

# For political revolution in Vietnam!

A document produced by the Vietnamese Trotskyist Group in France.

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The Vietnamese Communist leadership is difficult to define, for it does not correspond to the norm which says that a bureaucratised leadership of Stalinist origin betrays the movement that it has the responsibility of leading. Like the Chinese and Yugoslav leaderships, it has been able to take the lead of a national liberation struggle and, through it, to seize power then install a workers' state.

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The theoretical possibility that a Stalinist leadership could go further than it itself wanted on the road of breaking with the bourgeoisie had been envisaged in the Transitional Programme. In China, in Yugoslavia and in Vietnam, it was parties which were members of the Comintern which organised huge peasant masses militarily and politically around democratic objectives (national liberation, democratic liberties, agrarian reform).

Probably little disposed to jump through the stages and to rapidly give anti-capitalist objectives to the struggle that they were leading, they were led to do so in order to be able to conquer precisely the democratic demands that they had fixed for themselves. It was thus that three parties of Stalinist origin became the unexpected agents of that permanent revolution that they had been taught to fight against.

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These three parties did not carry in themselves the germs of dissidence. For many years they were totally subordinated to the wishes of the Kremlin, even if their development suffered from it. The Chinese CP paid for its alignment in the '20s with an unprecedented disaster.

Tito reorganised the Yugoslav CP as from 1937 with the complete agreement of Stalin and the Comintern.

As for the Vietnamese CP, it is erroneous to present it as being relatively independent from Moscow since 1930. Like its founder, Ho Chi Minh, it has always tried to preserve its national interests without clashing with the Kremlin head-on. The episode of the united front with the Trotskyists in 1933 took place with the full agreement of the Third International and with the assistance of the French CP;

its break-up took place at the point when the Kremlin had had enough of it (even if the Trotskyists took the initiative for it).

The creation of the Viet Minh and the unleashing the armed struggle against the Japanese and the Vichyists was in the framework of the anti-fascist war. If the seizure of power in 1945 was not allowed for by the Potsdam Agreement, still this initiative of the Vietnamese CP [VCP], though not at all encouraged by Stalin, was not condemned by him either. He used it in his diplomatic dealings.

The extremely opportunist line of the VCP between 1945 and 1947 shows that in that period it quickly responded more to the counsels of moderation from the French CP and from Moscow than to the demands of the peasant movement, which it helped to dam up. The heroic struggle of the Viet Minh during the first resistance could not put the Vietnamese leadership in opposition to Stalin at a time when the cold war was going full blast. By signing and respecting the Geneva Accords of 1954, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades showed that the 'friendly pressure' of the Soviet (and Chinese) big brothers still had force of law for them.

It was only after the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the unleashing of the Sino-Soviet conflict that the Vietnamese leadership clearly separated itself from



Moscow and acquired an independent position, which it has preserved.

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The Vietnamese communist leadership has often acted in an empirical fashion, but it is not possible to present it as a passive leadership, tossed around by events and restricting itself to reflecting the rise of the mass movement.

This rise did not exist in 1941 when a few dozen persecuted militants took the decision to go over to armed struggle; it did not exist in the 1960s, either, when the North was smashed by bombing and the South was strangled by the American army and the police and mercenaries of Thieu.

For the Vietnamese people to hold firm and win, it had to be led by a bitterly determined party, disciplined and linked to the masses.

In this respect, the VCP is differentiated from almost all its homologues, which have only been able to lead struggles to defeat. It owes this, to be sure, to the quality of the cadres that it has been able to form, to their revolutionary heroism, but above all to the fact that it found itself in the situation of being the bearer of the national aspirations of a whole people, the national bourgeoisie and its political formations having defaulted.

The triumph of the Yugoslav Communists is explained in the same way.

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To define the Vietnamese leadership as 'empirical revolutionaries' is insufficient, and could generate illusions.

'Empirical revolutionaries' can educate themselves and eventually link up with revolutionary Marxism on the basis of their practical experience, their reading and their discussion. Such was the possible evolution of the Cuban leadership before the counterweight of massive Soviet aid intervened. Nothing like that can be envisaged for the Lao Dong [VCP], or for that matter for the comrades of Tito or of Mao.

