

A SPARTACIST PAMPHLET/\$1.00

STALINISM AND TROTSKYISM IN VIETNAM



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Ho Chi Minh



Ta Thu Thau

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Introduction

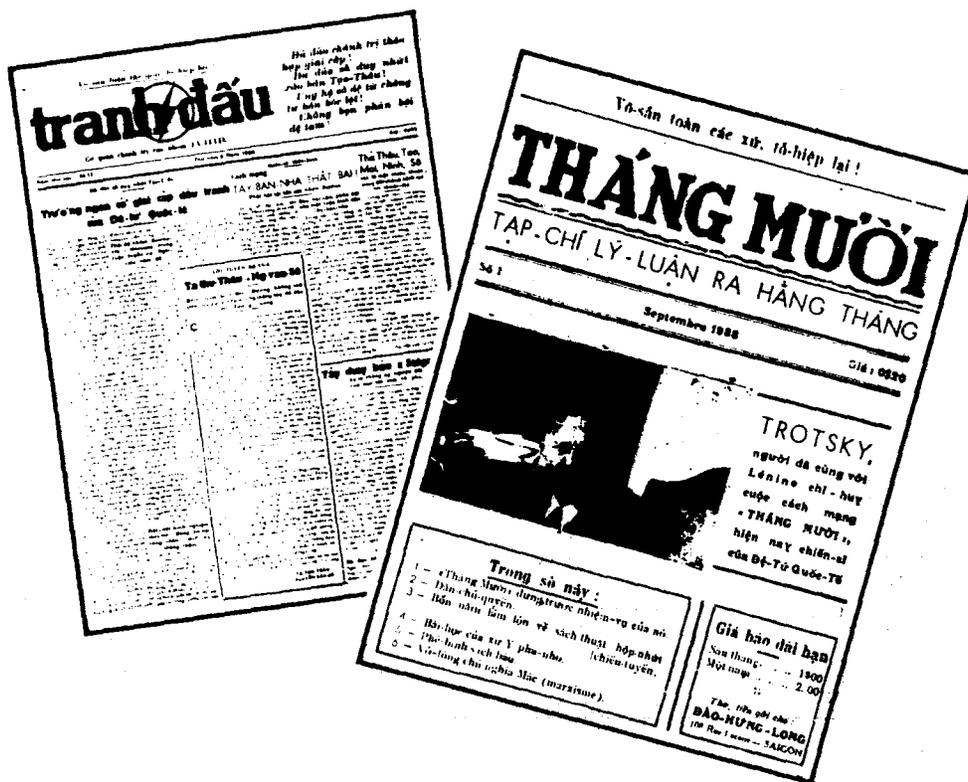
This pamphlet is dedicated to the martyred Vietnamese Trotskyists. The most uncompromising fighters against imperialism, they led the 1945 Saigon insurrection against the reinvading colonialists. For this heroic struggle they were massacred not only by the French and British expeditionary forces, but above all by the Stalinist Viet Minh. Today renegades from Trotskyism hail the Vietnamese Stalinists as "revolutionaries," even absolving them of responsibility for the vile murders of Ta Thu Tau and hundreds of other Vietnamese Fourth Internationalists. But the international Spartacist tendency proudly upholds the banner of Vietnamese Trotskyism.

The articles below, reprinted from the press of the Spartacist League/ U.S., are grouped into three chapters. The first, "In Defense of Vietnamese Trotskyism," is largely historical, covering the struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism in Indochina. The second heading, "The Struggle Against Class Collaboration in the Anti-War Movement," focuses on the SL's fight to draw the class line in the antiwar movement. Finally, the section "A Revolution Deformed" includes several articles on the last months of the Indochinese civil war, highlighting the Trotskyist call for military victory of the Stalinist armies against imperialism combined with the demand for the revolutionary ouster of the parasitic bureaucracies which continually endangered the struggle of the workers and peasants, and today continue to block the road forward to socialism.

Taken together these articles chronicle a decade of principled struggle for working-class independence and against the multitude of opportunists and confusionists who would tie the proletariat to the class enemy, in Vietnam and throughout the world.

CHAPTER I

In Defense of Vietnamese Trotskyism



Publications of Vietnamese supporters of the Fourth International in the 1930's. Left: *Tranh Dau* ("Struggle") of the Ta Thu Thau group. Right: *Thang Muoi* ("October") of the International Communist League.

Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam

by John Sharpe

—from Workers Vanguard
No. 19, 27 April 1973

Part I

[Editors' Note: This article is little more than a sketch of the history of Vietnamese Trotskyism. Only a brief account of the movement and sporadic issues of its newspapers are available to us at this time. Nevertheless, the facts that are known serve to underline doubly the historic importance of the struggle for the Marxist program of permanent revolution, the struggle to resolve what Leon Trotsky referred to as the "crisis of revolutionary leadership." The price of Stalinist betrayals is measured not only by their deliberate murder of hundreds of Trotskyist militants in the aftermath of the September 1945 insurrection (which the latter helped lead and the former helped defeat), but also by the subsequent deaths of more than two million Vietnamese workers and peasants in their heroic battle against French and U.S. imperialism. Most of these could have been avoided if the Stalinists, and in the first instance Ho Chi Minh, had not been able to sell out the struggle at crucial periods with their policies of appeasement of the bourgeoisie.]

As was the case throughout the world, the Trotskyist movement in Vietnam was forged in the struggle against the errors and betrayals of the Stalinists. However, unlike most other areas, the Vietnamese supporters of the Fourth International succeeded in achieving a mass

base during the late 1930's. In fact, both of the competing groups claiming to be Trotskyist were publishing daily newspapers before or just after World War II.

Nevertheless, both groups, the centrist La Lutte group led by Ta Thu Thau, and the more leftist International Communist League (the October group) led by Ho Huu Thuong, were paralyzed by French repression and ultimately decapitated by the Stalinists. These defeats were *in part* the result of certain erroneous policies, notably a tendency toward perpetual united fronts with the Stalinists and a failure to draw a sharp line against popular fronts. We honor the memory of these martyrs and their determined battle against French colonialism and against reformism in the workers movement, but we must also learn from their mistakes.

Formation of the Indochinese Communist Party

The history of the Vietnamese Stalinist movement is inseparably bound up with the life of Nguyen Ai Quoc (later known as Ho Chi Minh), its founder and principal leader.

He emerged as one of the leaders of the Communist International in the Far East after his journey to Moscow in 1923 as the delegate of the French CP to the "Peasant International" and his participation in the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, where he delivered a report on the colonial question. An important factor in his development was the fact that he became involved in the Comintern only after it had already begun to degenerate seriously under the Stalin-Zinoviev leadership. The "Peasant International," for example, was one of Zinoviev's more dubious maneuvers, designed to seduce populist peasant leaders such as the Croatian Radič into support for Russia. Not only was it a phantom organization from the beginning, but it was necessarily based on Stalin's policies of the "democratic dictatorship of the peasantry and proletariat." For Marxists, who seek to organize the *workers'* international, there could be no question of building a *peasants'* international, that is, of organizing another class.

Nguyen Ai Quoc also participated in the "Intercolonial Union," which included several left bourgeois nationalists from the Middle East, hardly a model of communist organization. Thus it is not surprising that when he reached Canton in 1925 as an associate of Borodin (chief Comintern representative in China at the time) he set up not a communist party, but instead a socialist-oriented nationalist grouping, the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Association (Viet Nam Cach Menh Thanh Nien Hoi, or Thanh Nien for short).

This was the kind of "Marxism" which Nguyen Ai Quoc learned from Stalin, who at the time was instructing the Chinese Communist

Party to liquidate itself into Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang, turning over membership lists and even arms to these "anti-imperialists." Shortly after Stalin made him an honorary member of the Communist International, Chiang turned on his Communist allies and butchered thousands of militant workers in Shanghai in April 1927.

Despite this graphic object lesson in the consequences of opportunist policies (as a result of which he had to leave first Canton and then later Hankow also), Nguyen Ai Quoc refused to learn. Thus for the first several years the Thanh Nien concentrated on consummating a fusion (which never came off) with the strictly bourgeois Revolutionary Party of New Vietnam (the Tan Viet). At the first congress of the Thanh Nien in May 1929, his supporters on the presiding committee obstinately opposed the formation of an explicitly communist party. A minority, small (3 out of 17 delegates) but influential (it was the entire delegation from the interior), walked out of the congress and set up the Indochinese Communist Party (Don Duong Cong San Dang), sharply condemning the Thanh Nien leadership as petty-bourgeois nationalists.¹

The new party experienced immediate success, appearing to the masses as the more revolutionary of the two, so in August the Thanh Nien switched gears and set up the Vietnamese Communist Party (Annam Cong San Dang). This was in part the result of Stalin's "left turn" internationally (the so-called "Third Period"), as the Comintern had refused membership to the Thanh Nien, called for the formation of a unified CP and criticized the program of the Nguyen Ai Quoc faction. The unified party, also called the Indochinese Communist Party, was formed in October 1930 and affiliated to the Third International the following April.

The first Communist efforts were directed at spearheading a desperate peasants' revolt centering on central Vietnam during 1930-31. In the Annamese provinces of Ha Tinh and Nghe-An the ICP broke up the large estates and set up peasant "soviets" on the order of the border-region soviets set up by Mao in southeastern China during the period 1927-29. Like the latter, however, they were brutally liquidated by the government forces.

In contrast to its adventuristic policies in the countryside, the CP tactics in the cities were restricted to "democratic" demands and "peaceful" demonstrations, thus leaving the masses unprepared for the bloody repression by the French colonial regime. Mercenary soldiers machine-gunned the defenseless masses, as the Foreign Legion terrorized the Annam peasant districts which had risen in revolt. The repression cost the lives of some 10,000 workers and peasants, with another 50,000 deported to the prisons at Poulo

Condor. In June 1931 the Central Committee of the ICP was arrested in Saigon.

Formation of the Trotskyist Groups

It was in these circumstances that the two principal groups claiming to support Trotskyism were formed, the *Nhom Thang Muoi* (October) group and the *La Lutte* (Struggle) group. The International Communist League, usually called the October group after the name of its newspaper, *Thang Muoi*, was led by Ho Huu Thuong and founded in 1931. Due to the fact that it was illegal to publish left newspapers in Vietnamese, this group led a clandestine existence from 1931 to 1936 when the popular front led to a slight liberalization. It went over to a weekly legal French paper, *Le Militant*, in 1937, which, however, was prosecuted and then banned. They reverted to a semi-legal paper before beginning publication of what was probably the first daily Trotskyist paper in the world (Gerry Healy, please note), the *Tia Sang* (Spark), in 1939. Due to its clandestine existence, its more leftist positions and the fact that its material was published mainly in Vietnamese, little is known about Ho Huu Thuong's group. What is known is that it opposed the united front between the Stalinists and the Thau group which lasted from 1933 to 1937.

The other group was centered around the person of Ta Thu Thau, a student returned from Paris who had been active in the Left Opposition in France. Its leadership had been arrested in August 1932 during the White Terror and tried in May 1933. However, some of the comrades were liberated in early 1933 and formed a united front with the Stalinists in Saigon led by Tran Van Giau in order to present working-class candidates in the May 1933 elections to the Saigon city council. Their official joint newspaper was called *La Lutte* (Struggle).

The coalition had an enormous electoral success. On the first ballot (of two rounds, as in France), the candidate of *La Lutte* with the least votes still received more votes than the leading bourgeois candidate. On the second ballot, two working-class candidates were elected, the Stalinist Nguyen Van Tao and the Trotskyist Tran Van Trach. The coalition continued its existence and joint newspaper until 1937. The united front was limited to the legal activities, while the illegal organizations of both groups operated separately.

It is unclear whether this united front was simply a no-contest pact, or involved joint propaganda around a lowest common denominator program. If it were the latter, this would certainly represent an opportunist retreat from one of the basic principles of Leninism, the need for the independent organization of the vanguard. A common program obliterates the line between Bolshevism and centrism. In

any case, by its very nature, a joint newspaper and an *ongoing* united front could only lead to political confusion in the minds of the masses and the cadre themselves. Why was there a division between Trotskyists and Stalinists if the two could work together for years, the workers would ask? Moreover, for a period at the beginning of the French popular front, the Stalinists monopolized the newspaper and thereby effectively suppressed the objections to this class-collaboration by the Ta Thu Thau group.

The Thang Muoi group of Ho Huu Thuong, however, was opposed to *any* collaboration with the Stalinists and restricted itself to underground work in this period. To oppose limited joint actions directed against the bourgeoisie and the colonial regime, for instance common demonstrations or in certain circumstances a no-contest agreement in elections, is to attempt to raise a Chinese wall between the revolutionaries and the workers in reformist or centrist organizations and to weaken the proletariat in its battle against the common class enemy. The united front tactic is a permissible "compromise" where it is possible to draw a class line. But things were quite different during the popular front.

The Popular Front

With the formation of the Radical-Socialist-Communist popular front in 1935, the Stalinists made a sharp turn to the right, forming their own Indochinese popular front. They allied themselves not only with the Vietnamese section of the SFIO (Socialists), but with bourgeois nationalists such as Nguyen Pham Long and Bui Quang Chien, whom the joint Stalinist-Trotskyist *La Lutte* had bitterly denounced a few years earlier. Not content to form an alliance with the "progressive" comprador bourgeoisie, the ICP went even further and, according to the Stalinist historian Le Thanh Khoi, "broadened" the popular front to include monarchist parties!²

Under Stalinist editorship, *La Lutte* greeted the appointment of the socialist Maurius Moutet as Colonial Minister of the popular front Blum government. A few short weeks after this welcome, Moutet telegraphed officials in Saigon (September 1936): "You will maintain public order by all legitimate and legal means, even by the prosecution of those who attempt to make trouble if this should prove necessary.... French order must reign in Indochina as elsewhere."³ The Stalinist members of the Saigon city council went so far as to actually vote for military special taxes for "French national defense"⁴ Clearly, such taxes could only be used directly against the Vietnamese peasants and workers, as indeed they were soon afterwards.

As the French historian Devillers put it, "in these conditions the

—from “Action Program,” *LA LUTTE*, No. 213, 14 April 1939

1. **Fight against war preparations, break the blockade which is strangling the Chinese revolution and favoring Japanese imperialism through mass action, through boycotting Japanese merchandise.**
2. **For direct action to force promulgation of social legislation in Indochina: a 40-hour law, collective bargaining, control over hiring and firing, sliding scale of wages.**
3. **Against the fascists, form action committees in factories, the civil service and the army to throw out fascist personnel and have them fired.**
4. **Against the Stalinists who preach “voluntary” submission! Popularize the slogan: “Unconditional National Independence.”**
5. **Build real alliances of workers, peasants and the middle classes in action committees, in factories, in neighborhoods, among peasants and soldiers to prepare for the workers and peasants government, to expropriate the capitalists and feudalists and to assure the well-being, peace and freedom for all workers—in factories, offices, fields, commerce and the army.**

**Down with the Fascists, Capitalists and Feudalists!
Down with the Stalinist Leaders, Lackeys of
Imperialism!
Long Live a May 1st Dedicated to Class Struggle!
Long Live the Fourth International!**

break with the Trotskyists became inevitable.” By allowing Tran Van Giau and the Stalinists control of the paper, the Ta Thu Thau group was able to continue the united front through the April 1937 elections, in which one Trotskyist (Thau) and two Stalinists (Nguyen Van Tao and Duong Bach Mai) were elected to Saigon city council on the joint ticket.

But in June 1937, the Trotskyists around Thau took editorial control of *La Lutte*, which assumed a distinctly different posture, fomenting strikes and mass protests, along with *Le Militant*, the legal paper of the Ho Huu Thuong group.

Thau launched the new line with an editorial entitled “The Popular

Front of Treason," which got him two years in jail as a reward from the authorities.

During this time the Stalinists were concentrating their efforts on building an alliance with bourgeois constitutionalists, the "Indochinese Congress." Breaking out of the limited electoral campaigns (the eligible voters included only about 40,000 or roughly 1% of the adult population), the Trotskyists, in contrast, utilized the limited freedoms introduced by the Blum government to push mass agitation in strike movements, campaigns against the repression and in favor of the right to unionization, the *hête noir* of the colonialists. The Trotskyists also set up "action committees" of labor and peasant organizations, as did the Stalinists. Due to their success, especially in the Saigon area, these committees were rapidly banned and brutally repressed by the French governor. In the rural areas, La Lutte initiated agitation around the demand of "Land to the Poor

—from Ho Chi Minh, "The Party's Line in the Period of the Democratic Front," July 1939

- 1. For the time being, the Party cannot put forth too high a demand (national independence, parliament, etc.). To do so is to enter the Japanese fascists' scheme. It should only claim for democratic rights....**
- 2. To reach this goal, the Party must strive to organize a broad Democratic National Front. This Front does not embrace only Indochinese people but also progressive French residing in Indochina, not only toiling people but also the national bourgeoisie.**
- 3. 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 neutralize those which 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.**
- 4. There cannot be any alliance with or any concession to the Trotskyite group. We must do everything possible to lay bare their faces as henchmen of the fascists and annihilate them politically....**

Peasants,” a clear class program as opposed to the “broad national union” being pushed by the Stalinists.

In the 1939 elections to the Colonial Council of Cochin China, the La Lutte group capitalized on this agitational work and managed to win a resounding victory, with more than 80% of the votes going to their candidates. The masses, faced with the choice between support for French colonialism by the Stalinists and a credible Trotskyist opposition fighting on a working-class program, overwhelmingly chose the latter. In consequence, shortly thereafter, the Indochinese Communist Party in Cochin China (southern Vietnam) split, the official party being headed by Duong Bach Mai and the dissidents regrouping around Nguyen Van Tao.

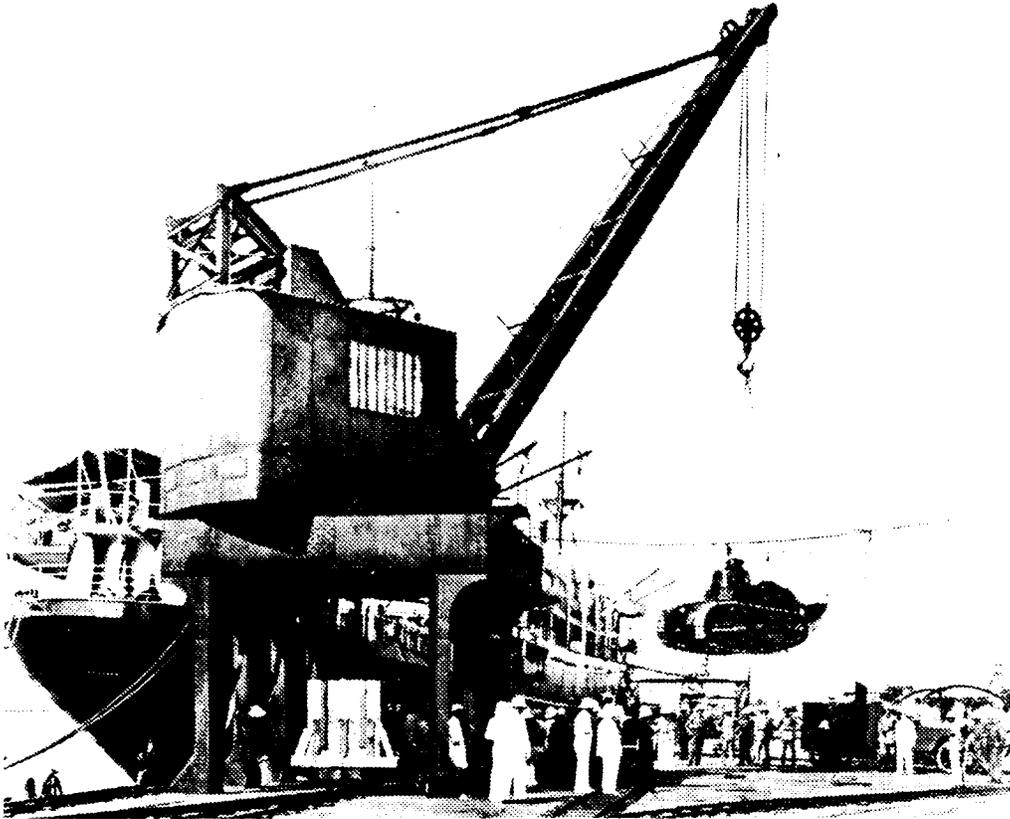
The polemics between the two competing groups supporting the Fourth International became increasingly sharp during this period. The Ta Thu Thau group, the official section of the FI, accused the Ho Huu Thuong group of “inventing” its opposition to the united front with the Stalinists years after it was first formed, which is almost certainly not true. However, Thau also condemned them for advocating a joint La Lutte and Stalinist ticket in the 1939 elections. At a time when the ICP was openly backing French imperialism and participating in a popular front (the Indochinese Congress), support for their ticket, however critical, was certainly a serious error. These were the same “communists” who were voting for “defense taxes” in the Saigon municipal council while the government was using the money to ship in tanks for use against Vietnamese workers and peasants.

On the other hand, while the Thang Muoi group did not score the electoral successes of La Lutte, it did manage to bring out its newspaper for some years in Vietnamese before the latter attempted this step and managed to put out a daily newspaper (*Tia Sang*, or Spark) during 1939.

While both groups made important errors during this period, and La Lutte appears to have had an overall moderate approach of a centrist character, both vigorously opposed French colonialism and stood sharply contrasted to the Stalinists during the crucial period. Their attraction of a mass base is a tribute to the Trotskyist politics of permanent revolution, even in a muted form.

