà Xuất Bản Tự Do)**, a local independent publisher that has produced books on public policy and political thought in Viet Nam. I find it particularly distressing to learn about two of its members who have been arbitrarily detained and tortured, and many others who have had to flee for their safety over the last year.

Most recently, on 8 May 2020, police in Ho Chi Minh City arrested and detained **Thủy Tuất**, a member of Liberal Publishing House when he was delivering books to a reader. While in custody, Thủy Tuất was interrogated and brutally tortured, including punching in the face, chest, ribs and stomach by police from 9am to 3am the following day. Upon release, despite having serious injuries, Thủy Tuất went directly into hiding fearing that police might re-arrest him. Subsequently, police arrested his 24-year-old daughter and refused to release her unless Thủy Tuất returns to the police station. She remains detained in police custody.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Police in Ho Chi Minh City have been accused of arbitrarily detaining and torturing a staff member of Liberal Publishing House before. In October 2019, another member was forced to go into hiding after being harassed by the police. Across the country, hundreds of people have reported their experience of being interrogated for buying books from Liberal Publishing House since October 2019, many have had their houses searched and books confiscated by the police.

Both Viet Nam's Constitution and international human rights law guarantee the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to receive and impart information and ideas. This includes accessing and reading information contained in books such as those printed by the Liberal Publishing House. Freely accessing such information and ideas is also an important aspect of the right to education.

**I therefore urge you Prime Minister to:**

- **Release Thủy Tuất's daughter immediately and stop the harassment and intimidation against Thủy Tuất and his family;**
- **Stop the crackdown campaign against Liberal Publishing House and its supporters immediately, and order an independent and thorough investigation into the alleged torture and arbitrary detention cases;**
- **Ensure that Liberal Publishing House and other independent publishers can enjoy their rights to freedom of expression, information and publishing.**

Yours sincerely,

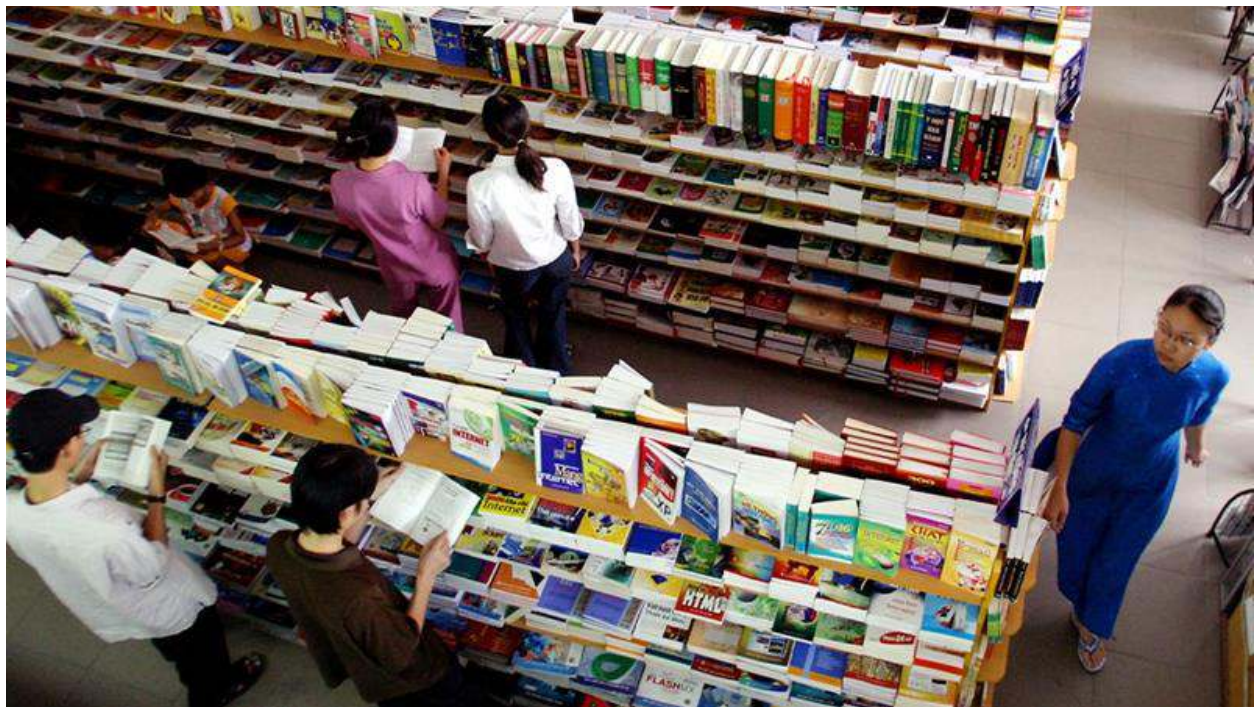
Screenshot of Amnesty International's page:  
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4123252020ENGLISH.pdf>

## 'Pushing boundaries': The rise of Samizdat publishing in Vietnam

By Adam Bemma /Al Jazeera<sup>8</sup>

January 14, 2020

*Liberal Publishing House publishes and distributes books Vietnam's government does not wants its citizens to read.*



*Vietnam's publishing industry is tightly controlled by the government [File: Kham/Reuters]*

**Hanoi, Vietnam** - Inside a cramped room in a secret - and temporary - location in northern Vietnam, a printer whirs to life, spitting out sheets of paper covered in text.

Neat piles are stacked on nearby tables and a man wearing an air respirator places one of them into a machine that cuts and binds the pages to a cover.

"The dampness in the room has caused the paper to crease. This isn't good," said the editor in chief of Vietnam's Nha Xuat Ban Tu Do - Liberal Publishing House - as he flipped through the newly-printed book.