Empiricism is a natural secretion of Stalinism, for which theory only serves to justify the past. But the empiricism of the VCP manifested itself within a strategy for the seizure of power which had been worked out for a long time. Although it allowed for the most risky and dubious tactical zig-zags, the continuity of the general line of these parties cannot be denied: to take the lead of the national liberation movement, to take power, and to install a regime taking its inspiration from the USSR and Red China.

To attain its objectives, the VCP showed an implacable revolutionary will and a constant concern to obtain the assistance of the 'socialist camp'.

It always knew how to manoeuvre so as not to abandon its objectives, without inconveniencing the Kremlin. It managed to do this right up to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956.

The Yugoslav experience is quite comparable. A leadership chosen by Moscow took the lead of a worker and peasant

uprising to drive out the Nazi invader. The necessities of the struggle led it to politicise the movement — creation of proletarian brigades, use of the red star symbol, local organs of power, etc.

Much more than in Vietnam, the Soviets multiplied their warnings, advice, and reproofs. Then they bowed to the accomplished fact, and the heroic Yugoslav CP, once it had taken power, hurried to install a People's Republic inspired by the Soviet model (which did not correspond to Stalin's policy). It is well known that, although it was the only country of the buffer zone not liberated by the Red Army, Yugoslavia was also the only one which carried through the decisive overthrows making it a deformed workers' state as early as 1945.

The same could be said of the Chinese CP, which managed never directly to confront Stalin, while still pursuing its objective: to take power by military defeat of the Kuomintang. It reckoned, correctly, that a victory is always forgiven.

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The Vietnamese Communist Party can be characterised today as a bureaucratized workers' party. Its ideology and its organisation come directly from Stalinism. It is ruled by bureaucratic centralism, and political discussions only take place at the highest level, in the Politbureau. The lower levels have no role beyond discussing the application of the line.

The education given to the militants has only a remote relation to a Marxist education which would aim to develop knowledge and critical awareness: essentially they study the editorials of the party paper, the speeches of the party leaders, and some chosen extracts from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Obedience and loyalty to the party are the cardinal virtues of the militant.

However, the relations which the leadership has with the masses differentiate the VCP profoundly from almost all the other CPs in power, and put it close to the Chinese CP.

The Lao Dong [party] rules by paternalist manipulation and control of the masses, and not by terror. This does not exclude the perfection of the police apparatus, and the impossibility of the slightest political opposition, but the VCP prefers to act through imposed consent rather than by brutal repression.

The aim is that the line worked out by the Politbureau should appear as the only correct line, and that every Vietnamese should apply it without even imagining that other solutions might be possible without being counter-revolutionary. The means are strict control of information, permanent and compulsory indoctrination (lectures, loudspeakers in the streets, multiple meetings, etc.), and the close linking of the cadres with the population.

The Vietnamese bureaucracy is defined less by the size of the material privileges that it disposes of than by its belonging to a rigorously codified, uncontrollable hierarchy, which has a mono-

poly of powers of decision. In this sense, it can be said that since the seizure of power there has been constituted, as in Yugoslavia, a bureaucratic layer whose material and social advantages depend on the hazards of the economic situation.

Its appearance has, to be sure, been very much favoured by what is called the objective circumstances (economic and cultural backwardness, shortage of cadres, isolation, etc.) but the decisive factor explaining the rapidity and the inevitability of the bureaucratisation was the deliberate will of the VCP to organise the party and the state on the inspiration only of the Soviet and Chinese experiences.

The privileges which the Vietnamese political cadres dispose of are rigorously copied from those granted to their counterparts in the other bureaucratized workers' states: special shops always supplied at official prices, official cars with chauffeurs, free holidays, reserved hospitals, trips abroad, lodgings with cooks (for the higher cadres), salaries depending on the party hierarchy, advantageous food cards, free medicines, political conference with expenses paid, etc.

In absolute value, these privileges would be disdained by a Soviet or Rumanian party secretary, but their existence alone is of enormous significance: there exists no mechanism to prevent them growing in proportion as the economy of the country is reconstituted, and it is again them that the political opposition that they will have given birth to will eventually crystallise.

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To continue to see in Vietnam only a 'bureaucratic layer in process of formation' is insufficient. The experience of the Russian, Yugoslav and Chinese revolutions shows that in the absence of a clear awareness of the bureaucratic danger, a leadership in power rapidly becomes gangrenous. The defence of its power and of all the advantages (of every type) connected with it, becomes its principal motive.