However, the bourgeoisie regained the upper hand and from October 1939 to January 1940 managed to wipe out the entire legal organizations of both the Communist Party and the Trotskyists. The ICP survived this repression better than did the Trotskyist groups, partly because the latter were more of an immediate threat to the

French in the south, partly because the CP cadre were able to retreat to China where (after a period in Kuomintang jails) they eventually received Chinese and U.S. aid and partly because the Stalinists had begun retreating to clandestinity as early as 1938.



UPI

French tanks being unloaded in Vietnam, July 1939. In the popular-front period, while Vietnamese Trotskyists demanded immediate independence, Stalinist members of the Saigon city council voted for special military credits.

Part II

Saigon Insurrection 1945

—from Workers Vanguard No. 20, 11 May 1973

Immediately following World War II, the Stalinist and Trotskyist groups in Vietnam faced the crucial test of a revolutionary situation. The working masses rose up against the occupying imperialist powers (France, Japan and Britain), and at the same time against the landlords and the native bourgeoisie. While the Stalinists, led by Ho Chi Minh, succeeded in betraying and crushing the revolutionary upsurge, they were not able to prevent the Trotskyists of the International Communist League (ICL) from playing a heroic role during the few short weeks between their liberation from French prisons and the brutal repression of the Saigon insurrection of September 1945.

Against these Bolshevik-Leninists Ho Chi Minh resorted to the ultimate tactic of Stalinists everywhere: assassination. From Leon Trotsky, to the entire remaining Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917, to the thousands of Russian Left Oppositionists in the Siberian labor camps, to the heroic Spanish, French, German and Czech Trotskyists, to the Vietnamese supporters of the Fourth International (the ICL and the Struggle group), Stalinism carried out its murderous work. The Stalinist parasites came close to destroying the living continuity of the Marxist movement internationally, but they could not tarnish the revolutionary program of the Fourth International.

The Viet Minh in World War II

The dismissal of the French popular front government in 1938 rapidly led to the banning of the CP in France. As a consequence,

beginning in September 1939 the French colonial government outlawed all socialist groups in Vietnam, throwing hundreds of supporters of the Fourth International into prison. Both the Struggle (La Lutte) group and the International Communist League were broken up by the ferocious repression.

While many members of the Stalinist Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) were also imprisoned, Ho Chi Minh and his central committee were able to obtain refuge in Kuomintang China. This was no accident, as the Stalinists supported the Allies in World War II (as did Chiang Kai-shek) and were willing to make an alliance with the Kuomintang against the Japanese. The Trotskyists, in contrast, took the Bolshevik position of revolutionary defeatism during the war, refusing to support any of the rival imperialist camps and their puppets.

Beginning in September 1940, Japanese troops occupied Indochina, while the pro-Pétain colonial government remained in place. The occupation was met in the south by a large-scale peasant uprising in the Mytho region, an uprising led by Stalinist and Trotskyist forces, in November 1940. This and other abortive revolts were brutally put down by the French Foreign Legion, with more than a thousand arrests. (The Indochinese CP subsequently condemned the uprising as premature and in typical Stalinist fashion executed two of the leaders and expelled others.)⁶

In May 1941, the ICP called a congress in southern China to found the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Viet Minh for short). The program of the Viet Minh was that of a typical popular front, saying nothing of socialism, limiting itself to "democratic" demands, such as national independence and allying itself with the Allies against Japan and the pro-Pétain French colonial government. Its main demands for the exploited peasants, for instance, were reduction of rents and prohibition of forced labor and usury, with no more than a vague mention of agrarian reform.⁷

Disintegration of the Franco-Japanese Regime

On 9 March 1945 the Japanese, under tremendous military pressure in the Pacific, moved to tighten their control over Vietnam by ousting the fictitious French colonial government and disarming and interning the French troops. As a consequence of this move, however, bourgeois order began to deteriorate, allowing left wing groups to expand their activities clandestinely. The Viet Minh, which under Ho's instructions had avoided military operations up to now, established a guerrilla base along the Chinese border in the north.

Meanwhile, the Trotskyists had begun to regroup. The International Communist League was reconstituted in Saigon in August

1944 with only several dozen members. However, among these were five founders of the Vietnamese Trotskyist movement, each having at least 12 years' experience of revolutionary struggle, and several experienced cadre formerly from the Hanoi section. After the March 1945 Japanese takeover, the ICL issued a manifesto calling for preparation for the imminent revolution:

"The capitalists and feudalists who today serve the Japanese general staff will also serve the Allied imperialist states. The petty bourgeois nationalists with their adventurist policies will also be unable to lead the people to a revolutionary victory. Only the working class fighting independently under the banner of the Fourth International, can accomplish the tasks of the vanguard of the revolution.

"The Stalinists of the Third International have already abandoned the working class in order to capitulate miserably before the 'democratic' imperialists. They have betrayed the peasants by no longer talking about the agrarian question. If they are marching today with the foreign capitalists, they will also aid the domestic exploiting classes to crush the revolutionary people in the coming hours.

"Workers and peasants! Assemble under the banner of the party of the Fourth International!"

—Manifesto of the ICL, 24 March 1945

In the meantime, the petty-bourgeois independence parties and the quasi-political religious sects were floundering without direction. The Cao Dai sect (a peasant grouping with a mystical Christian-Buddhist-Confucian ideology) had supported the French during the 1930's and then the Japanese during the war. Now, however, the leadership continued to support Japan while the ranks were openly revolting. The Hoa Hao, whose poor peasant and proletarian members were aroused by the prospect of independence, were forced to oppose the French. The Vietnamese Kuomintang, the VNQDD, while barely existing as an organized movement, had retained some support among the petty bourgeoisie because of its unsuccessful uprising in 1930 and also opposed the re-establishment of French rule.

While such bourgeois nationalist groups may oppose one or another foreign imperialist, they are not opposed to imperialism as a system, and therefore they *must* oppose the struggle of the working masses for their liberation from capitalist exploitation. It will sometimes be necessary for workers' organizations to enter into limited, essentially technical or military agreements with a section of the bourgeoisie for joint action in a particular struggle, but it is a betrayal of Marxism to form a strategic alliance or long-term bloc with *any* bourgeois formation.

However, in spite of their claim to support the program of the Fourth International, the centrist Struggle (La Lutte) group formed just such a bloc, founding the "National United Front" together with the VNQDD, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao! This "Trotskyist"-

bourgeois-feudal popular front effectively erased the class line separating exploiter and exploited. With its "democratic" program limited to national independence it was impossible to distinguish from the Viet Minh!

The August Days

On 16 August 1945 the news of the defeat of Japan reached Indochina. The following day the Japanese general staff declared the countries of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) independent. The rapidity of the surrender surprised everyone. The Viet Minh, however, had already convened a congress which the same day formed a People's National Liberation Committee as a provisional government. Everywhere they moved rapidly to fill the governmental void, simply taking over the apparatus of the former Franco-Japanese colonial regime. Viet Minh troops rapidly occupied Hanoi without opposition from the Japanese. Seeking to avoid any appearance of revolution, the Viet Minh asked for and received the abdication of Bao Dai, the traditional emperor, who was henceforth "Supreme Political Advisor" of the new government.

In a significant gesture, Ho drafted (together with U.S. advisors) a Declaration of Independence, which begins by quoting the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, two of the key documents of the *bourgeois* revolution. According to the Stalinist theory of revolution in stages, to call for socialism at this point would have been "premature," as the defeat of the feudalists and imperialists was the immediate task. The reality of this "theory" was revealed by Ho's appeal to the French a month earlier for independence within the French Union in "not less than 5 and not more than 10 years," and by the agreement signed in Hanoi in early 1946 which permitted the reintroduction of French troops!

In the South, events moved at a somewhat different pace due to the relative weakness of the Stalinists. On 19 August the workers of the Ban Co district of Saigon formed the first People's Committee of the South. The following day a similar committee in the Phu Nhuan district, the largest workers' district of Saigon, took over governmental power. In the countryside the peasants rose up at the same time, burning villas of the large landowners, as well as several rice mills, in Sadeo province on 19 August. In the province of Long Xuyen alone more than 200 government officials and police were killed by peasants in the first days after the Japanese surrender.

On 21 August the National United Front called an independence demonstration which attracted more than 300,000 participants. The Hoa Hao and Cao Dai marched behind the monarchist flag with a

delegation of 100,000. The Trotskyists of the International Communist League represented the other main pole of attraction in the march. Behind a huge banner of the Fourth International came a series of placards and banners with the ICL's main slogans: "Down with Imperialism! Long Live World Revolution! Long Live the Workers and Peasants Front! People's Committees Everywhere! Toward the Popular Assembly! Long Live the Arming of the People! Land to the Peasants! Nationalization of the Factories under Workers Control! Toward the Workers and Peasants Government!" As the banner of the Fourth International appeared, hundreds and thousands of workers who had never forgotten the revolutionary movement of the 1930's flocked behind it, embracing old friends, fighting over who would have the honor of carrying this or that placard, saluting each other with clenched fists. In a matter of a few hours the contingent of the ICL grew to 30,000. The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao peasants, against the discipline of their leaders, applauded the banner of the Fourth International each time it passed and listened attentively to the Trotskyist orators' agitational speeches on the national and peasant questions.⁸

The Viet Minh Coup d'Etat

Faced with the growing mass upsurge, the Stalinist leadership of the Viet Minh began to move quickly to take power. Their primary tactic was to present themselves as the legitimate representatives of the victorious allies. Thus, in a Viet Minh proclamation on 23 August, Tran Van Giau, the top southern Stalinist, proclaimed: "We have fought for five years alongside the democratic allies..." The previous evening, Giau had issued an ultimatum to a meeting of the National United Front calling on it to dissolve itself and turn over its administrative posts to the Viet Minh. The next day the NUF disbanded and joined the Viet Minh. (As a crowning touch to the betrayals of the Struggle group, which had set up the NUF as a "Trotskyist" popular front, they were accorded a seat on the "Southern Committee" of the Viet Minh on 10 September 1945!)⁹

The ICL was hardly inactive during this period, setting up a printing shop, issuing bulletins to the population every three hours and forming military units as a step toward arming the workers.

But the Stalinists moved faster. At 5 a.m. on 25 August the Viet Minh carried out a bloodless coup, occupying the city hall and police stations. Behind the backs of the masses, and with the participation of the bourgeois nationalists (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, VNQDD), the Stalinists simply took over the existing state machinery and installed a new bonapartist bourgeois regime.

Later that day the Viet Minh called a mammoth demonstration,

with more than one million participants. More than 30 political associations were present, but the outstanding forces were grouped behind the Stalinists and the ICL. With the break-up of the Japanese administration, the police itself divided into two sections, the majority supporting the Viet Minh, but a minority marching behind the banner of the Fourth International! The ICL delegation was noticeably smaller (only 2,000 marchers) than in the previous demonstration but this time many ICL supporters were marching with their trade union contingents.

By this time the difference between the Trotskyists and Stalinists was posed with razor sharpness. Two days after the coup, Nguyen Van Tao, now Minister for the Interior of the Viet Minh regime, issued a menacing challenge to the ICL: "Whoever encourages the peasants to take over the landed properties will be severely and pitilessly punished.... We have not yet carried out a communist revolution, which would bring a solution to the agrarian problem. This government is only a democratic [!] government, and therefore it cannot undertake this task, I repeat, our government is a democratic and bourgeois government, even though the Communists are in power."¹⁰ One could hardly ask for more clarity!

Military Support to the Viet Minh

Faced with this bonapartist bourgeois government, the Trotskyists of the International Communist League correctly adopted the position of an anti-imperialist united front. While Stalinists and ex-Trotskyist revisionists (such as the Bolivian POR) have used this slogan as an excuse for forming a political bloc with bourgeois nationalists, the ICL had the Leninist policy of *political independence* of the workers movement from the bourgeois regime, but *military support against the imperialist* (British-Japanese-French) *forces*. While the Stalinists called for "All Power to the Viet Minh," the Trotskyists called for "All Power to the People's Committees."

Following Tao's press conference, the Viet Minh cranked up an incessant anti-Trotskyist campaign in its press, accusing the supporters of the Fourth International of sowing disorder. On 1 September Tran Van Giau declared: "Those who incite the people to arm themselves will be considered saboteurs and provocateurs, enemies of national independence. Our democratic liberties will be granted and guaranteed by the democratic allies."

While Ho Chi Minh was reading the Declaration of Independence in Hanoi, the southern Viet Minh organized a demonstration on 2 September to greet the British troops which were to arrive imminently. Late in the afternoon more than 400,000 persons joined in a peaceful demonstration proceeding to the Cathedral. As a priest

known as sympathetic to the Vietnamese was speaking from the steps of the Cathedral, shots rang out and he was killed. The crowd ran for cover, but more than 150 were wounded in the shooting which followed. The situation developed into a generalized riot, with attacks on French colons suspected of responsibility for the criminal attacks on the demonstration. A number of French were arrested, but then immediately released the next day by the Stalinist police chief Duong Bach Mai, who issued a statement "deploring" the "excesses."

In response to the events of 2 September the Stalinists and Trotskyists issued two clearly counterposed appeals. As the British troops under General Gracey were expected to arrive any day, the Viet Minh proclaimed:

"In the interests of our country, we call on everyone to have confidence in us and not let themselves be led astray by people who betray our country. It is only in this spirit that we can facilitate our relations with the Allied representatives."

—leaflet of 7 September 1945

In contrast the ICL declared:

"We, internationalist communists, have no illusions that the Viet Minh government will be capable, with its class collaborationist policies, of fighting successfully against the imperialist invasions in the coming hours. However, if it declares itself ready to defend national independence and to safeguard the people's liberties, we will not hesitate to aid it and to support it with all technical means in the revolutionary struggles. But in return we must repeat that we will strictly observe the absolute independence of our party with respect to the government and all the political parties, because the very existence of a party calling itself Bolshevik-Leninist depends entirely on this political independence."

—communiqué of 4 September 1945

The People's Committees

Under the influence of the ICL, during the three weeks after 16 August more than 150 "People's Committees" (To Chuc Uy Banh Hanh Dong) were set up in the Nam Bo (southern Vietnam), approximately 100 of them in the Saigon-Cholon region. A Provisional Central Committee composed of 9 members (later expanded to 15) was constituted after the 21 August demonstration.

The question of the historical role of these "people's committees" is of paramount importance to revolutionary Trotskyists. In the *Quatrième Internationale* article cited earlier, "Lucien" (a Vietnamese leader of the ICL) writes: "The ICL led the revolutionary masses through the intermediary of the People's Committees. . . . Despite its numerical weakness, the ICL achieved, for the first time in the history of the Indochinese revolution the grandiose historic task of creating the People's Committee or Soviet."¹¹

The ICL and the People's Committees did consistently call for

political opposition to the bourgeoisie. Thus the People's Committees gave no political support to the bourgeois Viet Minh government, while calling for a military bloc against the invading Allies (which the Viet Minh naturally rejected, since its policy was to *greet* the Allies). The ICL called for the arming of the working masses and took practical steps to carry this out. The ICL slogans called not for a "democratic" revolution limited to national independence, but also for expropriation of industry under workers control.

Nevertheless, the very term "People's" Committee obscures the need for the independent mobilization of the proletariat as a separate class. While an alliance with the peasantry and sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie against imperialism and semi-feudal landowners is a burning necessity, this alliance must be based first of all on the independent organization of the working class. In predominantly peasant countries, indiscriminate mobilization of the "people" guarantees the domination of the unstable petty bourgeoisie over the working class. The necessary alliance of workers and peasants soviets must destroy the bourgeois state and replace it with a *workers* state.

These general considerations had an immediate practical consequence. While the People's Committees refused the ultimatums of the Viet Minh to subordinate themselves to the bonapartist regime, the *class* difference between the two powers was not always clear to the masses. The People's Committees, especially in Saigon, were essentially organs of workers power, while the Southern Committee government of the Viet Minh was a popular front regime based on the existing bourgeois state. But to the masses this appeared simply as the difference between two "people's governments," one dominated by the Stalinists, the other by Trotskyists. Between these two state powers a violent clash was inevitable but by calling for People's Committees the Trotskyists of the ICL failed to adequately prepare the masses politically for the impending battle.

Massacre of the Trotskyists

The inevitable clash soon took form. On 7 September Giau issued a decree ordering the disarming of all non-governmental organizations. All weapons were to be turned over to the Viet Minh's "Republican Guard." This affected the religious sects but also the "vanguard youth organizations" and factory-based self-defense groups led by the Trotskyists. The most important such group was the workers militia jointly organized by the workers of the Go Vap streetcar depot and the ICL. The militia issued an appeal to the workers of Saigon-Cholon to arm themselves for the struggle against the inevitable British-French invasion.

The British and Indian troops under General Gracey arrived in Saigon on 10 September. Along the road from the airport the Viet

Minh had put up banners and slogans welcoming the Allies; at city hall Allied flags were flying on both sides of the Viet Minh flag. The Viet Minh "Southern Committee" sat inside doing its paper work, while the British proceeded to eliminate its power in the city. Gracey, who only a few weeks earlier had declared, "The question of the government of Indochina is exclusively French," banned the Vietnamese press, proclaimed martial law and imposed a strict curfew. All demonstrations were forbidden as was the carrying of any arms, including bamboo sticks.

On 12 September the People's Committees and the ICL issued a joint manifesto denouncing the policy of treason of the Viet Minh government. Popular discontent was seething in the workers' districts. Faced with the likelihood of insurrection, the Viet Minh moved to behead it. At 4 p.m. on 14 September Duong Bach Mai, Stalinist head of the police, sent a detachment of Republican Guards to surround the local of the People's Council which was in session at the time. Incredibly, the Trotskyists simply gave up to these butchers! In the words of the ICL account:

"We conducted ourselves as true revolutionary militants. We let ourselves be arrested without using violence against the police, even though we were more numerous and all well armed. They took our machine guns and automatic pistols. They sacked our office, breaking furniture, ripping our flags, stealing the typewriters and burning all our papers."¹²

By this single act of cowardice, the ICL leadership sealed its own doom and that of the first Vietnamese revolution. Behind such a capitulation must have lain a serious misunderstanding of the true nature of Stalinism. It is true that during the 1930's the southern leaders of the ICP were in a long-term bloc with the Struggle group, and showed themselves to be somewhat more "leftist" than Ho. But this was only a tactical adaptation to the presence of significant Trotskyist forces. In a similar fashion the Bolivian CP agreed to form the Popular Assembly in 1971 along with the "Trotskyist" POR, but only in order to better betray it. A proof that this was only a temporary aberration is given by the Stalinists' own criticism of the southern party for its "leftist deviations... its underestimation of the Trotskyist danger and its unprincipled cooperation with the Trotskyists"¹³ in the popular front period.

(Among the ICL leaders who were shot as a result of the Stalinist coup were Lo Ngoc, member of the central committee of the ICL; Nguyen Van Ky, ICL labor leader; and Nguyen Huong, young leader of the workers militia, killed by the Stalinist police in July 1946.)

By 22 September the British had sufficiently fortified their position to try an open test of strength. The British took over the Saigon jail, while the French troops of the 11th Colonial Infantry were armed.

The French colons went wild later that day, arresting, beating and killing innumerable Vietnamese. During the following night French troops reoccupied several police stations, the post office, central bank and town hall, all without armed resistance.

As the news reached the working-class districts a spontaneous movement of resistance broke out. The Viet Minh opposed "violence," instead trying to obtain "negotiations" with General Gracey. In the outlying suburbs trees were felled, cars and trucks overturned and furniture piled up in the street creating crude barricades. During this time the workers' suburbs (Khanh Hoi, Cau Kho, Ban Co, Phu Nhuan, Tan Dinh and Thi Nghe) were firmly in the insurgents' hands. In some areas French were shot indiscriminately in an outburst of racial hatred, the result of 80 years of brutal colonial domination. In the center several important factories and warehouses were burned down, and the port was under continuous attack. Water and electricity were cut off completely and supplies were precarious. The following day the Vietnamese insurgents openly paraded in the main streets of the city center.

The most significant organized contingent in the insurrection was the workers militia of the Go Vap streetcar depot, a force of 60. The 400 workers of the company were well known for their labor militancy. While affiliated to the Stalinist-dominated labor federation, they refused to use the label of Cong Nhan Cuu Quoc ("Workers Saviors of the Fatherland"), and refused to carry the Viet Minh flag (yellow star on a red background), saying they would fight instead under the red flag of the workers. The force was organized into shock groups of 11 members under elected leaders, with the overall command headed by Tranh Dinh Minh, a young ICL leader and novelist formerly from Hanoi.

(Faced with the joint opposition of the Allies and the Viet Minh police, the Go Vap workers militia tried to open a line of retreat to regroup in the Plaine des Jones area. After several battles with the French and Indian troops they reached the regroupment area, where they established contact with the poor peasants. Already having lost 20 men, and on 13 January 1946 its leader Minh, in battle against the imperialist forces, the militia was eventually overwhelmed, several of its members stabbed to death by Viet Minh bands.)

In this revolutionary atmosphere the Viet Minh Committee of the South issued its appeal: "There is only one answer—a food blockade." Futilely hoping to starve out the French (while British ships controlled the port!), Giau concentrated on negotiations with the British. A truce was announced on 1 October, but by 5 October General Leclerc and the French expeditionary force arrived and rapidly moved to "restore order" and "build a strong Indochina

within the French Union.”¹⁴ The truce was the best present the beleaguered French and British troops could have received, an obscene betrayal of the insurgent masses.

