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POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS OF VIETNAMESE NATIONALISTS

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POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS OF VIETNAMESE NATIONALISTS

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INTRODUCTION

On September 2, 1945, shortly after the Japanese surrender, the Vietnam Democratic Republic was proclaimed in Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, three of the five administrative divisions of French Indochina. The new state is inhabited principally by Vietnamese (until then called Annamese), and is ethnically and linguistically separate from Cambodia and Laos, the other two divisions. Abroad, significance of the new development was not immediately recognized. There had been some awareness of the existence of nationalist feeling among the indigenous population of Indochina, and some advocacy of a new status. It was not thought, however, that a vigorous and purposeful nationalist leadership was ready to demand recognition of "the independence and unity of Vietnam."

Within the past four years, the Vietnamese nationalist movement has proved to be one of the strongest colonial independence movements of the postwar period. In spite of its importance, little is known about its character and antecedents. The following is an effort to present such information as is available about political alignments in Vietnam and to sketch a frame of reference within which current developments may be judged. In view of the paucity and the partisan nature of the sources, such an interpretation must of necessity be tentative.

The intrinsic strength of Vietnamese nationalism is drawn from a feeling of identity shared throughout Vietnam by all classes of the population. This feeling rests on a common pattern of language, script, literature, religion, art, customs, social institutions, and government evolved over a period of 2,000 years. Although Vietnamese civilization includes many elements absorbed from abroad, particularly from China, it is an integrated national heritage.

Before the French achieved complete control of Indochina in the 1880's, political awareness among the broad mass of the population hardly extended beyond

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the village. Autonomous in its internal affairs, the Vietnamese agricultural community was tied to the central government only through a civil service of mandarins responsible to an absolute monarch. Even within the village, an oligarchic system of government limited responsible participation in the local administration to a minority. Vietnamese institutions fostered extreme localism and discouraged contact beyond the village.

The French system of administration and French economic and cultural influences rapidly destroyed the traditional pattern of local isolation and self-sufficiency. Local efforts to cope with the invader failed. However, the very disintegration of the old pattern and the opening up of the whole country to new foreign influences paved the way for the gradual transformation of the traditional feeling of cultural unity into an intense nationalism. The present-day alignments of Vietnamese nationalists reflect the whole range of Vietnamese political efforts to find solutions for the problems that arose in the wake of French control. In the search for such solutions, political forces within the country responded strongly to the major political influences that were brought to bear on Indochina. The strength of various political parties in Indochina fluctuated with the rise and decline of their counterparts abroad. Although all Indochinese nationalists shared a common goal -- the end of French rule -- the means they chose for reaching it not only differentiated them in ideological allegiance but also in some instances led to fratricidal conflict.

Open resistance to French rule first came from elements of the mandarin class that rose in defense of the old order against the new. They were defeated by superior force of arms and then sapped of their remaining strength by the transfer of their functions to the French civil service. The next response reflected recognition of the superior effectiveness of Western ways. On the one hand, there was an adaptation to the conqueror and an effort to reform Vietnamese society in the French image; on the other, there was a search for aid abroad. The Japanese,

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in particular, seemed to have the formula for meeting the challenge of the West. The rise and fall of Japanese imperial ambition was accompanied in Indochina by a parallel development of political groups that maintained contact with and received monetary aid from Japan. The Chinese nationalist movement also had its repercussions in Indochina. In seeking external bases for operations in Indochina on Chinese soil, in aligning themselves with the various Chinese parties, and in accepting help from them, the Vietnamese nationalists utilized the continuing historical interest of successive Chinese regimes in Indochina.

The deepest imprint on Vietnamese political organization was made by the French party system. This was due in part to the fact that decisions on colonial policy were matters of internal French politics and therefore evoked among the educated Vietnamese intense interest in French political alignments. Beyond this immediate concern, many Vietnamese became thoroughly imbued with French political thinking through years of study and residence in France. As a result, those French parties which were amenable to demands for colonial improvements called forth parallel organizations in Indochina. New elements of Vietnamese society who prospered under French rule developed reform parties that sought redress for their grievances from the moderate political groups in the metropolitan country. Similarly, the French Socialist, Communist, and Trotskyist movements were mirrored in Indochina, a trend stimulated by developments in the USSR and China. Lastly, French Catholicism maintained bonds with the Catholic minority in Indochina that are reflected in political groupings. In periods of acute economic distress the activities of these groups were reinforced by revolts among the otherwise politically inert peasantry.

These in brief are the main formative influences within Vietnamese nationalism. They are strongest among the most mobile and articulate elements of Vietnamese society: French-trained Vietnamese administrators, urbanized groups, industrial and plantation laborers, and soldiers with overseas service

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in France. But under the stimulus of World War II, indigenous political movements in Indochina reached a level of organizational integration and breadth of popular support that permitted operations on a nation-wide scale. The war provided various groups with opportunities to capture the leadership of the nationalist movement. The group that ultimately emerged in the fore was the Vietnam Independence League, popularly known as the Viet Minh. Its principal organizer and leader was the Communist Ho chi Minh, who became President of the Vietnam Democratic Republic. His personality and prestige contributed in large measure to the maintenance of a broad coalition of diverse political groups behind his government. Ho's government has recently been challenged by another established under the aegis of France, with Bao Dai, the prewar and wartime Emperor of Annam, as Chief of State. In the first four months of its existence, however, this new regime has not brought about a significant realignment of political forces within Indochina.

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POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS OF VIETNAMESE NATIONALISTS

I. ORIGIN OF THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT: THE ERA OF PLOTS, 1884-1918

A. General Characteristics 1

The present-day nationalist movement in Vietnam originated during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. At that time a number of movements were organized by mandarin and monarchical circles in opposition to a French colonial policy that tended to destroy the traditional forms of government. Popular support of these movements was limited by the same factors that had permitted French conquest: The authoritarian character of the old regime, its corruptibility, and its inability to meet French military and political power on equal terms. Nevertheless, the challenge presented by French colonization evoked a number of determined and violent attempts against the invader.

