

**A Comparative Study of the Roles of the
Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the
Vietminh in the Struggle for
Independence in Vietnam
1930-1945**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled
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Independence in Vietnam, 1930-1945" submitted by
Mr. Sudhir Kumar Singh in partial fulfilment of six
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credits for the award of the degree of Master of
Philosophy of this University. This dissertation
has not been submitted for the M.Phil Degree of this
University or any other University. This is his own
work.

We recommend that the dissertation be placed
before the examiners for evaluation.


(PROF. PARIMAL KUMAR DAS)
CHAIRMAN


(DR. GANGANATH JHA)
SUPERVISOR

To

My

Mother

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P R E F A C E

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In the Vietnamese Nationalist struggle the period 1930-45 is of special significance since it was marked by the birth of two major organisations, the Indo-Chinese Communist Party (the ICP) in 1930 and the Vietminh in 1941. It was these two organisations which were the main proponents of the Vietnamese nationalist movement and gave it a major thrust, an anti-imperialist ideology and proper direction. The divergent nationalist organisations prior to 1930 were united under the banner of the ICP and later on under the Vietminh (from 1941 onwards), the nationalist movement became more broad-based and egalitarian. Needless to say that the present day Vietnam which was unified as Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1975 would not have existed in its present shape but for the cooperative efforts of these two political parties.

A comparative study of these two political organisations is required in order to understand their contributions to the Vietnamese nationalist movement. The ICP, in fact, was guided by communist ideology and orientation, and thought in terms of protracted class conflict. The Vietminh was more broad-based and egalitarian, hence, it could unite under its banner large sections of peasants, workers, intellectuals, landlords and businessmen. But in essence the two parties had the same objective, i.e., to overthrow the French Government and later the Japanese colonial rule and establish a popular government. Their objective was to form a new Vietnam that may be united, independent of foreign involvement, and modern in its economy

and society. These two parties were guided in their ideology and programmes by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the Kuomintang Party of China. Hence it is appropriate to examine the various phases in the Vietnamese nationalist movement during 1930-1945 when these two parties played the vanguard role.

The period 1930-1945 has been chosen for study because it was a delicate phase in Vietnamese national struggle. It marked a real watershed when Ho Chi Minh appeared on the scene, when history was virtually being rewritten by the Party and revolutionaries of these organisations. Thus by 1945 not merely the French colonial rule ended in Vietnam but also the Vietnamese revolutionaries made a declaration of independence against the Japanese. The events during this period are rich in historical details which is the purpose of the present work to examine.

The dissertation is in five chapters. Chapter one presents the pre-independence period of Vietnam and the rest three chapters compare the two parties and show some striking similarities of the ways and means in the struggle against the French and later the Japanese.

The first chapter traces the evolution of the colonial policies and forces in the context of Vietnam. It examines the basic aims and contradictions of the French imperialists vis-a-vis the Vietnamese people and their objectives.

In the second chapter, an attempt has been made to trace the genesis and growth of Vietnamese nationalism during the period of French colonialism. The major factors leading to the success of the Vietnamese nationalists and the role of revolutionaries like Ho Chi Minh have been analysed in detail.

In the third chapter, the rise of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party in 1930 and its revolutionary strategy from 1930 to 1941 have been discussed. Attempt has been to analyse how communism was made acceptable to the people of Vietnam.

The fourth chapter has analysed the significant role played by the Vietminh in Vietnam during the critical years 1941-1945. The purpose is to analyse how Vietminh appeared on the scene and enlisted cooperation of several nationalist groups in Vietnam.

In the concluding chapter a summary of the events during the 1930-1945 period has been made. It highlights the significant role played by the ICP and the Vietminh organisations on a comparative basis. A post-script survey of the two organisations reveals their contribution in the political, military and diplomatic struggles in Vietnam.

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However if there are any factual errors or lapse of judgement, they are entirely my own.



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Chapter I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The emergence of Vietnamese nationalism under the leadership of Ho-Chi Minh transformed the nature and character of Southeast Asian politics. Vietnam has to its credit a history of struggles and wars against the Chinese, the French and the Japanese forces. The political developments during the Second World War paved the path for Vietnamese independence. The French government was not ready to transfer power easily. But its forces were not capable of subduing the Vietminh forces. The Vietnamese under the banner of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Vietminh inflicted several defeats on the French forces. The French were compelled to transfer power to the Vietnamese. It is therefore worthwhile to study their strategy, resistance-style and negotiating techniques vis-a-vis the French.

This dissertation will confine its enquiry only during the first fifteen years (1930-1945) of Vietnam's national struggle under communist leadership. It will provide a comparative analysis of the role of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Vietminh and their arduous struggle to achieve independence.

Like many third world countries which achieved freedom after a great struggle, the Vietnamese also achieved independence after a great struggle. But Vietnam, in the process, has established its own tradition of guerrilla warfare and pattern of socio-economic emancipation of the

masses. The skills and sophistication that were shown by the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Vietminh had its roots in the past experiences since the time of Chinese intervention in Vietnam. War has been a dominant feature in Vietnam's history. The nationalist movement in Indo-China started almost at the same time as the French succeeded in establishing their domination.

The writings of French scholars like Montesquieu and Rousseau had a profound influence on the people of Indo-China. But it was the First World War which brought the people of Indo-China into direct contact with Western democratic concepts and ideas. In 1925, the revolutionary Party of Young Annam was founded but the Party was paralysed due to the mutual jealousies of its members. In 1927 the Nationalist Party, modelled on the Kuomintang Party of China, was formed at the instance of Phan Boi Chau, a revolutionary leader. Throughout the period of nationalist struggle, there remained two schools of opinions among Vietnamese nationalists : one group formed the "Constitutionalist Party" which wanted Franco-Vietnamese collaboration; and the other formed the Communist Party of Indo-China under the leadership of Nguyen-Ai-quoc, better known as Ho Chi Minh. The latter preferred revolutionary methods to achieve independence. It was a notable feature of the nationalist struggle in Indo-China that the communist movement emerged in Vietnam. They raised rebellions at various places.¹ This party, in particular, played a prominent role in

1 Frank N. Trager, Why Vietnam? (New York, 1966), p. 53.

mobilising public opinion against the oppressive nature of French colonial rule. The French did not hesitate to order mass-killings of the Vietnamese. But the Second World War made the situation difficult for the French colonial masters in Indo-China. It was during this period that the various groups of the Vietnamese nationalists fighting for independence united under one organisation called Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, and popularly known as Vietminh.² It was the Vietminh which carried forward the task of eliminating French imperialism from Indo-China. It allied itself with other organisations to create anti-French sentiments in Vietnam. But the Vietminh did not emerge in a vacuum. It was the offshoot of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP) under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and professing the tenets of communism. Here an attempt will be made to analyse the comparative significance of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Vietminh in Vietnam's national movement. But their political activities may not be understood in proper perspective unless we know the brief history and socio-political pattern of Vietnam, when the communist organisations such as Indo-Chinese Communist Party or Vietminh emerged.

Vietnam lies between $8^{\circ} 33'$ and $23^{\circ} 21'$ north latitude. It is bordered on the north by China and on the south by the Gulf of Siam, on the east by the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea for more than 1400 miles, and on the west by Cambodia and

2 Parimal Kumar Das, India and the Vietnam War (Delhi, 1972), p. 71.

Laos. Total land area of the whole country, north to south, is approximately 127,000 square miles. Vietnam is a land of diversity, with mountains and plains alternating with deep valleys, cultivated green fields are found. About half of the country is jungle, with eighty per cent of the land covered with trees and bushes. In the north is the intensively cultivated and highly productive red river delta, these flatlands give way to a long undulating coast with small fertile plains interspersed by rocky prominences jutting out to the sea, and farther south the thin coastal strip widens and eventually slopes into the farthest limit of the Vietnamese expansion.³ Vietnamese society is predominantly a peasant society. Rice is the main source of income for most of the people. By nature, the Vietnamese are peace-loving and traditional. The predominant religion followed by the Vietnamese is Buddhism and the most common form is the Great Vehicle or big wheel (Mahayana) which they inherited from China.⁴ The villages of Vietnam used to be self-governing with a deep rooted autonomy guaranteed by statutes. The Vietnamese social contract is an agreement between heaven, the land, and the ancestors, whose spirit was thought to be embodied in the

3 M.G. Kahin, ed., Government and Politics of South East Asia (New York, 1967), p. 376, and Joseph Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam (New York, 1958), p. 26. For the detail geography of Vietnam see Great Britain, Admiralt Naval Intelligence Division, Geographical Handbook Series, BR 510: Indo-China (Cambridge University Press, 1943).

4 Douglas Pike, Vietcong (New Delhi, 1966), p. 12.

living generations.⁵ In their struggle for national liberation, the Vietnamese have given equal importance to the diplomatic offensive in the pursuit of national interest. The Vietnamese, in fact, took much pride in their history. This historical experience influenced the future policy of Vietnam to achieve independence.

The history of early Vietnam, is a history of countering Chinese attempts to extend their influence southwards. Traditionally Vietnam along with the Indo-Chinese region, has been a zone of contact and interaction between India and China. Vietnamese culture has the amalgam of Indian and Chinese cultural influences. For many centuries the Chinese had been interested in occupying this area and had at various times extended their political control and influence to the region that is now known as Vietnam.⁶

According to the Chinese sources, Vietnamese first emerged in 221 B.C., when the Chinese emperor Chin Shih Huang Ti decided to annex the country of Nan Yueh. The first significant date in Vietnamese history is the founding of the kingdom of Nam Viet, in 208 B.C. which during the Han Dynasty was an autonomous kingdom under a vague suzerainty.⁷ The

5 Johan F. Cady, South East Asia : Its Historical Development (New York, 1964), p. 105.

6 For details, refer to The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House, 1975); Hoang Vanchi, From Colonialism to Communism (New Delhi, 1964), p. 4; and Ganga Nath Jha, Southeast Asia and India (New Delhi, 1986), pp. 27-31.

7 G. Coedes, The Making of Southeast Asia (London, 1966), pp. 39-40.

Chinese empires had an expansionist tendency. When it was strong and stable, it spread its political, cultural influence through military conquest to less powerful neighbours. Chinese invasions of Vietnam were begun "about 214 B.C. by Chao T'0 and ended in AD 186",⁸ when the latter was militarily annexed. Vietnam remained as a Chinese province upto 939 A.D.⁹ The era preceding 939 A.D. was marked by the gradual imposition of Chinese economic, social and political institutions. They also brought a mandarin-type bureaucracy, and introduced Confucian ethics and the Chinese writing system.¹⁰ In fact, they eventually managed to establish their identity as a separate country within Asia. However, there was an attempt in this period for cultural assimilation between the Chinese and the Vietnamese through intermarriages.¹¹ The Vietnamese did not forget that the Chinese were foreigners, ruling over them and "throughout a thousand years of Chinese rule, the Vietnamese rose time and again against alien domination."¹² However, the Chinese occupation ended in 939 A.D. following the fall of the T'ang Dynasty in China and an autonomous Vietnamese kingdom was able to defend itself against any

8 D.G.E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia (London, 1981), p. 212; V. Thompson, French Indo-China (London, 1937), p. 119.

9 Kahin, n. 3, p. 375.

10 Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indo-China (Stanford, 1959), p. 52.

11 Jhon T. McAlister, Jr., Vietnam : The Origins of Revolution (New York, 1969), p. 20.

12 Hammer, n. 10, p. 55.

13

Chinese attack.

The country after the overthrow of Chinese rule was, however, far from peaceful. For the next five centuries internal battles among princes and dynasties for the throne swept the whole country.¹⁴ Although nominally united under a centralised kingship, the Vietnamese in fact were disturbed by dynastic struggle and the wars of rival princely families. It was also disturbed by an unending conflict amongst the kings and emperors of that region. There was a conflict between the Khmers and the Chams, the Annamites and the Chams and the Khmers and the Annamites. Besides, the kingdom of Chanpa in the South imbued with the Hindu cultural tradition, failed to adjust itself to the main currents of Vietnamese tradition, which had been mostly influenced by China since its very inception. A continuous conflict between the three loomed large for quite a long time, until most of the Cham territory was conquered by the Le Dynasty, and the kingdom was thereupon reduced to the rank of a feudatory state.¹⁵ Barring a short period from 1012 to 1050 A.D., the relations between these three states were never cordial.¹⁶ The Chinese took advantage of this disunity and occupied Vietnamese areas once again in 1407 A.D., only to

13 Buttinger, n. 3, p. 129.

14 Das, n. 2, p. 71.

15 Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indo-China (Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 21.

16 D.G.M. Tate, The Making of Modern Southeast Asia (London, 1971), p. 436; Helen B. Lamb, Vietnam's Will to Live (New York, 1972), pp. 21-24; Kahin, n. 3, p. 376; Coedes, n. 7, p. 82; Hall, n. 8, p. 216.

surrender it in 1427 A.D.¹⁷ Vietnam's national hero, Le-Loi defeated the Chinese after a ten-year struggle. Later in 1802, a Nguyen Prince, Nguyen Phuc-Anh, under the title of Gia-Long, restored his own dynasty at Saigon and captured Hanoi so as to united the whole kingdom under one administration.

With the discovery of sea routes to the region, the trade prospects in the East and Far-East led the European powers to establish their hold over Asia by the mid-nineteenth century. Vietnam could not escape from it. The European companies entered Vietnam, with their missionaries to help in their expansion and then the flag followed. They included the Dutch, the Portugese, the British and the French. Finally only the French were able to succeed in penetrating and subjugating the land of Vietnam. Gia Long, in order to consolidate his territorial gains, accepted substantial military aid from France; this marked the beginning of French interest in Vietnam.¹⁸ After that, France adopted a systematic colonial policy and decided to complete the occupation of the country by military conquest.¹⁹ It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that France became anxious to force a settlement on the Vietnamese rulers.²⁰ French military conquest was initiated after Louis Napoleon was proclaimed as the emperor

17 Hall, n. 8, p. 218.

18 J.F. Cady, The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia (Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 11-12.

19 Hoang, n. 6, p. 7.

20 Don R. Hoy, A Region Divided and United (New York, 1980), p. 657.

of France. He revived the imperialistic policy and openly²¹ declared that France must have a colony in the Far East. Hammer writes that "the French were afraid to get Vietnam before the British did not and thus to make up their territorial and trade losses in India".²² In 1855 Napoleon sent a mission to secure a new treaty, the apparent purpose of which was to put an end to the killing of the French and Spaniards caused by the violent, anti-Christian movements, and to the general refusal by native rulers to accept French missions. The mission failed, and as a consequence France and Spain sent a naval expedition in 1858.²³ A combined Franco-Spanish force comprising 14 war vessels and some 3,000 men commanded by Admiral de Genouilly stormed and captured Da Nang from the Vietnamese on 2 September 1858 and by 1859, they began to capture various provinces.²⁴ They launched an attack on Saigon. After a week's hard fighting Saigon fell into French hands. Tu Duc, the last emperor of the Nguyen dynasty, through his anti-Christian policy initiated a joint Franco-Spanish intervention in Saigon, in which European arms technology defeated the Asian troops. Afterwards, in a long diplomatic manoeuvre, the French were victorious and they signed a treaty with the Court of Hue in April 1863. Vietnam ceded to France three Eastern provinces of Cochin-China and agreed to pay a

21 Cady, n. 5, p. 87.

22 Hammer, n. 10, p. 90.

23 Cady, n. 5, p. 189.

24 Tate, n. 16, p. 447.

heavy indemnity in instalments over ten years, free exercise of Catholic religion and opening of the three ports of Tourance, Balat and Kuang.²⁵

The threat from the north and internal revolts weakened, Tu Duc's hold over the country and the French exploited the situation very tactfully. The French started troops mobilisation gradually to suppress the 'Black Flags', who were active in North Vietnam. They were both Chinese and Vietnamese, violating law and order and symbolising the worsening economic conditions,²⁶ misery and discontent of the contemporary Vietnamese masses. Finally France signed a treaty with the Vietnamese emperor, recognising French sovereignty over Cochin-China. Tu Duc agreed to accept a French resident with armed escort. Tu Duc tried to invite the Chinese to intervene against the French, but French forces counterfoiled the Chinese intervention and this failure exposed the Vietnamese hope of holding victory against the French. Hiep Hoa, the last emperor, was forced to sign a treaty with the French representative, Dr. Harmand on 25 August 1883, by which "Vietnam recognized the French Protectorate and surrendered control over her external relations to France".²⁷ Moreover, they agreed to have French administration in Vietnam over local authorities, and thus the treaty ended the independent status of Vietnam as a state.²⁸ McAlister

25 Hall, n. 8, p. 690.

26 Tate, n. 16, p. 453.

27 Buttinger, n. 3, p. 277; Hall, n. 8, p. 702; Tate, n. 16, p. 453.

28 Tate, n. 16, p. 455.

writes that for the French it was more of an interest "in²⁹ acquiring territory than religious converts".

Initially the French, who established firm control over the region by the end of the nineteenth century, were more interested in improving trade relations with China. But later on Indo-China became a prestigious possession of the French colonial empire. The region, which was already conflict-ridden, provided France with a pretext to intervene and to annex Cochin-China, Tongking and Annam. The fact is that, the annexation of these three provinces halted the disintegration and division of Cambodia. Pluvier writes that French penetration in these regions was a result of "the lack of awareness" of the historical and cultural background or the conditions under which they were living.³⁰ Moreover the French navy was superior and had modern sophisticated weapons for fighting, where Vietnamese lacked both.