While the Viet Minh continued its policy of appeasing the Allies, agreeing to allow free passage to British and Japanese troops through rebel areas, the French and Indian troops launched a general attack to the northeast, thus breaking the blockade of the city. Instead of fighting back, the Stalinists concentrated their efforts on eliminating the Trotskyists. Having eliminated the ICL and the People’s Committee leadership on 14 September, they now moved on the Struggle (La Lutte) group and, surrounding its headquarters in the Thu Duc area, they arrested the entire group and interned them at Ben Suc. There they were all shot as French troops approached. Among those thus murdered were Tran Van Thach (elected a Saigon municipal councillor in the 1933 elections), Phan Van Hum, Nguyen Van So and tens of other revolutionary militants. Shortly after this the Viet Minh were forced out of Saigon.

Ho Sells Out to the French

In the North, Ho was following a similar policy of capitulating to the Allies, in this case the Chinese and French. However, the process took considerably longer than in the South, as the first Chinese troops did not arrive until late September, giving the Viet Minh time to consolidate its rule. Also, the Viet Minh had its own makeshift guerrilla army in the North, and the Chinese were not actively opposed to an independent Vietnam. In line with his policy of “broadening” the coalition to include bourgeois nationalists and Catholic leaders, Ho in November ordered the complete liquidation of the Indochinese Communist Party. The Central Committee statement said that “in order to complete the Party’s task... a national union conceived *without distinction of class and parties* is an indispensable factor” and that this step was being taken to show that Communists “are always disposed *to put the interests of the country above that of classes, and to give up the interests of the Party to serve those of the Vietnamese people*” [our emphasis]!¹⁵

At this same time, however, opposition was still strong in the North. The Struggle group at this time was publishing a daily newspaper in Hanoi, *Tranh Dau* (Struggle), which had a circulation of 30,000 in late 1945.¹⁶ A letter to the International Secretariat of the Fourth International in this period spoke of a well-organized but persecuted organization of the Struggle group in the North. Led by “Th...,” former leader of the Tonkin printers during 1937-38, it held large meetings and published several books in addition to its daily newspaper. One region where the line of the Struggle group had

particular success was Bach Mai. As a result of a large meeting there, Ho Chi Minh gave the order to arrest Th... and other supporters of the Fourth International. (Th... was able to escape from his Viet Minh captors and was fighting in the guerilla operations in the countryside at the time.) Already a large number of Trotskyists had perished in the resistance.¹⁷ Eventually this group, too, was wiped out entirely by the Stalinist repression.

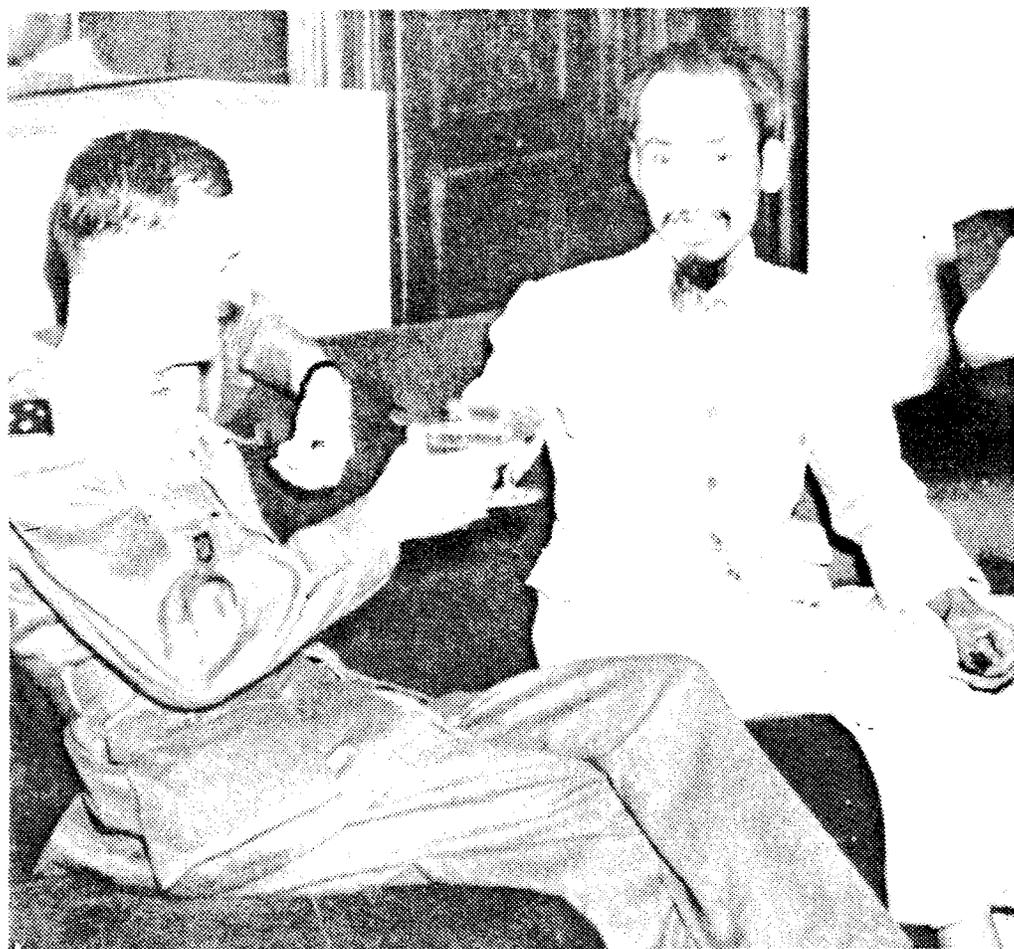
At this time, Ta Thu Thau, the leader of the Struggle group was in Hanoi, working on coordinating flood relief and "conferring" with Ho Chi Minh. On his way south he was arrested on the orders of the Viet Minh. Tried three times by local People's Committees, he was acquitted each time—a tribute to the Trotskyists' reputation in Vietnam at that time. Finally, he was simply shot in Quang Ngai in February 1946, on orders from the southern Stalinist leader Tran Van Giau. Gullible souls have questioned whether the wise Uncle Ho could ever have carried out such a vicious act. Such doubts are an expression of political light-mindedness, as there is no known account of Thau's murder that even suggests that he was not killed by Viet Minh forces, acting on orders. As for Ho, his only known statement on the subject was made in a conversation with the French socialist Daniel Guerin:

"He [Thau] was a great patriot and we mourn him," Ho Chi Minh told me with unfeigned emotion. But a moment later he added in a steady voice, "All those who do not follow the line which I have laid down will be broken."¹⁸

Having physically liquidated the entire leadership of the Trotskyist movement in Vietnam, Ho was now ready to conclude a "deal" with the French government (which included the Communist François Billoux as minister of defense!). The preliminary convention between France and the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam," signed in Hanoi on 6 March, provided among other things that "the Government of Vietnam declares itself prepared to receive the French army amicably," and for the stationing of 15,000 French troops north of the 16th parallel. The overall content of the accords was for a limited independence, within the French Union. Defending this despicable betrayal against revolutionary Trotskyist criticism, which lived on in spite of the physical extermination of the Trotskyist cadres, Ho was forced to call a mass rally in Hanoi the following day, during which he declared: "The people who are not satisfied only understand total independence as a slogan, a demand on a piece of paper or in the mouth. They do not see independence of the country results from objective conditions...."¹⁹ Primary among these objective conditions, of course, was the fact that the French Communist Party and Stalin were opposed to Vietnamese independence!

It was with the arrival of Allied troops that the defeat of the first

Vietnamese revolution was sealed. The primary responsibility for this defeat lies clearly with Ho Chi Minh and the Stalinists who consistently sabotaged the popular uprising and murdered its leaders. Only by realizing the magnitude of this betrayal can one gauge the significance of the capitulation of the Struggle group in joining the Viet Minh, a move which led to its physical annihilation and to the generation-long war against French and U.S. imperialism. While the International Communist League demonstrated a similar underestimation of the lengths to which the Stalinists would go to eliminate revolutionary opposition, its overall policies in this period presented a clear Trotskyist opposition to the class collaboration of the Viet Minh.



Ho Chi Minh toasting March 1945 accords introducing French troops to North Vietnam, with General Leclerc (left).

Part III

“Socialism” in Half a Country

—from Workers Vanguard No. 21, 25 May 1973

After repeatedly capitulating before the imperialist powers (Saigon, September 1945; the 6 March 1946 accords; Fontainebleau *modus vivendi*), the Viet Minh were finally forced to fight the French by a series of open provocations in late 1946. On 20 November, the French navy, which had blockaded the Haiphong port, seized a Chinese junk trying to run the blockade; in response, a Vietnamese shore battery shelled the French. Seizing on this incident as an excuse, three days later the French brutally attacked Haiphong with heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, killing roughly 20,000 Vietnamese. Early in December, the French demanded that the Vietnamese withdraw entirely from the city and the surrounding roads; in response, the Vietnamese commander, Vo Nguyen Giap, proposed a mixed commission to discuss the question! Subsequently, on 19 December the French demanded the disarming of the Viet Minh militia, and that night general fighting broke out in Hanoi. The fighting continues to this day. As it turned out, the Viet Minh were quickly driven out of the capital and did not return until after the 1954 Geneva settlement. Had the Stalinists resisted the French reoccupation from the beginning, when the imperialists were weakest, a quarter century of war and more than two million deaths would have been avoided.

The attitude of the French Communist Party in this conflict was an illustration of the lengths to which the Stalinists would go in attempting to ingratiate themselves with their respective bourgeoisies. Thus, while Ho Chi Minh was writing servile letters to the Americans, forming political blocs with the pro-Chinese bourgeois nationalists, dissolving the Indochinese Communist Party and

agreeing to permit the entry of French troops into the north, his French comrades were busy explaining why the right of national self-determination did *not* apply to Vietnam and voting war credits to finance the French expeditionary force!

As early as September 1945, the Saigon committee of the French CP "warned [the Viet Minh] that any 'premature adventures' in Annamite independence might 'not be in line with Soviet perspectives.'"²⁰ That same month the French government (including several CP ministers) proposed a military budget of 193 billion francs, including 100 billion for the Expeditionary Force in Indochina; the CP voted for the bill.²¹ In July 1946, smelling a victory in the next elections, the Communists took up a virulent nationalist stance: "Are we, after having lost Syria and Lebanon yesterday, to lose Indochina tomorrow, North Africa the day after?" wrote *L'Humanité* (24 July 1946).²² Two days later the CP deputies voted for a constitutional definition of the French Union which made Vietnamese "independence" purely fictional!

But this obscene nationalism could not stop at mere generalities: On 20 December 1946, a month after the French bombardment of Haiphong, the CP voted in the French Assembly to send congratulations to General Leclerc and the Expeditionary Corps. On 23 December, three days after the outbreak of hostilities in Hanoi, the CP deputies voted a special military budget made necessary "because of the resumption in hostilities in Indochina." As Vice-Premier in the government of Paul Ramadier in March 1947, Maurice Thorez, head of the French CP, signed the order for military action against the Vietnamese; at the same time, Ramadier stated that "on the question of Indochina, we have always noted the correctness of the government of the Soviet Union!"²³

Some have alleged that because of these nationalistic acts, the French CP during the late 1940's was opposed to the line of Ho Chi Minh in a fundamental sense, implying that Ho was essentially a centrist, as against the reformist Thorez. That the differences were essentially tactical is shown by Ho's repeated efforts to enlist American aid (at least eight letters to Truman in this period), his agreement to the March 1946 accords and the Fontainebleau agreement and the extremely conservative policies followed by the Viet Minh through most of the first Indochinese war. Ho and Thorez were simply capitulating to different bourgeoisies; qualitatively their policies were the same.

The Agrarian Question

As Leon Trotsky wrote in the "Transitional Program":

"The central task of the colonial and semi-colonial countries is the *agrarian revolution*, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and *national*

independence, i.e., the overthrow of the imperialist yoke. Both tasks are closely linked with each other.”

From the very beginning, in 1941, the Viet Minh took only the most minimal reformist position on the agrarian question, favoring a 25 per cent reduction in rents. The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam written in 1946 stated flatly: “The rights of property and possession of Vietnamese citizens are guaranteed.”²⁴ In the period from 1945 to 1949 even this minimal program of rent reduction was only applied to five per cent of the land belonging to large landlords, while eight per cent (belonging to “unpatriotic” landowners) was redistributed—hardly a radical land reform, much less an agrarian revolution.²⁵ However, beginning with the agrarian decree of 12 April 1953, the picture changed as the stipulations calling for reduction of rent, elimination of debts and distribution of lands owned by colonists were put into effect by the local peasant unions. At the same time, the membership of the peasant unions doubled and the percentage of poor peasants in the Lao Dong [Workers] Party increased from 37 per cent to 53 per cent. The French commander at Dien Bien Phu commented that after the new agrarian legislation he wasn’t dealing “with the same adversaries.”²⁶

Yet even this change was merely tactical. With the beginning of the Cold War with the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, the Soviet foreign policy had undergone a shift to the left, embodied in the “Zhdanov line.” The victory of the Chinese CP in the civil war with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949 meant that Ho was assured of supplies from the deformed workers states. Thus, soon after, the Vietnamese Communist Party was refounded as the Lao Dong [Workers] Party in 1951, and in 1953 the Viet Minh decided to launch a militant land reform campaign. This pattern was virtually identical to that followed by Mao in China, where even the simple democratic demand for land reform was put off until the final break-off of negotiations with Chiang in 1946! However, in both cases, the agrarian program which was implemented in the final stages of the civil war in no way called into question bourgeois property relations in the countryside. We have referred to Mao’s policies in China as simply “reformism under the gun,” a label which certainly applies with equal force to Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam.

1954 Geneva Settlement

As Stalinists, the Viet Minh leadership ultimately represented the interests of the bureaucratic clique running the deformed workers states. At the first opportunity after a stalemate was reached in the Korean War in 1953, the Russians began pressing for a peace settlement in Vietnam as well. Ho soon took up the refrain even

though the Vietnamese were winning militarily. By the time the negotiations finally took place in spring of 1954, the Viet Minh controlled roughly 85 percent of the country, according to Western estimates, and had decisively defeated the French expeditionary force at Dien Bien Phu. Commenting on the settlement, Douglas Pike, a U.S. official associated with the CIA, has written:

“Ironically the agreement written at Geneva benefited all parties except the winners....

“Only the Viet Minh, the winners, lost. Or were sold out. Ho Chi Minh somehow was persuaded—apparently by a joint Sino-Soviet effort—to settle for half the country on the grounds that the other half would be his as soon as elections were held....”²⁷

The role of the Soviet Union in pushing for this sellout “settlement” is well known. The equally pernicious role of the more militant-talking Chinese was documented by the “Pentagon Papers.” A key point in the negotiations came on 18 July 1954, when a Chinese official transmitted a message to U.S. negotiators at Geneva. According to a State Department cable:

“The informant said the Communists are pressing for the stamp of American approval on the armistice agreement—already okayed in principle by Britain and France—which would divide Vietnam between Communist leader Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh and Bao Dai’s pro-Western regime....

“But the informant did not (repeat not) rule out the chance of an Indochina cease-fire even if the U.S. refuses to okay the armistice agreement.”²⁸

As for Ho, despite rumors of secret dissatisfaction with the cease-fire, and opposition to Moscow and Peking, this is how he presented it to the Vietnamese people:

“At this conference, the struggle of our delegation and the assistance given by the delegations of the Soviet Union and China have ended in a great victory for us.”²⁹

With victories like this, who needs defeats!

The Viet Cong

The whole struggle for the liberation of South Vietnam since the 1954 Geneva agreement reads like a replay of the earlier war against the French. The names are changed, but the play is the same. For six years Ho and the Hanoi leadership refused to organize a revolutionary movement in the South, believing instead in the miraculous powers of “peaceful coexistence.” Meanwhile, the butcher Diem was hunting down southern resistance leaders, throwing peasants off their lands, murdering thousands. Ho’s answer to this savagery summed up the position of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) leadership quite nicely: “Our policy is: to consolidate the North and to keep in mind the South.”³⁰

As late as 1960, the DRV was still trying to hold down the struggle in the South, arguing:

"The Northern people will never neglect their task with regard to one half of their country which is not yet liberated. But in the present conjuncture, when the possibility exists to maintain a lasting peace in the world and create favorable conditions for the world movement of socialist revolution and national independence to go forward, we can and must guide *and restrict* within the South the solving of the contradiction between imperialism and the colonies of our country." [our emphasis]³¹

As in the first Indochinese war the agrarian program and political perspective of the National Liberation Front are clearly and precisely limited to "democratic" tasks. From the very beginning, the NLF called for a coalition government:

"The present South Vietnamese regime is a camouflaged colonial regime dominated by the Yankees.... Therefore, this regime must be overthrown and a government of national and democratic union put in its place composed of representatives of *all social classes*, of all nationalities, of the various political parties, of all religions....

"Support the national bourgeoisie in the reconstruction and development of crafts and industry." [our emphasis]³²

The NLF has subsequently called for protection of foreign investment and has never expropriated the *French* rubber plantations; thus in good old Stalinist fashion it distinguishes between the good and the bad imperialists.

As for the agrarian program, in the words of NLF Chairman Nguyen Huu Tho:

"Our program reflects the broad nature of the Front and the forces represented in it. We are in favor of land to the peasants for instance, but not systematic confiscation; we are for reduction of rents but for the maintenance of present property rights except in the case of traitors. Landlords who have not supported the U.S. puppets have nothing to fear."³³

The 1973 Paris Accords

Since April 1965, when Premier Pham Van Dong set out the DRV position on peace negotiations (the "Four Points"), the fundamental North Vietnamese demands have been for U.S. withdrawal and a coalition government in Saigon. The coalition government is clearly intended to be based on the existing state apparatus, which would make it a classical popular front regime. If realized it could spell outright defeat for the millions of Vietnamese who have fought for years with the NLF against U.S. imperialism and the feudal-bourgeois reactionary regime in the South. By preserving the property rights of "patriotic" landlords and the "national" bourgeoisie, by guaranteeing foreign investors against expropriation, such a regime would necessarily be unable to fulfill the fundamental

aspirations of the working masses.

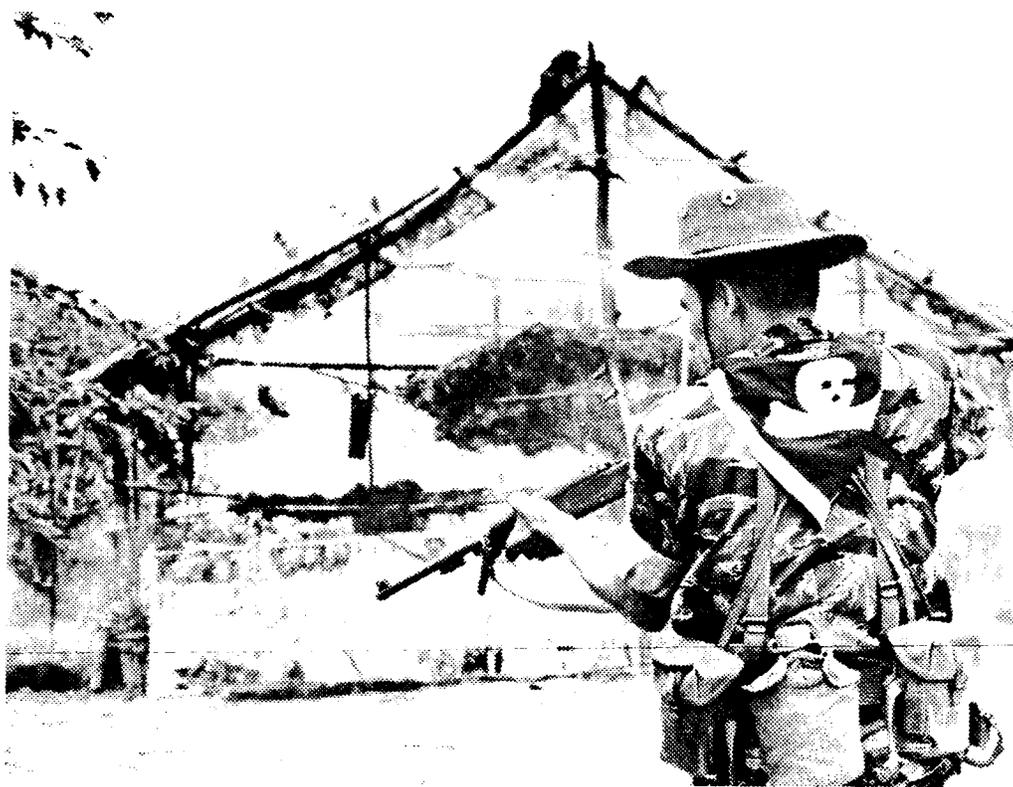
The actual Paris accords of January 1973 do not set up such a government, nor do they call for regroupment of North Vietnamese forces or disarmament. As a result, this "ceasefire in place" is not simply a sellout, as the 1946 and 1954 agreements clearly were; on the other hand, aside from the U.S. withdrawal, which itself could be reversed, it settles nothing. There is no peace; the civil war goes on. In the meantime the Stalinist leadership of the DRV/NLF has essentially abandoned the civilian political prisoners in the South, as it continues its fundamental strategy of betrayal, the search for a bloc with the non-existent "good" bourgeoisie.

- No Support for the Robbers' Peace—U.S. Imperialism Out of S.E. Asia—Free All Political Prisoners in Saigon Government Jails!
- Unconditional Military Defense of the DRV—Political Revolution in Hanoi!
- Military Victory for the NLF—Viet Cong Take Saigon—No Coalition Government!