In Cochinchina, which became a French colony, the mandarins withdrew before the French, leaving a void that was gradually filled by direct French administration. In the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin, however, the French succeeded in using the mandarins as intermediaries with the population while depriving them systematically of their position of leadership. Even so, the French continued to consider the mandarins a reactionary and essentially hostile class whose disintegration would facilitate the development of a modern administration. They deliberately destroyed the prestige of the mandarins by making arbitrary appointments, discontinuing the educational system that emphasized Chinese tradition, disregarding the Vietnamese codes, and introducing elements of direct administration by French officials through the medium of native interpreters. In time, the mandarin class was completely destroyed except for some ornamental survivals at the Imperial Court whose obvious impotence discredited them as political leaders of a nationalist movement.

Resistance of the traditionalist elements did not lead to a mass movement against the French, but many of the personalities involved in the early struggle became legendary patriotic figures. Vietnamese culture places great emphasis on historical tradition, and later nationalists carefully nurtured the myth of direct

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continuity of their movements with the earliest manifestations of nationalism. The methods employed during the early period -- passive resistance, court intrigue, formation of secret societies with strong internal discipline based on adherence to individual leaders, plots, assassinations, military insurrection, guerrilla warfare, educational movements, and recourse to foreign aid -- set a pattern that was utilized subsequently by other nationalists.

F. Individual Movements

The first movement of the mandarin group that resembled a political party was the Scholars' Party (Van Than Dang)¹ in northern Annam, formed at the time of the establishment of the French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin in 1883. The Scholars' Party was a secret society. It comprised the irreconcilables of the mandarin who regarded the imposition of French rule and culture as a barbaric intrusion into Vietnamese society. Considerable court intrigue on their part culminated in 1885 in a plot by the Emperor Ham Nghi and the regent, Ton that Thuyet, to drive out the French.² Uprisings in Annam and Tonkin began with an attack on the French garrison at Hue, Annam. It took the French four years to quell the movement. Ham Nghi was exiled in 1888,³ but other military revolts continued.

Of the many famous military figures who waged war against the French, two of the most celebrated were Hoang hoa Tham⁴ and Phan dinh Phung.⁵ Hoang hoa Tham, better known as De Tham, "The Tiger of Yen The," was so successful in his military activities against the French that they compromised with him in 1897 and recognized his autonomous rule over a large area in Thai Nguyen Province in northern Tonkin. (His rule lasted until 1913.) Phan dinh Phung, following the defeat of Ham Nghi, raised the banner of independence under the symbol of imperial restoration. His troops, noted for the modern training they had received, fought the French in Ha Tinh Province in northern Annam from 1893 to 1896. Phan boi Chau, later one of the most famous Vietnamese nationalists, began his political activities as a supporter

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of Phan dinh Phung.

In the end, the French were successful in their campaigns of pacification. Many of the rebellious mandarins were forced to seek refuge in southern China, which became a center for emigrant Vietnamese nationalists. In 1902, Phan boi Chau went to China in the hope of soliciting aid from the émigré Vietnamese and the Chinese Government. He traveled extensively and received sympathetic hearing but little material aid. He also visited Japan and there laid the basis for the creation of an overseas training center for Vietnamese revolutionists.¹ From China and Japan, Phan boi Chau addressed poetic appeals to his compatriots in Indochina. These messages, the best known of which is the "Overseas Letter Written in Blood," struck a sympathetic chord in many young intellectuals.²

Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 had an important effect on Vietnamese political developments. It encouraged many of the educated leaders to seek through the modernization of Vietnamese life a road to success over their Western oppressor, France. This changed attitude opened the way for Western as well as Chinese and Japanese influences. Two parallel phenomena developed. One consisted of conspiratorial activity with foreign support, centered in the secret society known as the Vietnam Modernization League (Vietnam Duy Tan Hoi), formed in 1904 by Phan boi Chau.³ The other was the creation of the "Tonkin Free School" (Dong Kinh Nghia Thuo)⁴ movement to educate the people of Vietnam through the establishment of a series of free schools for higher education. This second tendency reflected modern French influence within the traditional leadership.

Phan boi Chau returned to Indochina in 1905 to raise funds to send young nationalists to Japan for training. In January 1906, he left for voluntary exile in Japan with the first contingent of Vietnamese students, among whom was the young Prince Nguyen Cuong De.⁵ These students actively sought Japanese aid for the purpose of freeing their country from the French and installing the prince on the throne

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of Annam. In the period from 1906 to 1909, about 150 students went to Japan to receive a military and political education from their Japanese teachers.⁴

The movement for popular education in Indochina reached a high point with the opening of the "Tonkin Free School" at Hanoi in 1907. A leading role in this venture was played by Phan chu Trinh,² a famous Vietnamese scholar trained in both the Chinese and French ways of thinking. The school evoked considerable popular support and encouraged a mass movement whose supporters were known as the "Hair-Cutters" (Dong Bao) because they sought to modernize the culture of the Vietnamese by discarding old-fashioned customs such as wearing of a queue. Both movements were brought under French interdiction in 1908 during a period of general revolutionary upheaval in Indochina. The school was closed on the ground that it was a center of subversive activity and the "Hair-Cutters" were suppressed by military action when they developed a program of social reform that called, among other things, for reduction of taxes.³ Phan chu Trinh was deported to France.⁴ In exile, he became the teacher and leader of many young Vietnamese students in Paris. The young radical Nguyen ai Quoc, later known as Ho chi Minh,⁵ the first president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, was one of these students.⁵

The role played by the Imperial Court in Hue in the nationalist movement declined steadily in importance. The weakness of the court was shown in 1907 by the relative lack of popular reaction to the dethronement and exile of Emperor Thanh Thai,¹ who was removed by the French for court intrigue directed against their authority. The nationalist movement under the leadership of Phan boi Chau, however, continued its clandestine activity within the country and maintained liaison with émigré groups in China and Japan. In 1908, a series of revolutionary disturbances occurred throughout Annam and Tonkin. The movement was joined by Hoang hoa Tham,

* See below, pp. 28 ff.

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"the Tiger of Yen The," who was implicated in a plot to poison the French garrison at Hanoi in June 1908.¹ The rebellion was suppressed by the French authorities. Expected aid from Sun Yat-sen and southern Chinese did not materialize.² Hoang Hoa Tham was finally killed in 1914.³

Since Cochinchina was a colony rather than a protectorate, the nationalist movement took a different form there. The existence of a greater degree of freedom of the press led to publicity for many of the Vietnamese grievances and brought certain improvements. There was less reliance on force on the part of both the French and the Vietnamese. The nationalists masked their clandestine activities by creating a network of commercial enterprises. The famous Gilbert Chieu conspiracy was discovered in the course of French investigation of this movement, which the French regarded as little more than a manifestation of Japanese espionage activities:

"With Gilbert Chieu, nationalism was of Chinese intellectual character, clearly xenophobic, created by former scholars whose careers as "professors of Chinese characters" has been wrecked by the French Schools, and, what was worse in their eyes, whose social prestige was ruined. Gilbert Chieu has the arrogance of these first xenophobes, intellectual half-breeds, wrecked by hate.