Nearly a century of French colonial rule altered Vietnam's traditional government machinery. Although for the first fifteen years of occupation, there were frequent riots and attacks against French officers, the leaderless natives were suppressed, and after that French colonial administration followed the most "inflexible policy" compared to other European powers.³¹ To administer their territorial acquisition, the

29 McAlister, n. 11, p. 38.

30 Jan M. Pluvier, South East Asia From Colonialism to Independence (New York, 1974), p. 4.

31 Ibid., pp. 4-5 and Thomas E. Emis, French Policy and Developments in Indo-China (New York, 1973), p. 64.

French created a state in which colonial administration could oust the indigenous forces and hence to prevent opposition.³² Hall described this as "the neat hierarchy of French colonial administration modelled on the Napoleonic pattern".³³ Thus, suppression of Vietnamese political life was begun by the administrative partitioning of the country. Under this scheme, Cochinchina was brought under direct French rule. A French Governor administered the colony, supported by a privy council, a colonial council, executive and legislature. It was an administration by French officials, which was governed by the flight of the traditional administrative officers. French "colonial law adjudicated in French created courts was applied".³⁴ The lower ranks of the French civil service were awarded to the Vietnamese.³⁵

Tongking and Annam were governed as protectorates. The kings and their courts, together with their hierarchy of mandarins, continued to exist alongside the French administration, but French influence made itself felt strongly. However in these two protectorates, the indigenous administration retained its character in theory. The regions came to be under the authority of the French superior resident, assisted by the privy council and a protectorate council. The traditional

32 McAlister, n. 11, p. 39.

33 Hall, n. 8, p. 798; McAlister, n. 11, p. 91.

34 Robert Scigliano, South Vietnam : Nation Under Stress (Boston, 1964), p. 8.

35 Hall, n. 8, p. 799.

mechanism continued to operate in the form of a facade of indirect rule; as Hall says, "the distinction between direct and indirect rule was a legal rather than a practical one".³⁶

The French colonial system was based on the assumption that the colonies and protectorates would be drawn progressively closer to France as integral parts of a closely-knit empire.³⁷ The French did not altogether wipe out the native administrative machinery : it was allowed to exist in order to make "foreign rule somewhat less unpalatable".³⁸ But in its actual working, French control over the native administrative machinery was absolute. In Annam, the traditional Vietnamese court and the mandarins were retained, but they did not enjoy any real power. In the absence of a mandarinal framework, Cochinchina went under direct French rule.³⁹ Frank Trager writes that "the French were willing to use mandarins and other Vietnamese as intermediaries between themselves and the general public", but they were always placed in positions inferior to those held by the French, and they were always regarded as untrustworthy. The French were determined to introduce their own form of administration, their own brand of civilization, their own laws and customs.⁴⁰ They even partitioned Vietnam into three regions. They did not

36 Hall, n. 8, p. 800.

37 Paul H. Clyde and Burton F. Beers, The Far East (New Delhi, 1977), p. 393.

38 McAlister, n. 11, p. 90.

39 Hammer, n. 10, pp. 112-13.

40 Trager, n. 1, p. 30.

regard Vietnam as one country. They allowed the name Vietnam which was officially adopted by the Gia Long in 1802 to prevent countryside uprisings. Thus "administrative barriers were imposed to discourage the Vietnamese from unifying their potential resources against the French".⁴¹ The provinces were governed separately with different policies and programmes, which later developed regional differences and caused disunity in Cochin-China, as it was ruled as a colony of France with fewer legal and treaty restraints.⁴²

The policy of cultural assimilation which was imposed by the French towards the people of Vietnam was designed to turn natives into Frenchmen, and to inject French culture to suppress their highly developed politico-social organisation and to promote Catholic citizens.⁴³ They introduced French education, language and law. It was assumed that the natives would eagerly turn from their own "darkness to occidental light".⁴⁴ The results were disastrous. Many officials fled to China, the emperor confined himself to his palace. According to Ennis "In the eyes of the Indochinese it was not administered with the traditional religious basis, but was dispensed in a secular, harsh, almost inhuman manner".⁴⁵ In other words, there was a superimposition of alien norms and culture over the indigenous

41 McAlister, n. 11, p. 40.

42 Ibid., p. 41.

43 Hall, n. 8, p. 801 and Dermis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London, 1968), p. 86.

44 Ennis, n. 31, p. 58 and Thompson, n. 8, p. 400.

45 Ennis, n. 31, p. 58.

culture. However "This has not prevented a constant drift back to the basic proposition that the ideal of the French colonial vocation is to bring less-fortunate peoples within the fold of the French culture and a single all-embracing France"⁴⁶. Cultural assimilation became still more the aim of the French during the First World War; under the Gen. Sarraut's second term of office (1917-19), a scheme was introduced under which the state was to take over-all primary instruction and make the study of French Universal. Entrance examinations for the mandarinat which tested Confucian learning were abolished in Tongking in 1915 and in Annam in 1918; Franco-Vernacular schools were also introduced.⁴⁷ Hall writes that "Vietnamese nationalism seems to have been the special product of the Franco-Vernacular schools"⁴⁸. Thus the policy of assimilation formulated by the French administration "almost exclusively guided by the French concepts and norms, cultural, political and economic"⁴⁹ was ruthlessly followed.

Economically, Vietnam was considered by the French as a supplier of raw materials. Moreover Vietnam was a supplier of raw material to France and became the market for French imported goods. The economy of French Indo-China, therefore, came to depend almost on the interests of France. Thus even though

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- 46 Rupert Emerson, From Empire to Nation (Cambridge, 1959), p. 69.
- 47 McAlister, n. 11, p. 42; Hall, n. 8, pp. 800-2 and Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path (London, 1981), p. 185.
- 48 Hall, n. 8, p. 800.
- 49 R.E.M. Irving, The First Indochina War (London, 1975), pp. 8-10; Pluvier, n. 30, p. 8 and Duncanson, n. 43, p. 400.

"Economic assimilation went far in relation to markets and investments", it "carried no implication that standards of living and social services should rise to the level of those in France"⁵⁰. Indo-Chinese goods exported to France were fish, eggs, nuts, ebony, ivory, calomel and the imports were sugar, spices, herb, cloth, red silk. The chief activity of Vietnam is rice-production which constituted the greatest source of wealth. As soon as the French administration became established, the exportation of rice was authorised.⁵¹ In 1878 the Franc replaced the Pias as the currency of Indo-China. In 1938 the French were buying 53 per cent of Vietnamese exports and supplying almost 80 per cent of Vietnamese imports.⁵²

The relationship between the Vietnames tenants and the French landlords and indigenou landlords was feudal in character. The position of the share-croppers was not better than that of the serfs of the pre-revolutionary era of France. They worked for the landlords who loaned them cattle, seeds, manure and tools, sometimes at the rate of 50 per cent interests.⁵³ The general condition of the cultivator was poor. The Europeans owned tea and rubber plantations. French capital was invested in mining industry, coal industry, tin, timber extraction and rubber planting.⁵⁴ In spite of these, the peoples' standard of living,

50 Hall, n. 8, p. 826 and Rupert, n. 46, p. 72.

51 Emnis, n. 31, p. 112.

52 Duncanson, n. 43, p. 108 and Hall, n. 8, p. 829.

53 Hall, n. 8, p. 827.

54 Ibid., p. 829.

which the French wanted to raise, remained the same, as the Vietnamese were powerless in competition with French manufactured goods. The fact is that people did not gain from the prosperity of their country. The general masses were reduced from poverty to wretchedness, while the small number of newly rising bourgeois, who became partners in exploitation, began to prosper. These practices of the French increased hostilities; later the country witnessed the anti-colonial and nationalist movement.

The imposition of French rule in Vietnam, which did not produce any reform for the Vietnamese, was met with organised resistance which later developed into a more radical form of nationalism which sought to end French rule in Vietnam. In fact the anti-colonial movement was a reaction to imperfect economic, political and educational development. Added to this was the alien nature of capitalism and the lack of any kind of democracy. There is no doubt that the French exploited the Vietnamese and obtained rubber, coal and rice from Vietnam. The masses suffered from oppressive French rule which was made worse by heavy taxation and poor wages. This was naturally irritating to the people and they were keen to get rid of the foreign rule. These conditions contributed to native hostility towards French rule. Discontent with French rule became apparent and the French witnessed constant threats of revolts and rebellions.

55 Nguyen Khac-Vien, The Long Resistance : 1858-1975 (Hanoi, 1975), p. 55; and Paul Mus and J.T. McAlister, Jr., The Vietnamese and Their Revolution (Harper, New York, 1971), p. 7.

56 William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power (Westview, 1981), p. 10.

57 McAlister, n. 11, pp. 55-56.

The destabilising effects of French colonialism produced several important consequences in developing the potential for revolution in Vietnam. The new elites emerged from French colonial institutions which were bringing Vietnam into closer contact with the modern world. The concept of nationalism, which was hence ushered in, was initially moderate and reformist in nature and aimed at a renaissance of Vietnamese society.⁵⁸ The sense of humiliation, owing to the loss of self-respect which was brought by the French takeover of the responsible administrative posts of the country,⁵⁹ led to the discontent against the French. The victory of Japan over Russia provided a great impetus. The overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty by the Chinese nationalists in 1911 provided further impetus. But it was the First World War which brought the people of Indo-China into direct contact with Western democratic concepts and ideas. The disturbances were led by high school and college graduates unable to find⁶⁰ worthy employment.

Vietnam entered upon a very significant phase, when in 1905 the first political organisation was founded and later a peasant uprising was organised. This was followed by many organisations like the Revolutionary Party of Young Annam in 1925 and in 1927 the Nationalist Party modelled on the

58 McAlister, n. 11, p. 48.

59 Ennis, n. 31, pp. 62-63.

60 Hall, n. 8, p. 802; Ennis, n. 31, p. 177; Hoang, n. 6, p. 12 and Thompson, n. 8, p. 476.

Kuomintang Party of China was formed. Another notable feature of nationalist struggle in Indo-China was the emergence of the communist movement led by Ho Chi Minh. He organised the peasants to gain independence.

The October Revolution in the Soviet Union gave an impetus to the national movement in Vietnam during the early days of their national struggle for independence. The peoples' belief that "the Russian revolution, occurring in a backward country, was the harbinger of a future world society in which all peoples would be free", offered "psychological compensation for their recognition of the backwardness of their own society".⁶¹ Ho Chi Minh praised the October Revolution and had said "The French imperialists' barbarous oppression and ruthless exploitation have awakened our people compatriots, who have all realized the revolution is the only road to survival and that without it they will die a slow death".⁶² A number of Vietnamese leaders were influenced by the revolutionary ideology of Marxism and Leninism. Ho Chi Minh who believed in the principles of Marxism and Leninism took the initiative to unite the working class of Vietnam and accelerate patriotic movements. In one of his early speeches Ho Chi Minh said that "there is no other path to national salvation and emancipation than that of Proletarian revolution".⁶³ Ho Chi Minh endeavoured

61 Milton Sacks, "Marxism in Vietnam", in F.N. Trager, Marxism in South East Asia (Stanford, 1978), p. 108.

62 Ho Chi Minh Selected Writings (Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1973), pp. 110-11.

63 Ho Chi Minh Selected Writings (SU That Publishing House, Hanoi, 1960), p. 705.

to propagate Marxism-Leninism into Vietnam and prepare the working class for founding of its party. Thus, the Vietnamese working class, influenced with the revolutionary spirit of Marxism-Leninism after the October Revolution in Russia, combined Marxism-Leninism with the national struggle and became a strong force to assume the leadership of Vietnam's revolutionary movement. Hence the Indo-Chinese Communist Party was founded in February 1930, and several organisations and associations were brought under the Indo-Chinese Communist Party⁶⁴ to oppose French colonial rule.

The outbreak of the Second World War produced a deep impact on the nationalist movement in Indo-China. The swift and overwhelming Japanese victories over the colonial regimes provided a chance for the nationalists to reorganise themselves.⁶⁵ France, after the defeat at the hands of Germany in Europe, was forced to concede certain concessions to Japan and thus Vietnam was occupied fully by the Japanese without dismantling French rule. This was because at this time the Japanese forces were fighting against Western colonialism. The Japanese saw that Indo-China would be better ground for the reorganisation of defeated troops and a supply base for the fighting forces in the various countries.⁶⁶ A Franco-Japanese treaty was signed on 30 August

64 Fifty Years of Activities of the Communist Party of Vietnam (Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1980), p. 6; Robert F. Turner, Vietnamese Communism: Its Origin and Development (Stanford, 1975), pp. 17-18.

65 Hodgkin, n. 47, p. 109.

66 Kiyoko Kurusu Nitz, "Independence Without Nationalists: The Japanese and Vietnamese Nationalism during the Japanese Period, 1940-45", Journal of South East Asian Studies, vol. 15, no. 1, March 1984, p. 108.



1940, recognising the prominent position of Japan in the Far East, because the French forces were insufficient to withstand a Japanese invasion. Instead, the French were allowed to retain their sovereignty in Vietnam,⁶⁷ as the local administrations and security functions were in their control. In return, the French placed military facilities and economic resources at the disposal of the Japanese. It was a "gradual process achieved largely without violence but through diplomatic measures in response to specific strategic needs".⁶⁸ The Japanese occupation of Indo-China brought great changes in Vietnamese political life. The weak French regime depended for its existence on the good grace of the Japanese.

In fact there was no opposition to the Japanese occupation of Indo-China, even though France continued to administer the country. The people of Indo-China had to organise struggle on two fronts. On the one hand, they organised a number of popular uprisings against the French authorities, even though these were effectively brought down by the French.⁶⁹ On the other hand, the people of Indo-China also started an anti-Japanese movement under the Vietminh. Although the significance of the Japanese period in Vietnamese history seems to be widely accepted, but the interpretation of its contributions differ greatly. Ellen Hammer considers that

67 B. Fall, The Two Vietnams (New York, 1969), p. 45 and Hall, n. 8, pp. 856, 857.

68 McAlister, n. 11, p. 109.

69 Gilbert Khoo, A History of Southeast Asia Since 1500 (Kuala Lumpur, 1970), p. 148.



"the significance of the Japanese period lies in the fact that the power of the nationalists was concentrated in the hands of the Vietminh, owing to anti-Japanese sentiments caused by Japanese occupation".⁷⁰ The political gap, after the Japanese surrendered, is accepted as one of the most significant contributions to the rise of the Vietminh and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Hammer summarises the Japanese period with the conclusion that "one thing was certain. Events in Vietnam, since the end of the Second War would have been very different if the Japanese had not come to Indochina".⁷¹

The period 1940 to 1945 caused a change of tempo as well as methods in Vietnam's national movement and produced the real beginning of the war of independence. It was the Vietminh who played a crucial role in the Vietnamese struggle for independence. Founded by Ho Chi Minh, the Vietminh united all anti-colonial forces under one banner, and demonstrated a formidable nationalist movement, the Vietminh provided a stiff resistance to the French forces.⁷² Since 1943 the Vietminh had two major objectives, i.e., to expand its organisation by developing mass support and to build-up its armed strength against the French colonial masters and to counter the Japanese invaders side by side.

The Vietminh thus evolved a great insurrectionary movement to seize power from the French rulers.

70 Hammer, n. 10, p. 22.

71 Ibid. , p. 43.

72 Hall, n. 8, p. 86; Kahin, n. 3, p. 392; Hammer, n. 10, p. 98; Buttinger, n. 3, p. 328.

Chapter II

RISE OF VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

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The growth of national feeling in Asian countries was the direct result of the reaction against Western aggression. However nationalism has been a remarkable phenomenon of Modern Asia. Its origins have varied from country to country and, in many cases, they go back by at least several generations.¹ According to Kennedy, the growth of nationalism in Asia in terms of an Asian revolt against a West which, in the nineteenth century, had often shown itself to be superior in skills of political and commercial organisation, technical achievement and military and naval warfare.² Watson writes that "Nationalist activities developed among Vietnamese intellectuals between the World Wars", as some had studied in France, some in Japan. "French influences, ranging from some sort of liberalism to communism"³ while Hayes says that "nationalism is a modern emotional fusion and exaggeration of two very old phenomena -- nationality and patriotism".⁴ He also states that the French Revolution also proclaimed the altruistic and messianic character of the new nationalism.⁵

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- 1 K.M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance (London, 1953), p. 317.
 - 2 J. Kennedy, Asian Nationalism in the Twentieth Century (Macmillan, 1968), p. 13.
 - 3 H.S. Watson, Nations and States (London, 1977), p. 309.
 - 4 Carlton J.H. Hayes, Essay on Nationalism (Macmillan, 1926), p. 6.
 - 5 Ibid., p. 44.

For the Vietnamese, it is obvious that the struggle against imperialism has played an important part in stimulating nationalism. The life in French Indo-China was not so much surcharged by Western ideas and education. The French had allowed the native institutions of government and economic life to continue under the administration of top French officials. On the other hand because of Chinese immigration, many immigrants had become landowners, farmers, merchants, bankers, and they had introduced the Chinese thought and customs. Education had reached only the coastal cities and the capitals and not the greater portion of the population inside the country.⁶ Through the efforts of scholars, like Phan-Chau-Trinh who had founded the Tonkinese Association of Free Education, the situation had gradually improved and men, like De Than - the greatest of the Indo-Chinese revolutionaries, had imbibed the ideas of Western democracy. Besides, a large number of students had attended French University and came under French influence.⁷

Culturally, the Vietnamese owed a great deal to China and it is not surprising that events in China during and after the time of the Boxer Rebellion influenced the growth of Vietnamese nationalism. On the whole the age of modern nationalism in Vietnam began in the latter part of the nineteenth century and since the middle of the twentieth century it had become a dynamic political force in Asia. This nationalism was a revolt against Western imperialism, which, because of its rigorous

6 R.S. Chavan, Nationalism in Asia (New Delhi, 1973), p. 58.

7 Ibid.

exploitation of the people, sowed the seeds of its own
destruction.⁸

Vietnamese nationalism was the product of several developments. The French financial policy, education policy, the absence of industrialisation in Vietnam and the suffering of the middle class were some of the motivating issues. It was also powerfully influenced by developments elsewhere in Asia. Though the nationalists differed in their approaches to be adopted in their national struggle, the final consensus was in favour of the revolutionary means under the stewardship of the Communist Party, namely the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Vietminh. Before analysing their role in the freedom struggle it is necessary to have a perusal of the evolution and dimensions of Vietnamese nationalism.

The Chinese rule for one thousand years in Vietnam, ended in A.D. 939. Their rule contributed to the development of nationalism of the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese had to fight against the Chinese intermittently and in the process there was the rise of Vietnam's nationalism. Later when French rule was imposed on them, they were aware of their historical existence. The impact of colonial rule merged with socio-economic changes of wider dimensions as a repercussion of the industrial revolution spreading through the world. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the spread of technology, the growth of commerce, gradual urbanisation, the expansion of education. The social and economic pattern facilitated and encouraged the socio-

8 Kennedy, n. 2, p. 54 and Chavan, n. 6, p. 65.

economic changes in Vietnam, which "transformed representations of traditional structures, have been adopted to the performance of such functions as mobilizing and channeling the growing political participation"⁹. The above theories postulated that revolution as the process by which the old order is destroyed and new political institutions and social relations are created. Thus revolution is commonly thought of as the enemy of tradition. "Revolutions are made in human societies which have their own history, and some aspects of the heritage of the past stay, constant to serve as the framework within which other aspects of the old order are shattered or transformed"¹⁰. Generally speaking successful revolutionary movements are those which have been able to revive, or rechannel, strong progressive historical currents. The Vietnamese revolution, it has been argued, owed the success of its surprising victory over French colonialism to the skilful combination of Revolution and Tradition. Most importantly, Vietnam had especially strong revolutionary traditions, in particular a heritage of wars of liberation against foreign invasion and repeated peasant uprisings against exploitation by landlords and the imperial court. The Vietnamese revolution involved rallying the traditional popular forces for national and social revolution behind a Marxist-Leninist leadership with understanding of the new

9 Robert N. Kearney, Politics and Modernization in South and Southeast Asia (New York, 1975), p. 7.

10 Christine White, "Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam", Bulletins of Concerned Asian Scholars (Massachusetts), vol. 10, no. 3, October-December 1978, p. 36.

forces of imperialism and capitalism.¹¹ Under French colonialism ancient institutions of the Vietnamese village and family found new strength and Vietnam had been lost to the French. "The village and family had been undermined or dissolved as the poor were forced out of their village in search of food and husbands sold wife and children to pay taxes to the French".¹² Moreover Vietnamese revolutionary leaders have stressed the element of tradition in their movement more than most revolutionaries. They succeeded in mobilising those who wanted to preserve Vietnamese society from a devastating foreign onslaught as well as those who wanted to revolutionise Vietnamese society from the bottom upwards.

However, from late nineteenth century the forces of imperialism and capitalism profoundly changed Vietnam while trying to maintain a traditional facade. French colonial rulers tried to use Vietnamese imperial traditions and the mandarinal hierarchy for their own untraditional ends. It was in this spirit that the Young King Bao-Dai was sent back to Hue in September 1932, after a ten years studying in France. Monarchy¹³ became an instrument to combat communist insurgency. Thus the alliance between colonialism and feudalism was considered the real enemy of the Vietnamese revolution. When the Indo-

11 William J. Duiker, The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam (London, 1976), pp. 15-16.

12 White, n. 10, pp. 36-37.

13 Nguyen The Anh, "Vietnamese Monarchy Under French Colonial Rule : 1884-1945", Modern Asian Studies (Cambridge), vol. 19, no. 1, February 1985, p. 158.