**National
Liberation
Front
guerrillas.**

Foreign Languages Press



Above: special "ranger" troops of Saigon puppet regime burn down villages, shoot fleeing inhabitants. Below: My Lai massacre.



Newsweek/Ronald L. Haeberle

Part IV

Those Who Revile Our History

—from Workers Vanguard No. 21, 25 May 1973

Vietnam in 1945 was a typical colonial country. The vast mass of the population was composed of poor peasants and landless laborers, who suffered from exploitation at the hands of feudal and bourgeois landowners, and from direct military oppression by various imperialist powers (France, Japan, China, Britain and the U.S.). Yet, as shown by centuries of unsuccessful peasant revolts, this heterogeneous popular mass was unable to lead a victorious social revolution. In the early years of this century the urban petty bourgeoisie threw up a series of nationalist sects which, however, were equally unable to achieve the unity or social force necessary to overthrow a developed colonial power. At the same time, the tiny bourgeoisie never advanced beyond the most timid reform demands and, faced with an awakened working class and peasantry, chose instead to cower behind the protection of its French, and later U.S., masters.

Thus the lot of emancipator of the oppressed Vietnamese masses fell to the young, small, but highly combative proletariat. In contrast to India or even China, the bourgeois nationalists were never more than a secondary (and at times minuscule) force in Vietnam after 1930, while the political scene was dominated by the two major currents of the workers movement, Trotskyism and Stalinism.

The Trotskyists stood on the historic Marxist program of permanent revolution, insisting that because of the combined feudal-capitalist character of Vietnamese society and the uneven development of the various class forces, the “national” and “democratic” tasks of the bourgeois revolution could be fulfilled only under the dictatorship of the proletariat, supporting itself on the peasantry.

This program was represented in Vietnam by the International Communist League (ICL), which called for complete national independence, land to the peasants, nationalization of the factories under workers control and a workers and peasants government. At the height of the Saigon insurrection of 1945 this program was crystallized in the demand of all power to the People's Committees. While seeking to overthrow the bonapartist bourgeois Viet Minh regime in Saigon, they called for a military united front against the invading imperialist powers. Nevertheless, although at the high point of the uprising the ICL led tens of thousands of workers, it was militarily overwhelmed by the Stalinist Viet Minh, which brutally massacred hundreds of its militants, along with leaders and members of the centrist Struggle group (also supporters of the Fourth International) and various bourgeois nationalist leaders.

This heinous crime gave Ho Chi Minh and the Stalinists unchallenged hegemony in the Vietnamese political scene. However, despite this position they have consistently refused to mobilize the working class for socialist revolution. When faced with imperialist armies, their policies have amounted to a classic "bloc of four classes"—a purely national revolution in coalition with the "patriotic" bourgeoisie (and, in this case, the monarchy as well). In power, they have adhered to the policy of "socialism in one country" (more precisely in half a country), first sacrificing and then only reluctantly supporting their own comrades against U.S. imperialism and its puppet regimes in South Vietnam.

These are the counterrevolutionary policies of Stalinism, the political expression of a parasitic bureaucracy which acts as the agent of the bourgeoisie in the workers movement; this is the program of the "communist" Ho Chi Minh. It is also the program of his foreign mentors, in the first instance Stalin himself and the French Communist Party, but also of the more militant-posturing yet equally reformist Mao regime in China. The sorry results of this strategy of betrayal have been three successive robbers' peace settlements, in 1946, 1954 and 1973, each of which has left intact a bourgeois regime in Saigon.

Revolutionary Defensism

What attitude are proletarian revolutionaries to take when faced with the actual struggles led by the Stalinist leadership, these butchers of the Vietnamese Trotskyists, betrayers of the peasants and workers, appeasers of French and U.S. imperialism—who, however, also base themselves on and, in a limited and distorted manner, defend the conquests of the working class? As Marxists we must begin with the fundamental question—what is the class character of the states

involved? The Democratic Republic of Vietnam is a deformed workers state; that is, while it has socialist property relations, political power is in the hands of a parasitic bureaucracy rather than the working class. The struggle in South Vietnam is essentially a civil war, pitting the working class and exploited peasantry on the one hand against the local and foreign bourgeoisie on the other. Fundamentally, the NLF-controlled areas in the South are deformed workers states in embryo. Therefore, the only attitude that a party claiming to represent the historic interests of the proletariat can take in a conflict between the NLF/DRV and capitalist forces is one of revolutionary defensism. Thus we unconditionally defend the NLF/DRV against the U.S. and the bourgeois regime in Saigon, while at the same time calling for a political revolution to overthrow the treacherous reformist leadership which is holding back the struggle.

This was the approach taken by the Vietnamese Internationalist Communist Group in France, which in 1947 declared:

“Our attitude vis-à-vis the Viet Minh can best be defined by Lenin’s phrase ‘march separately, strike together.’ The Vietnamese internationalist communists are ready to join their blows against imperialism with those of the Viet Minh, but they must maintain complete programmatic independence and freedom of criticism, because in the face of the past capitulations of the Viet Minh, placing confidence in its policies would mean renouncing a revolutionary position.”³⁴

Ho “Assimilates the Permanent Revolution”

In their rush to capitulate to the heroes of the petty-bourgeois radical milieu, the fake-Trotskyists of the “United Secretariat” and the “International Committee” must gloss over the real history of Stalinism in Vietnam.

The U.Sec. of Frank, Mandel and Hansen is the direct descendent of the Pabloist International Secretariat, which in the early 1950’s formulated the “theory” that the world was divided into two camps, the imperialists and the Stalinists; because of the sharp character of the impending conflicts, the Stalinists would be forced against their will to defend the interests of the proletariat. Pablo’s conclusion: The Trotskyists should dissolve their movement in favor of “deep entry” into the Stalinist parties.

In the early 1960’s the U.S. Socialist Workers Party came over to Pabloism with its theory that Fidel Castro was an “unconscious Marxist” and thus the SWP’s function was to be merely a cheering section for Castroism, recapitulating the European Pabloists’ capitulation to the Algerian nationalists. The common thread of Pabloism is the belief that one or another non-proletarian force (the Stalinist bureaucracy, students, peasant guerillas, etc.) will carry out

the revolution, thereby rendering superfluous or at least secondary the leading role of the Trotskyist party.

What this means in the case of Vietnam can be seen from a recent book by Pierre Rousset, a leading member of the French U.Sec., on *Le Parti Communiste Vietnamien*. The book's central thesis is that:

"...the Vietnamese leadership as a whole has assimilated the decisive implications of the permanent revolution for colonial and semi-colonial countries." [emphasis in original]³⁵

As we have shown, Ho Chi Minh's policies of vacillation and betrayal were in direct counterposition to revolutionary Trotskyism and in fact required the massacre of thousands of supporters of the Fourth International. How does this revisionist explain the extermination of the Vietnamese Trotskyists?

"These assassinations, about which historians of the Indochinese CP don't speak, in their writings in French at least, show at least two things: the width of the political gulf which then separated the Trotskyist groups from the Indochinese CP [one would hope so!], the former probably underestimating the importance of the national question in the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, the latter profoundly underestimating the social question in the colonial revolution, including at the outset."³⁶

In short, for the Pabloists there is not only no need to be a Trotskyist in Vietnam, since the North Vietnamese and NLF leadership has absorbed the lessons of the permanent revolution; but in addition, the ideological conflict between Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam was entirely unnecessary, since there was a little bit of truth on both sides. The murders? Just an unfortunate mistake.

Healy and "People's War"

The position of the U.Sec. at least has the virtue of reflecting a consistent long-standing policy: the open abandonment of the Transitional Program and rejection of the essential lessons of Trotskyism. It is noteworthy that the Socialist Labour League (Britain) and its fake "International Committee," which claim to be fighting Pabloism, and which criticize sharply Hansen's phrase about Castro being an "unconscious Marxist," take precisely the same position regarding the Vietnamese Stalinists as the U.Sec. In their obituary of Ho we read:

"There can be no doubt that he [Ho Chi Minh] contained within himself and came to personify, all the anti-imperialist hatred and fighting spirit of the colonial peoples....

"Like Mao Tse-tung, Ho instinctively yearned to do battle with imperialism and the internal forces of reaction within his native country."³⁷

Rather than an "unconscious Marxist" (à la U.Sec.), we find here Ho Chi Minh the "instinctive" Marxist. A distinction without a

difference, if ever there was one!

Elsewhere the Healyites elaborated:

“It is indisputably true to say that, on the basis of the Vietnamese experience, guns combined with the courage and endurance of individual guerrilleros would have meant little or nothing if Ho Chi Minh and other leaders were unable to analyse the principal and secondary conditions within Vietnam as well as between Vietnam and imperialism and on that basis outline a strategy for the conquest of power.”³⁸

And just what was this strategy?

“It [Vietnam] demonstrates the transcendental power and resilience of a protracted peoples war led and organized by a party based on the working class and the poor peasantry and inspired by the example of the October revolution [!].”³⁹

And the Vietnamese Trotskyists, murdered by these “instinctive” Marxists—what of them? Well, here it seems that Ho was a little naughty, for which the SLL slaps his hand in reprobation:

“We do not forget these crimes committed against our movement by Ho Chi Minh, any more than we seek to play down his very real contribution to the struggle against world imperialism.”

But at the very moment that Ho massacred the Trotskyists, he was according to the Healyites lined up against world Stalinism itself!

“Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh were on one side of the barricades, Thorez, Stalin and French imperialism on the other.”⁴⁰

So you see, it is all here: The unconscious (or instinctive) Marxism, the assimilation of the lessons of the permanent revolution, the understanding attitude toward the murders of the Vietnamese Trotskyists. And it is no isolated case. Healy’s famous “method” also allows him to support the Red Guards, Mao Tse-tung, the “Arab Revolution” and Indira Gandhi as supposed fighters against imperialism.

Although Healy uses “theory” and “method” primarily as a smokescreen to hide his abandonment of fundamental Marxist principles, there is in fact a method to the madness. The thread which unites these various positions is the same objectivism which is implicit in Pabloism: Since the sweep of the revolutionary wave (the objective forces) is so all-embracing, the struggle for the program of permanent revolution, the organization of the Trotskyist vanguard party, the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International—all this is secondary and ultimately expendable.

SL and the Vietnamese Trotskyists

In contrast, the Spartacist League continues to uphold the struggle and the memory of the Vietnamese Trotskyists, while recognizing and seeking to learn from their mistakes. This is no secondary or sentimental question. We have seen how the scandalous abandon-

ment of the theory of permanent revolution on the part of the IC and U.Sec. leads them to solidarize themselves with the Stalinists against the Trotskyists in Vietnam, going so far as to *apologize* for the murder of the latter. The practical consequences of Pabloism are liquidation of the revolution and annihilation of the revolutionaries.

The Spartacist League has *consistently*, throughout its history, called for military defense of the NLF/DRV, including in times or places where this has not been a popular demand. We have demanded that Russia and China provide adequate military aid to the Vietnamese. Alone of *all* the tendencies of the U.S. left we raise the question of the war in our trade-union work, calling for immediate U.S. withdrawal and labor strikes against the war. At the same time, as Trotskyists we hold high the banner of permanent revolution and expose the repeated betrayals of the Vietnamese Stalinists. Likewise we analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Vietnamese Trotskyists in order, in the words of the Transitional Program, "to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be." Only in this manner, by openly struggling for the program of revolutionary Marxism, can the Fourth International be reborn.



Militant

Vietnamese independence fighters jailed and executed by re-invading French colonial troops in late 1945. Trotskyists led Saigon insurrection while Stalinists welcomed "democratic" imperialist forces.

Corrections

—from Workers Vanguard No. 21, 25 May 1973

In Part II of this series (*WV* No. 20, 11 May, p. 4), in a paragraph dealing with the differing fortunes of the Vietnamese Stalinists and Trotskyists during World War II, we wrote:

“...the Stalinists supported the Allies in World War II (as did Chiang Kai-shek) and were willing to make an alliance with the Kuomintang against the Japanese. The Trotskyists, in contrast, took the Bolshevik position of revolutionary defeatism during the war, refusing to support any of the rival imperialist camps and their puppets.”

While the paragraph is clearly talking of the Vietnamese Trotskyists, the sentences in question could be misinterpreted as implying that the Fourth International as a whole took a defeatist position in the war between China and Japan. While the FI took a revolutionary defeatist line in the struggle between the Allied and Axis imperialists, it did make a distinction in the Far East by supporting China against Japan. In *WV* No. 4, January 1972 (“War, Revolution and Self-Determination”) we argue that this position was correct until 1942, when the Chinese were essentially subordinated to and integrated into the inter-imperialist war, thereafter necessitating a position of revolutionary defeatism, while continuing to support the right of self-determination for China. This was the position taken by Lenin with regard to Serbian and Polish independence in the similar situation during World War I.

The position of the Vietnamese International Communist League gives added support to this policy. In the specific conditions of Vietnam, where both Japanese and Chinese sought to dominate Vietnam, a position of support for the Chinese could only have led to a new imperialist master, as in fact occurred in North Vietnam in 1945 and early 1946, with Ho Chi Minh acting in concert with the Kuomintang army instead of fighting against it.

In Part I (*WV* No. 19, 27 April) we referred to the Struggle group as the official section of the FI. It has since come to our attention that this is only partially correct. An article from Vietnam in the *Labor Action* of 27 October 1947 mentions that when the Struggle group was recognized as the official section of the FI in 1939, the ICL fused with it. In 1945 the two groups separated once more, over profound divergences concerning the attitude to be taken toward the Viet Minh. At that time (1945-47) the reports on Vietnam appearing in the official organ of the International Secretariat (*Quatrième Internationale*) treated both groups as Trotskyists.

Letter

—from Workers Vanguard No. 23, 22 June 1973

Dear Editor,

The series "Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam," while an important contribution to the history of this little-known chapter of world Trotskyism, nonetheless contains certain significant omissions. Part I of the series in *WV*, 27 April 1973, leaves open to question whether the 1933 electoral bloc between the Indochinese Stalinists and the Trotskyist group led by Ta Thu Thau (the "Struggle" group) "was simply a no-contest pact or involved joint propaganda around a lowest common denominator program." I. Milton Sacks, in his article "Marxism in Vietnam" (in F. Trager, ed., *Marxism in Southeast Asia*, Stanford, 1959) states that the Ta Thu Thau group and Indochinese Communist Party ran on a common electoral program which "stressed mainly a series of democratic demands (right to strike, right to form unions, voting rights, etc.) and a number of welfare measures designed to alleviate the condition of the Vietnamese workers (lighter taxes, housing, recreational facilities, etc.)."

Part 2 of your series (*WV*, 11 May 1973) states that "Seeking to avoid any appearance of revolution, the Viet Minh asked for and received the abdication of Bao Dai..." The Viet Minh were so anxious to avoid "any appearance of revolution" that they actually *did not* ask for the abdication of Bao Dai and were anticipating working within the framework of the monarchy. The Stalinist "two-stage revolution" which divides the democratic and national tasks in the colonial countries from the socialist revolution, and proscribes a prior "democratic-national revolution" which is supposed to be carried out in alliance with the colonial bourgeoisie, is converted in practice into a "three-stage revolution" with a prior "progressive aristocratic-comprador bourgeois" stage! The Stalinists in inverted fashion are aware of the dynamic of the permanent revolution outlined by Trotsky, i.e., that to carry through the tasks of the democratic and national revolution the tasks of the socialist revolution are necessarily placed on the agenda. Thus, the Stalinists, in order to delay the socialist revolution, must also prevent the tasks of the national and democratic revolution from being carried through. So it was in Spain where the Stalinists prevented the expropriation and redistribution of land; so it was in Vietnam; and so it is today in Chile. Ho Chi Minh's futile attempt to recrown the "progressive monarch" Bao Dai, puppet of French and Japanese imperialism, anticipated Mao Tse-tung's courtship of that cast-off puppet-Prince of U.S. and French imperialism, Sihanouk, by 25 years. Bao Dai's actual abdication was the result of a telegram sent on 21 August 1945 by a mass meeting of the Hanoi General Association of Students, in response to a motion raised by Ho Huu Thong, leader of the Trotskyist Indochinese Communist League.

Comradely,
Reuben Samuels
18 May 1973

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NLF Program: Fetter on Victory

—from Spartacist supplement, May 1968

The National Liberation Front's extremely successful military offensive during Tet, together with the siege at the American outpost at Khesanh, brought them very near to total military victory over the U.S. imperialists and their Saigon puppets. This makes Hanoi's decision to agree to negotiations at this particular time especially disheartening, for the lifting of the siege shows a willingness to throw away the long-thwarted victory in the Vietnamese people's fight for independence and social reconstruction.

Hanoi's willingness now to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory is nothing short of a betrayal of the people of Viet Nam and of all socialist principles. It calculatedly ignores the lessons of the Geneva sellout of 1954, where China and the USSR pressured the victorious Viet Minh to accept partition in exchange for promises of free elections and a peaceful national reconstruction. As a result of the "compromise," South Viet Nam became an imperialist outpost again. By sabotaging the NLF offensive, Hanoi's Stalinists are merely accommodating the U.S. need for a power base from which to negotiate.

For just as it was possible for world capitalism to make a deal before in Indochina, it is reasonable for them to assume it will be possible again. An examination of the nature of the anti-imperialist struggle in South Vietnam, its program and its leaders, is vitally necessary for the left at this time, especially because it has been virtually ignored.

The NLF and its Program

There has been an understandable but nevertheless unfortunate tendency on the part of the American left to idealize Ho Chi Minh and the leadership of the NLF, and for radicals to turn their correct

demands for military victory against imperialism and its puppets into uncritical political support for these leaders and their politics. This is a grave error, for not only do these would-be revolutionaries not understand the deformities of those they support—and are extremely likely to feel personally betrayed when the inevitable occurs—but are likely to carry over the Stalinist hallmarks of class-collaboration and murderous opportunism into the American revolutionary movement. It is vitally necessary to keep in mind that Ho Chi Minh and his co-thinkers have already sold out the Vietnamese revolution twice before. They stand ready, able and *about* to do the same thing again in 1968. And if they do, another, perhaps even more brutal and protracted, war in Vietnam will automatically be put on the docket.

Although the present anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam had its origin in spontaneous uprisings under nationalists against Ngo Diem, then American puppet-in-residence, it soon came under the control and direction of the remnants of the Stalinist cadre left from the Viet Minh. Even so, their influence was not sufficient to squelch the embryonic civil war. The leaders had little control over the matter; had they pulled out they would have lost influence altogether. Today there is no question that the “communist” People’s Revolutionary Party, allied politically with Ho’s Lao Dong in the North, holds political leadership in the NLF.

Yet despite the fact that the NLF leadership is officially communist, the program under whose banner it fights is nothing of the sort. The new, revised and heavily publicized program (*Guardian*, 21 July 1967), agreed upon early last September at a convention of the top NLF leadership, is totally inadequate to implement or even project the changes needed internally in South Vietnam in order to wrest it from imperialist control. Among other things, the program affords protection for private trade and industry, the private ownership of land, the seizure and distribution of the land of *absentee* landlords (other land is to be bought up gradually, presumably when the money is available—hardly the massive “land reform” program everyone knows is vitally and integrally necessary), *protection of the interests of foreign plantation owners and others*, respect for land tenure of Buddhists and other religions, a liberal economy with state support in its “*vital*” sectors and the acceptance of economic aid from any countries, East or West, provided there are no strings attached. These are the more “radical” sections of the document!

It is quite evident that this program cannot be considered a “transitional” one (a bridge between capitalism and capitalism?) insofar as, far from laying the groundwork for the liquidation of a

capitalist class structure even eventually, it only calls for the establishment of a "neutral" capitalism, independent of any sector of world finance capitalism. Why it should require a communist-directed government in order to lead a capitalist state is not explained, nor is there any explanation of how a weak, neutralist capitalist state can remain independent, let alone compete with the giant imperialist complexes. Presumably this is not seen as a real problem, although the failure to cite models or economic and historical precedents should raise some obvious questions. But fantastic as this may seem, it is only the start.

Perhaps the problem ought to be viewed from a different angle. The U.S. government has given indications recently it wants to begin some sort of peace talks, which would presumably lead to the subject of negotiations. Now since it is unreasonable to assume that the U.S. plans simply to negotiate its own withdrawal—which it could carry out unilaterally, in any case—obviously the subjects for negotiation can only be the structure and nature of a coalition government. But a coalition between "socialist" and capitalist forces is by its very nature contradictory and highly unstable and therefore by definition only an interim government. One side would have to win out and smash its opposite number.

Such a coalition is analogous to the Kerensky interim Russian government of 1917, which contained both capitalist and nominally "socialist" members. But the real role of the socialist ministers there, as in this case, was to function as a "left cover" for the capitalist elements, to lull the workers while the rightists prepared a counterrevolution. In this instance for the NLF, no matter what the nominal political affiliation of its leadership, to participate in such a coalition would be an outright betrayal of the struggle. With a program which does not lead to socialism but to a rarefied capitalism, with no projection of a government in the interests of the workers and peasants, without even the forms of soviets to carry on the fight for socialism—and without a revolutionary vanguard to intervene and take power before the government slips back into the hands of the counterrevolution—entering such a coalition would simply be to take willing steps to one's own liquidation.

The Vietnamese people need a massive land reform and the liquidation of all extensive holdings—impossible demands within the limits of the new NLF program. The reunification of the country is a vital necessity, along with the integration of the Southern economy with the North. Soviet democracy is vitally needed in order to lay the groundwork for becoming a workers state. Instead, they are offered a

program to maintain private property and capitalist relations indefinitely.