The Vietnamese party has not even had an opposition capable of sounding the alarm, as took place in the Bolshevik party. Right from 1945, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades set about implacably applying the Stalinist devices which the USSR acquired only after an intense political battle: de facto one-party system, ideological monolithism, fusion of the party and the state, liquidation of opponents, official privileges, etc.

It can be said that the Vietnamese workers' state was born bureaucratically deformed and that it had no internal possibility of preventing the evolution towards bureaucratic degeneration. The sincerity and the revolutionary ardour of Ho Chi Minh, of Tito, and of Mao, are not put into question by this analysis: only, their integration into the world of Stalinism led them to install mechanisms which must inevitably transform the leading layer into a privileged and omnipot-

ent bureaucratic caste.

This phenomenon of the bureaucratisation of the leading layer of the party, once it is directing the state, had been well observed by Rakovsky in his pamphlet written in 1928, 'The Professional Dangers of Power'. He showed how the bureaucracy is born, starting from the fraction of the working class which exercises power: the differentiation is at first functional, and then becomes social when institutionalised advantages accompany the official positions.

It should be noted that Trotsky himself had to revise with a critical eye the assessment he had given of the Soviet bureaucracy of the 1920s. In 1935, he wrote for the first time that the bureaucracy could celebrate the tenth anniversary of Thermidor, that is, of its seizure of political power, displacing the proletariat. The necessary conclusion from this is that the problem of the violent overthrow of this bureaucracy was posed historically as from 1925 even if for tactical reasons it was not possible to pose it at that time to the Soviet proletariat.

When Trotsky came to consider that one year after the death of Lenin the bureaucracy already formed a caste with interests opposed to those of the proletariat, it is difficult to see how 30 years after the seizure of power by a leadership unaware of the dangers of bureaucratisation the appearance of such a layer could have been avoided in Vietnam.

The fact that the VCP has successfully led a revolutionary struggle does not contradict this assertion.

Like bourgeois democracies or fascist regimes, the workers' bureaucracies of Stalinist origin are not at all identical, even if they are genetically similar. To believe that a bureaucratic caste can only be cowardly and capitulatory is a blinkered view, and besides contradicted by the experience of the CPSU during the Second World War when it was fighting for its survival.

As from 1945, the Hanoi leaders knew that they could only triumph by making themselves the heroes of the liberation of all Vietnam. There was a tendency struggle in the apparatus at the end of the 1950s against the 'Khrushchevites' who wanted to abandon the south so as to build socialism in half a country alone,

but the majority came down in favour of resolute aid to the militants in the south.

It was precisely at that moment that the Vietnamese leadership clearly abandoned the Soviet fold to defend itself. As a workers' bureaucracy conscious of its fundamental interests, it knew that it would have an autonomous and stable existence only at the head of a reunified Vietnamese state: it was impossible for it to accept an American base on its doorstep, enslaving its compatriots and depriving it of the richest part of the country.

This is how the stubbornness of the VCP and its refusal to bow down before the American genocide is explained.

We can be certain that it will put the same determination into organising the reconstruction of the country. That will not be sufficient to secure the building of a socialist society in Vietnam.

North Korea was probably even more devastated. Pyongyang, the capital, had only two buildings intact, while Hanoi has not been destroyed. In Korea there was not a town, not a village, not a school, not a hospital, not a building that had not been totally smashed. And despite that, under the leadership of the Korean CP and its 'great leader', everything was rapidly reconstructed.

Who could claim that the regime of Kim Il Sung, with its nepotism, its bureaucracy, its stifling Stalinist ideology, has anything to do with a socialist democracy? It is however a workers' state whose infrastructure explains the economic and social progress.

It remains a fact that the Vietnamese leadership could on several occasions have capitulated to French or American imperialism, and it didn't. Even if it has never directly confronted Stalin or his successors, it has always known how to defend its interests before those of the Kremlin, while obliging the latter to come to its help: in this sense it is not a matter of a Stalinist leadership (and the type of relations that it has with the masses confirms this).

But if it is not Stalinist, it is nonetheless totally bureaucratized.