Chinese Communist Party was formed in 1930, its main tasks were defined as "Anti colonial and Anti feudal struggle".¹⁴ It seems that before the formation^{of} an organisation there must be an idea and before that there must be favourable conditions. When Vietnam was ripe, the events and time shaped the Vietnamese to fight against colonialism.¹⁵

The strong urge of the Vietnamese to remain autonomous and resist alien rule of any sort is not a recent product of French domination over their country. This reluctance to accept the deprivation of their independence had in early centuries led them to revolt many times against the Chinese to regain their freedom. When the French came and established their rule, the Vietnamese "fought for independence from France as their ancestors had fought to oust the Chinese from Vietnam since the first century A.D."¹⁶ A tradition of resisting Chinese efforts at conquest became deeply imbedded in the national consciousness. Hall says, "Nationalism was born of their struggle against Chinese domination since the fourth century and has impelled them to retain and defend their own individuality".¹⁷ Speed describes "Vietnamese Nationalism, first evident under the Chinese, continued a vital force under the French, and the

14 Thomas E. Ennis, French Policy and Developments in Indochina (New York, 1936), pp. 62-63, and Nguyen Khac Vien, The Long Resistance : 1858-1975 (Hanoi, 1975), p. 55.

15 Douglas Pike, History of Vietnamese Communism : 1925-1976 (California, 1978), pp. xii-xiii.

16 Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford, 1954), p. 55.

17 D.G.E. Hall, "Integrity of Southeast Asian History", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, vol. 4, no. 2, September 1973, p. 159.

period before World War II there were numerous nationalist societies, many of them Marxist-oriented".¹⁸ These people, with a long tradition of nationalist struggle, had risen up since the early days and ignored the court's order to submit to the French. The mandarins and scholars bitterly resented the coming of the French and organised themselves under their kings to revolt against the foreigners. However, the French had been able to suppress the resistance with their superior strength in both arms and methods of warfare. Under French rule, the traditional xenophobic sentiment developed to a nationalism, which sought to end French rule in Vietnam.

The French were constantly faced with difficulties in administration of their empire. These difficulties as Houston summarised were caused by three factors: (a) Failure to understand their position in a protectorate; (b) Friction and jealousy between the civil and military authority; and (c) Growing nationalist sentiments among the peoples of Annam.¹⁹ This uneasy situation was rendered more difficult for French administrators by the Chinese, who still considered the region as an ancient and integral part of China. Thus various groups and organisations mushroomed under different banners to lead the people to political goals. These goals ranged from the militant yet uncoordinated and ineffectual protests of those identifying with the traditional political structure, to political parties based on the ideologies of nationalism and

18 F.W. Speed, Asia Today (Singapore, 1970), pp. 32-33.

19 Charles O. Houston, "The Position of Indochina", Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), vol. 18, no. 1, 1 January 1955, p. 6.

communism in the year 1925. The struggle was characterised by the frustrated attempts to overthrow the French rule.²⁰

The upsurge of nationalism in Vietnam was part of the general awakening of Asia to worldwide events. Inspiration was drawn from the ideas of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume and Bentham, which reached Vietnam through French lawyers and linguists. The effects of revolutionary France became noticeable in Vietnamese life. The Peninsular War (1808-13) as it had started as a national movement against Napoleon and in 1813 begun the war of liberation in Germany, nationalism which acquired a new significance in European thought, influenced the Vietnamese. The Boxer rebellion of 1900 also influenced the Vietnamese as a new force. In India in August 1905 the Swadeshi movement in Bengal was formally started. The whole country witnessed the thrill of a new epoch and the anti-partition agitation turned into the boycott of British goods by the Bengali people. Surendra Nath Banerjee acted as the leader of the movement, which strengthened the Vietnamese as a tool for their struggle. Japan's victory over Russia at Portsmouth in 1905 halted in an effective manner to the "whiteman's ^uchav^uinistic cult of racial superiority". Japan emerged as a mighty leader of freedom movements through Asia. Russian Revolution of 1905 considered as a dress rehearsal of the 1917 October Revolution provided enthusiasm for the Vietnamese. The emergence of Sun Yat Sen in China after the downfall of the Manchu dynasty and the Chinese

20 J.T. McAlister, Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (New York, 1969), p. 67.

boycott of American goods, which was going on at that time exerted great influence on Vietnamese public life and culture. ²¹

Further, the French colonial policy itself had also acted as a stimulant to the development of nationalism and nationalist movements in Vietnam. The policy of assimilation had the results that had not been intended by the rulers, because "the bitterest ²² opponents of French were those who knew the language best". It was then that the patterns of indigenous political thinking were shaped. The predominantly new institutions resulted from the impact of French rule on Vietnamese society, because older political and religious conceptions had subtly influenced and pervaded the new structures. It opened the door of a closed society to new ideas such as European concepts of individualism, social humanism, and Marxism. Vietnamese nationalists who opposed French rule, drew on these ideal political customs to gain popular support. ²³

Another factor that should be noted is the importance of Chinese influence in the development of Vietnamese society and its political institutions. So profound was the influence of Chinese culture in Vietnam that even after the Chinese government had officially abolished the traditional civil examination in 1905,

21 This section is largely based on the writings of D.G.E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia (London, 1981), p. 802; Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism (Delhi, 1964), p. 9; F.N. Trager, ed., Marxism in Southeast Asia (California, 1960), p. 107; D.J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London, 1968), p. 177; Duiker, n. 11, p. 38 and Ennis, n. 14, p. 177.

22 Hall, *ibid.*, p. 801.

23 Trager, n. 21, p. 104.

the Vietnamese examination system lingered on for a few more years. The Chinese mandarine system with its Confucian values helped the elite to carve out an area of influence, "buttressing further their social and economic position vis-a-vis the peasantry"²⁴. While most of the bureaucratic positions were filled by the elite who could afford the luxury of a long drawn education in the Confucian classics, the bulk of the people remained outside the pale of sinicisation.²⁵ It is however interesting to observe that, ironically enough, the sinicisation of the Vietnamese resulted in the latter's passionate desire to remain independent of China's influence and hegemony. In the words of Joseph Buttinger "The more they absorbed the skills, customs, and ideas of the Chinese the smaller grew the likelihood of their ever becoming a part of the Chinese people"²⁶. In fact it was during the centuries of intensive efforts to convert them into Chinese, the Vietnamese emerged as a separate people, with political and cultural characteristics of their own.

Under the French education policy, Franco-Vernacular schools were opened for the purpose of subordinating the population and promoting policies of assimilation. It only succeeded in raising the level of political consciousness among the people. Education and the educational process, had actually stimulated the Vietnamese

24 D.R. Sardesai, South East Asia. Past and Present (New Delhi, 1981), p. 40.

25 Ibid.

26 Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam : A Political History (New York, 1968), p. 29.

revolution. Alexander Woodside considers, "soldiers and primary school teachers were the pillars of the anti-French Nationalist"²⁷. As a concession to nationalism, in the year 1907, an university was founded by Paul Beau in Hanoi; there was an outburst of nationalistic assertiveness among the students. It was because the Vietnamese teachers and students were forced to speak French rather than Vietnamese. Vietnamese primary school teachers were ordered to teach French history from its beginnings. Such linguistic and literary stratification "cut them off" from the peasantry and made them revolutionaries.²⁸ The budgets of the government allotted 10.7 per cent of their revenues to courts and prisons while only 4.4 per cent of their revenues to education. In fact education and debates over different forms of education had constituted a centrally important battle-ground for revolutionary politicians in Vietnam.²⁹

In terms of religion, the French Catholic missionaries pursued a vigorous policy of conversion, which claimed one lakh thirty thousand converts till 1920, resulted in resistance. According to David Hunt "Campaigns against Catholic enabled people to come together in work, in play and in revolt". This was because the people sensed that their social existence, as well as their religion, was being threatened. Many peasants

27 Alexander Woodside, "Problems of Education in the Chinese and Vietnamese Revolution", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol. 49, 1976-1977, p. 644.

28 Ibid., p. 651; Hall, n. 21, pp. 803-4.

29 Ennis, n. 14, p. 181.

participated in the anti-feudal uprising.³⁰

On the economic side, colonial policy was shaped by the concept of Indo-China as a profitable economic enterprise to be exploited for the benefit of the mother country "colonization was undertaken for the sole benefit of France".³¹ This reduced the condition of the people to a miserable state. However, fiscal burdens imposed upon the people to pay for the construction and development of railways and roads only led to great hardship. McAlister writes under the impact of French colonialism, "Vietnam became a nation off balance".³² But Ennis summarises, one of the elements of discontent, exclusive of the general sentiment that no longer the Vietnamese were allowed to govern the land. It was caused by the fiscal organisation and tax evasions. The consciousness "of being grown between the stones of local greed and western efficiency, thus prompts rebellion".³³ Another source of discord was caused by the refusal of Europeans to pay tax. In Cochin-China where the French had concentrated, many anti-French demonstrations had been motivated by the favouritism of tax collectors. One of the most confusing situation brought about by French administration was due to the promulgation of Western law. As

30 David Hunt, "Village Culture and the Vietnamese Revolution", Past and Present (Oxford), no. 44, February 1982, p. 94.

31 Virginia Thompson, French Indochina (New York, 1942), p. 391.

32 McAlister, n. 20, p. 49.

33 Ennis, n. 14, p. 64.

traditional relationships within families were destroyed with the advent of French law. The French administration and cultural policies rapidly destroyed the traditional pattern of local isolation and self sufficiency.³⁴ The development of the communication system contributed its share to the changed rhythms of life. The disintegration of old patterns invigorated traditional national feeling and promoted nationalist and political organisations.³⁵

Under the French colonial regime Vietnamese suffered the indignity of being ruled by foreigners, saw their patriots imprisoned, and watched Frenchmen grow rich from their exploitation of Vietnam. All these factors intensified the discontent among the people and gave rise to revolutionary sentiments, which later culminated in the formation of political organisations with a common goal -- the end of French rule.³⁶

The first phase of national resistance against the French rule came to an end with the failure of armed rebellion under mandarinal leadership who attempted to use the institution of monarchy as a rallying point. Their military efforts were thwarted, and they were deprived even of the most of the administrative functions by the French. These rebels from the

34 Trager, n. 21, p. 106; Ennis, n. 14, p. 65.

35 Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indo-China (London, 1961), p. 61; Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path (London, 1981), pp. 155-56.

36 McAlister, n. 20, pp. 60-61; Hall, n. 21, p. 800 and W.J. Duiker, Rise of Revolutionary Movement (Westview, 1981), pp. 7-9.

mould of old tradition could not succeed against the French, but many of them became legendary heroes. In the words of Buttinger, "Not only was nothing won but nothing was learned either by the victors or the vanquished"³⁷. The son of deposed monarch, Ham Naghi himself provided leadership to this resistance. The movement known as "Can Voung or Loyalty to the King" was a centre of attraction for all sorts of Vietnamese but the absence of King later on hampered the causes of movement itself and gradually it was despirited.³⁸ From 1885 to the end of the century the peasants, led by the patriotic scholars harassed the French troops with continuous guerilla warfare. The scholars who directed it, had no political programme, no plan for social reconstruction and no adequate methods of struggle, resulting in petering out of the movement.³⁹ Hoang Vanchi writes that "Another contributory factor to their failure is to be found in the inertia of the population, who persisted in the old practice of leaving the destiny of the nation to the King and his royal court. While, on the other hand, the King, being too autocratic and ignoring completely his people never called upon them for help, and failed to exhort their dormant patriotism"⁴⁰. The emphasis on historical

37 Buttinger, n. 26, p. 155.

38 David G. Marr, Vietnamese Anticolonialism: 1885-1925 (London, 1971), p. 49 and Duiker, n. 11, pp. 28-30.

39 Dünconson, n. 21, pp. 11^o-20 and McAlister, n. 20, p. 58.

40 Hoang, n. 21, p. 11.

tradition that is a feature of Vietnamese culture led nationalists of a later time to claim direct link between their movement and these early efforts. Marr says that "The Can Voung movement provided crucial moral and spiritual continuity in this long struggle against foreign invader"⁴¹.

The year 1900 became a point of departure in the political history of Vietnam, when resistance started again. This time it was under new leadership, men inspired by new ideas, impelled by new forces and organised on new lines. With the advent of the twentieth century, a new group of nationalists led by Phan Boi Chau emerged on the scene. Unlike its predecessor 'Can Voung' it was more nationalist and was influenced by liberal Western democratic ideas. Phan Boi Chau was the "first prominent Vietnamese nationalist who realized that Asia would continue to be a victim of Western exploitation unless the east added modern western technology and political ideas to its ancient store of knowledge"⁴². The national movement between 1900 and 1905 was led by him. He sought Chinese support but China herself was under European pressure. Ultimately he turned towards Japan. For almost a decade Japan became the training centre of Vietnamese nationalists, which had their head quarter at Tokyo. Hall writes "Japan victory over Russia in 1905 led to the development of a revolutionary movement of Vietnamese and they considered the victors to be an ideal teacher"⁴³ and turned to the schools

41 Marr, n. 38, p. 76.

42 Buttinger, n. 26, p. 155.

43 Hall, n. 21, p. 802; Ennis, n. 14, p. 178; Duiker, n. 11, pp. 49-50.

of that empire in order to obtain first hand information regarding the Japanese technique. Phan encouraged and organised Vietnamese students to study in Japan. Many students were unable to find worthy employment in Vietnam and their talents as scholars had procured for them to obtain official posts under French rule. This had led to many attacks against the French. The revolts against French authority were not well-organised but were more violent and led to greater loss of life because the native believed⁴⁴ at this time that their civilization could be saved from being thrust into the background". Phan got Prince Cuong De, a descendant of Emperor Gia Long exiled to Japan in 1906 in order to set up a new monarch, in accordance ^{with} his plan. Here he founded his first political organisation, in Tokyo. By late 1907 he planned a revolt through the Vietnamese military unit at Hanoi but it was leaked out.⁴⁵ In 1908 Phan founded an East Asian League with the Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian and Philippin^o revolutionaries, in the hope that it would become an alliance of Asian countries against Western imperialism.⁴⁶ For about twenty years Phan was the most determined Vietnamese leader and was regarded by the French as the most dangerous nationalist revolutionary.⁴⁷ He organised peasant demonstrations against taxation in Annam and carried out numerous

44 Ennis, n. 14, p. 63; Duncanson, n. 21, p. 123.

45 Duiker, n. 11, pp. 49-50.

46 Buttinger, n. 26, p. 151.

47 Ibid., p. 158.

terrorist activities. During this period he had written a book Viet-Nam Vong Quoc Su (History of the Loss of Vietnam). This was quickly published and distributed among overseas Chinese and was also smuggled into Vietnam. This is one of the most important books to appear in the course of Vietnamese anti-colonial efforts. Marr considers it "Vietnam's first revolutionary book".⁴⁸ Phan described the causes and the truth about Vietnam's loss; French policies leading the Vietnamese people into ignorance; illiteracy, weakness and misery; biographies of patriots during the annexation and the future course of Vietnam. More than Viet-Nam, Vong Quang Su explained the strong, continuing psychological or emotional under-current of anti-colonial thinking,⁴⁹ which had resulted in the severe repression of peasant demonstrations in Annam in 1908. Basically, Phan struggled with the moderate aim of a reformed monarchy. But he had to give in to the dominant Republican trend in the national resistance movement. He formed the organisation 'The Vietnam Quang Phuc Hoi' (Association for the Restoration of Vietnam) and proclaimed the establishment of a Democratic Republic as its ultimate aim.⁵⁰ It was responsible for a number of outrages in Tonking, but it was suppressed by the French. Hall considers that this brought "the first phase of the twentieth century national movement to an end".⁵¹ Thus Vietnamese nationalists under the

48 Marr, n. 38, p. 114.

49 Ibid., p. 119.

50 Buttinger, n. 26, pp. 157-58.

51 Hall, n. 21, p. 803.

leadership of Phan Boi Chau were responsible for some minor public demonstrations and no concrete steps were taken to achieve independence. The failure of the moderates and reformists to gain something meaningful, gradually encouraged revolutionary groups and they became the forebearer of the independence movement after the World War I.

The years 1911-1914 were something of a turning point in the development of Vietnamese nationalism. It was during the World War I period that the nationalist movement grew very strong in Vietnam. The people of Asia had admired the bravery and endurance, discipline and power, of the Europeans, displayed during the conflict.⁵² During the war significant numbers of Vietnamese came into contact with Marxist ideology. Some 100,000 Vietnamese were sent to France during the war. In the armed forces and in the industry, they met Socialists and trade unionists who opposed the war and preached the creed of class struggle. Some of these Vietnamese returned to Vietnam fired with the desire to transform their own country in the light of their newly acquired Western knowledge. They^{were}/determined to achieve the goal of democracy and self-government that they had seen applied in France.⁵³ During the war France had made very generous promises to the people to win their support and to maintain peace in the country. At the end of war France refused to redeem these promises. This naturally injured the feelings of the people and provided an impetus to the growth

52 Thompson, n. 31, p. 480.

53 Hall, n. 21, p. 803; Ennis, n. 14, p. 182.

of subversive activities. An abortive attack on Saigon central prison in February 1916 was followed by a great many arrests of the supporters of secret societies in the protest against the death sentence, and the exile of members of societies. Another protest occurred in Annam in May 1916.⁵⁴ The post-war period saw the rise of political parties taking their inspiration from developments in the outside world. The elite were stirred by the doctrine of self-determination proclaimed by President Wilson among his fourteen points for settlement of Europe. Some wished to imitate Gandhi's Swaraj movement in India, while others imbibed the teachings of the Cantonese Communists.⁵⁵

It was Bui Quang Chieu (1873-1945), the second son of Bui Quang Dai a native of Mocay who founded the first open political organisation The Cochinchina Constitutional Party in order to agitate along moderate lines. His family had a strong tradition both of Confucian scholarship and of opposition to the French.⁵⁶ He was inspired by the promises of constitutional reforms by Governor General Albert Sarraut in 1919. Marr writes "that the two tenures in office of Governor General Sarraut (November 1911 through January 1914 and January 1917 through May 1919) had marked the opening of a new "pro-native" era in colonial policy".⁵⁷ The party sought

54 R.B. Smith, "Bui Quang Chieu and the Constitutional Party in French Indochina : 1917-1930", Modern Asian Studies (Cambridge), vol. 3, no. 2, 1969, p. 131.

55 Hall, n. 21, p. 803.

56 Smith, n. 65, p. 133; Hall, n. 21, p. 803; Duiker, n. 36, p. 11.

57 Marr, n. 38, p. 250.

to seek more liberal press laws and privileges for the people under French rule, and "seriously strove to make associations a political reality". Its leaders opposed both social revolution and demands for independence.⁵⁸ His own view appears to have been that "Since Vietnam could not hope to succeed in modernizing its economy and society without outside aid, it might well learn from the French and from the Japanese".⁵⁹ He founded the newspapers La Tribune Indigene and La Cochine Liberale "to promote the diffusion of French ideas among the educated elements of Annamite population".⁶⁰ The party also drew its main strength from large landowners. Their demands were political reforms, equal pay for equal work, and greater Vietnamese participation in the political process.⁶¹ But the party fell into oblivion owing to the French colonial policy which had not changed essentially. The refusal of the French to meet any proposal for reforms paved the way for more revolutionary groups to emerge. Efforts to create reformist movements in Annam and Tonking by Phan Quynh, Huynh Thuc Khang and Levan Huan failed. They were not allowed to join The Constitutionalist Party nor The Vietnamese People's Progressive Party.⁶² The uncompromising rebuff of the moderates naturally opened the way for the rise of revolutionary

58 Buttinger, n. 26, p. 174.

59 See Smith, n. 54, p. 133.

60 Ibid., p. 135.

61 Duiker, n. 36, p. 11.

62 Buttinger, n. 26, p. 174 and Hall, n. 21, p. 804.

groups who adopted the style of Constitutionalists.

Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnam National Party) (VNQDD) was formed in 1927 by Nguyen Thai Hoc in Hanoi, and was a Vietnamese replica of the Kuo Min Tang. Although it was not Marxist-oriented, it was the most dominant political organisation in Indo-China in 1920s. It was as nationalist and conservative as its Chinese model. It was based on the same doctrine of Sun Yat Sen's three principles: Principle of nationalism, democracy and the people's livelihood. The VNQDD's most characteristic features were an uncompromising hostility to French rule and a commitment to revolution as the only road to power.⁶³ It consisted largely of journalists and teachers, who began by preparing booklets on current affairs for publication, later turned to violent methods.⁶⁴ In January 1929 it made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Governor Pasquer and in the following month killed Bazin, the head of the Labour Bureau. Its terrorist activities brought the police so hot on its trail that it was forced to launch a rebellion with inadequate precautions.⁶⁵ They began a mutiny in February 1930 at Yenbay which was followed by outbreaks of violence in many places. In reaction the French suppressed the manifestation by force. Many of its leaders were arrested, the party was

63 Duiker, n. 36, p. 12 and G.M. Kahin, ed., Government and Politics of South East Asia (New York, 1963), p. 324.

64 Hall, n. 21, p. 804.

65 Hoang, n. 21, pp. 16-17.

dissolved, and many leaders fled to China.⁶⁶ The nationalist organisation was also non-existent for almost fifteen years, which only reappeared⁶⁶ under the Chinese auspices during World War II. Kahin says "The VNQDD was the most important non-communist revolution^{ary}/nationalist organization in Indo China between the two wars', with the aim of revolutionary overthrow of French rule and establishment of a republican government along the lines of the Chinese Kuo Min Tang".⁶⁷ While Hoang writes that "Nguyen Thai Hoc and his followers were somewhat closer to the proletariat than their communist rivals".⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that no big landlords, rich or eminent intellectuals joined the nationalist movement, while the sons of mandarins and of big landlords supported the movement, "who were idealist, adopted a new faith that was Marxism and started another kind of revolution".⁶⁹ The disappearance of the VNQDD from the political scene facilitated the rise of Vietnamese communism to a position of dominance. Duiker believes that the seeds of Marxism seem to have been initiated at the time of VNQDD, whose counterpart was the "Tan Viet or new revolutionary party". The party was composed of a mixture of older veterans of previous scholar-gentry based organisations and young radicals. It had mildly Marxist leanings, but no direct ties with the Comintern in Moscow.⁷⁰

66 Hall, n. 21, p. 804.

67 Kahin, n. 63, p. 324.

68 Hoang, n. 21, p. 16.

69 Hoang, n. 21, pp. 16-17.

70 Duiker, n. 36, p. 12.

Duiker expresses his views saying "Alongside the VNQDD and the Revolutionary Party arose the first wholly Marxist organization in Vietnam, was The Revolutionary Youth League".⁷¹ It was an outgrowth of the rising nationalist sentiment in post-World War I in Vietnam.

The struggle for independence that had become more radical was the Vietnam Cach Menh Thanh Nien Dong Chi Hoi (The Association of Revolutionary Vietnamese Youth). It was Nguyen Ai Quoc (later known as Ho Chi Minh) who trained and indoctrinated several Vietnamese living in Canton and founded the party in 1925. He was twenty two years old when he went to Europe in 1911. At the end of the First World War he was in Paris sharing lodgings with Phan Chau Trinh and helping him with his work as a photographer's assistant. There he formed an Association of Vietnamese Peoples, on behalf of which he presented a memorandum to the Versailles Peace Conference. He became well-known as a Vietnamese Nationalist lobbying for the independence of Vietnam. He wrote the pamphlet, "French Colonialism on Trial". In 1921 he became the founder member of the French Communist Party and edited Le Paria for the party. In 1923 he went to Russia to learn revolutionary techniques and methods. From Russia he moved to Canton and in 1925 he founded the Revolutionary Youth Movement, an organisation for the training and indoctrination of Vietnamese nationalists at Whampoa Military Academy. His Association was composed largely of young men who had been trained under

71 Duiker, n. 11, p. 157.

Russian supervision. He came in contact with Sun Yat Sen. In April 1927 he returned to Moscow and ultimately shifted to Siam.⁷² In February 1930 Ho united the Revolutionary Youth Movement with two other groups to form the Indo-Chinese Communist Party. Thus with this, a new chapter had started in the nationalist struggle in Vietnam.

The nationalist movement had been relatively inactive since the First World War. The old leadership which had dominated resistance activities for nearly a quarter of a century lost its grip. The young activists were looking for inspired new leadership and ideas. Moderates were active and attempted to find an acceptable line between collaboration and social revolution.⁷³

Phan Boi Chau was arrested and sentenced to death in 1925 by the French leading to mass demonstrations attempting to change the sentence of death to house arrest in Huc. There was a deeper socio-economic reality behind these demonstrations.⁷⁴ Commercial and industrial activity were on the rise, and a new consciousness was appearing among workers and the lower middle class in urban areas throughout the country.

72 Refer to Hammer, n. 16, pp. 81-82; Trager, n. 21, pp. 108-9; Duiker, n. 36, pp. 15-17; Hall, n. 21, pp. 804-5; Duiker, n. 11, pp. 194-205; Hoang, n. 21, pp. 25-26; McAlister, n. 20, pp. 83-84; Marr, n. 38, pp. 256-60; Hodgkin, n. 35, pp. 220-23; Duncanson, n. 21, pp. 141-44 and J. Duiker, "Revolutionary Youth League : Cradle of Communism in Vietnam", China Quarterly (London), no. 51, July-September 1972, pp. 475-80.

73 For details refer Smith, n. 54, pp. 133-50.

74 Duiker, n. 72, p. 478.

The Vietnamese struggle against the French rule in 1920-1930 was led by students and their teachers. This included activities such as the Cochín-China movement to boycott classes as a means of demanding the release of Nguyen An Ninh, public mourning ceremonies for the suddenly deceased nationalist leader Phan Chu Trinh in 1926 and demands for amnesty for the other great nationalist leader, Phan Boi Chau. A student at the Hanoi protectorate school, Pham Tat Doc, wrote a piece of adolescent nationalist propaganda summoning "Back the lost soul of the country"⁷⁵ in 1925 and was sentenced to three years in prison. Many Vietnamese students and teachers in the 1920s-1930s "as member of fiercely proud mandarin families or of villagers victimized by the French conquest and were predisposed to resistance even before they set foot in the schools"⁷⁶. Thus the nationalist movement was about to enter in a new stage. The beginning of this new stage in Vietnam was signified by the emergence of Ho Chi Minh. Hall describes him as "self effacing" as a leader, he was a strict disciplinarian where the other leaders and their parties failed, his firm, intelligent leadership succeeded". Thus France was unable to put down the movement he launched as a leader of "inflexible will and tireless energy"⁷⁷. However, it was later suggested that Phan's arrest was deliberately staged by Ho Chi Minh in order to obtain the reward money and create a martyr

75 Duiker, n. 72, pp. 478-79.

76 Woodside, n. 27, p. 479.

77 Hall, n. 21, p. 806.

for the revolutionary cause.⁷⁸ Duiker denies this and according to him "It was engineered by Nguyen Thuong Huyen"⁷⁹ but Western writers justified Ho's involvement.

The failure of the early nationalists to achieve any significant reform opened the way for more extreme organisations. Thus the Indo-Chinese Communist Party gained popular support to organise revolutionary movements to oust the French rule. Ho Chi Minh became a legend in Vietnam for his anti-French and anti-colonialist writings and activities. He was influenced by Marxist and Leninist ideology. It is certain that his ideological perspective was influenced by Leninist theory on the problem of nationalism in colonial and semi-colonial areas. Lenin had been one of the first Marxist to see the importance of utilising nationalist movements in Asia and Africa as allies to the communists in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. He had outlined the tasks of the communist movement in colonial areas in his famous "Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions", presented to the Second Comintern Congress in 1920".⁸⁰ The basis of Lenin's thesis was that nationalist movements in colonial areas were led by the bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat. He considered Western imperialism and Asian feudalism as common enemies of the people. In Vietnam, the application of Leninist principles of

78 See Marr, n. 38, pp. 260-61.

79 Duiker, n. 72, p. 479.

80 Charles B. McLane, Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia (Princeton, 1966), pp. 11-27.

the United Front led to the communists joining mass nationalist movements under middle class leadership. A broad United Front was created — of all forces opposed to feudalism and the preservation of imperialist authority.⁸¹ By 1925 it was the Petit Bourgeoisie, the storekeepers, managers, civil servants, students, interpreters, professionals, and technicians, that had moved to the political forefront, providing leadership and ideological direction to most of the anti-colonial efforts.⁸² Ho Chi Minh became the first communist and the first to receive a thorough revolutionary and political training. Duiker says, "Nguyen Ai Quoc's instructions were to set up the nucleus of a communist movement in Vietnam within the small but growing proletariat".⁸³

The new revolutionary group was not designed as a formal communist party, but as a nursery for the training and education of committed Marxists who would learn later from the full-fledged Marxist-Leninist organisation. At this stage no one understood the meaning of the word communism. Ho established three separate levels of organisation to structure his conception of communism and to educate the people in understanding communism. First of these organisations was the League of Oppressed People of Asia (Hoi Dan Toc Bi Ap Buc The Gioi), which existed as a training ground for future members of the second party, the Revolutionary Youth League

81 Marr, n. 38, pp. 262-63; Duncanson, n. 21, pp. 142-43.

82 Ibid., p. 263.

83 Duiker, n. 72, p. 479.

and the third was the Communist Youth Group (Thanh Nien Cong San Doan).⁸⁴ The League's training programme became a relatively sizeable operation. Under this, 300 young Vietnamese were sent to Canton for training and a few were sent to Moscow to study Marxist-Leninist theory.⁸⁵ When they came back from Canton they initiated activities in Vietnam. Unlike its predecessors, the new movement was determined to strike its roots among the masses. Ho emphasised that the proletariat and the peasantry, were the most alienated elements in society. The key to revolutionary success was with them.⁸⁶ He then set up several regional committees in several provinces. As propaganda, he started a journal (Thanh Nien) Youth.⁸⁷ The major task of the League was to bring some order into the nationalist movement. He wanted to bring all of disparate elements together in a broad anti-imperialist united front because the revolutionary youth league was losing ground among workers, due to competition from other parties. They were Bui Quang Chieu in the south, the Vietnam Cach Minh Dang and the Vietnam Cach Minh Dong Chi Hoi in central and in the north it was VNGDD.⁸⁸ There was no unity among these parties. Finally, the League members began to organise peasants' associations, mainly in the rural areas of

84 Pike, n. 15, p. 3 and Duiker, n. 36, p. 19.

85 Reinhold Neumann Hoeditz, Portrait of Ho Chi Minh (Herder and Herder, Hamburg, 1971), p. 93.

86 McAlister, n. 20, pp. 84-85.

87 King C. Chen, Vietnam and China, 1938-1954 (New Jersey, 1969), p. 23.

88 Pike, n. 15, pp. 2-3.

North Vietnam. They trained and organised men who later⁸⁹ became the major force of Vietnamese communist revolution. The League had made considerable progress during these years and soon developed into the most active of the anti-French political organisations in Vietnam. By the end of 1929, membership had reached about 1,000. According to Duiker, "one indication of progress was that by 1929 the French intelligence services in Indochina were beginning to devote more attention to the League than to all of its rivals put⁹⁰ together".

The Thanh-Nien was merely a transitional organisation to the communist party. Hence there was no unity among the members, the party started disintegrating. This was due to the personal clashes and doctrinal differences in the cadre. The absence of Ho Chi Minh was also a contributing factor. An effort to heal these differences was made at the Thanh Nien Congress in Hong Kong in May 1929. Many delegates proposed organising a communist party, it set loose forces that resulted in a three-way split of the party i.e. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang), The Annam Communist Party (Annam Cong San Dang), and the Indo-Chinese Communist League (Dong Duong Cong San Lien Doan). These groups were opposed to one another and when the Comintern intervened it resulted in the united Indo-Chinese Communist⁹¹ Party headed by Ho Chi Minh. In these circumstances, the

89 Chen, n. 87, p. 24.

90 Duiker, n. 36, p. 25.

91 Chen, n. 87, pp. 25-26 and Pike, n. 15, pp. 7-8.

communist forces in Vietnam consolidated their strength. The setting up of a united Communist Party was of tremendous significance for further development of the national liberation movement in Vietnam to fight against foreign imperialism and local reaction, and with the aim to help the proletariat to lead the revolution for the sake of all oppressed and exploited people of Vietnam.

Chapter III

VIETNAMESE NATIONAL STRUGGLE UNDER INDO-
CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (1930-1940)

Chapter III

VIETNAMESE NATIONAL STRUGGLE UNDER THE INDO-CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY 1930-1940

The year 1930 marked the political beginning of the Vietnamese Communists, composed of the working class and peasantry. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party came into existence in 1930 and immediately became the spokesman for the workers and peasants. Historians have given it credit for organising revolutionary upsurge for the country's independence. The organisation of the peasantry for mass revolution was led by Ho Chi Minh. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party worked for anti-French struggle in Vietnam. Thus they organised several rebellions and movements. The ICP played a very significant role in revolutionary movement in Vietnam.¹ It aroused Vietnam's nationalism against the French imperialism. It organised resistances and attacks on French imperialist forces with great skill and enthusiasm.

Vietnamese objective of attaining independence was difficult and arduous. The French Government was well entrenched in Vietnam and thus the ICP resistance was hard, bloody and long. However, the communist movement in Vietnam became successful at the end. The roots of Vietnamese communism which emerged from a small revolutionary organisation in French controlled Indo-China

1 Helen B. Lamb, Vietnam's Will To Live (New York, 1972), p. 315; Jean Sainteny, Ho Chi Minh and his Vietnam: A Personal Memoire (Chicago, 1972), pp. 24-26; and Jayne Warner, "New Light of Vietnamese Marxism", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, vol. 10, no. 3, October-November 1978, pp. 42-43.

into a highly effective political movement, was the product of ordinary peasants. The communists were gradually not only capable of obtaining the support of majority population of Vietnam but it also became well poised to lead the destiny of the nation.²

The communist movement was so powerful in Vietnam that it subdued not only the French forces but also the internal opposition.

The present chapter is an attempt to trace the strategies which contributed to strengthening the ICP into a highly effective revolutionary organisation. Unlike in China the communist movement in Vietnam was not a sudden product but a continuous effort that fruited in the formation of the ICP "as a result of years of trial and error".³

The emergence of the ICP in Vietnam was a result of several important developments. But domestic developments were at the background in promoting it.

Vietnamese nationalism gathered momentum with the emergence of strong groups like the working class and the intellectuals from a traditional society. The Soviet Union's revolutionary success inspired the intellectuals, to provide ideological orientation to the Vietnamese nationalism. Thus the communism became a main force in building up a patriotic spirit for the anti-colonial struggle. Of these leaders, Ho Chi Minh spearheaded the communist movement. It is rightly observed by Milton Sacks, "that Ho Chi Minh first learned his Marxism and began his career as a

2 Joseph J. Zasloff, McAlister Brown, eds, Communism in Indo China (London, 1975), p. 3.

3 Ibid.

communist leader".⁴ Ho Chi Minh's world view can be easily known from his comments at Tours Congress and the 1924 Fifth Congress of the Communist International. Ho Chi Minh felt that the prevailing level of patriotism would be active only when fused with the strength of Marxism and communist ideas. He observed that "at first it was patriotism and not yet communism which made me put my trust in Leninism and in the third international. Step by step, in the struggle and by combining theoretical study of Marxism-Leninism with practical work, little by little, I came to understand that only socialism and communism can free the oppressed nations and the toiling people in the world from slavery".⁵ In this process, peasants also became a vital force. The peasantry who suffered a lot due to the exploitative machinery of colonial administration, was easily accessible to create a strong basis for Vietnamese nationalism at the rural level. The existing cleavages between the landlords and agrarian labour was further reinforced by the effects of the Great Depression of 1929-1930. Along with the peasants, the industrial labour also with the rising discontent proved to be another rallying point. In this context, "These conditions plus the knowledge that labourers and owners completed for the enterprise's proceeds would bring the workers together against the owners".⁶

4 Milton Sacks, "Marxism in Vietnam", in Frank N. Trager, ed., Marxism in Southeast Asia (California, 1960), p. 108.

5 Our President Ho Chi Minh (F.L.P.H., Hanoi, 1970), p. 194.

6 James Scott and Ben Kerkvliet, "The Politics of Survival : Peasant Response to Progress in South East Asia", Journal of South East Asian Studies (Singapore), vol. 4, no. 2, September 1973, p. 252.

Meanwhile the Comintern, the international communist organisation started giving guidelines to the Indo-Chinese anti-colonial struggle. Comintern assigned a vital slot to Indo-China in its strategy of "revolutionary spread up in East Asia". The emergence of Ho Chi Minh, a confirmed communist by that time, helped the cause of Comintern.⁷ Despite all these factors, there was a dearth of centralised leadership in the Vietnamese struggle to drive out the French. The earlier organisation like the Caodaists of 1930s could not last long enough in their effort.⁸ The only organisation that had some continuity was Ho Chi Minh's The Association of Revolutionary Youth that came into existence in 1925. When there was a serious break-up in the party organisation in 1929, only Ho Chi Minh's pervasive influence prevented the eventual dissolution of the party.

The above analysis reveals the nature of organisations involved in the Vietnamese anti-colonial struggle. Particularly the communist organisations, the dominant force reveals certain characteristics of secret societies with respect to their decision-making process and implementation levels.⁹ Another party originally outside the communists framework was the

7 William J. Duiker, The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam : 1900-1941 (London, 1976), p. 213 and Nguyen Thanh, "Communist International and Indo Chinese Revolution", Vietnam Courier (Hanoi), vol. XX, no. 2, 1984, pp. 8-9.

8 R.B. Smith, "The Development of Opposition to French Rule in Southern Vietnam, 1880-1940", Past and Present (Oxford), vol. 54, February 1972, p. 128.

9 Allen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indo China (Stanford, 1954), pp. 81-82.

organisation of Nguyen An Ninh of 1927-28. Even though it operated independently of Ho Chi Minh's party, the party collapsed after the arrest of the party's leaders, and the communist "takeover" technique devoured this organisation.¹⁰

On the whole, in the given set up of Vietnamese politico-economic conditions, the different organisations that emerged ultimately succumbed to the over-reaching influence of Ho Chi Minh's personality and to the strength and appealing substance of the international communist movement. From here on, it is interesting to study how the anti-colonial movement came into the near monopolistic grip of the communists.