Limitations on Stalinist Maneuvers

The Vietnamese people have now been fighting for 27 years, and a by-product of this destruction has been the uprooting of a large part of the infrastructure of native capitalist relations. Nor is there adequate capital available for rebuilding. Much indigenous cash will be moving to the Riviera with its owners and will be unavailable to any reconstruction government. And the situation is too unstable and fluid to attract much aid from the affluent imperialist powers.

Even more: the struggle has apparently found roots among the city workers as well as the peasantry. There have been a number of large strikes within the city of Saigon itself, and recent arrests of supposedly "safe" labor leaders by the Ky government have caused some embarrassment in AFL-CIO circles here. Given the government and social conditions in Saigon today, such strikes cannot but take a distinctly political turn. If as a result the workers were to become fully politically conscious it is inconceivable they would be willing to accept the dominance of any capitalist government, no matter how benign or "neutral."

On Balance

So as a result what we have is this: given its political ancestry and recent history, both the Ho Chi Minh and NLF leaderships are quite capable of doing their best to derail the Vietnamese revolution again, as they did in 1946 and again in 1954. This almost certainly will be the end result if the NLF decides actually to enter a coalition government, or makes similar deals for the semblance of power. This would mean accepting shadows in the place of substance, and those for only a very short while. Ultimately, it would mean putting off—again—until later the basic struggle for socialism.

At the very best, what can be achieved under the present leadership in South Vietnam is a deeply flawed and partial social transformation in the direction of a workers state. But even this would mean the tacit discarding of the formal NLF program, for no social progress in this direction is possible with it as the operative guideline. The PRP in the South, like the Lao Dong in the North, unquestionably holds absolute control over the NLF at present, and there is no other agency for social revolution in Vietnam.

On balance, and assuming the critical point that the Yankees and their agents leave, it is likely that the NLF will simply bypass its program and will then set out to make a limited, distorted and bureaucratic revolution from the top. The capitalists should be able

to put up very little resistance; the bourgeois state is visibly crumbling. Still, for all its advances, there should be no illusions about this: the workers and the peasants will have not a smell of political power in the South any more than they now have in the North. In short, the best that can come out of such a unified Vietnam is but another deformed workers state.

But if anything can betray the Vietnamese revolution—limited and deformed as it will be—the NLF leadership and its program are just the tools to do it.

**COMMUNIST UNITY TO DEFEND VIETNAM REVOLUTION
REQUIRES WORKERS' POLITICAL REVOLUTION
AGAINST THE BUREAUCRATS IN HANOI, PEKING, AND
MOSCOW!**



**Two post-World War II publications of Vietnamese Trotskyists
in France.**

A Postscript on Vietnamese Trotskyists

The following is a report on a July 1975 interview with V.S., a senior Vietnamese socialist who has a long-standing familiarity with the Vietnamese ostensibly Trotskyist movement.

Beginning about 1938, the French colonial government transported large numbers of Vietnamese to France as manual laborers. Thus in the period immediately following World War II there were some 12,000 Vietnamese in France. The Trotskyists were firmly implanted in this overwhelmingly proletarian population and, according to V.S., occupied a politically dominant position: there were at this time as many as 500 organized ostensible Vietnamese Trotskyists in France.

The Trotskyist organization, largely supporters of Ta Thu Thau's La Lutte group, founded a "Comité Provisoire Représentant des Indochinois en France" (Provisional Committee Representing Indochinese in France) in July 1944 which included pro-Stalinists such as the noted philosopher Tranh Duc Thao. This "broad" committee was to serve as a base among which the Trotskyists could work, while at the same time maintaining their own independent publication.

According to V.S., during the first few years after the war, the Vietnamese section in exile contributed substantial financial support to the Fourth International, much more than many other sections. At the same time the section published a paper, *Tranh Dau* (Struggle), before 1947; after the first congress of the Groupe Communiste Internationaliste de Vietnam (GCI—Internationalist Communist Group of Vietnam) in 1947 it published *Vo San* until 1958.

However, beginning in the late 1940's the French government began massive deportations of the Vietnamese back to Vietnam, including about three-quarters of the Trotskyists. The latter simply disappeared after their return to Vietnam, presumably through capitulation to the Viet Minh Stalinists or liquidation by either the Stalinists or the French.

Consequently, by 1951-52 there were only about 70 Vietnamese ostensible Trotskyists left in France. The GCI was in turn divided between former followers of Ta Thu Thau's La Lutte group and Ho Huu Thong's International Communist League. At the time of the Pabloite split in 1951-53, there was a parallel debate among the Vietnamese resulting in a split in the GCI, with 18 opposing the Pabloist "entrism sui generis" (i.e., liquidation), about 40 supporting it and the remainder abstaining. The "independents" (anti-Pabloites) managed to bring out one issue of their paper, *Cours Nouveau* (New Course), edited by Lucien who had written an important article concerning the 1945 Saigon uprising [see footnote 8, page 95], but were unable to continue. Ironically, although the majority was theoretically in favor of entrism, it was never able to carry it out.

At the time of the 1963 reunification between the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Pabloite International Secretariat (IS), the two Vietnamese groupings also reunited, to form the Bolshevik-Leninist Group of Vietnam (BLGV). According to V.S., this was due to the fact that their practical work had led to a convergence of positions rather than as a result of the SWP-IS discussions. By this time, however, the Vietnamese minority had been converted to the theoretical position of entrism (while the entire combined group recognized the impossibility of putting it into practice). From 1964 on, the BLGV decided that it was impossible to edit an explicitly Trotskyist paper in Vietnamese, and instead began working with an independent anti-Stalinist, "*trotskyisant*" (Trotsky-oid) paper, *Quat San*, which is still being published today.

V.S. stated that in spite of the post-war assassinations and elimination of any organizational presence, traces of the Trotskyist heritage in Vietnam have not totally disappeared. Thus the Stalinists have reportedly never dared attack Ta Thu Thau in person (although carrying on the usual slander campaigns against other individuals), and there is still sentiment in Vietnam for moving Thau's grave from the Vietnamese highlands to Saigon. In addition, there have been periodic reports of Trotskyist influence in the South Vietnamese trade unions. In the early 1950's U.S. government cold warrior Vietnam expert Milton Sacks claimed the Trotskyists maintained a certain presence, and even later V.S. reported some influence of ostensible Trotskyists in the trade unions of the Saigon area.

* * * * *

These sketchy reports reinforce the preceding analysis of the history of Vietnamese Trotskyism, particularly regarding its weaknesses. When Vietnamese Trotskyists in France after World War II concentrated on front-group formations, they repeated the pre-war error of the La Lutte group in not drawing a clear organizational dividing line between themselves and the Stalinists. Before the war, this failure had left the Trotskyists relatively open to repression by the French and Japanese; after the war it politically disarmed them against the Viet Minh, who were meanwhile attempting to murder all known ostensible Trotskyists in Vietnam.

As for the fake-Trotskyist United Secretariat (USec), it has refused to give its Vietnamese section, the BLGV, any assistance, and has in fact kept the BLGV's existence secret (see the letter by the Vietnamese to the USec's "Tenth World Congress" reprinted in this pamphlet). This is hardly surprising given the position of the USec majority that the Vietnamese Stalinists are "empirically revolutionary." Further, by casting doubt on and denigrating the significance of the Stalinists' murder of Ta Thu Thau, the USec majority reviles the history of their own Vietnamese comrades. The SWP, for its part, blocks with the majority in refusing to pose the question of building a Trotskyist party in Vietnam today.

In deliberately *refusing* to build a Vietnamese section—because of the centrist USec majority's political capitulation to the Stalinists and the reformist minority's abject tailing after the liberal bourgeoisie—the Pabloists have made abundantly clear that *the construction of a Vietnamese Trotskyist party can only come about through the struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International, and the political destruction of the false pretenders to its mantle.* The international Spartacist tendency, which despite lack of access to many sources has been *unique* in seeking to draw the lessons of Vietnamese Trotskyism, pledges itself to this task.

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Appeal of the Bolshevik-Leninist Group of Vietnam

—from Workers Vanguard No. 72, 4 July 1975

The following letter was sent to last year's "Tenth World Congress" of the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International." This poignant appeal is itself a devastating comment on the liquidationist consequences of the USec's capitulation to Vietnamese Stalinism. If, as USec leaders allege, the "Vietnamese Communist Party" is "empirically revolutionary," and the "Vietnamese leadership as a whole has assimilated the decisive implications of the permanent revolution for colonial and semi-colonial countries" (Pierre Rousset, Le Parti Communiste Vietnamien), what interest can Ernest Mandel & Co. have in building a Vietnamese Trotskyist party?

It is small wonder, then, that to this day the Bolshevik-Leninist Group of Vietnam has received "no help whatsoever from the International or from the Ligue Communiste." Not only does the BLVG's letter remain unanswered, but the top leadership of the French Ligue (now LCR), the USec majority's star section, has refused to "publicize" the existence of the Vietnamese group even by publishing this letter in its internal bulletin or discussing the matter in its Central Committee!

The BLVG asks pointedly, "Should the International concern itself with a Vietnamese Trotskyist group" loyal to the USec under difficult conditions? And "Should we work towards the creation of a section of the Fourth International in Vietnam?" Following the taking of

Saigon, the professional tailists of this fake-Trotskyist fake International have in effect responded to the questions of their Vietnamese comrades... in the negative.

In articles and statements celebrating the military victory of DRV/NLF troops over the puppet Thieu regime, neither the guerrillaist majority nor the orthodox-posturing reformists of the minority "Leninist-Trotskyist Faction" have seen fit to even mention the assassination of several thousand Vietnamese Trotskyists by the followers of Ho Chi Minh in 1945-47. USec majorityites actually apologize for the Stalinist butchers and now hail the overthrow of capitalist rule in South Vietnam as "the first victorious 'permanent revolution' since the victory of the Cuban revolution" (Inprecor, 8 May 1975).

It has been left to the international Spartacist tendency to uphold the struggle of our martyred Vietnamese comrades and call for the formation of authentic Trotskyist parties in Indochina as part of a reborn Fourth International. While unconditionally defending the new deformed workers states of South Vietnam and Cambodia against imperialism, we have called for extending the revolutionary conquests and opening the road to socialism by political revolution to replace Stalinist bureaucratic rule with the democratic rule of the working class (supported by the exploited peasantry) through soviets.

* * * * *

Dear Comrades,

The Bolshevik-Leninist Group of Vietnam (BLV), sends you its fraternal greetings and wishes the Congress great success in keeping with our great hopes.

We know that serious subjects are presently being discussed in the International, especially the Vietnamese problem. We deeply regret that for material reasons (date of the Congress became known too late, passports, visas...) the BLV is absent from your debates. We regret it all the more because our group does not have the same position as the International nor the comrades of the opposition. We could contribute original ideas as Vietnamese Trotskyists, having been able to read many Vietnamese documents hardly known outside of the country.

Our BLV group was constituted as a section of the International in 1947, by joining the International. It has a long history behind it. It was our group that had successfully led, during the 1946-1953 period, the movement of 20,000 emigrant workers in France... Our group was able to resist the most brutal repression of French imperialism during the first war in Vietnam.

...a small group remains in France and carries on in spite of a

thousand difficulties. It is the present defender of Vietnamese Trotskyist traditions and ideas.

Although for tactical reasons we don't officially identify ourselves in our press as Trotskyists, all the Vietnamese political circles in France know of our existence, especially the North Vietnamese ruling circles. We are seeking to constantly intervene in the struggle against American imperialism through all sorts of actions taking many different forms.

In the very special historical conditions in Vietnam, where the enormous weight of the VCP ["Vietnamese Communist Party"] crushes all the organisations to its left, maintaining a Trotskyist group, even a propaganda group, is an extremely difficult task. We have been able to do this during these last years with no help whatsoever from the International or from the Ligue Communiste.

In the political debate now unfolding in the International, we note two opposite errors. The first consists of prettying up the VCP to the point of labelling it a Revolutionary Party, thus forgetting the entire past historical development of this party, and not taking into account its present opportunistic and empirical policy which could cause serious setbacks for the Vietnamese Revolution. The second error is wanting at all costs to stick to the old schemas and refusing to see the evolution of this party in the new conditions and the fact that it has successfully led the national liberation struggle.

The BLV group is constantly careful to not fall into either of the two errors. It constantly attempts to keep in touch with reality, to understand it and to draw the lessons from it for action, never losing sight of the fundamental principles of Trotskyism and Leninism.

Comrades,

We request that you make our existence known to the sections and that you debate out the following questions.

1) Should the International concern itself with a Vietnamese Trotskyist group which has remained loyal to the International and which has carried on against great obstacles, in the most difficult of conditions?

2) Should we work towards the creation of a section of the Fourth International in Vietnam?

An answer to these two questions would already resolve half the debate under way on the Vietnamese problem.

Our very fraternal greetings,

the BLVG

February 5, 1974

CHAPTER II

The Struggle Against Class Collaboration in the Anti-War Movement



WV Photo

NY Peace Parade

Press Release:

Spartacist Breaks with New York Parade Committee

—from Spartacist No. 5, November-December 1965

The following statement was read by a Spartacist representative at the 29 September 1965 meeting of the New York Peace Parade Committee, an anti-war coalition dominated by right-wing pacifists and liberals. Among the "individuals" in the committee were members of Progressive Labor Party, the Socialist Party, Workers World, ACFI (predecessor of the Workers League), the Communist Party, the liberal New York SANE and the Committee for Non-Violent Action. Previous meetings had decided in favor of a single, liberal slogan ("Stop the War in Vietnam Now") for the October 16 anti-war parade and a speakers list at the rally featuring the liberal Dr. Benjamin Spock, among others. The committee's grossly social-patriotic "Call" objected to in the Spartacist statement said that the "war in Vietnam is not necessary for national security," since the "United States is the richest, most powerful... nation in the world," and the war "cannot enhance the honor of the American people." After reading its statement the Spartacist delegation withdrew from the committee.

* * * * *

At the last meeting on September 22, we raised serious objections to the "one slogan" policy and the political composition of the Rally speakers list.

Had we been invited to the first meeting on September 15 where the substantial issue of non-exclusion was discussed and decided, we would have made our views known then. We objected to the concept that this is a committee of "individuals" rather than organizations.

But of course *votes* are taken on the basis of *organization* and *not* individuals since that is the reality. In an attempt to obscure the exclusion taking place, speakers for the rally were chosen on the basis of artificial "representative" categories: Women, Art, Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Students, Marxist-anti-Imperialists, etc., with one speaker from each category. But our objections are not simply petty organizational grievances—they are political ones.

Since the last meeting we have carefully considered these issues as well as the line of the Call that has been issued and have decided that we can no longer participate in this committee on a principled political basis. Therefore we announce our withdrawal and request that our name be removed from the list of sponsors of the demonstration.

Stop WHOSE War in Vietnam?

The slogan "Stop the War in Vietnam Now" can mean many things to many people. But given the composition of this Committee, the fact that it is dominated by right-wing pacifists and "liberals," i.e., pro-capitalist and pro-LBJ, it is clear that the slogan is deliberately ambiguous in order to avoid facing the duty to advance the *only* demand that has any meaning: "For the Immediate, Unconditional Withdrawal of All U.S. Troops from Vietnam!" Instead of this, the Call demands that "all foreign troops" be removed from Vietnam. This is only an endorsement of the position of the U.S. Government. Further, we are not simply for stopping the war, but rather *for* the victory of the social revolution that is taking place in Vietnam. It is absurd, and against the interest of the revolution, to call simply for disengagement of forces, and implies a confidence in the integrity of U.S. Imperialism to keep such a bargain. You have completely obscured what we think is the most important character of the Vietnam war—that this is a naked, ruthless intervention by U.S. Imperialism to interrupt and drive back a social revolution in Vietnam, a revolution that is the *only* road to freedom for the Vietnamese working masses. We are not neutral in this. What is involved is not simply a matter of self-determination or moral indignation or national security or the honor and reputation of the American people as the Call indicates. The best defense of the Vietnamese revolution in this country is to build a militant antiwar movement strong enough to compel the United States to get out of Vietnam!

For Real United Action!

There are many people in this committee with whom we share a number of positions on a range of issues including Vietnam. As in the

past, we stand ready to work fully and loyally with you on the basis of political agreement. But we cannot be a party to this committee as it is presently constituted, containing forces that in a class sense are simply not compatible.

This split might have been avoided by a policy of genuine non-exclusion, where all political viewpoints could be expressed. This would have meant, of course, that SANE and some others would have left the committee as they have threatened to do. Instead, in the name of "unity," you have combined with these right-wing elements and chosen to frustrate this alternative and suppress all but the most "respectable" political views. The Socialist Workers Party has deliberately acted as a broker to cement this unprincipled alliance. Well, we for one value *our* political viewpoints more than we do such a fake "unity."

All those who recognize the truth of what I have said should seriously reconsider their continued participation in this committee and act accordingly.

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Beyond October 21: From Protest to Power

—from Spartacist leaflet distributed at 21 October 1967 anti-Vietnam War march in Washington, D.C.

The April 15th⁴¹ mobilization was at once the greatest success of the official peace movement and definitive evidence of its political bankruptcy. The series of demonstrations leading up to the April 15th affair not only had no effect on government policy, but the escalation of the war appears to have coincided with each demonstration. The complete ineffectiveness of the April 15th march and the cynical indifference of the Johnson administration to anti-war sentiment has engendered a hysterical hatred of the “power structure” and a sense of frustration among the most active sections of the anti-war movement. Isaac Deutscher caught the problem exactly when he said that he’d exchange the whole huge April 15th mobilization for just one dock strike.

Mass Action—Not Kamikazes

There is widespread sentiment to make the demonstrations more aggressive, dramatic and personally involving. The result has been a turn toward self-sacrifice and personal heroics in direct physical confrontations with the “war machine.” The notion that the sheer strength of will of its opponents can end the war has its logical culmination in the hippies’ project to “raise the Pentagon.”⁴² Except for satisfying masochistic demonstrators and sadistic cops, nothing is gained from such “confrontations.” Whether the demonstrators fight back or not, under these circumstances the odds are all on the side of the cops. Such direct action is as ineffectual as large, orderly

demonstrations, and more expensive to the movement in terms of bruised bodies, jail sentences and money.

Personal sacrifice can never substitute for a mass movement, and it is necessary to understand this in developing a perspective for the anti-war movement. This does not mean reverting to the simple pacifist humanitarianism of the official peace movement in order to get middle-class liberals on the picket lines. What it does mean is tapping the fundamental discontent and conflicts in American society; the black ghetto uprisings and rash of militant strikes indicate the depth and explosiveness of this discontent. Some of this discontent is with the war itself, or things related to the war, such as the inflation eating into real wages. But all of it stems from the fundamentally oppressive character of American capitalism, of which the slaughter of the rebellious Vietnamese peasantry is simply the most dramatic external manifestation.

You WILL Go

Closely related to the tendency of anti-war radicals to think in terms of personal assaults on the "system" is the draft-resistance campaign, which has become the principal organizing focus of the student anti-war movement. Far from resisting the war, the voluntary purging of radicals from the army strengthens the ideological purity and political reliability of the army. The government still seeks to screen radicals out of the service. Radicals, rather than going off to prison or Canada, would be far more effective educating their fellow soldiers. The Americans who suffer most from the war are the soldiers in Vietnam, and as the war grows longer and bloodier, discontent among G.I.s and its effect on prosecuting the war could be very great indeed.

Perhaps even more important is the effect of student draft avoidance, particularly the frenzied scrambling after 2-S deferments, which are available only to the intellectually or financially privileged, on the attitude of working-class draftees. The majority of draftees are vaguely disquieted about the war and disgruntled about being drafted during a shooting war, where they could get killed. But they accept the draft as a fact of life, and the idea of refusing to go is completely alien to their whole mode of thinking. They view the "we won't go" movement as motivated by physical cowardice, holier-than-thou moralism and a desire on the part of spoiled college kids to avoid the harshness of army life. The anti-war movement will never break out of the campuses and coffee-houses, and reach the masses, unless young radicals share the common experiences of all working-class youth, in serving a few years in the army. Only by such measures can the debilitating, and potentially dangerous, isolation of bohemian

intellectuals from the mass of the working class, so characteristic of the American left, be overcome.

For Anti-War Strike Actions

The widespread feeling that the continual repetition of big marches is ineffectual and demoralizing is correct. However, kamikaze tactics are not the answer. It is necessary for the anti-war movement to achieve the maximum social power it can muster in protests. To this end, the Spartacist League advocates concretely building for a one-day general strike in factories, offices, ghetto neighborhoods and schools as the next national mobilization. Given the existing strength of the anti-war movement, and proper organizing, such a mobilization could bring out huge numbers of workers and students, and have a severe effect on whole segments of the economy. Even on this modest scale, such a demonstration would put the "fear of god" into the government, because it would mean the anti-war movement had gone far beyond accepted forms of protest and attacked the very foundations of American capitalism—production. Such a strike would be infinitely more effective than this endless series of marches whether or not decorated by the bloodied heads of martyrs.

Toward Conscious Class Struggle

Apart from being a more effective form of protest, the proposed general strike would enable the anti-war movement to widen its base among forces other than political activists and particularly to strengthen organized anti-war sentiment among workers. It would be an excellent way for anti-war trade unionists to organize among their fellow workers and inject the war question into trade union politics. Since the trade union bureaucracy would certainly oppose it, the fight over the proposed strike would reinforce the increasing rank and file discontent in the unions. In fact, in many places, the strike would not only be around anti-war demands, but economic issues as well. It would then be a protest of general social discontent, and would help lay the basis for a mass revolutionary socialist party.