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Foreign policy is always at the service of internal policy. While it was struggling

to drive out the Yankees, the VCP symbolised resistance to imperialism, and its attitude in face of American arrogance and duplicity was often exemplary. It showed that it was not necessary to possess computers and atom bombs to triumph in a revolutionary war, even if the use of rockets and modern armaments was shown to be indispensable.

Its example galvanised millions of people world-wide, and it can justly be considered as the godfather of the French May 1968 and of the revival of the far left in America, in Europe and in Japan.

But at the height of its struggle, the internationalism of the VCP was shown to be singularly narrow. A prisoner of the theory of socialism in one country, it always considered that its liberation struggle could fulfill all its internationalist duties. When the interests of a given working class entered into contradiction with what the Vietnamese leadership considered as important for itself, internationalism was brushed aside: it supported the repression in Ceylon and the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. Less sectarian and more realistic than others, the VCP accepted all sorts of assistance (including from Trotskyists) to win. Victory once acquired, it becomes clear that it is being selective about its friends.

The fact is that the VCP does not have a principled attitude in relation to the world workers' movement: for it, only the official CPs represent 'the interests of the working class', and officially the VCP will do all it can to hush up the disagreements it has with them (for example with the French CP during the two Indochina wars).

Since the dispute with the USA is still acute, the Vietnamese leadership speaks in firm tones in relation to the former aggressors. The recent example of China suggests, however, that a damper will be put on when the USA, after the presidential elections, agrees to give economic aid, to re-establish diplomatic relations, and to let Vietnam enter the UN.

The opportunism of Vietnamese diplomacy is shown clearly in its support for the reactionary and repressive regimes of Ceylon and of India, not to speak of the windy rhetoric of Pham Van Dong about the 'non-aligned' countries. Its attitude towards the Thai regime is currently hardening, but this is due to the recent anti-communist coup d'état, which brutally interrupted a normalisation of relations which was well under way.

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The Vietnamese leadership has two major preoccupations.

- To find varied foreign economic aid from workers' states and developed capitalist countries, so as to be able to preserve an independent position;

- Internally, to put to work a population which is physically and morally exhausted by the war, with a lack of technically competent cadres.

To achieve this without really giving the masses a chance to speak, the lead-

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ing bureaucratic layer is throwing itself into a more and more frenzied nationalism. The national glorification to which all the Vietnamese publications apply themselves no longer has anything to do with the reawakening of a people whose past and whose customs were long scoffed at: we have a Communist Party praising the kings and emperors who used to rule through the chances of factional struggle, we have 'Marxists' celebrating national virtues (warlike ardour, endurance, the high culture of its ancestors) and make their deceased president into a demigod whom people will come to adore in his mausoleum.

The construction of this ruinous mausoleum in a period of poverty says a lot about the 'post-mortem Bonapartist' role that the Vietnamese leadership wants to have the corpse of Ho Chi Minh play.

In face of the nationalist turning-inwards of the Vietnamese and Cambodjan, it is high time to relaunch the old slogan, 'Long live the socialist federation of the countries of Indochina!'

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The current evolution of South Vietnam is repeating past experiences under our eyes.

Despite the lack of information available, there is no doubt that we are seeing there the development of a workers' state already carrying all the deformations which leave no chance of socialist democracy.

To be sure, there have been no defeats of the masses, while Stalin's victory was explained in the last analysis by the setbacks of the world revolution and the demoralisation of the Soviet workers. But beware of mythology. The Vietnamese people was bled white by the war. It must be imagined what thirty years of uninterrupted violence mean — the fantastic number of dwellings destroyed, families decimated and scattered, children maimed. The immediate demand is for a better life and for tranquillity.

Contrary to the clichés of official propaganda, the masses of South Vietnam did not rise up massively to destroy the Thieu regime — neither in the towns, nor in the countryside.

The victory was military-political: the army of the DRV [the North], supported by partisans (very much a minority in the towns) was the essential instrument. It smashed a rotten regime, half abandoned by its American protectors, while benefiting from the tacit support of a part of the population wearied by the war and the corruption.

Because of all these circumstances, the thousands of cadres that Hanoi has sent south to reorganise the country will have had little difficulty in establishing themselves. The liberation of the south was not even accompanied by the emergence of the workers' councils which could be observed in Germany, in Poland and in Czechoslovakia when the liberating Red Army advanced in 1944.