Despite the fact that unrest was growing within the nation, the French administration effectively "suppressed the fanned flames of nationalism and separatism".¹¹ Hence the three parties viz. the Indo-Chinese Communist Party, the Annam Communist Party and the Indo Chinese Communist League merged into the Vietnam Communist Party on 3 February 1930. The unification meeting was held in Kowloon (Hong Kong). At its founding the new party claimed a membership of 211 people. Its purpose was to carry out the policy laid down from Moscow and to apply the scientific methods of revolution developed by the Comintern. It was Ho Chi Minh who brought together several associations with divergent opinions but with one general aim, namely, opposition to the French.¹² In the words of Duiker, "By 1930, the communist

10 Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam : The Revolutionary Path (London, 1981), pp. 218-19.

11 Robert F. Turner, Vietnamese Communism : Its Origins and Developments (Stanford, 1975), p. 17.

12 Thomas E. Ennis, French Policy and Developments in Indo-China (Chicago, 1936), p. 200.

movement had survived a perilous period of factionalism and had achieved a delicate unity".¹³ The initial formation of the Vietnamese Communist Party took place in the major urban areas of Saigon and later spread to the outlying areas of capitalist mining and plantation activities.¹⁴ The unification conference also produced Vietnam's first mass organisation through which the party hoped to unite and to control various elements of the society for a successful revolutionary movement. These included a political programme, rules and strategies for the development of mass organisations such as the Red Trade Unions, Red Peasants Association, Communist League, Women's Association for Liberation, Red Relief Society, and Anti-Imperialist Alliance.¹⁵

The central committee of the Vietnam Communist Party held its first plenum in October 1930 and changed the official name to Indo-Chinese Communist Party (Dang Cong San Dong Duong), following the Communist International's instructions. Thereupon, it was granted national status by the Comintern at its Eleventh Plenum in April 1931. The session decided to change the Party's name to ICP because, the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian proletariat had politically and economically to be closely related in spite of their difference in language, customs and

13 W.J. Duiker, "The Red Soviets of Nghe-Tinh : An Early Communist Rebellion in Vietnam", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore), vol. 4, no. 2, September 1973, p. 495.

14 Sacks, n. 4, p. 124.

15 Ngo Vinh Long, "The Indo Chinese Communist Party and Peasant Rebellion in Central Vietnam, 1930-1931", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, vol. 10, no. 3, October-December 1978, p. 15.

race.¹⁶ According to Duiker, "In Moscow's view, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were linked by economic ties despite cultural differences, and activities in the three areas should therefore be directed by a single Party".¹⁷ Thus the Party had been organised on Soviet lines and placed under the direct supervision of the Third International of Moscow. This organisation worked directly through the Shanghai and Hong Kong committees, which in turn directed the central committee located at Saigon.¹⁸ A political programme prepared by Tran Phu, who was later elected as the first Secretary General of the party, was accepted by the party representatives. The representatives (a) acknowledged that the Vietnamese and world revolutions were a seamless web. (b) They accepted the two-stage revolutionary scenario for Vietnam. (c) They fixed the party's two chief tasks as ending imperialism and ending feudalism in Vietnam, to be accomplished so as to skip one of the Marxist stages of development - the capitalist stage. (d) They broadened the revolutionary base to root the struggle in the worker-peasant alliance.¹⁹ In the words of Ho Chi Minh "From now on we must join the Party, help it and follow it in order to implement the following slogans":

1. To overthrow French Imperialism and Vietnamese feudalism and reactionary bourgeoisie.

16 Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism (New Delhi, 1964), p. 40; Douglas Pike, History of Vietnamese Communism: 1925-1976 (California, 1978), p. 12; King C. Chen, Vietnam and China 1938-1954 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1969), p. 26; Turner, n. 11, p. 18; Hammer, n. 9, pp. 81-82.

17 Duiker, n. 7, p. 216.

18 Ennis, n. 12, p. 201.

19 Turner, n. 11, pp. 313-16; Pike, n. 16, p. 13.

2. To make Indo China completely independent.
3. To confiscate the banks and other enterprises belonging to the imperialists and put them under the control of the worker-peasant soldier government.
4. To establish a worker-peasant soldier government.
5. To confiscate all the plantations and property belonging to the imperialists and the Vietnamese reactionary bourgeoisie and distribute them to the poor peasants.
6. To implement the 8-hour working day.
7. To abolish the forced buying of government's bonds, the poll-tax and all unjust tax hitting the poor.
8. To bring democratic freedoms to the masses.
9. To dispense education to all the people.
10. To realise equality between man and woman. 20

The founding of the Vietnam Communist Party (Vietnam Cong San Dang), renamed the Indo-Chinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang) was the product of various factors: the growing contradictions within Thanh Nien, the impact of Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolutionary coup in April 1927 and Ho Chi Minh's withdrawal, the very rapid development of anti-colonial and working class movement within Vietnam during 1927-29 and the generation, the familiar problem of the relationship between the external and internal wings of an underground revolutionary movement.²¹ However, it was the party of the working class. It helped the proletariat to lead the revolution and waged a struggle on behalf of the oppressed and exploited people. A large number of intellectuals and officials who had been

20 Ho Chi Minh Selected Writings (Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1973), p. 41.

21 Hodgkin, n. 10, p. 227.

disillusioned and frustrated became communists because they saw in that party an instrument for action against the French.... The communists succeeded in extending the roots of the party into the peasantry. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party reportedly had 1,500 members in 1931 and 100,000 peasants affiliated to it through peasant organisations controlled by the party.²² Ho Chi Minh clearly defined the Indo-Chinese Communist Party's relation with the international communist apparatus. The communists' final success was due in large measure to the suppleness of their tactics which enabled it to appear communist or nationalist as changing circumstances demanded, while keeping well concealed the unchanging objectives. Thus, with the decline of VNQDD after the Yen Bay uprising in 1930 the ICP had virtually an open field to lead the resistance against the French authority.²³

The centre of imperial capital domination became the sources of recruitment for socialist movement. The implantation of the Communist Party and its ideology, the recruitment of the initial cadre and militants coincided with the initial insurrection of the Communist Party and was the first major class struggle in the region. The growth and expansion of communist influence coincided with the expression of the class struggle throughout the 1930s, increasingly enveloping regions of commodity producers. From a movement of class mobilisation, there emerged a mass mobilisation involving small producers,

22 Hammer, n. 9, p. 82.

23 Hoang, n. 16, p. 34; Duiker, n. 7, pp. 164-65.

traders, school teachers, civil servants. "The working class movement served as a detonator for a larger movement but remained, through the Communist Party, the ultimate determinant of the political direction which the social struggle would take".²⁴

French imperialism, essentially oriented toward the economic exploitation of the region through the implanation of commercial agriculture and mining, created a rural and urban proletariat which served as the original nucleus of the Communist Party.²⁵ Petras writes that "the multiple processes of exploitation occurring in the areas under land rent, taxation, increasing appropriation of the surplus as well as the means of production, labour requisitions, etc. cleared the way for large-scale, long term movements of capital."²⁶ However, the Indo-Chinese Communist Party was dedicated as an organ for revolutionary struggle against the whole French colonial system to operate throughout the Federation of Indo-China and not merely in Vietnam. It set its sights on the world revolution and the characteristic objective of communist revolution had priority over national liberation and national unity. They were socialisation of the means of production and elimination of political power of the owning class. Moreover the Revolutionary

24 Burnard B. Fall, ed., Ho Chi Minh on Revolution 1920-1966 (New York, 1967), pp. 1-5.

25 Johan T. McAlister, Jr., Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (London, 1969), p. 82.

26 James F. Petras, "Towards a Theory of Twentieth Century Socialist Revolution", Journal of Contemporary Asia (Sweden), vol. 8, no. 2, 1978, p. 168.

Young League had been essentially an elitist group, composed primarily of middle class intellectuals. But under the Comintern, it was making a strenuous attempt to broaden the basis of its support among workers in factories and the mines, on the rubber plantations in south and among poor peasants in the rural areas throughout the country.²⁷ The formation of the ICP "was the ideological context of the revolutionary crisis of 1930", justify Nguyen The Anh, "when the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD) launched the mutiny at Yen Bay and now the Indo-China Communist Party organised mass demonstration among the peasants and strikes among the workers. He calls it a crisis which had resulted from the proliferation of clandestine movements since 1925, the multiplication of violent incidents and assertive actions towards 1927 of the motto "Immediate independence".²⁸ What was new in the 1930s, however, was the general rejection of the colonial order. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP) appeared on the political scene at the time when widespread outbreaks of rural and urban opposition occurred. This crisis was to shake French colonialism in Vietnam up to its foundations.²⁹

Consequently, the Indo-Chinese Communist Party began to take shape, it organised illegal trade unions and led the peasantry in a series of mass demonstrations against the French

27 Duiker, n. 7, p. 215.

28 Nguyen The Anh, "Vietnamese Monarchy under French Colonial Rule 1884-1945", Modern Asian Studies, vol. 19, no. 1, February 1985, p. 158.

29 Ibid.

to produce a recurrence of the kind of widespread rural opposition. It could achieve little real impact on colonial power although it proved more extensive and better organised than the movements of earlier years.³⁰ This in turn the Chinese Communist Party declared that "Indo-China is one of the most important links in the world chain of imperialism and the Indo-Chinese revolution is one of the decisive factors in the East".³¹

The formation of the new communist party came at a crucial time in the history of Vietnam. The worsening economic conditions throughout Indo-China had led to growing unrest in the urban working areas and rural plantations. The working conditions and salaries were unsatisfactory and the worldwide economic depression had had the most serious effect upon the Vietnamese peasantry. The situation in the countryside was highly explosive. Under these circumstances the communist leaders saw in this situation, an opportunity to lead the angry peasants into open revolt. So, on May Day 1930, huge meetings were organised in the villages, followed by hunger marches which later degenerated into bloody riots,³² in the three regions of Vietnam. According to Ngo Vinh Long "From April 1930 to November 1931, there were at least 129 workers' strikes and 535 peasant demonstrations, hundreds of public meetings and rallies which were also forms of political struggle".³³ The first major incident was in the

30 Smith, n. 8, p. 117, and Nguyen The Anh, n. 28, p. 163.

31 Virginia Thompson, Left Wing in Southeast Asia (New York, 1930), p. 112.

32 Hoang, n. 16, pp. 40-41; Duiker, n. 7, p. 218; Pike, n. 16, p. 17; Trager, n. 4, p. 121.

33 Ngo Vinh Long, n. 15, p. 17.

Thanh Chuang district of Nghe An Province where three thousand peasants raided the Ky Vien Plantation, destroyed property, seized rice and tools, and planted the hammer and sickle flag on the main administration building. Similar riots took place elsewhere in Annam and in Tonking. The main target was aimed at the Phu Riang rubber plantation in Cochi-China, at a match factory in Central Vietnam, and at a textile plant at Naun Dinh in Tokin.³⁴ In the same month fifty students residing in Paris planned a demonstration in front of the President's Place. It turned into a clash and twelve students were arrested and deported to Indo-China. Riots were continued and by mid-summer the discontent had spread from outbreaks in the big industrial centres to the rural areas in Central and South Vietnam. In early September, the disturbances began to reach their peak. A series of major peasant revolts broke out against French colonial authority of Nghe An and Ha Tuh. It was rapidly replaced by village peasant-Soviet under the Communist Party leadership. In the words of Hoang "Driven to despair by the failure of the revolt and in a final bid to save the movement, the Indo Chinese Communist Party decided on the creation of peasant Soviets",³⁵ in several districts of Nghe-An Province, one of the most rebellious province of Vietnam, which had produced a high percentage of radical leaders in anti-French resistance movement. Hodgkin describes, "the most intense and widespread political movement since Can Vuong",³⁶ while Chen summarises

34 Duiker, n. 13, p. 499

35 Hoang, n. 16, p. 41.

36 Hodgkin, n. 10, p. 245.

"the first and only Soviet that ever appeared in Vietnam before the communist came to power"³⁷. Although Ho Chi Minh had not participated in this revolt that he was against the peasant rebellion but he followed the majority decision.³⁸

The Nghe-Tinh Soviets was the short name after the provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh. It has been viewed as a major event in modern Vietnamese history, the first serious rebellion against French rule since the beginning of the century and the first appearance of Communist Party as a major force on the political scene in Indo China.³⁹ The first Soviet was formed at Vo Liet village in Tnanh Chuong district on 12 September 1930. Thereafter, Soviets were established throughout the Nghe An district. It were simple organisations that took the form of typical communist peasant associations. For protection it formed a self-defence force armed with sticks and spears or knives and to maintain support for new authorities, mass organisations for workers, women, and youth were formed. The major cause for the Soviet movement was peasant dissatisfaction with the economic conditions. The new Soviets were dominated by the poorer peasants in the villages.⁴⁰ The above activities and infrastructure formed the groundwork for the first outbreak\$ of mass protest that led to the establishment

37 Chen, n. 16, p. 27.

38 Hoang, n. 16, p. 42.

39 Duiker, n. 13, p. 499.

40 Duiker, n. 7, p. 225; D.G.E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia (London, 1981), p. 805.

of Nghe Tinh Soviets in September 1930. An intense and decisive period of struggle began late in August and continued through the month of September 1930. Large demonstrations and attacks on governmental offices caused the total disintegration of the governmental infrastructure in districts and villages. Many mandarins and officials fled, while others turned to the Red Peasant Associations. Fierce struggles broke out in Ha Tinh while demonstrations took place in Nghe-an. A few months afterwards thousands of peasants in Cochin-China held demonstrations with red flags and the sign of the Soviets and with the slogans — the land for the peasants, against taxes, down with the imperialist terror, defend the Soviet Union.⁴¹ The demonstrations and attacks which occurred in Cochin-China were on a smaller scale than the Nghe Tinh rebellion in northern central Vietnam. But they were significant in the political development of Cochin-China itself. But the unrest met with failure, after repression and mass arrests by the French.⁴²

Before the ICP mounted its support campaign, there were already isolated struggles in Annam. On July 1930, a group of over 700 peasants marched to the district and presented the district chief with a list of demands including the release of political prisoners. The French rejected this as before, as over 100 men and women were arrested. Similar demonstrations were staged in the other districts of Annam and open struggles

41 Trager, n. 4, p. 126; Hodgkin, n. 16, p. 251; and W.J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam (Westview, 1981), pp. 36-37.

42 Smith, n. 8, pp. 120-21; Trager, n. 4, p. 126.

continued till June 1931. Demonstrations in some areas were foiled because the French found out their plans in time. Isolated demonstrations were staged from time to time but the peasants were unable to threaten the French.⁴³

On the whole, despite these efforts, it was extremely difficult for the regional cadres to hold the movement together. First of all, the entire central committee of the ICP was seized during March and April 1931 because one of its members confessed to the French police. Secondly a serious famine worsened in Ha Tinh and Nghe-an provinces. The famine and increasingly brutal repression made the movement become less and less coordinated and the defence of the Soviets more and more difficult.⁴⁴ By the first week of July, the rebellion was restricted to a few cantons and even to a few villages within districts. It had become easier to detect the presence of the communist leaders.⁴⁵ An increasing number of Soviets disintegrated and their leaders were arrested. It was already clear by the end of July that the Nghe-Tinh Soviet movement had been defeated. Thousands of members of anti-French organisations, including many of the ICP members were arrested. The communist organisation was completely disrupted. In June 1931, Ho himself was arrested in Hong Kong and sentenced to deportation by a French ship. Later, he was released. According to communist sources, the number of political detainees in French prisons reached 10,000 in 1932. Pike writes, "ICP Secretary General

43 Ngo Vinh Long, n. 15, pp. 30-33; Ennis, n. 12, pp. 188-89.

44 Trager, n. 4, p. 126.

45 Hall, n. 40, p. 805; Ngo Vinh Long, n. 15, p. 28.

Tran Phu was jailed and reportedly tortured to death " on 6 September 1931. Other leaders were also sentenced to imprisonment including Pham Van Dong and Ton Duc Thang.⁴⁶ Thus writes Hodgkin, "This episode of the Nghe-Tinh Soviets had a profound and very positive influence on the subsequent history of the party and of Vietnam".⁴⁷ Duiker writes about the Soviet period as a glorious stage in the early history of the movement in Vietnam.⁴⁸ However, the Indo-Chinese Communist Party came under sharp attack as a result of its failure in the 1930-1931 period. It was also criticised for the languishing manner in which illegal activities had been conducted even in the absence of a mature and disciplined communist party "which the revolutionary leaders sought to steer unrest than the things that the peasants of Nghe-An were fighting for".⁴⁹ McAlister writes "Perhaps the most fundamental mistake was that the communist terrorism was almost exclusively directed at lower echelon. Vietnamese officials who were exercising authority on behalf of the French, rather than at the French"⁵⁰ as conditions were not ripe for a revolutionary upsurge. But the lessons that the party drew from the events resulted in beneficial effects on its behaviour and strategy.

46 Pike, n. 16, pp. 20-21; Duiker, n. 41, pp. 40-41; Turner, n. 11, pp. 20-21; Chen, n. 16, pp. 27-28; Reinhold Neumann-Hoditz, Portrait of Ho Chi Minh: An Illustrated Biography (Harder and Harder, 1972), pp. 114-15.

47 Hodgkin, n. 10, p. 257.

48 Duiker, n. 7, p. 230.

49 Milton Osborne, "Continuity and Motivation in the Vietnamese Revolution: New Light from the 1930's", Pacific Affairs, vol. 47, no. 1, Spring 1974, p. 99.

50 McAlister, n. 25, p. 99.

And it was an important landmark in the process of opposition which was to culminate in the Vietnamese revolution.

From the debacle of the Soviet movement there emerged a revolutionary organisation more united, better disciplines, and better able to utilise the appeal of nationalism. Internal difficulties led to the emergence of a number of small groups which reacted to the party defeat by attributing it to faulty leadership. Then the policies of the party and the Comintern were repudiated later formed the significant Trotskyist movement in Indo-China. The first Trotskyist group emerged in western Cochin-China in May 1931, called Lien Doan Cong San (Communist League). It was followed in August 1931 by founding of the Ta Doi Lap (Left Opposition) and finally Dong Duong Cong San (Indo-China communism). These three groups agreed to follow one line, that was of Leon Trotsky, who had developed Communist International under the leadership of Stalin. The organised party was named the Trotskyist group of Indo China by Ta Thu Thau.

Thus the period between 1932 to 1937 in the history of Vietnam was the time of the greatest ideological diversity. The ICP and the Trotskyists were both prominent forces in the communist movement. Points and counterpoints in the debate between the two were common in these periods. The Trotskyists had criticised the ICP for its role in the 1930-31 uprisings. The Trotskyists faulted with the ICP for immature conspiratorial tendencies and its Stalinist opportunism. The ICP countered the Trotskyist criticism by charging that the Trotskyists

51 Trager, n. 4, pp. 127-28.

failed to appreciate the revolutionary potential of the peasantry.⁵² The ICP started to emphasise worker's struggle over the peasant struggle. The Trotskyists, on the other hand, emphasised that the only path for revolution lay in class struggle and the organisation of a workers' movement.⁵³ In the same period, two communist leaders, who had been studying abroad, returned home: Tran Van Giau from Moscow and Ta Thu Than from France. They founded a French language journal La Lutte, which gained popular influence.⁵⁴ The Trotskyists were better educated on the whole than the communists. They won the sympathies of the Cochinchinese intellectuals and the petty-bourgeois. But the bulk of the workers and peasants remained under the control of the communists of the Third International.⁵⁵

In 1932, the leading committee of the ICP, headed by Le Hong Phong put forth a new programme of action, which was based on the 1930 Tran Phu document which were more adequate in the new situation. It envisaged:

1. Full and complete economic and political independence of Indo-China, downfall of French domination, expulsion of all police force, land, naval and aerial military forces from the worker and peasant territory of Indo-China.
2. The overthrow of native dynasties, of court of Annam, of the Kings of Cambodia and Laos with all their mandarins and notables, confiscation of all their possessions.