Protest or Power

To the extent that most anti-war activists think in terms of politics, they mean running "peace-conscience" candidates, whose sole activity consists of about six weeks of electioneering. This type of discontinuous and one-sided activity can never build an effective movement. In fact, it is seen as a gesture of protest and nothing more. However, the fundamental weakness of this type of peace candidate is not organizational inefficiency, but political. The general social program of most of these candidates—the type of program King or Spock⁴³ would run on—is not substantially different from the liberal

wing of the Democratic Party, who, for purely opportunistic reasons, are unwilling to oppose Johnson. The official leadership of the anti-war movement reinforces the hegemony of the Democratic Party, purged of the personal noxiousness and "aggressiveness" of Johnson. King or Spock would simply be a tryout for Robert Kennedy in '72.

Even on the question of the war itself, a program which implicitly supports American capitalism is self-defeating. The Vietnamese war is not unique. It is simply the largest in a series of colonial wars that the U.S. and all other imperialist powers have been fighting for the past century and will continue to fight until capitalism is overthrown in its main centers. In brief, the U.S. is in Vietnam to suppress a peasant revolution which challenges the dominance of U.S. business in Asia. It is futile to oppose the intervention in Vietnam while supporting the economic system which generates that intervention and the ideology that legitimatizes it.

Toward a Labor Party

Moreover, a political movement built solely around the war is incapable of unifying the various forces of discontent within American society. On the contrary, the necessary support given to the suppression of the American working class by establishment "doves"—Wayne Morse is a leading Congressional advocate of government strike-breaking while the liberal establishment, including King, unanimously supported the bloody suppression of the ghetto risings—is a major obstacle to building a mass anti-war movement. Only such a revolutionary Labor Party, projecting a long-term struggle in the interest of the working masses, represents the kind of qualitative political change needed to create a serious break with the traditional parties and counter the political apathy of most workers. With the widespread discontent over the war, the rising militancy and restiveness in the labor movement, and the explosiveness of the black ghettos, the prospect for initiating such a party is better now than at any time in the last twenty years.

The anti-war movement can force Johnson to withdraw U.S. troops only if he is more afraid of it than of the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution. No demonstration, however effective and militant, can do this. Only a movement capable of taking state power can. The anti-war movement has no future except as a force for building a party of revolutionary change.

The Vietnamese War has opened many people's eyes to the horrors and injustices inherent in the mainstream of American politics. Nothing short of a fundamental change in the class axis of those politics will eliminate these injustices.

Against NPAC Pop Fronts: For Class Action Against the War!

—from Spartacist supplement, July 1971

The “Spring Offensive”⁴⁴ is over, but the Vietnam war drags on. The Mayday Tribe’s threat to “Stop the Government” if the government did not stop the war only demonstrated with what ruthless efficiency the government handles radicals who talk about stopping the government but lack any means except wishful thinking. The Mayday Tribe represented merely a new chapter in the conflict of perspectives which has been ingrained in the anti-war movement since its inception: “respectable” reformism vs. petty-bourgeois adventurism. Each outbreak of confrontationism is greeted by a new wave of “we told you so” from the radical-liberal-bourgeois coalition dominated by the astute class-collaborationist maneuvering of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). What hypocrisy! For it is precisely the obvious liberalism of the mainstream anti-war movement which has driven the frustrated student protesters in desperation into the ranks of the Mayday Tribe. And as for futility, what has the SWP’s much-touted “mass movement” accomplished?—the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) “peace action” of April 24 only produced the traffic jam to which the Mayday Tribe aspired. So long as the anti-war movement continues to be circumscribed by these two alternatives—reformism or adventurism—there can be no way forward.

Kent State Revisited

The outraged opposition spontaneously generated last year by the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the Kent-Jackson State massacres

has been completely dissipated. The invasion of Laos earlier this year—an escalation and expansion of the war equal to the Cambodia invasion—produced only scattered protests. The July 2-4 NPAC Convention takes place after the first relatively quiet spring in nearly a decade on college campuses, heretofore the bastion of the anti-war movement. Instead, the campus has become a breeding ground for reactionary cultism (with Campus Crusade for Christ Revivals rivalling anti-war rallies for attendance) and relative political apathy.

The energy of the May 1970 upsurge was dissipated precisely because its lessons have been ignored. The massacres of students took place in the midst of a massive, ascending strike wave representing a radicalization of the U.S. and international working class unprecedented since World War II. One of the most important episodes of this strike wave was the nationwide teamster wildcat. In Ohio during April-May 1970 twenty thousand teamsters went out. Joining with the trucking owners in calling on right-wing Republican Governor Rhoades to mobilize four thousand National Guardsmen to break the wildcat were “friends of labor,” “friends of the peace movement” like Senator Saxbe and Mayor Stokes, and the international “leadership” of the Teamsters, including President Fitzsimmons and Vice-President Harold Gibbons—labor’s “representative” on the podium at the April 24 rally in Washington and endorser of this NPAC Convention.

The trucking owners tried to move scab trucks in convoys of five, supported by a massive show of firepower: military helicopters, armored cars and armed Guardsmen literally riding shotgun in each cabin. The teamsters countered by organizing flying-picket squads which massed at terminal gates whenever the owners tried to move scab trucks. The teamsters were able to face down the Guardsmen and defend their strike.

It was from this strike-breaking detail that four hundred Guardsmen were taken and sent to Kent State. Unlike the teamsters, the students put up no resistance. But it was students, not teamsters, who were gunned down. Why? A massacre of teamsters, in the middle of a tense, militant nationwide wildcat by one of the country’s strongest unions, would have precipitated a series of nationwide protest and sympathy strikes—a far greater show of social power than all the student strikes, peace crawls and police confrontations combined. In contrast, the massacre of students had little more long-term social impact than starting summer vacation three weeks early on college campuses.

What made the protesting students so vulnerable was precisely the question of brute social power: the teamsters and other organized

workers have it; students do not. Likewise, while polls, parades and police confrontations may demonstrate that the overwhelming majority in this country is against the war, no variation or combination of protest politics can force the U.S. ruling class out of Indochina. Only a combination of social forces whose consciousness and militancy pose a greater threat to the world hegemony of U.S. imperialism than military defeat in Vietnam can force a halt to the war.

NPAC's Predecessor

The predecessor to this NPAC Convention was last year's "Emergency National Conference Against the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam War" held in Cleveland over June 19-21. Mayor Stokes, fresh from helping break the teamster strike, officially endorsed the conference and proclaimed June 19-21 as "Peace Action Days." The SWP-dominated conference immediately proposed a demonstration in downtown Cleveland "against Agnew"—a demonstration which any liberal Republican or Democratic hustler like Stokes could solidarize with. SDS, supported in their demand by Progressive Labor and the Spartacist League, counterposed a demonstration in support of the teamster wildcat and against Stokes as well as Agnew. The SWP, predictably, was enraged at the suggestion of anything that might "divide" the peace movement and alienate its "friends" in the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy.

In addition to marching "against Agnew," the conference attempted to reassemble from the wreckage of various Mobilizations, Coalitions, Committees, Conferences, Caucuses, Congresses, Conventions and other concoctions an even newer, broader, more indivisible peace-group-to-end-all-peace-groups—the "National Peace Action Coalition." Although maneuvering in lesser arenas, the SWP has adopted the Communist Party's proclivity for forming coalitions only to toss them out again when their treachery is no longer of service. Such was the history of the "Spring," "National" and "New" Mobilizations behind which the SWP was the motivating force, and such will be the history of NPAC. NPAC is a Popular Front combining the SWP with the liberal bourgeoisie and Cold Warrior "socialists," through which the SWP can "lead" masses of people and rub shoulders with Vance Hartke and Victor Reuther. The SWP is able to "lead" these masses through the oldest opportunist sleight-of-hand in the world—by adopting the liberal bourgeoisie's program! Capitalist politicians like Hartke know that the real decisions about when and how to "end" the war are made in Wall Street high-rises and Pentagon sub-basements. They come to

these conferences as they go to livestock shows and state fairs—to garner votes.

“Mass Actions”

To the accusation that formations like NPAC are Popular Fronts of class collaboration, SWPer Doug Jenness responded:

“If NPAC was watering down its program to get support from capitalist politicians, your charges would be justified. But NPAC follows an entirely different course. It has an independent perspective to unite as many people as possible, regardless of political affiliations or views, in mass actions against the Vietnam War.”

—*Militant*, 28 May 1970

And to be sure, the Cleveland “Emergency Conference” dutifully passed a resolution calling for “mass actions.” Jenness’ statement is perfectly clear—and perfectly meaningless. The SWP wants to “unite” lots of “people” (explicitly regardless of politics) in “mass actions.” “Unite” *which* “people,” on the basis of *what program*, in *what kind* of “mass action”? The massacre of a million Indonesian communist workers was a “mass action.” So were the Cossack pogroms. So, for that matter, was the October Revolution. The demonstration “against Agnew” and the teamster wildcat were also “mass actions.” However, the SWP endorsed the former while one of their spokesmen (Miguel Padilla, at Cleveland) dismissed the latter as “racist and reactionary.” Why do the self-proclaimed “Marxists” of the SWP have so much difficulty understanding that society is made up of *classes*, not undifferentiated masses, and that the two primary classes in capitalist society are the bourgeoisie and the working class? It is absurd to talk about having “an independent perspective”; the reformist anti-war movement is deliberately organized as a classless formation, but though it may opt to ignore the class struggle, the class struggle does not ignore it! The middle-class youth who have flocked to the anti-war movement in moral outrage must *choose sides* in the class struggle; they can play no rôle outside it. The SWP’s “independent perspective” in reality means independence from the fight for the international proletarian revolution, in favor of back-handed support to the class enemy of U.S. workers and their class brothers in Indochina.

Lest anyone should think that the SWP has gone astray through simple ignorance of these elementary tenets of Marxist analysis, it is instructive to compare the SWP’s current politics with its analysis of the way to conduct anti-war struggle at the time of the Korean war, another instance of imperialism’s continuing assault on the gains of limited social revolutions abroad expressed militarily. In March 1953 Farrell Dobbs—then and now a principal leader of the SWP—wrote:

“...the most vital place to carry on anti-war agitation and participate in anti-war actions is in the unions where the masses are. We have

always envisaged the struggle against war as an *extension of the class struggle* onto a higher plane. *The fight against the war can really be effective only to the extent that the workers adopt class-struggle policies in defending their interests.* If we are to help this process along we must be in the unions....”

—SWP Internal Bulletin Vol. 15, No. 6, March 1953 (our emphasis)

Now this is neither a particularly profound nor a particularly eloquent polemic. It is simple matter-of-fact statement of an orientation which stands blatantly and diametrically counterposed to the current politics of the SWP. The SWP leaders are not naive would-be revolutionaries ignorant of the theories of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky; they have consciously rejected Trotskyism in favor of a perspective of reformist class collaboration.

Clear-Cut Choice

Like the national postal strike before it and the recent two-day mini-general strike of New York City public employees, the Teamster wildcat produced a clear-cut line-up of class forces. The trucking owners, cops, courts, the bourgeois press and politicians (from the most liberal to the most conservative) stood united as a class and, together with their agents in the unions, the labor bureaucracy, tried to crush the Teamster struggle. On the other side of the barricades were the Teamsters. The SDS resolution put before the Cleveland “Emergency Conference” a clear-cut, inescapable choice: support the Teamsters (which would have forced NPAC to break with capitalist politicians like Stokes and the “lieutenants of capital” within the workers movement like Fitzsimmons and Gibbons); or cement the Popular Front bloc by calling the Teamsters simply “racist and reactionary” and demonstrating against Agnew. The SWP chose the latter course—the course of class collaboration and betrayal.

On the main issue facing the Cleveland conference—class collaboration—the SWP’s conduct was unequivocal. Not so that of the pseudo-Trotskyist Workers League (WL) which, in a frenzy of the same opportunist appetite which led it to enthusiastically and virtually uncritically endorse the wretched 1970 SWP electoral campaigns, insisted that the real issue was “Trotskyism vs. Stalinism.” By this catchy slogan the WL meant that *its* main enemy at the conference was PL (“Stalinism”) and the SDS motions which posed, in a limited but generally correct way, an anti-liberal, working-class orientation for the anti-war movement. The WL in effect made a bloc with the SWP (“Trotskyism”—but since when is the SWP legitimately Trotskyist?) against opposition *from the left*, thereby endorsing the essence of Stalinism though not the label, for Stalinism—like all varieties of revisionism—is nothing more or less

than the abandonment of an international, proletarian and revolutionary perspective in favor of alliances with some wing of the class enemy, precisely the SWP's policy in the anti-war movement! (The WL, which has jumped all over the map on the anti-war question—tailending the Popular Front in 1965, offering critical *political* support to the NLF Stalinists and Ho Chi Minh in 1967—recently adopted a new face: calling its own rally on April 24, the WL denounced all those who participated in the “official” rally, thus condemning the mass of anti-war activists for the betrayals of their reformist, social-chauvinist leaders.)

The SWP Rediscovered Workers

The SWP and its succession of front groups have made their choice—class collaboration rather than class struggle. But since the SWP's usefulness to its bourgeois allies depends precisely on its continued ability to lead the would-be radicals among the anti-war protesters into the Popular Front trap, the SWP now needs the left cover of a pseudo-working-class orientation. Many of the more conscious student activists cannot fail to compare the futility of the April 24 “mass action” with the virtual paralysis of New York City caused by a few thousands of militant workers, even despite their sellout leaders. So the SWP is making renewed efforts to develop the facade of a labor base. A call in the June 18 *Militant* for the NPAC Convention announces that NPAC is preparing a series of letters addressed to “various anti-war constituencies.” Prominent among these separate-but-equal “constituencies” is “trade unionists,” and several union bureaucrats are listed among the sponsors of the Convention.

But a Marxist working-class perspective does not consist of the willingness to orient towards workers (mediated through the class traitors of the labor bureaucracy, to be sure) for the purpose of including them among the various other “constituencies” assembled under the political banner of the liberal bourgeoisie. The empirical reflex of much of the U.S. left, faced with the demonstrated revolutionary aspirations of the working class following the 1968 French upsurge, has been to go where the action is by adopting a simple-minded “workerism” underlaid with the social do-goodism previously characteristic of the New Left's attitude toward the “Third World.” In this respect PL-SDS's “tactics” of “allying” with workers by showing how much you want to help them is not atypical, and provides yet another excuse for the right wing of the radical movement (perfectly typified by the SWP's Padilla as well as the old New Leftists) to justify dismissal of the working class as the force for revolution because of the false consciousness (racism, patriotism)

which simple-minded "workerism" must ignore as a principle.

To the extent that sections of the working class do remain imbued with the ideology of the bourgeoisie, groups like the SWP have only themselves to blame. Workers see their most sophisticated enemies (McCarthy, Lindsay, Hartke) lauded by the supposed "Marxists," cheered on by the labor parasites who serve the bourgeoisie within the workers' own organizations. The sections of the left who recognize the SWP's sellout for what it is must go beyond "workerism" to a program which can break the disastrous unity of anti-war militants with the most self-conscious and dangerous wing of the bourgeoisie, and replace it by a *real* unity—a unity based on a program of international class struggle:

Class Struggle Program

1. *No Liberal Bourgeois Speakers at Anti-War Rallies!* Under the rubric of "non-exclusionism" and "independence" the SWP-NPAC leadership welcomes the class enemy into the anti-war movement. The major activity of the movement's "mass actions" has been to provide both the forum and a captive audience for liberals to do their canvassing. The only real "independence" for the movement is irreconcilable opposition to the class enemy.

2. *For Labor Political Strikes Against the War!* No amount of student strikes and weekend peace crawls can force U.S. imperialism to end the Indochinese war. But a strike by U.S. workers in solidarity with the Indochinese working people could compel the capitalists to face an enemy even more potent than the Vietnamese Revolution—a powerful, organized and conscious working class in struggle for its own class interests in the very citadel of imperialism. The NPAC leadership opposes this perspective because it wants to maintain its alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, trading away the potential of a powerful, working-class-based mass movement in order to win the adherence of "moderates" to a classless, implicitly pro-capitalist line.

A struggle for this demand means the struggle against the conservative, self-interested labor bureaucracy which mortally fears any class action which would upset its peaceful coexistence with the bosses and their politicians.

3. *Break with the Capitalist Parties—For a Political Party of the Working Class!* The U.S. working class will remain politically trapped until it has built, by struggle against its fake "leaders," its own party. A workers party must have a consistent class program as well as a working-class base. We do not call upon the tested servants of capitalism, the labor bureaucrats, to form this party; we do not seek to pressure them into building a trap for the workers along the lines of the British Labour Party. We must fight *from the beginning* to make

the workers party a revolutionary party.

4. *Smash Imperialism—All U.S. Troops Out of Asia Now!* We must expose the pro-imperialist liberals who speak at the invitation of the SWP-NPAC—no negotiations, no timetables! We must make it clear that we want no bourgeois evasions—de-escalation, troop shifts, moratoriums—to interfere with the *defeat* of imperialism in Asia!

5. *Victory to the Indochinese Revolution—No Confidence in Sellout “Leaders” at Home or Abroad!* The SWP-NPAC demands “self-determination” for Vietnam. But for Marxists there is an even higher principle at stake: the class nature of the war. We have a responsibility to take sides. Our commitment to the revolutionary struggle of the Indochinese working people demands that we must give no confidence to the Stalinist traitors who have repeatedly sold out the struggle (from the Geneva Accords to the People’s Peace Treaty).⁴⁵ All Indochina Must Go Communist!

* * * * *

The document printed above was prepared for the July 1971 NPAC conference and encapsulated the sharp political struggle which had raged within the antiwar movement for six years. That conference represented a political milestone where the SWP, now class-collaborationist to the core, sealed its popular-front strategy in blood. After years of organizing toothless pacifistic conferences and “peace now” marches on a basis politically acceptable to the “dove” section of the bourgeoisie, these ex-Trotskyists finally succeeded in luring a genuine capitalist politician, U.S. Senator Vance Hartke, onto the NPAC steering committee. At the conference the SWP demonstrated that its political degeneration was matched by the appropriate organizational methods—Stalinist-style gangster attacks on left critics.

To the discomfiture of the SWP and its friend Hartke, Spartacist League supporters demanded that this imperialist spokesman be summarily excluded from the conference, and (when the SL motion was ignored by the chairman) SLers joined with supporters of Progressive Labor (PL) and SDS in soundly booing Hartke’s speech. The second major spokesman was Victor Reuther, United Automobile Workers (UAW) representative and a key red-baiting CIA lackey within the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. As Reuther rose to speak, the Spartacist delegation chanted “Labor Strikes Against the War,” a slogan designed to expose the labor leadership’s pro-imperialist hypocrisy, and then sat down.

PL supporters, who saw no difference between Reuther, a “labor lieutenant of capital” within the workers movement and Hartke, a direct representative of the bourgeoisie, attempted to prevent the

UAW misleader from speaking. At that point the SWP marshals responded to PL's verbal disruption with a vicious assault and began to physically throw them out. The SL supporters jumped up to protest these goon-squad tactics and were also attacked, resulting in injuries to several comrades.

The following day, while Hartke denounced PL as "just as responsible for the war as Nixon," the SWP capped its thug attack with a political purge and refused to allow any PL or SL supporters back into the conference. So blatantly provocative were the SWP's actions that even political tendencies that had not lifted a finger during the attack felt compelled to separate themselves from this violent exclusionism. Only one group was shameless enough to join with the SWP in the assault (later serving up nauseating "left" justifications to whitewash the SWP's anti-red purge): the Healyite Workers League, then pursuing one of its many unprincipled belly-crawling maneuvers toward the U.S. Pabloites.



WV Photo

Class-struggle contingent at March 1975 Vietnam demonstration in New York.

Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution! The War and the Class Struggle

—from RCY Newsletter No. 12, May-June 1972

Roused out of apathy by Nixon's escalation of the Vietnam war, students began a massive strike wave on Friday, April 21. On campuses across the country, the RCY is working to extend the student strikes to the working class by raising demands to turn students toward left-wing and anti-war groupings in the unions, and by raising among workers the crucial need for labor strikes against imperialist war. At Brandeis University in Boston for example, a work-stoppage committee was set up, under the direction of the RCY, to contact anti-war workers both on and off campus. At Boston University, already on strike against marine recruiters and the war, the RCY participated in the seizure of the Administration Building, then suggested, and was prominent in building, a defense squad and picket line. While sharply attacking the illusion that student actions by themselves can end the war, the RCY supports student strikes against the war and participates militantly in building such strikes, seeking to extend them to the organized working class. At Columbia University in New York City the RCY participated in militant picketing of buildings and, at mass strike meetings, presented demands aimed at defending and extending the strike, through a working-class orientation. The fact that Columbia workers met separately and voted for a work stoppage on Friday showed the practicality and immediate urgency of working with anti-war workers. At the University of California, Berkeley, all unionized campus workers are on strike for state recognition of their unions. The RCY

has been fighting to build student support for the strike with militant picket lines and seeking to link student anti-war sentiment to the workers' struggles. At UCLA and Los Angeles City College, RCYers raised the need to expand the student strike to a workers' strike, despite SWP/YSA opposition and obstructionism.