"Although he spoke and wrote French -- nothing more -- he had retained the imprint of his original Chinese education. This made him all the more dangerous to French influence, because he utilized the link created by character writing to assure himself of the support of the scholars who had been supplanted by the operation of our social system. He entered into relations with secret Chinese societies and maintained contacts of a clearly intelligence character with Japanese agents. The latter then developed around Saigon, in retaliation against our alliance with Russia, a network of brothels where the charms of Japanese waitresses, trained for espionage, served as bait for our European non-commissioned officers who were thus exposed to annoying mishaps.

"Gilbert Chieu's program was summed up in the formula: Drive the French out of Indochina. His activities -- filled with hatred for us -- happily were unmasked in time, not so much for the benefit of French peace, as in the interest of the legitimate aspirations of the Annamese people and of the possibilities of collaboration with them. The undertaking was liquidated by a long criminal action, diffuse and complicated by incidents involving the Japanese Government. To sum up, the mountain delivered a mouse...Not even that, because in order to calm Japanese apprehensions, all the conspirators, headed by Gilbert Chieu, benefitted from a nolle prosequi ordinance, motivated,

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one might say -- although it may cause embarrassment to the distinguished magistrate (M. Guy de Ferrieres) -- by requirements of a diplomatic rather than judicial nature."¹

Although the proceedings were quashed, the disclosures made in the course of the trial resulted in the expulsion of the Vietnamese students from Japan in 1909. The center for nationalist activities shifted to southern China. Many of the students formerly in Japan now enrolled in the Chinese military academy at Pao-t'ing.² A unified leadership for nationalist agitation in Indochina was reconstituted at Canton in 1912, when Phan boi Chau formed the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Minh Hoi)³ and proclaimed a Provisional Government of the Republic of Annam.⁴ The Vietnamese leaders, many of whom had been sentenced to prison terms after the unsuccessful movement in 1908, continued their work under its aegis both in prison and in exile.⁵

The Vietnam Restoration League was involved in insurrectionary attempts in 1913,⁶ and various further attempts to overthrow French rule, with and without the participation of the League, were made during World War I. None of them found a mass following, however, and all were easily suppressed by the French military. The Emperor Duy Tan was exiled in 1916.⁷ Since then the name of the Vietnam Restoration League has been connected with every major political upheaval in Indochina. Several later nationalist groups have traced their origin to it. It still represents elements of the conservative mandarin-royalist group, and Prince Cuong De continues as its titular head.* Active leadership of the nationalist movement, however, was assumed by other groups soon after World War I.

* See below, pp. 50 ff.

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II. NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS, 1918-41

A. General Characteristics¹

During the period between the two world wars, the Vietnamese nationalist movement underwent great changes in character. Its principal source of strength was popular dissatisfaction with French rule rather than the hostility of the old regime to the French. In its political aims, it was oriented no longer toward the restoration of Vietnam's traditional institutions but toward establishment of a modern state along Western lines. Leadership came increasingly from the French-trained intellectuals rather than from the mandarinats.

World War I itself had a profound effect on Vietnamese nationalism. Some 100,000 Vietnamese were shipped to France to aid the war effort. Many of them returned fired with the desire to transform their own country in the light of their newly acquired Western knowledge and determined to achieve the standards of democracy and self-government that they had seen applied in France. Their experience in France, and the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917, further acquainted the Vietnamese nationalists with Socialism and Communism, whose criticism of colonial policy supplied them with ideological weapons.

Immediately following World War I, there was a marked upsurge of democratic ideas in Indochina. Concepts of freedom of the press, assembly, and association gained currency. Vietnamese nationalists demanded a broadening of the educational system, provision for large-scale admission of Vietnamese into governmental administration, extension of the franchise, social legislation, and rights equal to those of the French in Indochina. Under the Governor Generalships of Albert Sarraut (1917-20)² and Maurice Long (1920-22)³, modifications were made in the governmental structure that provided for a semblance of native representation. These reforms stimulated the appetite of the Vietnamese for further rights.

The legal basis of censorship and other forms of political control in

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Indochina lay in the authority vested by the French Parliament and ministerial decrees in the Governor General of the Indochinese Federation and in the governors of the five states of Indochina. There was no separation of legislative and administrative functions in Indochina, and the ordinances that related to press control and political association were changed in accordance with administrative needs and policies. Newspapers were suppressed even if they had complied with all requirements known at the time of publication, including pre-censorship. There was no effective recourse against acts of the administration. The guarantees of individual liberties contained in the French Constitution were interpreted by the French courts as not applying in Indochina.

The French authorities permitted more freedom in the directly administered colony of Cochinchina than in the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin. In 1923, the Constitutionalist Party,^{*} the first of several moderate reform parties, was legally established in Cochinchina.¹ A native press appeared. The years 1924-25 were the high point of the French reform movement. However, underground student and revolutionary societies also developed, as did an illegal press.

Nationalist activity during the 1920's centered around several outstanding events. In 1924 a Vietnamese student in Canton, Pham hong Thai,² unsuccessfully tried to kill Governor General Martial Merlin when he visited there. Pham hong Thai, who apparently acted on his own initiative, lost his life in the attempt and subsequently became a Vietnamese national hero. In June 1925 Phan boi Chau^{**} was arrested by the French police in the French concession in Shanghai. His sentence to death on November 23, 1925 touched off a series of protest meetings and demonstrations.³ Further nationalist agitation accompanied memorial services for

* See below, pp. 12 ff.

** See above, pp. 3 ff.

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Phan Chu Trinh,^{*} who had returned to Indochina and died at Saigon, March 24, 1926.¹ School strikes and manifestoes made their appearance. The reforms demanded by even the moderate nationalists went far beyond the plans of the colonial administration, and, with the removal of the liberal Governor Alexandre Varenne in March 1927, the reform parties were temporarily eclipsed.