52 Trager, n. 4, pp. 128-29.

53 Pike, n. 16, pp. 36-37.

54 Hall, n. 40, p. 805.

55 Haong, n. 16, p. 43.

3. Support for worker and peasant revolutionary government for the creation of Soviets, and of a worker and peasant revolutionary army. Arms for all workers and freedom of military instruction.
4. Nationalisation by the worker and peasant state of all banks and industrial enterprises, both French and foreign, of all plantation, rail-road, navigation companies, irrigation canals. ⁵⁶

Thereafter, the party began its first phase of legal struggle. A Vietnamese-language journal Trung Lap was published. In Saigon the ICP members and the Trotskyists won several seats in May 1933 municipal elections. Thus McAlister writes that "success at the polls held this diverse groups together but internal frictions developed before both the Communist and Trotskyite organisations were decimated in late 1939".⁵⁷ With the exception of the communists, none of these groups staged any overt political demonstrations nor did they make any organisational links with the countryside. In the words of Huynh Kim Khanh, "Between late 1931 and the middle of 1935, there was, in Vietnam, virtually no overt communist activity worth noting".⁵⁸

In March 1935, the leaders of ICP met at Macao to attend the First Party Congress under the leadership of Le Hong Phong. It was attended by ten party members. The main tasks were:

- (1) Consolidating and developing the Party.
- (2) Enlisting the support of the working masses.
- (3) Fighting against the imperialist war.⁵⁹

56 Turner, n. 11, pp. 324-25.

57 McAlister, n. 25, p. 103.

58 Huynh Kim Khanh, "The Vietnamese August Revolution Reinterpreted", Journal of Asian Studies, vol. XXX, no. 4, August 1971, pp. 771.

59 Duiker, n. 7, p. 238.

Soon afterwards communists' initiated revolutionary activities began to appear in Vietnam in a new front, with new types of activities and with a new ideological orientation to organise a popular front. Le Hong Phong attended the seventh Congress of the Communist International at Moscow and was directed to lead the revolutionary movement together with the central committee.⁶⁰ Then in July 1936, the ICP held its second Congress to bring its policies in line with that of Moscow. The party line was changed in accordance with the new line adopted by the 7th Congress of the Comintern. Henceforth, the ICP deemphasised anti-feudalism and gave primary emphasis to anti-imperialism, lending its support to the French Popular Front and adopted a multi-class and multi-party front programme.⁶¹ This change pushed the ICP closer to the position of Ho Chi Minh. Before 1936, in fact, Ho was criticised in local ICP party publications for having advocated "reformist and collaborationist" tactics in the Nghe-Tinh Soviets. In fact, he was abroad during this period. In his July report to the Comintern Ho Chi Minh said, "The Party must assume a wise flexible attitude with the bourgeoisie, strive to draw it into the Front, win over the elements that can be won over and neutralise those who can be neutralized. We must by all means avoid leaving them outside the Front, lest they should fall into the hands of the enemy of the revolution and increase the strength of the reactionaries".⁶²

60 Turner, n. 11, p. 23.

61 Duiker, n. 7, p. 240; Duiker, n. 41, p. 51; Pike, n. 16, p.34.

62 Ho Chi Minh, n. 20, pp. 149-50.

The victory of the French Popular Front in May 1936 produced liberal conditions in Indo-China. Thousands of Vietnamese communists were released from French prisons including prominent political leader Phan Van Dong. Others returned from abroad published magazines and books. A greater measure of civil liberties were allowed, and the revolutionary underground organisations were able to build legal counterparts. In the south, the movement began with La Lutte (The struggle) and Dang Nai, in the north there was Le Travail (Labour), Doi Moi (New life), Hon Tre (Soul of youth), Tan Xa Lai (New society). Taking advantage of the liberal colonial policies of the French, the ICP emerged late in 1936 and began to organise overt, legal political activities, strikes, demonstration, public political debates took place all over Vietnam.⁶³ The ICP was very active during this period and its membership was increased by sixty per cent in March 1937. The Party and its fronts published several newspapers. The Indo-Chinese Democratic Front was successful in the election between 1937-1939. The Trotskyites continued to oppose the French Government and to demand independence. By 1937, however, rivalry had increased and it broke into the stages of La Luttu.⁶⁴ Thus writes Turner "marking the Trotskyites for eventual neutralization by the ICP".⁶⁵

Another session was held by the ICP central committee on 28-29 March 1938 in which it stressed the importance of democratic

63 Trager, n. 4, p. 141; Turner, n. 11, p. 25; Hoang, n. 16, pp. 43-44.

64 Duiker, n. 41, p. 54; Trager, n. 4, p. 143.

65 Turner, n. 11, p. 26.

centralism within front organisation. It resolved, "Either open or underground, all organizations must obey the Party's leading organ. Organizations operating openly are not on an equal footing with the central committee or any other respective party levels. It is only a part of the party's organization",⁶⁶ thus writes Hoang, "For the Popular Front government proved itself to be no less colonialist than its predecessors, often resorting to repressive measures and always restricting its revolutionary activities to empty promises for the future".⁶⁷

Finally, the time for new action came in the autumn of 1938. Once again the political landscape had changed radically. The end of the People's Front Government in France in 1938 and the advent of World War II ended in Popular Front movement in Vietnam. The party disbanded and the communists went underground. Almost all the leading Vietnamese communists took refuge in China.⁶⁸ But as the Russians had to muster goodwill in Europe, their interests declined gradually in the South-east Asia, characterising its policies towards Vietnamese independence movements as "neutral". Ho Chi Minh was in Moscow during 1938 when the ICP suffered due to French suppression. Moreover, the Kuomintang launched a five-year drive against the Chinese Communist Party, but the Sino-Japanese war in July 1937 resulted in the second rapprochement between the Chinese nationalists and communists.⁶⁹ A mass rally of

66 DRV Thirty Years of Struggle of the Party (F.L.P.H., Hanoi, 1978), pp. 54-55.

67 Hoang, n. 16, p. 44.

68 Chen, n. 16, p. 31; Hoang, n. 16, p. 44; Turner, n. 11, p. 26; Duiker, n. 7, p. 256.

69 Chen, n. 16, p. 31; Hoditz, n. 46, p. 126.

50,000 people for the celebration of May Day 1938 was staged in Hanoi for the first time in Vietnamese history.

The August 1938, Stalin-Hitler Pact led to a change in ICP strategy which also provided an atmosphere favourable for a smooth Sino-Soviet friendship.⁷⁰ In September 1939, ICP with its 10,000 members and many more sympathisers was declared illegal. Colonialist repression resumed and took a heavy toll. The ICP urban networks were destroyed throughout Vietnam, two thousand party workers were arrested.⁷¹ Despite the arrests, an underground, the hardcore member of Stalinist organisation prepared itself for action against the French authority. The ICP's central committee in Cochin China met in plenary session from 6 to 8 November 1939. A new anti-war policy was adopted. The Front was replaced by a new United Front of Anti-Imperialist Indo-Chinese peoples with the help of Russia.⁷² As it happened, however, the Communist Party was hardly in a position to attain these objectives. The French forces arrested more of their members on 21 January 1940. In the northern areas of Tonkin the Vietnamese nationalists undertook unsuccessful military operations against the French in September and October 1940. This included the unrest among the Vietnamese in Cochin-China. Hence the agitation of the ICP began to achieve some success.⁷³

70 Chen, n. 16, p. 32.

71 K.M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance (London, 1953), p. 223; V. Alexandrov, A Contemporary World History: 1917-1945 (Moscow, 1986), p. 386 and Hodgkin, n. 10, p. 289.

72 Turner, n. 11, p. 26.

73 Trager, n. 4, p. 144.

In November 1940, a decision to prepare for an armed uprising to seize power throughout the country was taken in the seventh plenum of the ICP. An insurrection began on 23 November 1940 in Namky in south. But the French had been informed in advance of the attempt. They were in turn repressed drastically by this time, eight thousand people were sentenced, of which more than one hundred received the death penalty. Some of its leaders, including Nguyen Van Cu, Nguyen thi Minh Khai, Ha Huy Tap, Vo Van Tan, Phan Dang Luu were executed. And for the second time, the ICP suffered at the hands of the French.⁷⁴ This gave the party invaluable discipline and experience and prepared it for the seizure of power in 1945. Despite severe French repression, the independence movement sustained its unity of purpose and organizational strength through effective direction of its leaders in exile which made it undoubtedly clear that France had to face the issue of national independence of Indo-China and that "the light was going out for the white man in Asia".⁷⁵ Thus Hodgkin summarised, "The movement was the second dress rehearsal for August 1945 revolution".⁷⁶

Ho Chi Minh's disappearance from the political limelight thus incapacitated the ICP in this period. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese landing in Vietnam, events took a different shape in which the ICP had laid foundations for its subsequent claims to the historic leadership of the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

74 Sacks, n. 4, p. 145.

75 Panikkar, n. 71, p. 223.

76 Hodgkin, n. 10, p. 273.

Chapter IV

EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF THE VIETMINH

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The outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, accelerated the struggle for freedom in Vietnam. A consciousness of nationalism provided the Vietnamese an opportunity to restore their freedom from the French Government. They began to move into a new epoch of struggle which continued for the next five years. The Vietnamese communists fought against the French, the Japanese and the Kuomintang China force to assert themselves nationwide. The ICP leaders and cadres were trained and indoctrinated by Ho Chi Minh. In view of Second World War and Japanese aggression on Vietnam the communists began to reorient and reorganise themselves to prevent and challenge the imperialist forces. Under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, the communists in Vietnam organised a formidable front in the name of the 'Vietminh' and challenged the Japanese as well as the French forces. The Vietminh laid the foundations for Vietnam's independence.

The Japanese during 1940-1945 also contributed to the success of the Vietminh. The Japanese Army entered Vietnam in September 1940. In Europe French forces were defeated by the Germans in June 1940. Japan moved rapidly to extend its control over Indo-China and expand its trade route. In the wake of World War Two, the French colonial administration were forced to accept the Japanese demands. Thus, in this favourable atmosphere the Indo-Chinese Communist Party leaders founded the united front organisation called the 'Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi', popularly known as the Vietminh, in May 1941 to tackle the

Japanese aggression and to precipitate the anti-colonial movement. During the period 1943-45 the Vietminh attempted to expand its organisation by developing mass support and building its armed strength. Thus it expanded countryside bases at a time when French rule was weak. Vietnam under the Vietminh assumes a pivotal role for the whole Indo-Chinese region. It was because of the heroic struggle of the Vietminh that Vietnam was able to declare her independence on 2 September 1945. In this study it is interesting to examine the role and the struggle of the Vietminh surviving during these difficult years.

If we take a comparative overview of the situations and roles of the ICP and the Vietminh, we find that the ICP was mostly concerned about political struggle. But with the Vietminh a new dimension was added and that was to resist the aggressors at the battle-front. During 1930-1940, Vietnam witnessed the repressive attitude of French Government and the agitation was met with severity, cruelty and persecution. During that period due to a series of unsuccessful uprisings against the French, many Vietnamese nationalists and revolutionaries had fled to southern China. China had emerged as a centre of Vietnamese revolutionary activities.¹ It was only during the Japanese rule that an effective nationalist movement led by the communists surfaced. The communists became the centre of the movement. At this moment the influence of Marxist ideas can be seen on the minds of the Vietnamese people and leaders in a clear cut manner.

1 Ronald Spector, "What the Local Annamitis are Thinking : American Views of Vietnamese in China, 1942-1945", Southeast Asia, vol. 3, no. 2, Spring 1974, p. 741 and George McTurman Kahin, ed., Government and Politics of South-East Asia (Ithaca, 1967), p. 391.

The same view is echoed by Milton Osborne in the following words:

The subordination of Vietnam to France economic interests was for young Vietnamese a classic example of the imperialist state's treatment of a colony. It was Vietnam's fate, or less dramatically its historical experience, that Marxist ideals should have appealed to men who proved themselves to be the best organized and the best able to lead. 2

The victory of the German army in Europe provided a golden opportunity to Japan to establish a new order in East Asia. The year 1940 marked the beginning of the end of French rule over Indo-China.³ In fact since Japan's transformation into a modern industrialised and militarily powerful state, it started taking interests in Southeast Asian affairs. The Japanese adopted a strategy to draw the support of nationalists in Southeast Asia in their struggle against the Western colonial powers. In this context, they enunciated the doctrine of Asia for Asians or the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, the Asian equivalent of Monroe doctrine, with twin purposes (a) to fight against the Western colonial powers in concert with the nationalist leaders of the Southeast Asia, and (b) to establish in the process their own sphere of influence within Asia.

Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany in November 1936, began its offensive on China, this included attacks on Manchuria, Korea and Siberia, which resulted in tension in Soviet-Japanese relations. The Japanese sensed that the weakness displayed by Britain and France in face of

2 Milton Osborne, Region of Revolt : Focus on Southeast Asia (Hammondsworth, 1971), p. 63.

3 J.L. Mehta, A Political and Cultural History of Vietnam Unto 1954 (New Delhi, 1970), p. 152.

the dictators, indicated that "she could get away with a policy of expansion in Southeast Asia". Japan's southwards push began in 1939 when Canton was seized and Hong Kong was isolated. Japan became more ambitious when Germany and Russia signed their Non-Aggression Pact on 21 August 1939. Japan decided to commit herself fully to the South-East Asian gamble. Japan's next victim was the city of Nanning.⁴ French Indo-China and the Netherlands Indies in the event of a German victory over the European countries, came under the sphere of the Japanese attack in 1940. Hitler's attack on Russia on 22 June 1941 provided Japan an opportunity to resume its southward expansion. During July her troops occupied the whole of Indo-China. After that Japan made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour which resulted in a humiliating loss to the USA. This followed the fall of British Settlement of Hong Kong and Philippines to the Japanese. Japan now had overwhelming naval supremacy in the Pacific and East Asiatic waters. With this the Japanese forces entered in Burma and Malaya. By May 1942, the Japanese had conquered most of the region of Southeast Asia. An interesting feature in this context is that the Japanese had failed to stimulate any nationalist rising against the Western powers before its invasion of South East Asia. The Japanese invasions were never assisted in any form by the nationalist elements in Vietnam.⁵ The swift and overwhelming Japanese victories over the colonial regimes in South East Asia during the early stages of the Second World War, enabled the nationalists in the region to organise themselves

4 D.G.E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia (London, 1981), pp. 855-56.

5 Ibid., pp. 858-59.

for national salvation. The Vietnamese people under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, prepared themselves to resort to revolutionary action.

Japan had been interested in the Indo-China region since the days of Phan Boi Chau year particularly for trade. And for trade with French Indo-China, Japan continued to seek a remedy favourable to it from a long term perspective, the natural resources in Vietnam, such as rice, coal, rubber, tin and manganese, were attractions for Japan. The year 1940 confirmed Japanese plans for expansion into Indo-China, after failing to stop the French who were supplying war goods to China. The large quantity of supplies that had flowed through Indo-China to the Chinese forces, a situation that had greatly embittered the Japanese and had slowly poisoned Franco-Japanese relations since the Russo-German Pact of August 1939.

The military and economic interests of Japan culminated in a series of military arrangements to station its troops in French Indo-China in the early 1940s. The Japanese Mission under General Nisihara and Rear Admiral Yanagisava arrived in Hanoi to negotiate with the Indo-Chinese authorities. Catroux sought support abroad but he was unsuccessful and he agreed to accept the Japanese demands. Later he was dismissed and replaced by the commander

6 Kiyoko Kurusu Nitz, "The Japanese and Vietnamese Nationalism During the Japanese Period, 1940-45", Journal of South-east Asian Studies. vol. 15, no. 1, March 1984, p. 110.

7 Johan E. Dreifort, "Japan Advance to Indo China, 1940 : The French Response", Journal of South-east Asian Studies, vol. 13, no. 2, September 1982, p. 279.

of French Naval forces, Admiral Jean Decoux.⁸ By the end of September 1940 an agreement between French and Japanese forces was concluded, by which the Japanese recognised French sovereignty in Indo-China. In return for military facilities, transit rights through Indo-China and the right to station troops, Japan was allowed to station six thousand soldiers in northern Indo-China. Then the Japanese moved to establish control stations in Haiphong, Ha Giang, Lao Kay, Cao Bang, Lang Son and Fort Bayard.⁹ The occupation of Vietnam by Japan did not come with a sudden attack. It was a "gradual process achieved largely without violence but through blunt diplomatic measures in response to specific strategic needs",¹⁰ considering how Malaya and the Philippines were captured. Thus it was clear that the ill prepared, poorly equipped, and demoralised French forces had suffered a major defeat.

The French concession to Japan was regarded by most Vietnamese and Chinese as French-Japanese collaboration against them. Hence the collaboration of French with the Japanese aggressors lowered the French prestige amongst the Vietnamese and stimulated them to revive their struggle for independence from the French as well as the Japanese. The Japanese entry into northern Vietnam brought a series of organised revolts by

8 William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam (Colorado, 1981), p. 60 and King C. Chen, Vietnam and China, 1938-1954 (New Jersey, 1969), p. 43.

9 Nitz, n. 6, p. 111.

10 Jhon T. McAlister, Jr., Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (New York, 1969), p. 109.

the Vietnamese nationalists led by the Vietminh. The Vietnam Phuc Quoc Party members organised a revolt against the French and communist-oriented uprisings spread in the northern mountain areas around Bac Son and in Cochin China in October-December 1940.¹¹ Although the Japanese leaders spoke about liberating Asian countries, they in fact "did not envisage independence for Indo-China" because they considered the Annamites to be devoid of the capacity for 'self-government'.¹² The Japanese presence in Vietnam had wider-ranging implications. On the one hand they considered Vietnam as a supply base and a stepping stone for their entry into Burma, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. For these objectives, the Japanese retained the political and administrative structure of the French. On the other hand, for their part, the Japanese encouraged the development of anti-French and pro-Japanese movements during occupation and found collaborators especially in the South where, there was a campaign of "Asia for the Asians".¹³ The Japanese kept a close watch on the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

The reaction of the Vietnamese population to Japanese entry in Vietnam was mixed. Some wanted to resist the Japanese and some pro-Japanese elements welcomed the Japanese occupation. They were Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and various Daiviet or greater Vietnam organisation who viewed Japan as a suitable model for Vietnam.