In Vietnam, as in the former Soviet Union, such publications are known as Samizdat - the illegal copying and distribution of books - and are banned by the government as "anti-state" activity. Under Article 117 of Vietnam's criminal code, anyone involved in Samizdat risks a jail term of 20 years. The Liberal Publishing House editor prefers not to share their name.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/pushing-boundaries-rise-samizdat-publishing-vietnam-200113071848863.html?fbclid=IwAR0WiMGnOwy66OneEqp6QlFiWoFcOzZHlyOIRS4SSh7\\_1S8o9MeyhW-wQSw](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/pushing-boundaries-rise-samizdat-publishing-vietnam-200113071848863.html?fbclid=IwAR0WiMGnOwy66OneEqp6QlFiWoFcOzZHlyOIRS4SSh7_1S8o9MeyhW-wQSw)



The publishing house was founded last February in Ho Chi Minh City by a group of dissidents as a direct challenge to the government's control of the industry and to bring the non-fiction work of Vietnam's growing crop of dissident writers to the nation's readers.

"Every printing house in Vietnam is controlled by the government. We had to buy our own printing press to do it clandestinely," said Tran Ha, Liberal Publishing House's founding member, who asks that we use a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Immediately after the press was set up, Ha had to move it from Vietnam's largest city to an undisclosed location due to pressure from police trying to shut it down and arrest them.

"We're unable to stay anywhere for a long period of time or our work may be revealed. If we're discovered even the community will be at risk," added Ha.

### **'Dangerous and damaging'**

The government has long censored and controls its media and publishing industries and imposed tight restrictions on them.



*Liberal Publishing House has published dissident author Pham Doan Trang's latest books Politics of a Police State and On Non-violent Resistance Techniques. [Adam Bemma/Al Jazeera]*

The Law on Publishing prohibits "propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," the "spread of reactionary ideology" and "the disclosure of secrets of the [Communist] Party, State, military, defence, economics, or external relations."

Liberal Publishing House has published 11 books from eight authors during the past year on politically sensitive topics including China's role in Vietnam and controversial legislation on Special Economic Zones. It has also released a legal handbook for jailed activists.

It is the first Samizdat in Vietnam to launch a website and Facebook page.



"We have tens of thousands of readers despite police repression and state censorship," Ha said. "Many of them are members of the Communist Party."

There is no way to verify these claims, but in October, Vietnamese authorities cracked down on Liberal Publishing House, its distribution network and readers.

In November, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch released a joint statement calling for an end to the intimidation and harassment of people either associated with the publisher's activities or trying to obtain copies of Samizdat books.

According to Amnesty International's Vietnam campaign team, police have questioned nearly 100 people for either owning or reading books printed by Liberal Publishing House.

"They know how dangerous and damaging [Samizdat publishing] is to their regime," said Trinh Huu Long, a democracy activist and co-founder of Legal Initiatives for Vietnam.

"By printing books, they can make independent information look professional and legitimate to readers. If they can hold it in their hands they trust it more. It's valuable."

### **Clandestine network**

Walking along popular bookshop-lined streets in either Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi it is easy to find and buy copies of Western and Vietnamese literature banned by the government since reunification in 1975. While some illegal books are smuggled into the country, most are photocopied versions of the originals.

But finding Samizdat books written by Vietnamese authors in Vietnam itself is difficult so press freedom activists have started a support network to help keep Liberal Publishing House operational.

Supporters help ship books within the country. Readers across Vietnam place an order and decide a location from which to collect the books which are delivered by motorbike-taxi drivers - rather like ordering food online.

"A lot of those shipping our books have been trapped by police officers pretending to be readers interested in buying copies. They order a book from us online and set a place and time to have the book delivered to them," said Ha.

"We've had two of our staff arrested and one was forced to confess."

Liberal Publishing House has begun to distribute digital versions of their most popular books to help pay for the costs associated with publishing physical copies.

### **'Pushing boundaries'**

Nguyen Quang A, 73, has been challenging state censorship under his SOS Squared Library for 20 years. He has published dozens of banned books in physical and e-book format and was the inspiration behind the Liberal Publishing House's Samizdat operation.

"I gave up printing paper books," Quang A said. "My objective is not to be a hero fighting against the corrupt censorship system. It's just to discuss ideas."

Ha said the feedback its Vietnamese readers give Liberal Publishing House reflects the hunger people have to know more about public policy in Vietnam.

"I think Liberal Publishing House is pushing the boundaries," said Dinh Thao, a 28-year-old activist living in Hanoi. "In the past, [Samizdat] publishers would rather print translated books, but now they publish books from Vietnamese authors inside the country. These are the kinds of books I like to read."



*A Samizdat book from Vietnam's Liberal Publishing House whose readers are mainly from the country's remote and poorer areas [Adam Bemma/Al Jazeera]*

Bestselling copies of dissident author Pham Doan Trang's latest books *Politics of a Police State* and *Non Violent Protest* sit on the table at Liberal Publishing House's Samizdat printing facility.

While Hong Kong's protests have continued into their eighth month, books on the subject are scarce in Vietnamese. Liberal Publishing House's next release will shine a light on anti-China protests in Hong Kong and those that took place inside Vietnam in June 2018 - the biggest protests since the end of the Vietnam War.

"We've had a lot of interest from Vietnamese readers about the Hong Kong protests," said Nguyen. "Our readers are coming from some of the most remote and poorest areas of the country."

# **LIBERAL PUBLISHING HOUSE**

“WE WRITE FOR YOU TO READ.”

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