The nationalists who had participated in the reform movements turned elsewhere. In Cochinchina, a strong religious movement called Cao-Daism^{**} emerged. In Tonkin and Annam, revolutionary nationalist parties began to grow, as did the Communist movement. While the movement toward religion was essentially a turning away from political action, the revolutionary movement was a direct continuation of the reform movements with alternative methods. In 1929, as a result of the impact of the world economic depression on Indochina, a wave of discontent, directed against the French administration, swept Indochina. In 1930, revolutionary groups led by the Vietnam Nationalist Party made a bid for power in the now famous Yen Bay rebellion.^{***} This was followed by the setting up of "soviets" among the peasants of Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces (Annam) by the Indochinese Communist Party.^{****} These insurgent movements were completely suppressed by the French, and the clandestine leadership of both parties went into exile in South China and Thailand.

As a result of the clash between the revolutionary nationalists and the French during the period 1930-32, the remaining reformist politicians were also placed in a difficult position. Many of the more radical nationalists came to regard them as traitors. Popular feeling turned increasingly against compromise with the French. With the defeat of the insurrectionary movement, the reform movement, too, declined.

* See above, p. 4.

** See below, pp. 14 ff.

*** See below, pp. 24 ff.

**** See below, pp. 36 ff.

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In 1933, the disorganized nationalist movement reformed its ranks by constituting an organization known as "The Struggle" (La Lutte) group.* The membership of this organization embraced Socialists, Communists, and Trotskyists who, taking advantage of the relatively liberal French press laws in Cochinchina, published a Saigon newspaper in French called La Lutte. This legal cover for the underground movement provided it with an opportunity to participate in the May 1933 elections for the Saigon municipal council.¹ The movement succeeded in electing two of its leaders. Its success in the elections indicated that public interest was centered not on matters of local administration but on issues of general political and economic reform. The moderate groups had been greatly weakened in personnel and conviction during the immediately preceding period of persecution of the nationalist movement.

Although methods of repression applied by the colonial administration were successful, they aroused criticism in the metropolitan country and abroad. By 1935, there was a corresponding liberalization of the administrative regime. The pressure of the newly formed Popular Front in France contributed to this process. "The Struggle" group developed considerable popular support. The nationalists who came to the fore were those who had been most successful in clandestine operations and now benefited from the prestige of the Popular Front. They campaigned on issues on which the French administration was not prepared to make concessions. Strikes and labor agitation multiplied.

Following the victory of the Popular Front in the elections of 1936 in metropolitan France, a French parliamentary commission visited Indochina to determine the reasons for the periodic turmoil and unrest and recommended reformation of the colonial regime, but its report had little effect.

With the collapse of the Popular Front government in France in 1938, the colonial administration regained its freedom of action against the nationalists.

* See below, pp. 38 ff.

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The danger of Japanese expansion and the outbreak of World War II led to renewed suppression of the Communists and revolutionary nationalists, many of whom has exposed themselves during the period of legality.

Following the German defeat of France, clandestine nationalist activities increased. Some groups began to lean toward the Japanese, whose growing influence and power were being felt as French prestige suffered. This trend was, however, not exploited by the Japanese, who, after their invasion of Indochina in September 1940, came to a political agreement with the Vichy-French administration. Abortive nationalist revolts took place at Dong Dang on the Chinese border; at Bao Son, north of Langson on the Chinese border; in Cochinchina; and at Do Luong, Nghe an Province, Annam. These movements were liquidated by French troops without Japanese interference, and, as a result, some of the militant nationalists adopted a strongly anti-Japanese attitude. The center of the nationalist movement again shifted abroad to South China, where the groups in exile began the painful process of reconstituting their organizations for readiness in the event of an Allied victory. The organizations formed before World War II provided the training ground for the leadership of the nationalist movement that assumed power in the period following the fall of Japan, and these organizations form the basis of the parties and groups that dominate the Indochinese political scene today.

B. Individual Movements

1. Reform Parties. The development of reform parties was characteristic of the period immediately following the end of World War I in Indochina. These parties achieved their greatest strength in Cochinchina, where the French administration permitted a greater degree of freedom of political organization than elsewhere in Indochina. Their inability to wrest significant reforms from the French allowed them little room for growth and development, however, and they were unable to compete with the emergent revolutionary nationalist parties.

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a. The Constitutionalist Party. The Constitutionalist Party, formed in 1923, was the first legal political organization to be formed in Indochina. Its prominent leaders were Nguyen Phan Long, a former functionary in the French administration; Duong Van Giao, a Saigon lawyer; and Bui Quang Chieu, a professor and educator. This party attempted, within the framework of French sovereignty in Indochina, to mitigate some of the more illiberal aspects of French rule. It campaigned for French citizenship, equality before the law, the transformation of the Colonial Councils into genuine legislative bodies, agricultural credit to improve the lot of the peasant, and other moderate reforms. The whole program was placed by its sponsors within a context of French-Vietnamese political collaboration, which alone, they declared could guarantee France's remaining in Indochina; any other course would abet revolutionary attempts to oust the French completely from Indochina.¹

The Constitutionalist Party gained some influence in Cochinchina among intellectuals, the wealthier Vietnamese landowners, and government officials. It waged a particularly successful campaign against a proposal to turn the port of Saigon over to a financial consortium that would operate it as a monopoly. In 1925, the party was successful in electing a bloc of its candidates to the Colonial Council.² The French colonial authorities tolerated the movement, particularly since it managed to establish some connections with liberal forces in metropolitan France.

When the reform movement was not successful in realizing its major objectives and the administration failed to act on its program, however, a number of its adherents gave up the political struggle and turned to the new religion, Cao-Daism.* Others found their way into the clandestine revolutionary groups.

After 1934, the Constitutionalist Party regained a certain amount of influence. It participated in the electoral struggles for the municipal council

* See below, pp. 14 ff.