11 William J. Duiker, The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941 (London, 1976), p. 267.

12 Jan Pluvier, Southeast Asia from Colonialism to Independence (New York, 1974), p. 259.

13 Douglas Pike, Vietcong (New Delhi, 1966), p. 25.

Although the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects enjoyed some popularity, they were not political organizations and without any high level of ideals and goals such as the independence of Vietnam. Nitz believes that "their primary objective was the expansion of their own power".¹⁴ But it seems that¹⁴ in the hope of obtaining their cooperation for information about the French and Vietnamese communists the Japanese might have assisted them. The Japanese released Cao Dai and Hoa Hao leaders whom the French had imprisoned and aided them to reorganise their sects.¹⁵ Other pro-Japanese nationalists group such as Dai Viet (National Party of Greater Vietnam) were organised in Tonking.¹⁶ The communists did not like either to support the Japanese or the French.¹⁷ The Japanese attack at Lang Son on 22 September 1940 opened an opportunity for the Vietnamese to revolt against the French colonial regime. The major attacks took place in the mountainous Boc Son District and thereafter the same kind of attacks took place in Cochin-China. But due to the rebels' lack of organisation and experience, the communist forces were defeated and forced to retreat to mountain areas.¹⁸ The uprising also concentrated on several district and provincial capitals throughout the Mekong delta. Unlike their counterparts the unrest was finally

14 Nitz, n. 6, pp. 125-26.

15 Chester A. Bains, Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict (New Jersey, 1967), p. 103.

16 Ibid.

17 Duiker, n. 11, pp. 261-62.

18 Ibid., n. 8, p. 62.

put down only in early December. Moscow realised that the resulting situation in Vietnam would be most favourable for the emergence of communism. "Ho Chi Minh was recalled to Moscow and from there sent to South China to resume the task that he had been forced to abandon ten years earlier".¹⁹ The development offered a good reason for Ho Chi Minh to return to his country. "Following France's complete loss Ho considered the situation called for our speedy return to the country, to establish connections with the masses and the Party's central committee".²⁰ After that Ho Chi Minh together with a number of members who were exiled since 1930, returned to the Sino-Vietnam border region. On 8 February 1941 Ho Chi Minh set up his headquarter at Pac Bo, in the mountains of Cao Bang.²¹ When French administration had been facing during January 1941 with Thailand's-Japanese supported invasion of Cambodia. At this stage the Japanese forces in Indo-China were 25,000 in comparison to the French forces of about 100,000.²²

Ho Chi Minh had an opportunity to meet the other party members in China which had become a popular residence in exile for Vietnamese nationalist groups. The VNQDD, the ICP, the

19 Hoang Vanchi, From Colonialism to Communism (New Delhi, 1964), p. 46.

20 Vo Nguyen Giap, "Cao Bang, One of the Two Centres of the Movement in Viet Bac - President Ho Chi Minh's Return to the Country", Vietnam, vol. 12, no. 6, 20 December 1972, p. 23.

21 Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path (Macmillan, London, 1981), p. 295.

22 Ibid., p. 296.

pro-Japanese Phuc Quoc as well as remnants of Phan Boi Chau's organisation had been active in the area for several years. The area was also filled by the Vietnamese people as a result of the Japanese invasion. In the words of Duiker, "the Southern Provinces of Yunan and Kwangsi presented a relatively secure haven for Vietnamese nationalists and a potential base for political activities in Vietnam".²³ Ho Chi Minh got in touch with the local communists and resumed his efforts to establish contact with the central committee in Saigon. The dedicated party members like Vo Nguyen Giap and Pham Van Dong joined Ho Chi Minh, the other young members who also joined him were Phung Chi Kien, Vu Anh. The small group now attempted to prepare the party to take advantage of the coming crisis. In the early months of 1941 Ho Chi Minh set up a new united front called 'The Vietnamese Liberation League' (Vietnam Giai Phong Dong Minh Hoi) to attract support from all nationalist groups in the area.²⁴ In fact, Ho wanted to use the VNQDD and the Kuomintang for his return to Vietnam. Thus, with other parties and leaders, the national movement came under communist control. Ho Chi Minh sensed that the potential for revolution in Vietnam had improved. He decided with his partymen to create a new communist-dominated united front and to form a new strategy²⁵ for the liberation of Vietnam from foreign rule.

In the eighth session of the Central Committee of the ICP in May 1941, a decision was taken to create an enlarged

23 Duiker, n. 8, p. 66.

24 Chen, n. 8, pp. 44-45.

25 Giap, n. 20, p. 26 and Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 297.

National Front to include not only workers and peasants, but also patriotic landowners.²⁶ It was attended by the top leaders of the party including Hoang Van Thu, Vu Anh, Truong Chinh, Phung Chi Kien, Hoang Quoc Viet and Ho Chi Minh. Duiker writes, "It was the first time since the founding session of the Party in February 1930 that Ho Chi Minh had taken an active part in a meeting of the internal party leadership".²⁷ To provide a vehicle for the new strategy, a new front organisation was established, called Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (Vietnam Independence League) which became popular as the Vietminh "to unite all patriots without distinction of wealth, age, sex, religion or political outlook so that they work together for the liberation of our people and the salvation of our nation".²⁸ Ho became its Secretary General. Throughout the period of the Second World War, he systematically built up the organisation of the Vietminh with the object of overthrowing both the French and the Japanese because the people had

26 Bernard B. Fall, The Two Vietnams : A Political and Military Analysis (London, Pall Mall Press, 1963), p. 62.

27 Duiker, n. 8 , p. 68.

28 D.R. Sardesai, Southeast Asia : Past and Present (Vikas, New Delhi, 1981), p. 294; Pike, n. 13, p. 11; Fall, n. 26, p. 62; Mehta, n. 3, p. 154; Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indo China 1940-1955 (Stanford University Press, California, 1954), pp. 95-96; Duiker, n. 8 , p. 68; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 297; Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945 (Ithaca, London, 1982), p. 256; McAlister, n. 10, p. 138; Chen, n. 8, p. 49; Hoang, n. 19, p. 47; Milton Sacks, "Marxism in Vietnam", in Frank N. Trager, Marxism in Southeast Asia (California, 1966), p. 146; Robert F. Turner, Vietnamese Communism : Its Origins and Developments (Stanford, California, 1975), p. 30; Kahin, n. 1, p. 391.

been under double imperialism as Japanese imperialism on the one hand and the French colonialists on the other. The bulk of the Vietminh membership was provided by the ICP. It included Vo Nguyen Giap and Pham Van Dong. They "pledged themselves to fight both Japan and Vichy for victory of the allied forces and the independence of a democratic Vietnam".²⁹ The foundation of the Vietminh by Ho for the obvious purpose of uniting all anti-colonial forces under one banner, sought and received support from Catholics, Buddhists and middle-class nationalists. The major significance of the formation of the Vietminh League was its solidification of the party's determination to utilise the forces of nationalism in the struggle to evict the French. However, the communists were the dominant group in the Vietminh and made all the important decisions. Khanh says that, "Vietminh Front was never a Party in the usual sense. Rather, it was an organizational link of politicized social groups organized and promoted by the ICP on functional, ethnic and religious lines".³⁰ While Hall writes, "In the pre-war period the Vietnamese national movement was ineffective and weakened by personal rivalries and local jealousies, it was to find new life under the direction of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh".³¹ In the words of McAlister, "In the theory the Indo Chinese Communist Party became a member of the Vietminh Front, but in practice the two were indistinguishable".³²

29 Hammer, n. 28, pp. 95-96.

30 Huynh Kim Khanh, "The Vietnamese August Revolution", Journal of Asian Studies, vol. XXX, no. 4, August 1977, p. 773.

31 Hall, n. 4, p. 806.

32 McAlister, n. 10, p. 138.

Moreover in practice, the ICP created several mass or front organisations or the National Salvation Associations. The associations acted as an architectural Front which shielded the ICP individually. The Vietminh Front was, in theory at least the coalition of National Salvation Association. "From 1941 onward the Vietminh Front -- and not the ICP, which was officially played down, took several steps to prepare for general insurrection".³³

The unsuccessful long Son and My Tho rebellions were followed by the sad plight of the Vietnamese communists. The Chinese Commander-in-Chief in the fourth war area, General Chang Fa Kuei, felt sympathetic towards them. He provided organisational facilities under his supervision, resulting in the formation of the Vietnam National Liberation League in Chinghsi.³⁴ China, at this time, was at war with Japan, hence, despite its authorities' contempt for communism, they tolerated the organisation because it was an anti-Japanese and anti-French. As the war continued in Asia, it seems that the ICP went along with the new united front line, though on its own terms. It was the South Chinese General Lu-Han, Luog-yun, and Chiang Fa-K'uei, who sheltered the ICP leaders, "for their own short-sighted purposes, pushed the wartime alliance between Vietnamese communists and nationalists to its ultimate conclusion".³⁵ Thus from the eighth plenum which established the Vietminh Front and

33 Khanh, n. 28, p. 264.

34 Chen, n. 8, p. 48.

35 Fall, n. 26, pp. 61-62.

authorised a newly-organised liberation League to prepare for armed insurrection until the August Revolution in 1945, guerrilla forces were assembled, small skirmishes staged and base areas consolidated.

Ho Chi Minh slipped back into Vietnam in 1941, and started organising the people for the coming task. The tasks of the Vietminh, which were decided at the eighth session of the party, were summed up in three major points:

1. To drive out the French and Japanese Fascists and restore the independence of Vietnam.
2. To unite with all the forces fighting Fascism and aggression.
3. To build a Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

36

The creation of the Vietminh for independence of Vietnam usually called the United Front was for Vietnam in particular and not for the whole of Indo-China. In theory, the Vietminh Front was to help Cambodia and Laos to establish their own separate Leagues. The decision to resolve the issue of national independence within each Indo-Chinese state was a significant change of course for the ICP. Hodgkin writes that "the national revolutions of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were thought of as distinct and distinguishable, though to win victory their national liberation movements must maintain close cooperation, support one another and stimulate one another".³⁷ Thus, with the formation of the Vietminh League at the Party's eighth plenum in 1941, the Vietnam independence movement entered in an active existence.

36 Chen, n. 8, p. 53 and Sacks, n. 28, p. 146.

37 Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 302.

The attempts of the French to eliminate it, it had become a major political force in Vietnam, certainly the most dynamic and effective organisation within the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

The political influence of the Vietminh gradually began to penetrate the area as the Party's military forces in the border zones began to take shape. The movement was carried by Ho Chi Minh. He said "now the situation both at home and abroad is favourable. Our Party must lead the people to regain independence at any cost. Even if we have to fight a battle we will fight it until independence is won"³⁸. Mass salvation associations for youth, workers, women, and peasants were formed. A propaganda newspaper Vietnam Doc Lap (Independent Vietnam) was also published under the supervision of the Vietminh leaders. In the villages, self-defence units began to appear and soon almost all villages in Vietminh-controlled areas had at least one unit. By the end of 1941, French attacks harassed the revolutionaries severely but they were strong enough to face such French intransigence.

Although the gradual extension of Japanese influence in Indo-China was on the way, the international situation took a favourable turn in December when Japanese attacked the US bases at Pearl Harbour and the Philippines. Thereafter, the United States entered the war.³⁹ The war had brought increasing hardships to the Vietnamese, unemployment was high in working

38 Vo Nguyen Giap, n. 20, p. 26.

39 Duiker, n. 8, pp. 75-76.

class, commerce was badly hurt and taxes and war requisitions were almost punitive. On the other hand, the Japanese power in Indo-China had not led to decline in French control. These new situations offered Ho Chi Minh a chance to organise more radical activities.⁴⁰

By the end of 1942, the Vietminh had established its clandestine network ranging from the village unit up to the provincial level throughout the nation. Ho Chi Minh foresaw the coming Japanese defeat and he asked his partymen to prepare for the approaching eventuality. Ho said, "Revolutionary work is an enduring task, lasting months and years; so it must be carried out with a firm will through thinking and no haste".⁴¹ Ho's work was most significant. He conducted many military and political cadre-training classes. He also wrote and edited some training and propaganda pamphlets. His written contributions were "Guerrilla warfare", "Experiences of Chinese Guerrilla warfare", and a translation from the Chinese of the "History of the Communist Party of the USSR".⁴² The Party, therefore, had an effective control over the front organisation. In 1942 an event took place that proved disastrous for the Party. In mid-August 1942, Ho Chi Minh went to China possibly in search of arms for his organisation because its guerrilla forces could not develop rapidly with primitive weapons such as knives, spears and old guns. Ho was arrested by the Chinese Nationalists at Tienpao

40 Bertrand Russell, War Crimes in Vietnam (London, 1967), p. 18.

41 Giap, n. 20, p. 27.

42 Chen, n. 8, p. 54.

on the Sino-Vietnamese border. He was charged as a Japanese-French spy and put behind the bars in Chinghsi prison on 29 August 1942. Then he was removed to Kweilin in mid-October. His absence was soon felt in the movement.⁴³ The Kuomintang as the nationalist government of China did not look upon the activities of the communist-inspired Vietminh with favour. The Kuomintang was however, willing to support any nationalist movement for the liberation of Vietnam. It encouraged and helped the nationalist revolutionaries of Vietnam (The VNQDD) to found a new organisation as a counter to the Vietminh. At a conference at Liuchow in August 1942, a nationalist front - the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (Vietnam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi) was founded under the sponsorship of Chang Fa-K'wi, the Chinese provincial governor. The most prominent organisation participating was the VNQDD which had been in exile in China since 1933. Later it was called 'Dong Minh Hoi'.⁴⁴ The Chinese contributed 100,000 Chinese dollars a month to support the 'Dong Minh Hoi' in the hope that the newly-united organisation would be able to provide intelligence information on Japanese activities in Indo-China. In 1943, Kuomintang policy towards the Vietnamese communists underwent a radical change. For their obvious purposes, they released Ho Chi Minh on 16 September 1943 after spending almost

43 Chen, n. 8, p. 56; Turner, n. 28, p. 32; Sacks, n. 28, p. 147; Mehta, n. 3, p. 154; Duiker, n. 8, p. 77; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 309.

44 Duiker, n. 8, p. 78; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 310; McAlister, n. 10, p. 145 and Chen, n. 8, p. 61.

one year from prison.⁴⁵ The Vietminh was permitted to join the Dong Minh Hoi as one of its constituents. Duiker writes that "the VNQDD dominated the organization, but the communists were adequately represented".⁴⁶ Moreover, the Dong Ming Hoi lacked able leaders and faced stiff opposition from the Vietminh. To solve these problems Chang installed Ho Chi Minh as the new head of the organisation in 1943. However only the Vietminh benefited from the new arrangement and by the summer of 1944, it controlled all of the Dong Minh Hoi executive committees. The Vietminh leaders had also strengthened and expanded their guerrilla bases within northern Vietnam.⁴⁷

It seems that there were some differences among the Vietnamese political groups. In fact there were two main groups of exiles in China but its description of two groups was rather inaccurate. The Vietminh was considered as having the backing of Chinese Government and Dong Minh Hoi as being composed entirely of overseas Chinese from northern Indo-China.⁴⁸ Thus Chang Fa-K'uei's effort to direct the Dong Minh Hoi had two objectives. One was to help the Vietnamese revolutionists to achieve their independence. The other was to prepare for China's future military advance into Vietnam in collaboration with allied forces. Chen says, "It was the expectation of a great plan

45 McAlister, n. 10, p. 147 and Our President Ho Chi Minh (Hanoi, F.L.P.H., 1980), p. 116.

46 Duiker, n. 8, p. 78.

47 Sacks, n. 28, pp. 148-49 and Chen, n. 8, pp. 66-67.

48 Spector, n. 1, p. 743.

of Chang Fa K'uei that the Vietnamese revolutionary forces would be mobilized to cooperate with the Chinese from within Vietnam in a joint effort against Japan".⁴⁹ In fact Chang wanted to use Ho Chi Minh for Chinese intelligence purpose and Ho Chi Minh too was willing to take advantage of it. Ho Chi Minh was asked to help allied military operations by providing them secret information on the Japanese activities in Indo-China. Ho Chi Minh accepted the offer as an opportunity to co-operate with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), hoping for the American support in Vietnam's independence struggle to get independence after the war was over.⁵⁰

The change in the international political situation brought about a relevant change in the attitude of the Vietnamese communists including Ho Chi Minh with the allied invasion of France in 1944. The Vietminh associated 'Dong Minh Hoi' began to receive allied assistance in return for which it performed intelligence work behind the Japanese lines in Vietnam. The free French Government took the Chinese sponsorship of the Vietnamese exile groups as evidence that the Chinese were planning a military offensive against the Japanese in Indo-China.⁵¹ Ho Chi Minh was viewed as a communist agent by the French "Although at the time there was considerable speculation as to his true political views".⁵² However in

49 Chen, n. 8, p. 71.

50 Hammer, n. 28, pp. 96-97.

51 Chen, n. 8, pp. 72-73.

52 Fred R. Vonder Mehden, South East Asia 1930-1970 : The Legacy of Colonialism and Nationalism (London: Thames and Hudson. 1974). p. 46.

March 1944 the Kuomintang helped the establishment of a provisional Republican Government of Vietnam in Liuchoo. Ho was given a ministerial post in this government. This provided a golden opportunity to Ho Chi Minh to expand the activities of Vietminh, which was gradually transformed into a regular army of Vietnamese people for National Liberation.⁵³ Its aim was to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Japanese and French military forces. In the words of Ginsburgs, "The Vietminh having first emerged as an insurgent movement and later been forced to wage a difficult guerrilla campaign" against the Japanese occupation forces in Indo-China.⁵⁴

With the allied invasion of France in the beginning of 1944 and the American success in the Central Pacific, the question of the future of Indo-China was taken into consideration by the Americans. In fact, official American policy was in favour of French sovereignty in Indo-China. From 1941 to 1944 they appeared to imply continued recognition.⁵⁵ But President Franklin Roosevelt advocated the system of trusteeship for French Indo-China, with a guarantee of its neutrality by the five big powers. He had suggested this system to Stalin and Churchill at Teheran Conference in 1943. Stalin agreed with the idea of Roosevelt that the French had done nothing for the betterment of the Indo-Chinese people and "after 100 years of French rule the inhabitants are

53 Sacks, n. 28, p. 149 and McAlister, n. 10, p. 149.

54 George Ginsburgs, "Local Government and Administration in North Vietnam", China Quarterly (London), no. 10, April-June 1962, p. 174.

55 Quoted by Spector, n. 1, p. 745.

worse than they were before".⁵⁶ But to preserve the unity of the Allies, Roosevelt had to abandon his plan of independence and international trusteeship for Indo-China.

Ho Chi Minh was unaware that Vietnam's future was being discussed by the big powers. Hence in August 1944 he returned to Vietnam to strengthen and expand his guerrilla movement. He found that the Vietminh was concentrating its energies on expanding its organisation and consolidating itself in the northern region.⁵⁷ By September, the Vietminh had an army of 5,000 men and had three mountainous provinces of Cao Bang, Lang Son and Boc Kan under their control. The revolution ary armed forces were growing and their morale was high. Ho's arrival provided further strength to the Vietminh. It sought to create several liberation committees and National Liberation Associations. It also created an Indo-Chinese Anti-Japanese Fascism Democratic Front, seeking to form an alliance with not only the French communists, and the Chinese but also with Japanese soldiers who were against the war.⁵⁸ They formed armed propaganda teams on 22 December 1944 to harrass the Japanese and the French in the mountainous regions of north Vietnam. They could get limited weapons by raiding isolated French posts under the command of Vo Nguyen Giap. By the December end the Vietnamese communists had 34fighters armed with 17 rifles, 14 hunting rifles, 6 time

56 Peter A. Poole, The United States and Indo-China. From FDR to Nixon (Illinois, 1973), p. 10.

57 Hammer, n. 28, p. 17.

58 Desai, n. 23, pp. 294-95; Khanh, n. 25, p. 774 and Duiker, n. 8, p. 79.

bombs and one American-made submarine gun with 150 bullets and
 with budget of 500 Piasters.⁵⁹ "Its influence became widespread
 throughout Cao-Bac-Lann and the people came to believe more and
 more in revolution, having previously been fluctuating".⁶⁰ Thus
 the Vietminh appeared to be considerably more active. With the
 return of Ho Chi Minh to Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh again went to
 China to seek arms, equipments and medicines. But he was in need
 of arms first, and attempted to gain American aid by this time.
 He was in contact with the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS).
 The OSS was active in the area.⁶¹ According to Robert Shaplen,
 "Ho Chi Minh personally called at OSS headquarters in Kunming
 seeking arms and ammunition in return for intelligence and aid
 to American pilots shot down in Indo China".⁶² At first the
 request was rejected because Ho refused to convince the Americans
 that arms would not be used against the French. Then a committee
 of Vietminh addressed a long letter to the American Ambassador to
 China about the history of Vietnamese struggle for independence
 and the aims of the Vietminh. It later appealed for American aid
 both in the struggle against the French and in the modernisation
 of Vietnam. The Vietminh proclaimed that they aspired to fight
 against Japanese Fascism and so they were in need of American

59 Kanh, n. 30, p. 774.

60 Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 320 and McAlister, n. 10, p. 154;
 Chen, n. 8, p. 89; William S. Turley, "Origin and
 Development of Communist Military Leadership in Vietnam",
Armed Forces and Society (Chicago), vol. 3, no. 2,
 Winter 1977, p. 222.