The role of the various revisionist tendencies in the current strike wave demonstrates their refusal to formulate working-class strategy for social struggles. Simple campus militancy, supported by various Maoists and leftover New Leftists, can lead at best to starting summer vacation a few weeks early. PL/SDS, while calling for "militant actions," has limited its demands to calling on the universities to divest themselves of "evil" stockholdings and ROTC. The mirror image of PL/SDS's adventurist student vanguardism is the reformist student vanguardism pushed by the SWP/YSA and its front group SMC,⁴⁶ which also ignores the need for working-class struggle, calling for students to turn campuses into "anti-war universities." The SWP/YSA seeks to use the student strikes to build its peace rallies as a left cover for McGovern-Muskie-Lindsay's presidential campaign.

The Labor Committee took a sectarian and abstentionist position on the student strikes, calling on the Columbia student strikers to "abandon anarchist tactics," adopt the full (reformist) program of the Labor Committee, and call for a city-wide meeting of the entire "non-ruling class population" on the basis of a "common-interest program." The Workers League covered its capitulation to the SWP/YSA's pop front by super-sectarianism, demanding repudiation of middle-class student strikes and "posing the question of April 22" and the building of a labor party in '72.⁴⁷ At Boston University, the WL's Pat Connolly was the only person at a mass student meeting to vote against calling a student strike!

For Labor Strikes Against the War!

Contrary to SMC claims that "in 1968 the anti-war movement forced Johnson to stop the bombing and invasion" (Columbia SMC leaflet), the re-escalation demonstrates that neither the anti-war movement nor student strikes by themselves can force U.S. imperialism out of Indochina. In fact, in 1968 Johnson did not stop the bombing; he merely moved it from the North to the South where the overall bombing was increased. Nixon only withdrew U.S. troops from Cambodia after he had opened the Cambodian border to successive waves of South Vietnamese Army invasions, U.S. aerial bombings, and last year the re-invasion of U.S. troops.

The present anti-war movement and student strikes have no real impact on the actual course of the war because they lack the social

power to challenge U.S. capitalism. Only the working class has both the social interest and the social power to fight imperialist war. The Cambodia-Kent-Jackson State student strike, while demonstrating the unquestionable opposition to the war of the overwhelming majority of students, ultimately had no real effect on U.S. government policy. On the other hand, the recent West Coast dock strike, if it had been extended to war goods, would have made it logistically impossible for the U.S. to maintain a military presence in Vietnam. Because ten thousand striking dock workers offer a far greater potential threat to capitalism than a million striking students, capitalist politicians like McGovern will support student strikes at the same time they call on Nixon to bust the dock strike.

Student strikes must be extended to labor strikes; the anti-war movement must be turned into an anti-capitalist movement. Radical students must turn their efforts toward support to the only real way of fighting imperialism: class struggle.

All Indochina Must Go Communist!

The liberal defenders of imperialism are quick to seek to turn the revulsion against Nixon's re-escalation to their own advantage. Bella Abzug, for example, rushed up to Columbia in an attempt to rally the striking students around her electoral ambitions. The elementary duty to exclude the class enemy from the student strikes must be linked with ceaseless political exposure of the liberals and fake-lefts who bring the bourgeoisie's program into the strikes. The liberals' call to "set the date"⁴⁸ only means that "date" when the Vietnamese revolution is crushed and a pro-American government stabilized. The SMC's emphasis on the single issue of troop withdrawal plays straight into Nixon's "Vietnamization" strategy of replacing U.S. soldiers with soldiers of the Saigon puppet government. To draw a hard line between those who oppose imperialism and those who seek a more popular, less costly way to buttress it, the student strikes must *take sides* with the embattled working people of Vietnam. They must oppose to the class collaborationism of the U.S. anti-war movement and of the Vietnamese Stalinists the demands:

MILITARY VICTORY TO THE NLF DRV!

ALL INDOCHINA MUST GO COMMUNIST!

CHAPTER III

A Revolution Deformed



NLF/DRV tank crashing through gates of Saigon presidential palace, 30 April 1975.

There Is No Peace! The Civil War Goes On

Statement of the Political Bureau of the Spartacist League

—from Workers Vanguard No. 16, February 1973

The American ruling class has reached a temporary bargain with the leaders of North Vietnam, in the form of an in-place ceasefire and withdrawal of U.S. troops. But neither in Vietnam nor at home does the Paris treaty mean real peace. In Vietnam the basic issues of the civil war remain unresolved. In the United States the Nixon regime is already stepping up its wave of repression, while wage controls place the burden of inflation squarely on the working class.

For the working masses of Vietnam the war goes back more than a generation, a war which has cost already more than 2 million lives, an incredible balance sheet of suffering. And yet, over the years, these heroic fighters have time and again demonstrated their resourcefulness and determination to carry the struggle against the forces of colonial and capitalist rule through to a victorious conclusion. We salute the workers and peasants who have fought and died bravely in this historic class conflict! Long live the Indochinese socialist revolution!

An Imperialist Gamble

Especially since the massacre of hundreds of thousands of workers and communists in Indonesia in 1965 accomplished a major imperialist aim in Southeast Asia, key sectors of the American bourgeoisie have favored an end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Distorting the domestic economy, undermining government authority at home, leading to repeated international monetary crises, worsening the U.S. bourgeoisie's competitive position vis-à-vis the other imperialist powers, and weakening the U.S. militarily, the war has increasingly appeared to the ruling class as a diversion from more pressing tasks. At the same time, U.S. imperialism has undergone a significant change in its global role, reducing it from the hegemonic world policeman to only the first among equals, leading to renewed sharp inter-imperialist economic rivalry and the first faint anticipations of World War III. The "American Century," not three decades old, has foundered in Vietnam. Recognizing this new position, and with promises of important new deals with the Moscow and Peking bureaucracies, the Nixon regime has decided to gamble against the possibility of an NLF/DRV victory in the South by agreeing to an "in-place" ceasefire in exchange for U.S. military withdrawal.

On the other side, the Viet Cong and the Stalinist leaders in Moscow, Peking and Hanoi are continuing contradictory policies based on their position as parasitic bureaucracies reflecting the pressures of the world bourgeoisie, but also forced, in the process of defending their own rule, to offer a real but limited defense of the workers' conquests when the very existence of the deformed workers states is threatened by imperialism. The actual policies vary somewhat according to the national interests of the bureaucracies. Thus the Soviet Union has for years been trying to force an open sellout, a liquidation of the struggle in the South, in the interests of a global entente with U.S. imperialism. This was expressed in part in the totally inadequate flow of Soviet aid to North Vietnam, vastly inferior in quantity and quality to that supplied to the bourgeois Nasser regime in Egypt, where oil, not revolution, was at stake.

The Chinese, who in the past had only shown a minor interest in the Vietnam war, have taken the same line as the Russians following the Nixon-Mao talks, which whetted their appetites for a diplomatic bloc with the U.S. The policies of these traitors today is the same as in 1954, when Chou En-lai and the Russians shoved an open sellout down the throats of the Vietnamese, who were forced to abandon vast areas of the South already under their control.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong face somewhat different pressures. On the one hand, from the very beginning they have followed a fundamental strategy of betrayal, beginning with Ho Chi Minh's support for French colonialism during the French popular front government of 1936-39. In 1946 it took the shelling of Haiphong harbor to convince the Vietnamese Stalinists that a deal with DeGaulle was impossible (at the time, they called for limited independence within the French Union!).

In South Vietnam, after abandoning the workers and peasants to the mercies of Diem, it took more than two years for the Hanoi bureaucracy to begin giving real support to the resistance struggle which began as early as 1956. Not only has the NLF consistently failed to organize the workers in class struggle against the capitalists, foreign or domestic, but their program calls not for socialist revolution but instead for a "democratic" *bourgeois* government, with firm guarantees for foreign investment and "free enterprise." The NLF/DRV peace program of a coalition government of class collaboration between workers and capitalist parties is only the icing on the cake.

Social Revolution

However, in spite of this appetite for betrayal on the part of the Stalinist leaders, they are faced at the same time with intractable social and historical realities. In the present epoch, the weak bourgeoisies of backward countries, closely intertwined with imperialism and mortally afraid of an agrarian revolution which would sweep away their dominion, are incapable of carrying out the national and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution. Today these tasks can only be carried out by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie, justifiably afraid of being quickly annihilated once deprived of massive imperialist aid, has refused to form a coalition government with the Stalinists. And the Vietminh/NLF/DRV, forced to rely on workers and peasants against imperialism, must acquiesce to certain revolutionary measures if they are to mobilize the masses. These fundamental characteristics of the epoch have made the Vietnamese war from the beginning a social revolution, with the workers and peasants on one side and the bourgeoisie ("national" and imperialist) on the other. Moreover, where the nationalist bureaucrats in Moscow and Peking are content to sell out someone else's revolution, for the equally nationalist Hanoi bureaucracy, and especially the Viet Cong, this would mean cutting their *own* throats.

Thus the NLF/DRV from their side also have agreed to a gamble, banking on the extreme fragility of the Thieu regime, the widescale corruption, and popular discontent to lead to a rapid decomposition of the Saigon government once the Americans leave. The main difference between this and the 1954 sellout is the ceasefire in-place, i.e., the continued presence of large numbers of NLF/DRV troops in the South. Because of this, and the difficulties (real, but not insurmountable) for the U.S. in reinvading, we can judge that the ceasefire does not mean an immediate liquidation of the struggle and could well eventually lead to a Viet Cong victory in the South.

However, this gamble is based on the fundamental *strategy of betrayal* which has been the essence of Vietnamese and international Stalinist policy since the inception of the struggle. There has been no Dien Bien Phu and the NLF continues to call for a coalition government, which if realized, with the Saigon military apparatus intact, could still lead to defeat.

No Support to the Robbers' Peace!

The Spartacist League does not support in any way this robbers' peace in Vietnam, in contrast with the obscene betrayal by the Stalinists and Maoists throughout the world, whose demand "Sign the Treaty" means supporting the concessions extorted by the American bourgeoisie from the Hanoi bureaucrats at the cost of the lives of tens and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and American working people! Nor do we simply limit ourselves to the correct demand of "U.S. Out of Vietnam," as does the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, since this enables them to conclude that the treaty is a victory, and therefore to give it backhanded support. The SL has always called for unconditional defense of the NLF/DRV in their struggle against imperialism, and for a military *victory* to the NLF in the South. In the civil war going on in Vietnam it is an elementary act of class solidarity to *take sides*. But we totally oppose any coalition government, or the slogan of a "neutral" Vietnam. *All Indochina Must Go Communist!* And we give no political support to the treacherous Stalinist bureaucracy. These parasitic misleaders put down by torture and murder the Vietnamese revolutionary militants—in the first place the Trotskyists—who fought from the outset in 1945 against the re-imposition of imperialism and for a socialist revolution. Should all of Indochina pass out of imperialist control it will be no thanks to Ho Chi Minh and his successors. Before the laboring masses in Vietnam can obtain even the beginnings of satisfaction of their elementary needs and hopes, a political revolution will be necessary, through revolutionary proletarian struggles, led by a Leninist, i.e., Trotskyist, party of permanent revolution. The struggle to build this party is an international task which requires an uncompromising struggle against imperialist war on a class basis, and an equally uncompromising struggle against the agents of the bourgeoisie within the workers movement, both here and in Vietnam. The only way to win a real and lasting peace in the interests of working people throughout the world is through socialist revolution!

Thieu's Troops On the Run Take Saigon!

—from Workers Vanguard No. 65, 28 March 1975

MARCH 23—U.S. imperialism's Vietnamese puppets have been compelled to surrender almost two-thirds of the territory of southern Vietnam to the forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). Nguyen Van Thieu's army is in full retreat, desperately trying to regroup around Saigon and Da Nang. Quang Tri, Kontum, Pleiku, Phobon, Darlac, Phuoc Long and Binh Long provinces have already been captured by DRV/NLF forces. The fall of Thua Thien, Khanh Hoa, Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc and Lam Dong provinces is imminent.

While Saigon's control in most of these provinces was always nominal outside of the larger towns, the current withdrawal is a stinging political and military defeat, which could take on the character of a total rout. Fleeing South Vietnamese army (ARVN) units find themselves helplessly entangled with hundreds of thousands of refugees who have clogged the roads leading from the Central Highlands south and east to the coast of the South China Sea and to Saigon.

U.S. newspapers again recite the once-familiar names of the cities and the battlefields of the northern coastal region and the Central Highlands—Khe Sanh, Phu Bai, Pleiku, An Khe, Kontum, Hue—sites of some of the bloodiest fighting of the Vietnam war. It was here that the massive buildup of American troops began ten years ago. All revolutionaries in the world, and especially the workers and peasants of Vietnam who have fought so long and suffered so much, can

celebrate the headlong retreat of the puppet forces of U.S. imperialism from this strategic area.

U.S. Imperialism, Hands Off Vietnam!

While Hanoi doubtless still seeks accommodation through the creation of a popular-front government in the South, it is not yet clear what the implications of the current offensive are. Should Thieu's army be mortally wounded and incapable of defending Saigon there will be a very strong pressure upon the American imperialists to intervene directly to head off a collapse such as that occurring in Cambodia. (A major battle near Saigon in which units of the ARVN are pulverized would produce a panic in the already shell-shocked puppet army, thus starkly posing this question.)

Vietnam is much more important to the imperialists than Cambodia. American imperialism was never directly involved in the Cambodian civil war, whereas in Vietnam it committed a very large expeditionary force. Vietnam represents an investment of billions of dollars in the most highly mechanized army in Southeast Asia. Loss of Vietnam would represent a political and military defeat of incomparably greater weight than loss of Cambodia, a defeat whose ramifications would extend far beyond Indochina.

A new American intervention into Vietnam must not be permitted. Militant workers must raise the demand: U.S. Imperialism, Hands Off Vietnam! Should such an aggression occur it would be the elementary duty of the world proletariat, and especially the American working class, to combat it by means of class-struggle actions: e.g., political strikes against intervention and the "hot-carguing" of military supplies bound to the U.S. Army and Thieu. Likewise, the Soviet Union and China must supply the DRV with the most modern weapons systems to ward off imperialist attack. Once again, as we did as early as 1964, the Spartacist League raises the call: Soviet Nuclear Shield Must Cover Hanoi!

Imperialism's Dilemma

In the current deep economic crisis and in the face of the certain widespread revulsion which a new Vietnam adventure would certainly engender, American imperialism would prefer to avoid direct military intervention in Indochina. Instead, through aid to Thieu and by seeking an accommodation with the Stalinists it hopes to extricate itself from its difficulties in the region. Present bourgeois reaction to the crumbling position of U.S. imperialism has so far been confined to blustering threats and political maneuvering amongst the various factions.

Thus, after conferring with Gerald Ford, former U.S. Vietnam commander General Westmoreland moaned that it was "too bad" that the U.S. "couldn't again mine Haiphong harbor" and fly saturation bombing raids by B-52's (*New York Times*, 14 March). Only slightly less rabid were the sentiments offered by Chief of Staff Brown, Defense Secretary Schlesinger and President Ford, all of whom have been trying to score political points for the Republican Party by blaming the Democrats for "letting Indochina go Communist."

Eager to replay the "Who lost China?" game, Ford and the Republicans accuse the Democrats of a "sudden reduction" of U.S. aid to Cambodia and Vietnam. They want to pin the collapse of the Lon Nol government and the retreat of Thieu's troops on the Democrats' aid reduction. But the issue is a red herring. Last year aid to Vietnam was \$805 million. If the Ford administration gets the \$300 million it seeks in addition to the \$700 million already appropriated for Vietnam aid this year, Thieu's loot will exceed that of any year since the Paris peace accords.

In making a plea for aid to pad the Swiss bank accounts of Thieu and his cronies, Ford and other reactionaries wept crocodile tears over the plight of the refugees created by the latest offensive. We do not deny that the human misery of these people is indeed staggering. But Ford's unctuous moralizing is just one more example of the imperialist hypocrisy from the representative of a class that has butchered *millions* in Indochina.

The hue and cry about the refugees and the incipient "communist bloodbath" comes to us from the people who saturation bombed North and South Vietnam, from the architects of "free fire zones" and "strategic hamlets," from the "humanitarians" who sprayed plant killers over whole provinces to "deny the enemy his food supply." The proletariat in power will give its own answer to these imperialist jackals.

U.S. aid will only go toward building up the "Paris Retirement Fund" for the ARVN officer corps, toward further oppressing the workers and peasants of Vietnam. We say: No Aid to the Rotting Corpses of the Reactionary Thieu and Lon Nol Regimes! Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution!

Indochina and the U.S. Antiwar Movement

As the Thieu government retreats to prepare the next year's "defensive," the Lon Nol government is precipitously collapsing in Cambodia. Lon Nol is, in fact, already packing his bags for a quick departure. Embassy files are being burned, household items shipped

out, and even U.S. relief agency personnel are trying to clear out of Cambodia (*New York Times*, 20 March).

Laos has also felt the effects of the intensifying Indochina war. According to the *Economist*, the Pathet Lao now controls about 65 percent of Laos "and could probably seize the rest easily." The dominos are tilting precariously.

In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos the Indochina civil war has raged on for years. In the United States antiwar movement it was the SL alone that carried the slogan "All Indochina Must Go Communist!" The reformists of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Communist Party (CP) who, with the liberals, led that long protest march into the Democratic Party, used to giggle at such "sectarianism." They preferred to build a movement in the United States based on the strategy of the liberal bourgeoisie: social pacifism ("Peace Now") and social patriotism ("Bring the Boys Home").

While the SWP's failure to call for the military victory of the NLF is a capitulation to liberalism, its "fraternal" colleagues of the International Majority Tendency of the United Secretariat preferred to capitulate to the popularity of Vietnamese Stalinism and Ho Chi Minh, the butcher of the Vietnamese Trotskyists. Revolutionaries cannot depend on the "logic" of armed struggle by Stalinist peasant armies which can at best create deformed workers states.

Rather, powerful Trotskyist parties capable of leading proletarian revolutions as part of a reborn Fourth International must be forged against all revisionist currents and particularly against the stranglehold of Stalinism. Such parties and such an International will never be built by those who yesterday and today chant: "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh." The SL slogans posed during the height of the antiwar movement are no less applicable today: Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution! For International Communist Unity Through Political Revolution, From East Berlin to Hanoi! No Political Confidence in the Stalinist Leadership -- All Indochina Must Go Communist! For the Rebirth of the Fourth International!



AP

Saigon police chief General Nguyen Ngo Loan shoots "suspected Vietcong sympathizer." Now the General Loans reside in the U.S.



AP

Marshall Ky with wife, 1966. In September 1970 Ky stated: "I have only one hero—Hitler. I want to infuse in our youth the same fanaticism, the same dedication, the same fighting spirit as Hitler infused in his people."

No Asylum for Indochinese Reactionaries!

**Send the Anti-Communist Butchers to
Saigon!**

Open the Borders to Chilean Refugees!

—from Workers Vanguard No. 68, 9 May 1975

Seven years ago Americans sat horrified before their TV sets as they watched a Saigon police chief, General Nguyen Ngo Loan, laugh as he shot at close range a young Vietnamese prisoner as a “suspected Viet Cong sympathizer.” Today all the General Loans are gathering at U.S. military bases in preparation for their government-sponsored entry into U.S. civilian life.

Who are “our allies” recently delivered by helicopter, ship and airplane to their asylum in the U.S.? Of course, among the 100,000 thus far evacuated are some wives and dependents of U.S. soldiers. Also, some of those fleeing have special training, like the seven doctors and six nurses who arrived at Fort Chaffee (they should have remained in Vietnam, and the SL would defend the right of the new government to hold them there where their skills are urgently needed). But in the main “our allies” are the despicable bourgeois collaborators with British, French and particularly American imperialism. They are the military officer corps and secret police which have for years “saved” the pay of foot soldiers in their own personal Swiss bank accounts for just this eventuality; the native capitalists, large landowners, drug traffickers and war profiteers who have, according

to the Swiss government, created a glut of gold bars in that country.

To justify President Ford's demagogic "Operation Baby-Lift"—the kidnapping of several thousand Vietnamese orphans (and some who aren't) in order to whip up anti-communist sentiment in the U.S. full-page newspaper ads talked of "ferrying the children to freedom." The media in the U.S. cannot pretend that "our allies" are poor peasants running from the "red menace" to the "land of the free": they arrive at the quonset huts with their matched patent leather luggage, wearing silk suits and dresses and gold bracelets from wrist to elbow. Among the Vietnamese heading for U.S. shores are such notorious imperialist war criminals as Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, well remembered in the U.S. for his "outspoken" praise of Hitler; he is also well remembered in the villages of Vietnam for the murderous bombing missions he flew, first for the French and then for the U.S.

These vicious professional anti-communist killers should not be allowed to escape punishment for their heinous crimes against the workers and peasants of Vietnam and Cambodia. The criminals must be tried and punished! The NLF and FALN⁴⁹ have set back the defense of the Indochinese Revolution by allowing them to flee. Indochinese collaborators in high places no more deserve asylum than did the Nazi High Command after World War II. Rather than flying out that murderous crowd around Thieu and Lon Nol, they should be flown back together with the U.S. war criminals from Calley to Nixon, Ford and Kissinger - to Hanoi, Saigon and Phnom Penh so their victims could try them for their barbarous acts. Justice would demand that the defoliators would be brought before the hungry, that the napalmers be confronted by the burned and maimed, that the terror bombers be judged by the survivors of their mass savagery, and that the architects of "tiger cages" now come face to face with the "tigers"!

Bourgeois Hypocrites Save Their Friends

It seems that the last terrible hypocrisy of an imperialist intervention which "destroyed villages in order to save them" must be Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger posing "moral" and "humanitarian" questions. The most rabid national chauvinists who scream for the scalps of the "illegal aliens" now rush to make votive offerings to the Statue of Liberty. Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen, tells the media not to worry about the "legal niceties" of the illegal evacuation; the President, he promises, is acting out of moral commitment. And Gerald Ford lectures the Congress, which has offered only tepid opposition to his evacuation program: it "is not worthy of a nation of immigrants."