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of Saigon, Cochinchina. But it never achieved any real measure of success, since by then the activities of the legal organizations of the revolutionary movement far eclipsed its activities. With the advent of World War II, a number of its followers, sensing the increasing influence of Japan in Indochina, helped form a new revolutionary nationalist party, the Vietnam Revolutionary Party,* and the Constitutionalist Party disappeared from the political scene.

b. The Vietnam People's Progressive Party. A movement parallel to the Constitutionalist Party developed in Annam, where Pham Quynh, an influential mandarin, sponsored the creation of a moderate party that attempted to achieve legal status under the French administration. The party attracted the more moderate elements of the clandestine revolutionary nationalist organizations. In September 1926, the party was formally launched under the name of the Vietnam People's Progressive Party (Viet Nam Tan Bo Dan Hoi). Its program was similar to that of the Constitutionalist Party, but attempted unity negotiations failed. Its membership was confined for the most part to Tonkin and Annam, since in Cochinchina it had a direct competitor in the Constitutionalist Party. The French authorities refused to recognize the party as a legal organization, and, as a result, some of its members turned to collaboration with the clandestine nationalist movement. The others remained active in various cultural and literary activities as well as in lesser administrative posts of the civil service.¹

c. The Democratic Party. In 1937, Trinh dinh Thao, an influential Saigon lawyer, founded another reform party in Cochinchina, the Democratic Party. One of its leaders was Dr. Nguyen van Thinh, who became, in 1946, the first president of the French-sponsored Republic of Cochinchina. Apparently an important factor in the party's organization was Thao's connection with the Cao-Daist Pope, Pham cong Tac. Little is known of the specific program of this group other than that it

* See below, pp. 49 ff.

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avored a dominion-type status for Indochina. The party participated in the elections in Saigon in 1937. It was the forerunner of the Indochinese Democratic Party, which emerged after the war in Cochinchina.*

d. The Socialist Party. It appears that no separate Socialist organization existed among the Vietnamese in the period between World War I and World War II. However, there was a branch of the French Socialist Party in Indochina. This organization, known as the Cochinchina-Cambodia Socialist Federation, embraced Vietnamese, a number of whom acquired French citizenship, as well as French citizens. It was recognized by the directing committee of the French Socialist Party in 1936.² It established a small membership in Hanoi as well as in Saigon. The Socialist organization attempted to ameliorate the colonial regime in Indochina. It favored extension of the metropolitan regime to Indochina and a policy of French-Vietnamese association. Some of its Vietnamese members became well known individually, but as a party it did not become an important factor in Vietnamese political life.³

2. Cao-Daism. In the inter-war period, the Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant religious communities in Indochina were not represented by corresponding political groups. The only religious group to develop its own political influence was the newly emergent Cao-Daist religion. Cao-Daism is a religious-social movement and not primarily a political party. However, its leaders and followers have been active in Vietnamese political life and exercise considerable influence.⁴

During the early 1920's Cao Dai (Supreme Palace, High Altar) was revealed to Cochinchinese spiritualists in the course of their seances. The Cao-Daist religion was formally organized in 1926.⁵ by Le van Trung, a Cochinchinese notable. Its elaborate dogma combines elements of the principal religions practiced in Indochina, i.e., Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, spirit worship, ancestor

* See below, pp. 135 ff.

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worship, and Taoism. Its organization resembles that of the Catholic Church; the chief of the Tay-Ninh sect of the Cao-Daists is called the Pope. Important founders of the religion, besides Le van Trung, were Nguyen ngoo Tuong, Le kim Ty, and Pham cong Tao, the present Pope.

From its birth, Cao-Daism found among the Cochinchinese intellectuals, and particularly among the disappointed nationalists, a favorable ground for its development. A great number of government officials, students, and landowners embraced the teaching of the new religion. The new religion -- half ancestral, half European -- appealed to the uneducated and essentially superstitious mass, who, amazed by the magic of spiritism and encouraged by disoriented nationalists, and more often by self-seeking dignitaries, hastened to join.

As was to be expected, the movement came under sharp scrutiny by the French authorities, who suspected it of serving as a cover for subversive nationalist activity. It also encountered strong opposition from the Catholic Church, which viewed with alarm this "religion of Satan." In Cochinchina, the movement quickly mushroomed in size and power and acquired over a million followers. Its spread into Annam and Cambodia was prohibited by the French authorities.¹

Toward the end of 1933, a schism occurred within the Cao-Daist religion.² Under the leadership of Pham cong Tao, a secret sect known as the Pham Mon was built, which tended toward political-social activity.³ With the death of Pope Le van Trung in 1936, a full-fledged struggle for leadership broke out in the ranks of the leading hierarchy of the church. Pham cong Tao seized control of the central temple at Tay Ninh and installed himself as "interim Pope." The Cao-Daists split into a number of distinct sects, the most influential of which was the Tay Ninh sect. Prominent individuals associated with the Tay Ninh sect were Trinh dinh Thao (Democratic Party) and Duong van Giao (Constitutionalist Party). Support by these men indicates that this sect had intimate relations with the reform parties in

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Cochinchina.¹

Another important sect was the Ben Tre Sect, which had influence in the two provinces of Ben Tre and Tra Vinh, and the chief of which was Nguyen Ngoc Tuong (brother-in-law of Rui Quang Chieu, a leader of the Constitutionalist Party). A third sect, the Tien Thien sect, had its central seat at Hoa Binh. Its chief was Le Kim Ty, one of Cao-Daism's founders. Among the prominent members of this sect was Nguyen van Tai, who attempted to establish connections with the exiled Prince Cuong De in Japan in 1940 and was sentenced to five years in jail. Another member involved in pro-Japanese activity was Nguyen ba Tong, who fled to Japan and became one of Prince Cuong De's bodyguards. A fourth sect, the Lien Hoa sect, had as its principal promoter Nguyen phan Long, a well-known leader of the Constitutionalist Party. Its central seat was located at Cau Kho. The Lien Hoa sect was the only Cao-Daist group that had a propaganda organ; this organ was entitled The True Religi (Cong Giao). A number of other smaller sects were scattered throughout Cochinchina.

The Cao-Daist movement was to become extremely powerful in Vietnamese political life after Japan's entry into Indochina in 1940. From 1934 to 1941, the Cao-Daists maintained secret relations with the Japanese. Aware of this relationship, the French colonial authorities deported Phan cong Tao to Madagascar when the Japanese entered Indochina. This did not, however, prevent the Japanese from using the Cao-Daist movement as a cover for promotion of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."²

3. Revolutionary Nationalist Parties. The revolutionary group among the Vietnamese nationalists consisted in the main of younger elements who despaired of reforming the French administration and adopted as their goal the forcible liquidation of French rule. Revolutionary ideas found ready acceptance in the lower ranks of the officialdom and among students, intellectuals, and the numerically small laboring class.