61 Duiker, n. 8, p. 81; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 321;
 Chen, n. 8, p. 93.

62 Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York, 1966), p. 33.

aid both moral and material. The US Government was impressed by the Vietminh's efforts. The Office of the War Information requested the State Department to assist the Vietnamese.⁶³

During the period, Ho Chi Minh struggled and got success in persuading the Americans to provide him with arms and other material support. Finally Ho was given six .38 calibre revolvers and 120 rounds of ammunition.⁶⁴ Some supplies to guerrillas were dropped from the air, by the Americans while British freed all communists who had been exiled to Madagascar and parachuted them into the Vietminh guerrilla zone. Ho Chi Minh used American arms to seize a few military posts from the French but his plan was to preserve the aid to defeat Japan and the emergence of new rivals.⁶⁵ Thus the Vietminh built up their guerrilla force with American arms in return for its help to the Allies in war. At the same time, the Vietminh drew-up a post-war programme as the war drew to a close. Many Vietnamese began to sense that Allied victory was there. Vietminh promised "an end to French taxes, which were to be replaced by others based on democratic principles", to set up "a national not a colonial economy, with industry developed and agriculture modernised and improved", and also "the eight hour day employment insurance, a minimum wage, aid to large families. Education to be developed at all level... Medical facilities to be increased".⁶⁶ It seems that the Vietminh

63 Sacks, n. 28, p. 149; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 321.

64 Duiker, n. 8, p. 81; Chen, n. 8, p. 94; Russell, n. 40, p.18.

65 Hoang, n. 19, p. 48.

66 Hammer, n. 28, p. 98.

programme was attractive as a means of realising the long-sought independence of Vietnam. Moreover, the Vietminh was gearing up to terminate alien domination, and popular support for Ho Chi Minh and his party grew. By the beginning of 1945 the Vietminh army had 10,000 well-armed Vietnamese freedom fighters. They held control over large areas of rural Tongking while the French and Japanese forces were concentrating in the towns and military camps only. "The help given by the Allied powers to the Vietminh during the early stages of its struggle for independence gave it some degree of legitimacy"⁶⁷. Thus, it was Vietminh that created the first anti-Japanese guerrilla force, provided intelligence to the Allies, spreading its propaganda among the civilian population and received all the credit for anti-Japanese activities during the period in Vietnam.⁶⁸ But the problem in hand for the Vietminh was the overthrow of the French administration, and that, they could not achieve by themselves. So they had to wait for the Japanese to take the initiative.

Towards the end of the war the Japanese experienced heavy losses in the South Pacific, the French received recognition from the Allies and Italy surrendered. These events impelled the Japanese to take security precautions. With the loss of Japanese occupied areas in Burma and the Philippines, Vietnam became even more vital for the Japanese military and their strategic supply base. US bombings were destroying the transportation system in

67 Fall, n. 26, p. 156.

68 Ibid., p. 63.

Vietnam.⁶⁹ Combined with the crop failure and seizure of Rice by the Japanese and the French caused an acute food shortage in Vietnam. The situation worsened when famine struck, which claimed about two million lives. Duiker writes that, "nearly one Vietnamese in ten was suffering from hunger".⁷⁰ The Japanese were also facing increasingly open resistance among the French. The Japanese, who feared that Vietnamese might cooperate with them on the one hand and the French colonial forces would be assisted in a possible allied invasion on the other hand. With the mounting threat to their dominant position in Vietnam, the Japanese decided to keep Vietnam within their power. They staged the armed takeover of French Indo-China on 9 March 1945.⁷¹ The Japanese deposed the French administration of Admiral Decaux, disarmed the army and took directly the control of Indo-China. Thus writes Khanh that "the entire French colonial system, which had been in existence for almost 90 years, came tumbling down".⁷² Soon after the coup on 11 March the Japanese backed Emperor Bao Dai to proclaim the independence of Vietnam. They also appointed Tran Trong Kim to organise a cabinet. Later he was appointed by Bao Dai as Prime Minister. But the former French colonies of Cochinchina, Hanoi and Tourane were placed under direct Japanese

69 Nitz, n. 6, pp. 290-91.

70 Duiker, n. 8, pp. 82-83.

71 Duiker, n. 8, p. 82; Chen, n. 8, p. 99; Khanh, n. 30, p. 291; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 322; Pike, n. 13, p. 27; Sacks, n. 28, p. 149.

72 Khanh, n. 30, p. 764.

control.⁷³ Bao Dai abolished the French-Vietnamese treaty of 1884. But the power of this government was limited because the Japanese continued to be in control, and it was unable to rule as its authority in the country was non-existent.⁷⁴ The Vietminh condemned the new Bao Dai Government as a "puppet government which deceives the people on behalf of its Nipponese masters".⁷⁵

Since the coup, the Japanese did not bother to move into the northernmost provinces of Vietnam, providing a golden opportunity to the Vietminh to establish its authority in that area. By taking advantage of the coup, they were able to disarm the French and this "increased its fund of weapons and also reduced the obstacles to its movements".⁷⁶ On some occasions the Japanese sold arms through private channels to the Vietminh. Even people were thinking that the Vietminh was the creation of Japanese. Ho Chi Minh was in China when the Japanese took over in Indo-China. The central committee of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party met to consider the new situation. The committee issued a directive, "The Japanese-French Conflict and Our Action".⁷⁷ The members were urged to give a strong push to the revolution, as the Japanese coup had created an acute political crisis. The conference observed that the "French power had been destroyed, Japanese power was not yet consolidated, and the population in-

73 Sacks, n. 28, p. 149.

74 Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam : A Political History (Andre Deutsch, 1969), p. 328.

75 Khanh , n. 30, p. 764; Chen, n. 8, p. 100.

76 McAlister, n. 10, p. 155.

77 Chen. n. 8. pp. 100. 110.

between was in consternation, that the conditions were not ripe for an insurrection".⁷⁸ While the Vietminh issued a similar declaration on 15 March, attacking the Japanese and Tran Trong Kim Government and calling on the people to "organize demonstrations, processions and strikes ... destroy all communication and transport facilities ... launch surprise attacks on their isolated outposts and ambush their patrol units..."⁷⁹

Thereafter several massive demonstrations occurred in Tongking and there was renewed guerrilla fighting. The two separate guerrilla forces of Vietnamese, National Salvation forces and Vietnamese Propaganda Liberation forces were united by the Vietnamese Liberation Forces. The force had 3,000 troops at this time. The force had acquired weapons and ammunition from French to protect Vietminh bases and to help in the attacks on rice granaries. According to Khanh "all these actions were aimed at having a propaganda effect and not at competing with the powerful Japanese forces in the Military field".⁸⁰ Vietminh called on the Vietnamese to help drive out the Japanese. On 15 April, Vo Nguyen Giap and other leaders decided to set up various war regions in six liberated provinces. Vietminh influence grew as many Vietnamese became aware that Japan was on the verge of defeat and as the news of Germany's surrender on 7 May came to Vietminh.⁸¹ Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam from China when he saw the favour-

78 Khanh, n. 30, p. 775.

79 Chen, n. 8, p. 100.

80 Khanh, n. 30, p. 775; Duiker, n. 8, p. 84.

81 Sacks, n. 28, p. 150; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 326.

able situation, because at this time the Western countries, America, France and Britain were at war. Ho wanted to cooperate with the West. A meeting of the National Committee of Vietminh was held at Tan Trao on 4 June. The various war regions were merged into "one liberated area" under the control of Vietminh, while the various armed units were unified in a "Liberation Army" under the command of Giap and headed by Ho Chi Minh.⁸²

The Vietminh forces began to operate with little resistance against the Japanese, while Vietminh dominated People's Revolutionary Committee became active around important administrative centres, particularly in Hanoi and Hue.⁸³ Between March and August 1945, the Vietminh guerrillas cleared large sections of five of six northernmost provinces of Tongking and engaged the full attention of the bulk of the Japanese twenty-first division.⁸⁴ On 7 August the Tran Trong Kim cabinet resigned which created a power vacuum. And with no effective central government, the situation became more favourable for the Vietminh. In the same month everywhere in the rural areas throughout North Vietnam, Vietminh organisations led liberation committees emerged and took over business of government. In Hanoi and other big cities in Tongking, there were almost daily demonstrations. After the Japanese offered to surrender, most of Vietnamese government administration was in Vietminh hands.

82 Chen, n. 8, p. 104; Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 326; Duiker, n.11, p.86

83 Khanh, n. 30, p. 776.

84 Ibid., p. 777.

At the end of the Second World War there was instability in the region. The Japanese had to go and French were poised to return. The internal and external events were developing in such a way that the Vietminh had to be prepared for revolution. The Vietnamese wanted an end of both French and the Japanese system of government.

When the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan was compelled to surrender.⁸⁵ Ho Chi Minh was fearful of the possibility of foreign intervention; he recommended the convening of a National Congress of Vietminh delegates before the close of the war. It was also necessary to hold a lightning session so that delegates could return quickly to their local regions and to lead the decisive struggle and to prepare for insurrection. A National Congress of the Vietminh met on 16 August 1945 in the Vietminh-controlled territory and founded a National Liberation Committee headed by Ho Chi Minh. The Committee had the representation of various organisations. They included, two from the communist-Vietminh, three from the communists, six from the Vietminh and three from the Democrats.⁸⁶ The Congress decided to get power from the hands of the Japanese and the puppet government before the arrival of the allied troops in Indo-China. A ten point plan approved by the Congress was to seize power, to gain independence for the (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), to develop the Army, to abolish inequitable taxes,

85 Stein Tonnesson, "The Longest Wars: Indo-China 1945-75", Journal of Peace Research, vol. 22, no. 1, 1985, pp. 11-12.

86 Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 331; Duiker, n. 8, p. 87; Turner, n. 28, p. 38.

to promulgate democratic rights, to redistribute communal lands, to maintaining good relation system, to build up an independent national economy and to promulgate labour legislation. An appeal was issued by Ho Chi Minh for general insurrection.⁸⁷ The Vietminh forces started capturing smaller towns in the north.

Meanwhile the Vietminh organised mass demonstrations and sought to undermine other nationalist groups' influence to make the revolution successful. In most of the Bac Bo and northern Trung Bo provinces, insurrections took place first in the villages and district centres since the bases of the party and the Vietminh in the country-side were rather strong and the Japanese and puppet forces were weak. Thus the Vietminh forces seized control of Hanoi on 19 and Hue on 23 August.⁸⁸

In southern Vietnam, an area where the Vietminh has never been very strong, the revolutionary movement faced greater difficulties. The various non-communist anti-French organisations had joined forces to form the United National Front (Man Tran Quoc Gia Thong Nhat). It included a small communists but it was dominated by non-communist groups such as Cao Dai and Hoa Hào religious sects. The Japanese had formally transferred power to the United National Front. When the Nationalists were convinced that the Vietminh was recognised by the Allied Powers, they allowed the Vietminh to intervene.⁸⁹ However conditions for the seizure of power in cities were ripe, the hundreds of peasants marched in from the villages armed with sticks, knives, and even

87 Desai, n. 28, p. 295 and Turner, n. 28, pp. 37-38.

88 Fall, n. 26, p. 64.

89 Turner. n. 28. p. 39.

a few rifles to take part in demonstrations, to attack police stations, and to seize public buildings, "made an essential contribution too".⁹⁰ By 25 August Saigon was under the control of Vietminh and meanwhile requested the emperor Bao Dai to abdicate in favour of the Democratic forces. Bao Dai abdicated on 30 August 1945, later he was made supreme political adviser to Ho Chi Minh's Provisional Unified National Government.⁹¹

The Vietminh is believed to have asked the Chief of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to convey the message of the independence of Vietnam to the Allies and asked for the recognition. On 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh, representing the new Republican Government, pronounced the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence in front of half-a-million Vietnamese gathered at Ba Dinh Square, Hanoi.⁹² The Declaration said "All men are created with equal rights: among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness".⁹³ The nation-wide demonstrations celebrating the independence testified the people's backing to the Vietminh. Thus the revolution was the most important political event in the history of the Vietnamese nation which

90 Hodgkin, n. 21, p. 332.

91 Hammer, n. 28, p. 216; Chen, n. 8, p. 111; Hoang, n. 19, p. 48 and Khanh, n. 30, p. 778.

92 Roger M. Smith, ed., Southeast Asia : Document of Political Development and Change (New York, 1979), p. 113; Fall, n. 26, p. 64; Khanh, n. 30, p. 778; Duiker, n. 8, p. 99, McAlister, n. 10, p. 195; Sardesai, n. 28, p. 295; Chen, n. 8, p. 111.

93 R.L. Wali, Vietnam : Long Road to Freedom (New Delhi, 1976), p. 18; Duiker, n. 8, p. 99. Further details for Declaration of Independence refer to Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings 1920-1969 (Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1973).

placed Vietnam "among the people's democratic and socialist countries".⁹⁴ Khanh writes that, "the August Revolution was the most significant turning point in the recent history of Vietnam, that the events of August 1945 were only the final climax of a five month political drama -- a drama which began on March 9 and was supposed to have ended on September 2, 1945".⁹⁵ While Rupert Emerson says, "the interval of the liberating forces of the allies enabled the ... Democratic Republic of Vietnam to consolidate governments and armies, the extent of whose sway shocked the French as they sought to restore the colonial systems which the war had irrevocably swept away".⁹⁶

The effort to return to power by the French colonial masters and Ho Chi Minh's Declaration of Independence of Vietnam marked the climax of the political turmoil in the region of Indo-China. Ultimately, however, the French Government had to accept the claims of the communist nationalists and left the region for good.

94 DRV, History of the August Revolution (Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1972), p. 160.

95 Khanh, n. 30, p. 781.

96 Rupert Emerson, From Empire to Nation (Cambridge, 1959), p. 31.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

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A comparative study of Vietnam's the Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP) and the Vietminh during the period 1930-1945 indicated that these organisations not only accelerated the pace of independence movements but also laid a solid background for national unity and integrity. The ICP believed in communist ideology and revolutionary warfare. But it was under the Vietminh leadership that the Vietnamese united and defeated the powerful French imperial forces. The success of the communists against internal and external adversaries, their popular appeal in the country and their victories at the battlefield against the French forces compelled France to transfer sovereignty to the people of Vietnam. While the ICP was the predecessor to organise proletariat in Indo-China, the Vietminh as its successor turned the communists movement into a popular mass movement. But whereas the ICP recruited only communists, the Vietminh was broad-based and besides communists, it included nationalists, democrats and others in the organisation. Their immediate objective was to drive out the French from Vietnam lock, stock and barrel and their final aim was to establish revolutionary socialism in Vietnam.

Vietnamese national movement like many other anti-colonial struggles, was the result of the urge of the people to remain free and resist alien domination. Thus, the relevance of the ICP and the Vietminh could not be understood in proper

perspective without understanding the ethos of Vietnam's national movement.

The dynamics of Vietnam's nationalism provided the tone and tenor of the two communist organisations. Vietnam under the French rule was suppressed to such an extent that the people became increasingly conscious about their rights and privileges. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party articulated the various demands of the Vietnamese people and provided astute leadership to fight against the French rule.

The communist movement in Vietnam was led by Ho Chi Minh. It is noteworthy that the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and the Vietminh were organised and led by Ho Chi Minh. Perhaps in no other independence movement, a person holds the nationalist movement in such sway as in the case of Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh.

Studied in **four** chapters, this study has tried to evaluate the relevance of communist organisation for contemporary Vietnam.

Herein an attempt is made to explain the geopolitics and history of Vietnam. Vietnam experienced colonial rule for centuries. The French colonial rule was ruthless and it was one of the **factors** to arouse Vietnamese nationalism. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party provided the nationalists a forum to unite and express their demand of independence.

In this dissertation, an attempt has been made to analyse various factors responsible for the rise of nationalism in Vietnam. The history of various types of French repression and their responses in Vietnam have been examined.

In this work an account is given of the ICP's contribution in Vietnam's struggle for independence. The analysis of the

emergence of the ICP has revealed how Ho Chi Minh came on the political scene of Vietnam and became the mass leader. So far the leaders who spearheaded the anti-French movements did not convince the queries of the lower sections of society like the peasants and the labour force. Hence those movements failed. Ho Chi Minh, drawing inspiration from the success of Bolshevik Revolution, put a new element in Vietnam's national movement, His mobilisation of support base for his organisation was unique. HO Chi Minh organised the Indo-Chinese Communist Party; he attempted to enlist the support of the Vietnamese masses for armed revolution. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party had a great appeal for the Vietnamese peasants. But it had to compete against other political parties and groups to dominate national politics. The Indo-Chinese Communist Party evolved gradually a popular support for its campaign to fight against imperialism. On the eve of the Japanese aggression on Vietnam, the Indo-Chinese Communist Party decided not to compromise with the invaders. It took a decision to broaden the existing organisation to put a formidable challenge before the oppressors. Thus the Vietminh came into existence. It converted the communist movement in Vietnam into a mass movement.

The Vietminh perceived the threat from both the French and the Japanese forces. It favoured revolutionary means against the French and the Japanese imperialist forces. The Vietminh unlike the Indo-Chinese Communist Party, was not based only on the communist ideals. It drew support from diverse sources. Several non-communist countries also supported the Vietminh. Even the USA was providing material support to it.

The Vietminh also got substantial support from Japan, the USSR and China, though clandestinely on occasions. Here the relevant point to be noted is that the Vietminh's support base cut across the barriers of the party, class and ideology. In Vietnam there was no other party except the Vietminh to mobilise maximum support from all the sections of the country. While the parties like the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dong (VNQDD) failed to elicit support from the lower segments, the ICP could not succeed in keeping the elites or the mandarins satisfied, but the Vietminh provided a common forum to major political groups to be united and work collectively for national emancipation.

The World War II came to an end in 1945. The French Government wanted to reestablish its colonial rule, but the nationalist leaders wanted to gain national independence immediately. But by that time the two leaders emerged to claim the leadership and advocated the suitability of two different systems for Vietnam. First was Ho Chi Minh campaigning for the communist system and another was Bao Dai campaigning for an anti-communist system. The French Government was sympathetic towards the leadership of Bao Dai. It was not willing to negotiate with the communist leaders. In August 1945, the Vietminh called for a "General insurrection" throughout the country to pressurise the French Administration to transfer sovereignty to Vietnam. In September 1945, Vietminh proclaimed the formation of the Government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam and derecognised the existence of the French colonial rule. This proclamation provoked the French Government to

start "the war of reconquest". The French effort to subdue the nationalist upsurge in Vietnam could not help the French interests but instead it helped in the origin and growth of revolutionary nationalism in Vietnam. But the French did not leave their control over Vietnam immediately until they were compelled to do so in 1954.

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