The pious responsibility felt by the bourgeoisie for "our allies" is

not moral, but political. They simply want to preserve their core of anti-communist friends for future use. There is a modern tradition for the evacuation of defeated class enemies after a social revolution. The U.S. brought Chiang Kai-shek and his nationalists to Taiwan where they have maintained an island of anti-communism ever since. Cuban gusanos have remained as a source of anti-communist terror against Cubans (the Bay of Pigs) and other CIA "enemies" (including leftists and unionists in the U.S.).

The staggering hypocrisy of all the moralizing about "commitments" (secret or otherwise) and the "humanitarian" need to bring Indochinese "refugees" to the U.S. is demonstrated by the revealing fact that the U.S. government has refused to admit even *one* persecuted Chilean after the bloody military coup of 1973. Legislative bills which would admit the persecuted Chileans to the U.S. lie inactive before the U.S. Congress which is providing millions in so-called "humanitarian aid" to the Indochinese counterrevolutionaries. The "humanity" of the U.S. Congress, however, is extended only to those who should be sitting now in jails in Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Spartacist League does not base its hostility to these war criminals on the fear of communicable disease, increased competition for jobs in the U.S., or on the racism against Asians that has unfortunately characterized so much of the sizable opposition to opening U.S. borders to the evacuees. But we solidarize with the disgust expressed by millions of Americans at the idea of living with U.S. imperialism's cowardly professional torturers. Our compassion is also class-determined—aid the victims of right-wing repression, not the butchers who are the perpetrators of that repression!

From Bangkok to Paris to New York, wherever this fleeing pack of poisonous rats goes, they will become a center of the most dangerous and vicious anti-communist activity. Worse than the gusanos who left Cuba, "our allies" will be used by the CIA for the dirtiest of tricks against communists, labor and blacks. Socialists and the labor movement must demand: No Asylum for Indochinese War Criminals!

After the Imperialist Defeat

Indochina: Deformed Revolution

—from Workers Vanguard No. 72, 4 July 1975

For half a century the workers and peasants of Indochina have fought tenaciously to break the stranglehold of imperialism. Their heroic will to struggle has been proven by incredible endurance in the face of years of the most barbaric repression and annihilation bombing. The victory signalled by the entry of troops of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam into Saigon on April 30 belongs to the Indochinese working masses. Yet today it is not the proletariat that holds political power in Vietnam, governing through democratic soviets, but a parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy that rules.

With the panicked flight of the Saigon bourgeoisie and the clear military victory by North Vietnamese armed forces, Vietnam has been wrenched from the orbit of imperialism and capitalist rule has been toppled. Similarly, a social revolution triumphed in Cambodia a few weeks earlier with the entry of the Khmer Rouge into Phnom Penh.

Does this mean, then, that the Vietnamese and Cambodian "Communists" are the iron-willed revolutionaries portrayed by the capitalist and Stalinist press throughout the world? Does this mean that peasant-based armies can usurp the role of revolutionary vanguard which Marxism has always ascribed to the proletariat?

Does this mean that the Stalinist program of "two-stage" revolution is no longer a strategy of betrayal, as Trotskyists have maintained, but only a more "realistic" program for eventual victory?

By no means. The Vietnamese Stalinists, led by Ho Chi Minh, have repeatedly compromised and sold out the militant struggle of the working masses in the vain hope of achieving "peaceful coexistence" with the imperialists. The cost: millions of dead as the battle has been needlessly drawn out for decades.

- In the 1930's the Indochinese Communist Party abandoned the struggle for national independence, instead calling for support to the popular-front government of French imperialism. In 1939, Stalinist representatives on the Saigon municipal council voted for war credits.

- In 1945 the Stalinist-led Viet Minh welcomed British and French colonial troops into Saigon. In March 1946 Ho Chi Minh signed an agreement for limited independence within the French Union and for the reintroduction of French troops. Six months later the French bombed and shelled Haiphong.

- In 1954 the Viet Minh agreed at Geneva (under pressure from Moscow and Peking) to abandon everything below the 17th parallel, although it controlled 85 percent of the country at the time. While the puppet Diem regime in Saigon proceeded to execute thousands of peasants, Ho refused to give substantial aid to southern insurgents until 1960.

- Following the signing of the 1973 Paris "Peace" Accords, the DRV/NLF subordinated all military considerations to the achievement of a class-collaborationist coalition government. Only the wretchedness of the Saigon regime, hopelessly corrupt and slavishly dependent upon U.S. imperialism, prevented the consolidation of such a capitalist coalition government.

Indochina and the Permanent Revolution

But if the Vietnamese Stalinists are as treacherous as ever, how can the overthrow of capitalist rule in Saigon be explained by the theory of permanent revolution? Among ostensible Trotskyists there has been a wide variety of responses to this question. Some, such as the grovelling reformists of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) simply close their eyes to reality. In a statement on the taking of Saigon the SWP declared: "...the possibility now exists for achieving the long-strived-for goal of national unification and self-determination of Vietnam. The objective conditions also exist for a social revolution to abolish the entire system of exploitation for private profit" (*Militant*, 9 May). Lots of possibilities, it seems, but nothing of historical significance accomplished!

On the other hand, the SWP's factional opponents in the fake-Trotskyist "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" capitulate to the popularity of Ho Chi Minh and the NLF by declaring them to be "revolutionaries." An editorial in the 27 March *Inprecor*, the organ of the USec majority, states that "the struggle of the Indochinese peoples" has for 30 years been "a road for the struggles of the workers of the world that is an alternative to the reformist sidetrack. It is the alternative of revolutionary combat." With the taking of Saigon they announce "the first victorious 'permanent revolution' since the victory of the Cuban revolution" (*Inprecor*, 8 May).

The international Spartacist tendency has been unique in recognizing that capitalist rule has been overthrown in Vietnam and Cambodia while refusing to hide the crimes of Ho Chi Minh and his successors (such as the murder of several thousand Vietnamese Trotskyists following World War II). Calling for unconditional military defense of the deformed workers states of Indochina against imperialism, we also warn the Vietnamese working masses that they must place no confidence in their leaders, whose narrow nationalism is an obstacle to the only real defense of the gains of the Vietnamese revolution: its international extension and the ultimate obliteration of capitalism throughout the world. In order to take the revolution forward it is necessary to carry out a political revolution to overthrow Stalinist bureaucratic rule.

The establishment of deformed workers states in South Vietnam and Cambodia has come under exceptional historical circumstances. The options of U.S. imperialism were severely limited by the extreme unpopularity of renewed military intervention, the discrediting of the government in the wake of Watergate and CIA scandals, and the fact that decisive sectors of the American bourgeoisie had written off Indochina as a lost cause. Local bourgeois forces in Indochina were almost totally disorganized, unable even to rid themselves of the Thieu and Lon Nol cliques until it was too late. The decisive factor enabling the Stalinists to assume power in Indochina was the absence of a class-conscious proletariat fighting in its own interests.

The First Days of Stalinist Rule in Saigon

News reports of events in South Vietnam during the two months since the military victory of the DRV/NLF fully confirm our analysis and program. On the one hand, it is clear that there has been no "first stage" of alliance with "democratic, anti-imperialist" bourgeois forces. A general of the North Vietnamese army heads the "Military Management Committee" which administers Saigon, and no coalition government was formed. The real situation was accurately

portrayed in the reported remark of the DRV officer who removed General Duong Van Minh from the South Vietnamese presidential palace after refusing to accept a formal transfer of power from the "third force" leader: "The revolution has seized complete power. The former Administration has been overthrown. No one can hand over what they have lost" (*New York Times*, 3 May).

In the succeeding days the "third force" has played no more of a role than it did on April 30. Asked about whether such groups will be represented in an eventual South Vietnamese government, the leader of the "People's Organization for the Application of the Paris Agreements," Tran Ngoc Lien, replied: "The victors are the PRG people. Our contribution has been quite small" (*Le Monde*, 23 May). A week later, one of the main "third force" organizations, the "Women's Movement for the Right to Life," dissolved in order to join the South Vietnam Liberation Women's Association, according to the official newspaper *Sai Gon Giai Phong* ("Liberated Saigon").

Concerning the question of nationalizations, the new authorities have issued contradictory statements. All abandoned properties (the majority of the industrial and major commercial establishments) have been expropriated. So, too, have the banks. On the other hand, a number of substantial French-owned businesses have been officially informed that they may stay on indefinitely, including Michelin and other major rubber plantations and the main brewery (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 June 1975). This, however, is not decisive in determining the class character of a state. The Bolsheviks did not begin widespread nationalizations until mid-1918, although the Soviets seized power nine months earlier, and privately owned industry was not finally eliminated until the mid-1920's.

The fundamental question is what class interests the state power serves. Although many "re-educated" civil servants may eventually serve in the new administration (just as a former economics minister is reportedly aiding the new authorities in reviving the economy), it is clear that the old capitalist state apparatus has been totally destroyed. This is particularly true of the former Saigon army, which melted away in a matter of hours.

For Workers Soviets, Not Bureaucratic Rule

The organizational framework of the new state power has not yet been decided. It is clear that, while for a time there will be a separate South Vietnam, rapid reunification is being sought. All references to the "People's Revolutionary Party" (which supposedly was the core of the NLF) have now been dropped, and a leading South Vietnamese official, Pham Hung, was recently officially described as a "member of the Vietnam Workers Party Central Committee Political Bureau

and secretary of the South Vietnam party organization" (*New York Times*, 20 May). A North Vietnamese radio broadcast reportedly announced that the DRV National Assembly had urged that Hanoi be the capital of the reunited country.

But while the capitalist state has been decisively smashed, and the remaining bourgeois forces have been politically atomized so that they are presently incapable of acting as a coherent force, the dictatorship of the exploiters has not been replaced by the democratic rule of the exploited through soviets such as existed in Russia at the time Lenin and Trotsky headed the Communist Party.

In a recent article entitled "Permanent Revolution in Vietnam" (*Inprecor*, 22 May), the USec majority's "Indochina expert" Pierre Rousset tries to mask this crucial fact by giving a distorted picture of the DRV/NLF takeover in Da Nang. After referring to "clandestine urban military actions; popular insurrectional movements; mass demonstrations" he concludes, "The new administration grows out of revolutionary action, and not primarily military action."

The USec is now willing to admit to the existence of certain "bureaucratic deformations" in North Vietnam, and even that the "revolutionary" Vietnamese leaders have "a programmatic adaptation... to the political heritage of the Stalinized Third International" which "continues to limit the conception that the Vietnamese CP has of the place in the workers state of structures of the Soviet type." But clearly this is only a minor omission in their eyes, which could be easily rectified by inviting Ernest Mandel to give speeches to the bureaucrats in Hanoi and Saigon as he used to do in Havana.

In fact, the DRV/NLF victory was one of military occupation of the cities and there were no generalized urban uprisings by the working class. Nor are there any democratic organs through which the proletariat can determine government policy. It was precisely such soviet-type organs which were set up 30 years ago in Saigon at the initiative of the Trotskyist International Communist League and which were the organizing centers of the mass insurrection against the reinvading colonial troops after the end of World War II. Just as the Viet Minh opposed the "people's committees" (To Chuc Uy Banh Hanh Dong), first opposing and then sabotaging the Saigon insurrection of 1945, so today the Vietnamese Stalinists would quickly suppress any attempt by the working masses to set up political organs independent of bureaucratic control.

As for the "revolutionary people's committees" reportedly being established at the neighborhood level in the major cities, their relation to workers democracy is accurately expressed in the ceremonies in which these previously unknown "leaders" are

“presented” to the population (for a description, see *Le Monde*, 16 May).

Bureaucratic Depopulation of Cambodian Towns

In sharp contrast to the halting nationalizations of the South Vietnamese Stalinists, the victorious Cambodian Khmer Rouge has had no reluctance to expropriate the remnants of capitalist property. All imperialist investments and enterprises, including the important rubber plantations, have been taken over (*Le Monde*, 12 June). The Cambodian leadership has, however, moved just as swiftly in acts of bureaucratic stupidity and cruelty. The contradictory character of Stalinism was nowhere more graphically revealed than in the actions of the victorious Cambodian peasant army marching into Phnom Penh not to liberate the poor and working people but rather to brutally impose an immediate and total depopulation of the city.

For the bourgeois press, the gun-point depopulation was an anti-Communist propaganda bonanza, Sydney Schanberg's powerful and believable eyewitness account described how “Hospitals jammed with wounded were emptied right down to the last patient. They went limping, crawling on crutches...” (*New York Times*, 9 May). It was an easy opportunity for professional cold warriors to characterize Communism as “anti-civilization.” Liberals pontificated about Communists revelling in “inhumanity” and even Henry Kissinger (!) felt he could label this a “major atrocity.”

For Stalinist cheerleaders of peasant-based guerrillaism these were simply cleansing actions in the “re-education” of urban dwellers. At the height of Stalin's bureaucratic forced-draft collectivization (which even Russian authorities now admit cost the lives of several million peasants) similar disingenuous apologies for bureaucratic arbitrariness were proffered by one Anna Louise Strong. Trotsky, of course, had called for collectivization (long before Stalin finally carried it out), but through the voluntary choice of the peasants.

In Cambodia some urban depopulation was indeed called for. The towns had become unmanageably swollen with refugees from the countryside, most driven there by U.S. saturation bombing. But Phnom Penh, which had already discharged its thin layer of capitalists, also contained a stratum of workers and petty bourgeoisie constituting the only developed basis of Cambodia's urban economy. For Marxists it is crucial to preserve this economic infrastructure while beginning an orderly program for the relocation of the peasant refugees. In any case the working and poor population should have itself decided in democratic soviets how to deal with artificially overpopulated cities. Certainly they would not decide to drive out the aged and the infirm, which surely would kill them.

Today there is the beginnings of a repopulation of the urban centers, but reportedly with selected relocated peasants who are given lessons in "urban hygiene." A thin bureaucracy worried that it cannot control a proletariat will continue policies designed to consolidate its rule at the expense of the interests of the laboring masses.

For Political Revolution!

In the wake of the overthrow of capitalist rule in Vietnam and Cambodia (and the continuing consolidation of state power in the hands of the Pathet Lao to the north), cynical Stalinist apologists will soon begin inventing "explanations" for the absence of a "democratic" stage of the Indochinese Revolution. The fake-Trotskyist centrists of the USec majority can be expected to continue their time-honored policy aspiring to be the "theoretician"-lawyers and (unsolicited) advisers of the new Stalinist regimes as they have attempted to do with Castro, Mao and Ho Chi Minh in the past. The SWP will continue with its head-in-the-sand posture until its refusal to recognize the reality of a social revolution becomes an embarrassment in petty-bourgeois milieus -- whereupon it will then discover a peaceful transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Those who would defend the banners of authentic Trotskyism must declare clearly that it is the duty of all class-conscious workers to defend the historic gains represented by the overthrow of capitalist class rule in the new deformed workers states of Indochina. At the same time they must struggle to take the revolutionary gains forward, by workers political revolution against bureaucratic rule in Hanoi, Saigon and Phnom Penh. This task -- the taking of the reins of state power by the laboring masses themselves and the international extension of the revolution in both capitalist and deformed workers states -- requires the leadership of Trotskyist parties in Indochina as a part of a reborn Fourth International.

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Footnotes:

- ¹ Ahn-Van and Jaqueline Roussel, *Mouvements nationaux et lutte de classes au Vietnam*, Paris, 1947, pp. 47-51. Except where otherwise indicated, most of the factual information is taken from this book.
- ² Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam*, Paris, 1955, p. 448.
- ³ Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina 1940-1955*, Stanford, 1954, p. 92.
- ⁴ Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 à 1952*, Paris, 1952, p. 69.
- ⁵ *La Lutte*, No. 205, 14 August 1938.
- ⁶ Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
- ⁷ Jean Chesneaux, *Contribution à l'histoire de la nation vietnamienne*, Paris, 1955, p. 230.
- ⁸ Lucien, "Quelques étapes de la révolution au Nam-Bo du Viet-Nam," *Quatrième Internationale*, September-October 1947, p. 43. Much of the factual information in this section is taken from this article.
- ⁹ Devillers, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
- ¹⁰ Lucien, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Pierre Rousset, *Le parti communiste vietnamien*, Paris, 1973, p. 26.
- ¹⁴ "1945: The Saigon Insurrection," *Spartacist West* No. 17, 22 August 1969. Most of the details on the September insurrection come from this article.
- ¹⁵ Alan W. Cameron, ed., *Viet-Nam Crisis, A Documentary History*, Vol. I, pp. 66-67.
- ¹⁶ I. Milton Sacks, *Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam*, unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1960, p. 224.
- ¹⁷ "Les Trotskyistes au Tonkin (Lettre de Hong Kong)," *Quatrième Internationale*, January-February 1948, pp. 71-72.
- ¹⁸ Quoted by Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, New York, p. 148.
- ¹⁹ Chesneaux, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
- ²⁰ Harold Isaacs, *No Peace for Asia*, pp. 173-174.
- ²¹ Bob Potter, "The Rape of Vietnam," *Solidarity* pamphlet, p. 9.
- ²² Quoted in Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
- ²³ Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Hammer, *op. cit.*, pp. 198, 200.
- ²⁴ Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
- ²⁵ Chesneaux, *op. cit.*, p. 298.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 297, 300.
- ²⁷ Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong*, Cambridge, 1966, pp. 51-52.
- ²⁸ NY Times, *The Pentagon Papers*, New York, 1971, p. 48.
- ²⁹ Bernard Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, New York, 1967, p. 246.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-273.
- ³¹ Le Duan, *On the Socialist Revolution in Vietnam*, Hanoi, 1965, Vol. I.
- ³² "Program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (1960)," in Bernard Fall and Marcus Raskin, eds., *The Viet-Nam Reader*, New York, 1967, pp. 216-218.
- ³³ Quoted in Wilfred Burchett, *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War*, New York, 1965, p. 187.

- ³⁴Comité central, Groupe communiste internationaliste vietnamien en France, "Nouvelle étape de la contre-révolution et de l'offensive impérialiste en Indochine," *Quatrième Internationale*, November-December 1947, p. 64.
- ³⁵Rousset, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ³⁷*Newsletter*, 9 September 1969.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*
- ³⁹"The Vietnamese Revolution and the Fourth International," *Fourth International*, February 1968.
- ⁴⁰*Newsletter*, 9 September 1969.
- ⁴¹On 15 April 1967 several hundred thousand people participated in a New York City anti-war demonstration dominated by liberal pacifist and civil rights spokesmen like Rev. Martin Luther King and Dr. Benjamin Spock, then national chairman of SANE.
- ⁴²During the October 21 demonstration in front of the Pentagon a band of hippies carried out a publicity stunt attempt to "levitate" the Pentagon by means of chants, songs and flute melodies.
- ⁴³Prior to King's assassination in February 1968, a "third party" presidential ticket of the pacifist civil rights leader and liberal baby doctor Spock was widely touted within the class-collaborationist anti-war movement.
- ⁴⁴In early May 1971, a disparate conglomeration of New Leftists attempted to "shut down" Washington, D.C., by blocking major traffic arteries. Ten thousand demonstrators were arrested by a massive force of police, national guardsmen and federal troops, and the so-called anti-war "Spring Offensive" proved a total failure. In an attempt to bolster its bid to take leadership of the class-collaborationist peace movement away from the SWP and NPAC, the Communist Party-backed Peoples' Coalition for Peace and Justice (PCPJ) supported the Mayday Tribe's idiot confrontationism.
- ⁴⁵The PCPJ pushed the Stalinist liberal scheme for a symbolic declaration of peace between the "people" of the United States and the "people" of Vietnam. The "treaty" begged U.S. imperialists to "set a date" by which they would commit themselves to removing U.S. forces from Indochina.
- ⁴⁶The Student Mobilization Committee, campus arm of the SWP-led National Peace Action Coalition.
- ⁴⁷Made nervous by the militancy of the strike movement which swept American college campuses following the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, and particularly following the killing of four student protesters at Kent State University in Ohio, the ultra-respectable SWP SMC played almost no role in the campus upsurge. The Workers League Young Socialists, eagerly tailing the SWP, openly opposed the strikes and sought only to build its own contingents for the April 22 NPAC SMC liberal peace crawl which it "critically" supported.
- ⁴⁸A reformist scheme for *future* U.S. withdrawal, advocated both by elements within NPAC and by Congressional liberals. See footnote 45.
- ⁴⁹The National Liberation Armed Forces, military arm of the National United Front of Kampuchea (Cambodia), whose Stalinist core was the "Khmer Rouge."

Telegram to Ho Chi Minh

This cablegram was sent on the day the U.S. air attacks against North Vietnam were begun:

Sunday, 7 February 1965

**President Ho Chi Minh,
Democratic Republic of Vietnam
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

**Spartacist in fullest solidarity with defense of your
country against attack by United States imperialism.
Heroic struggle of Vietnamese working people
furthers the American revolution.**

Spartacist Editorial Board

—from Spartacist No. 4, May-June 1965



In the Indochinese masses' decades-long battle against imperialism, Stalinism and Trotskyism met in repeated bitter conflict. While the Stalinists, led by Ho Chi Minh (above), supported "democratic" French colonialism in the late 1930's and World War II, Ta Thu Thau (below) and the Vietnamese Trotskyists fought for independence and proletarian revolution. When Trotskyists stood at the head of the 1945 Saigon insurrection, the Stalinists joined imperialist expeditionary forces in strangling the working-class revolt and murdering its leaders.