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a. The New Vietnam Revolutionary Party. The first of the revolutionary nationalist parties that emerged in the period between the two wars was an organization later known as the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang).¹ Its origin can be traced to the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) of Phan boi Chau and Prince Cuong De, popularly known as the Phuo Viet.* It is of particular interest because it was the meeting ground of a wide variety of nationalists ranging from reformists to Communists and the scene of unending quarrels between these elements up to the time of its dissolution in 1930.

Following the unsuccessful insurrection of 1913, the Vietnam Restoration League was primarily an association of older-generation political prisoners and exiled individuals favoring the restoration of Prince Cuong De.** It was not until July 1925 that a group of young men met in Ben Thuy and reformed the organization within Indochina. Devoid of real political acumen but agreed on the major aim of independence for Vietnam through revolutionary action, they resolved to establish contact with émigrés in Thailand and China to formulate a program of activities. An emissary to Thailand found the Vietnamese residents there disinclined to engage in political activity. Subsequent effort in Canton, China, was more successful, and the organization's representative established liaison with what was then a lively functioning center of émigré activity looking to the creation of revolutionary organizations in Indochina.

In March 1926, the Vietnam Restoration League changed the abbreviation of its name from Phuo Viet to Hung Nam² and modified its program by abandoning the avowedly revolutionary monarchical principles of the Phuo Viet. Its new program called for:

1. Independence, to be achieved by peaceful revolution.
2. Republican principles, to be supplemented by Communist theories when these theories would be practiced by the great powers.

* See above, p. 6.

** See below, p. 50.

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3. The moral, intellectual, and economic reawakening of Indochina:
 - a. Moral: Profound reforms in family and communal organization to combat superstition and vice.
 - b. Intellectual: New studies and the creation of new schools; the translation and publication of books and papers.
 - c. Economic: Commercial, industrial, and agricultural development through the creation of large Vietnamese commercial and industrial societies and the cultivation of uncultivated land.
4. Party reorganization, comprising the setting up of a secretariat, financial section, propaganda section, instruction section, inspection section, and commission section.
5. Elementary military training for all party members. The program stipulated, however, that military force was to be employed to achieve independence only after all other means had failed of success.

The envoy who had made contact with the existing émigré center in Canton returned in 1926. By this time he, as well as other members of the organization, had been won to support of the émigré Communist-directed Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Thanh Nien Hoi)* and was anxious to fuse the two organizations. After discussion, the name of the Hung Nam was provisionally changed to the Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dang)¹ to facilitate this action.

The moderate members of the Vietnam Revolutionary Party were not happy with the orientation toward the Communist-directed youth organization. When the movement of "Progressives" headed by Phan Quynh appealed for support,** many of them became immediate partisans of the new organization, only to have their hopes dashed by its failure to win favorable recognition from the French. The remaining members of the Vietnam Revolutionary Party decided to continue building their own "revolutionary party." The name Vietnam Restoration League (Hung Nam) was definitely dropped, and the organization moved steadily to the left.

By 1927, the Vietnam Revolutionary Party began to look for allies. In April 1927, fusion was attempted with the New Vietnam Party (Tan Viet Dang), a

* See below, pp. 30, ff.

** See above, p. 13.

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minor political group in Annam, which numbered some 60 members. The fusion was partially successful and some new members were won. When, in July 1927, the Canton émigré committee made renewed efforts to persuade the Vietnam Revolutionary Party to merge with the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League,^{*} the response was favorable. Actual negotiations started soon thereafter.

To facilitate fusion, the Vietnam Revolutionary Party accepted the program of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League and formally adopted a new name, Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Caoch Manh Dong Chi Hoi). The statutes of the organization were clearly Communist, calling for national and world revolution. The party structure was patterned after the cell structure of Communist organizations. This program, however, belied the true state of affairs within the newly formed Vietnam Revolutionary League. A considerable number of the members were not inclined to accept their newly found Communist allies. Aggravated by personal and political differences, the fusion negotiations foundered. A period of tactical shifts and feints began in which the Vietnam Revolutionary League or "Party of the Interior" vied with the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League or "Emigré Party" for support and adherents.

The active influence of the Vietnam Revolutionary League was confined to Annam. The bulk of its membership of 150 to 200 were petty functionaries within the administration. Since the organization had scant success in winning adherents in Tonkin, where the Communist-directed Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League and the Vietnam Nationalist Party^{**} were the centers of attraction for young nationalists, the Vietnam Revolutionary League decided to send agents to Cochinchina in an attempt to recruit adherents.

In February 1928, a meeting of the Central Committee revealed that the party

* See below, pp. 30 ff.

** See below, pp. 21 ff.

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was steadily losing ground to the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. Agents in Cochinchina reported the existence of a rival nationalist association led by Nguyen an Ninh* and were commissioned to prepare a definitive report on it. In the interim new efforts to contact the émigré center in Canton were authorized to facilitate fusion. The reply was a stunning blow to the leaders of the Vietnam Revolutionary League. They were urged to liquidate their organization and join the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. In July 1928, a convention was held to reorganize the weakened Vietnam Revolutionary League. At this convention, its name was changed to the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang). The convention was not disposed to take any action designed to link the party's destiny with that of other organizations because of continuing difficulties with the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. It turned down proposals for fusion with the Nguyen an Ninh Association in Cochinchina and the Vietnam Nationalist Party** in Tonkin in favor of a general policy of observing the development of other parties, looking neither to alliance nor to combat with them.

The New Vietnam Revolutionary Party fared badly. Left-wing members continued to desert to the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League, a process that reinforced the more conservative leadership in control of the organization. A meeting in February 1929 witnessed another reorganization of the already weakened party and the adoption of a new program that tossed overboard the Communist-inspired doctrine that had been officially adopted during the fusion negotiations. This action was a prelude to virtual dissolution. As a result of police suppression in 1930 and the desertion of members who formed a separate Communist group called the Indochina Communist Alliance (Dong Duong Cong San Lien Doan)*** preliminary to fusing with the Indo-

* See below, p. 33.

** See below, pp. 21 ff.

*** See below, p. 33.

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Chinese Communist Party, the new Vietnam Revolutionary Party was completely disorganized by 1930.

b. The Vietnam Nationalist Party (See appended chart of history of the party.)

i. In Indochina. The Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang)¹ is the most significant non-Communist revolutionary nationalist organization that emerged in the 1920's. It, too, traced its origin to the teachings of Phan boi Chau and to the student movement that developed at the end of World War I. It reflected the impact of Chinese culture on Vietnamese life as expressed in the doctrines of Sun Yat-sen and maintained throughout the years links with Kuomintang elements in China. This tie with China sustained the organization through many difficult periods and permitted it to survive while the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party succumbed under the combined blows of police repression and Communist attrition.