The committees of liberation were all set up and carefully controlled: the VCP does not like improvisation, especially

when it might lead the masses to act in an autonomous fashion.

The recent legislative elections, whose conduct and results (99%) recall the high points of Stalinism, may open the eyes of those who still hoped things were better.

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Should we lose all hope? How to understand that a people which has given the world such a lesson of courage, of revolutionary ardour and of original initiatives, can be satisfied with a regime that gives it no free speech?

China and Yugoslavia are there to show us that in a country where the peasantry constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population, if the revolutionary party ignores the problem of bureaucratisation, the working class is incapable of opposing the degeneration of the victorious party.

Its leadership, despite its record of prisons, torture and exile, transforms itself into a privileged and uncontrolled caste.

It has the power and it will not abandon it. Its prestige due to the victory and to the gains of the revolution, and the immense exhaustion of the Vietnamese people, will give it a respite of several years.

But after that? Young people will come into political life who consider independence and the collectivisation of the means of production as an established fact. The aura of old combatants will not be able to mask the reality of the privileges and the mediocrity of intellectual life.

It will no longer be possible to black out news and to prevent the penetration of new ideas (new for Vietnam):

- the right for several workers' parties to coexist;
- right of tendency in the Communist Party;
- independence of the trade unions;
- democratic administration of the state by a pyramid of councils starting from rank and file level;
- freedom of the press;
- suppression of the privileges of the members of the party and of the state apparatus.

It is of course impossible to foresee what concrete forms the clashes between the masses and the ruling bureaucracy will take. All that can be said now is that Vietnam will not see the birth of a socialist democracy without the ruling layer, its bureaucratic structures and its party being overthrown by force. This is what the Trotskyist movement has always called a political revolution.

To say this does not mean rejecting all the cadres of the VCP. It is very unlikely that they will take the initiative, but it is certain that a mass upsurge against the bureaucrats will bring divisions in their midst. In Hungary, in Poland and in Czechoslovakia, the great majority of the cadres went over to the side of the revolution: many from fear or from calculation, others because the workers' pressure made them rediscover the revolutionary tradition. In those three cases

only the brutal intervention of the Kremlin enabled the process of political revolution to be blocked and bureaucratic power to be fully restored.

In China, it was on the occasion of a struggle for power between bureaucratic factions that the first phase of the political revolution was unleashed. Taking Mao's directives to the letter, the Red Guards wanted to go much further than the Great Helmsman wanted. He had the army put out the fire which he himself had lighted.

But, as in Eastern Europe, repression cannot bring the old status quo back. The subversive ideas of workers' democracy, of freedom of expression, of suppression of privileges, have seized millions of people, and only wait for the next chance to show their strength.

In Vietnam, the political revolution is only at the stage of its first stammered words. The task of the Fourth International is however to prepare so that it can be carried out in the best conditions for the workers and peasants: that is, so that a vanguard will have understood what the problems to be resolved are and what forces to base itself on.

While continuing to demonstrate militant solidarity with the DRV when imperialism threatens it, we must leave no illusions on the nature of its leadership.

Given the impossibility of carrying out militant activity in Vietnam at the present time (the political-police infrastructure would annihilate it in record time), the International should use to the maximum the comrades of the Vietnamese Trotskyist Group in France to publish papers, pamphlets and books which, distributed among Vietnamese emigrés, will certainly reach the country.

It is not true that serious, well-argued and responsible Trotskyist analysis can find no response in Vietnam.

The incessant campaigns against the corruption of the cadres and against the incompetence of the bureaucrats which are launched by the Lao Dong [party] testify in their own way to a certain unease at the top of the hierarchy about the risk of a breach between the cadres and the population.

Besides, hundreds of militants educated in France by the Fourth International have returned to Vietnam since 1947 and have done their duty during the revolution. Doubtless some of them will become conscious anti-bureaucratic militants as soon as their isolation ends.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the dissident communist intellectuals of 1956-7 (grouped around Nhan Van) are still there. They have experienced in their own bones the Stalinist methods used by the ruling bureaucracy to smear and crush them at the same time as their Hungarian and Chinese colleagues were liquidated.

To make revolutionary Marxist ideas penetrate into Vietnam is a long-term job, full of difficulties.

But we have to begin at the beginning. Marxism and Leninism have to be rediscovered in Vietnam. Only the Fourth International is capable of carrying out this task.