At the outset, the differences between the Vietnam Nationalist Party and the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party were not very great.* An obstacle to unity was the particularist character of the two organizations brought about by regional differences in temperament and outlook. The Vietnam Nationalist Party's strength lay primarily in Tonkin, that of the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party in Annam. The issue of Communism was the bar on which unity foundered.

The Vietnam Nationalist Party was formed in November 1927 by a group of young intellectuals. The ground work for this undertaking had been laid by the organization of a political-commercial publishing venture named the "Annamese Library" (Nam Dong Thu Xa). Its publications dealt with such matters as the Chinese revolution, the life of Sun Yat-sen, nationalism, and world revolution. Although the commercial business was suppressed, it succeeded in establishing a circle of interested friends who became the organizers and leaders of the Vietnam Nationalist Party.

*See below, pp. 17 ff.

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The party was modeled directly after the Kuomintang. The lowest unit was the subsection committee, representing a hamlet, village, or canton, depending on the size of the party organization in a given area. These units were combined into provincial sections, local sections, and a central section. The central section was composed of three branches -- executive, legislative, and judicial. Attached to these three branches were departments of propaganda, finances, economic affairs, army, espionage, foreign affairs, etc. In effect, the party was organized to fulfill the functions of a government. It included Vietnamese of both sexes. Its doctrine was democratic Socialism. It favored the establishment of a democratic republican regime that would help other downtrodden peoples in their struggle against colonial oppression.

This orientation toward the Chinese Kuomintang was not accompanied by a desire for Chinese influence in Indochina. The Vietnam Nationalist Party counted on aid from the Kuomintang as an ally in the struggle to oust the French from Indochina, not as a "liberator" that would replace French domination by Chinese.

The party was clearly revolutionary in its approach. It envisaged the use of violence to obtain funds for operation; assassination of opponents and traitors; military training for its membership; etc. It carried on intensive work to win supporters among the natives enrolled in the French Army in Indochina. A women's affiliate was created, named the Society for Teaching Housewives (Nu Cong Hoc Foi).

The Vietnam Nationalist Party also attempted to unite with other revolutionary groups within and without the country. In June 1928 representatives were sent to Thailand, but to no avail. The only contacts made were with the affiliates of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League,* whose Communist leanings made unity impossible.

Delegates were sent to contact the Nguyen an Ninh Association** and the New

* See below, p. 30 ff.

** See below, p. 35.

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Vietnam Revolutionary Party in Cochinchina. The negotiations with the Nguyen an Ninh Association fell through, but liaison was established with the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party's Cochinchina organization. However, since this was only a small group that never developed any strength in Cochinchina, little advantage accrued to the Vietnam Nationalist Party as a result of the alliance.

In December 1928, an effort to get support from the Chinese governor of Kwangsi Province failed.

The Vietnam Nationalist Party remained virtually confined to Tonkin. On July 1, 1928, a party conference was held to solidify the organization. Discipline was tightened, and the President of the Executive Branch was given strong discretionary powers. An illegal journal called the Revolutionary Soul (Hon Cach Menh) was issued in Hanoi. This was later augmented by a Haiphong journal called the National Soul (Hon Nuoo). These papers were not very successful. To help financially, the party opened a hotel in October 1928. Poor security led to revelation of its sponsorship to the French police, and several raids were made on it in efforts to catch the party leaders.

The party was relatively successful in winning students and young functionaries in teaching posts. It enlisted Annamese soldiers and non-commissioned officers in the artillery, infantry, ordinance, and air corps. By the beginning of 1929, the party had 120 units comprising 1,500 sympathizers and members, among whom were 120 native soldiers.

In February 1929 the assassination of a Frenchman engaged in recruiting labor for work in Cochinchina and New Caledonia resulted in police action against the party. Some 225 individuals were indicted. This dealt a severe blow to the organization. However, it survived and soon recouped its strength under the direction of its most prominent leader, Nguyen Thai Hoc, a young student intellectual. The organization was reformed on the Communist cell pattern to give it the security

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needed to counteract the actions of the French police. The party engaged in the manufacture of bombs and small arms, raising the necessary funds for this work by banditry. A new program of action was elaborated, which envisaged the following successive phases of activity:

1. A secret period of organization;
2. A semi-secret period of preparation;
3. An open period of revolution;
4. A period of reconstruction under the direction of the party.

To recoup the losses brought about by traitors who had confessed to the police, the Vietnam Nationalist Party decided to punish several of them as an object lesson and as a public display of organizational strength. The bodies of the victims were marked with inscriptions, "for not having kept the blood oath."

By 1929, popular feeling against the French administration had become so strong that Nguyen Thai Hoo believed an armed uprising would be successful since it could gain the support of the mass of dissatisfied Vietnamese. A minority, disagreed, holding that a longer preparatory period was necessary. Nevertheless, February 10, 1930 was set as the date for the insurrection. It started at Yen Bay. There were attacks on Lam Thao and Hung Hao in Phu Tho Province, and bombs were thrown in Hanoi. Disturbances spread to a number of other cities, but the entire movement was vigorously suppressed by the French police. The leaders of the Vietnam Nationalist Party were arrested. Nguyen Thai Hoo was executed; other leaders fled to China.

The removal of the majority leaders gave the minority a chance to assume the leadership of the party. The new leaders sought to invigorate the movement by decreeing the death of high French functionaries and their mandarin supporters, but their immediate concern was to gain new funds. The party degenerated into a collection of bandit gangs that attempted to extort money from unwilling victims. The French police continued to track down the members. One after the other, the main sections of the party were discovered and the leaders arrested.

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The activities of the Vietnam Nationalist Party within Indochina came to a halt at the end of 1932. The center of the movement shifted to China, where émigrés maintained the organization and prepared for its eventual reconstruction within Indochina.

Unlike the Vietnam Nationalist Party in the interior of Indochina, the émigré organization had been badly split. Its unification came about as a result of pressure from the new elements who swelled the ranks following their flight from Indochina. The two major émigré groups were the Vietnam Nationalist Parties of Canton and Yunnan.¹ Both groups could trace their genealogy back to Phan boi Chau, who had laid the basis for their reformation in his activity from 1905 to 1925. Like the "Interior Party," these two groups were modeled after the Chinese Kuomintang.

ii. In China

(1) The Vietnam Nationalist Party of Canton. The first group that later became part of the Vietnam Nationalist Party of Canton was formed in 1925 by Vietnamese who were repelled by the Communist influence in the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League created by Nguyen ai Quoc.* The Canton government extended material and moral aid to this group. The first step envisaged was the building of a "League of Oppressed Oriental Peoples," which would comprise a Chinese, Vietnamese, Hindu, and Korean section. (This organization had no relation to the organization of the same name created by Nguyen ai Quoc.) Lack of sufficient Hindu and Korean members led to the establishment, instead, in 1928 of a party called the Vietnam Revolutionary Party² (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dang). Another group formed a rival party called the Vietnam Nationalist Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Cach Menh Dang) and vied with the first party for support from the Kuomintang. When the Vietnam Nationalist Revolutionary Party began to receive a regular subsidy from the Kuomintang, it became the more important of the two organizations and absorbed the membership of the first group. On October 28, 1930, it was officially recognized

* See below, p. 30 ff.

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by the Canton government under the name of the Vietnam Nationalist Revolutionary Party.

At the end of 1931 and toward the beginning of 1932, relations were established with the Vietnam Nationalist Party in Yunnan. The Canton organization thereupon dropped the work "revolutionary" from its title and began fusion attempts. These were not successful until 1933.

Meanwhile, in 1932, the organizer of the Canton party, Lenh trach Dan, decided to establish a "Provisional Indochinese Government," a project that permitted him to enlist the aid of wealthy Chinese in exchange for honorific titles. This led to internal difficulties within the group and representations to the Chinese Government. The Chinese Government, keeping in mind its diplomatic relations with the French Government, invited the Canton party to dissolve its "provisional government."

In April 1932, the Canton party held a congress for the purpose of reorganizing the Vietnam Nationalist Party. During this congress dissident members objected that Chinese Kuomintang delegates were playing too prominent a role. This had its effect, for the Kuomintang officially withdrew its subsidy from the party and then dissolved it for not having obeyed in full the previous order to disband the "provisional government."

The officials of the Canton party made their way to Nanking, where they successfully reconstituted the party. Contact was established with Lu Han, then chief of the Military Council Bureau of the Nanking Chinese National Government. This led to direct relations with the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang and important sections of the Chinese Government. Authorization was obtained to establish the party officially at Nanking, and, to make this possible, a monthly allocation of funds was provided. Following this, efforts were made to effect fusion with the Yunnan organization.

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(2) The Vietnam Nationalist Party of Yunnan. The origin of the Yunnan group, too, can be traced to Phan hoi Chau and Cuong De. Le phu Hiep, a supporter of their movement, had become politically active in Yunnan. He had achieved the rank of colonel in the Chinese administration and was a leading figure in the Vietnamese community in Yunnan. In 1928, he was instrumental in forming the Revolutionary Sino-Vietnam Military League (Trung Viet Cach Menh Lien Quan). This organization soon foundered, but its members later joined the émigré Vietnam Nationalist Party created by Nguyen the Nghiep, who had escaped from Indochina, where he had been sentenced to a ten-year jail term in the early part of 1930.* He established a number of party cells in Yunnan, where membership may have reached the figure of 300.

The party was actually a section of the Chinese Kuomintang -- its units corresponded to units of the Kuomintang and depended upon them. This arrangement served the Vietnam Nationalist Party quite well, since it gave them protection from the Chinese authorities. And protection was necessary, since the organization was constantly raising funds through extortion and robbery along the length of the railroad from Yunnan to Tonkin. Conditions became so bad, however, that the Chinese authorities were finally forced to put a stop to the illegal activities of the party. In September, 1930, Nguyen the Nghiep left to establish the party in Burma at Bhamo, an unsuccessful venture. He returned to Yunnan and was arrested following the murder of a political rival. The party, nevertheless, fared well. It obtained military training for its members by enrolling them in the Yunnan Military School. Some fifty odd partisans were enrolled in the Chinese Army. Still others worked in the arsenal at Yunnan, where they received training in the manufacture of grenades and explosives. The party engaged in a number of business and agricultural enterprises to augment its finances. By the end of 1932, it tried to solidify its position still further by fusing with the Canton and Nanking organizations. From July 15 to July 24, 1933, the fusion proceedings were in full swing and both parties

* See above, p. 24.

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were finally amalgamated under the leadership of the "Overseas Bureau" of the Vietnam Nationalist Party in Nanking.

Little is known of the later history of the exile organization up to World War II,^{*} although it is clear that this history is one of plots and counterplots as individuals vied with each other for control of the various sections. Party groups continued the policy of launching attacks on various settlements on the Indochina border as well as looting rail shipments. Within Indochina the party played no significant role during this period.

When the influence of the Japanese began to dominate the Indochinese scene in 1940, the Vietnam Nationalist Party underwent internal schisms. Some of the nationalist elements looked to Japan as they had previously looked to China for aid against the French. A pro-Japanese faction, under the leadership of Nguyen Tuong Tam, adopted the name Great Vietnam Democratic Party (Dai Viet Dan Chinh).^{**} It gained strength in 1940, but the Japanese permitted the French to clamp down on its activities, and it appears that Nguyen tuong Tam and other leaders were arrested in 1941.¹ At the same time Nguyen the Nghiep returned to Indochina and formed the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang). The leadership of his group in exile at Kunming, bearing the name Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) was taken over by Vu khong Khanh, a former school teacher.^{***} It was Vu khong Khanh's group that was to become a factor of political importance within Indochina with the resurgence of the nationalist movement at the end of World War II.^{****}

o. The Indochinese Communist Party.^{*****} The birth and subsequent development of the Communist movement² in Indochina is inseparably connected with the life and activity of Nguyen ai Quoc, or, as he is now known, Ho chi Minh, President of the Vietnam Democratic Republic. He was its creator, guide teacher, organizer, and inspi

* See below, pp. 58 ff.

** See below, p. 54.

*** See below, p. 62.

**** See below, pp. 77 ff.

***** See appended charts of the development of Communist organizations in Indochina.

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Ho Chi Minh first appeared on the political scene in 1919 in Paris at the Peace Conference, to which he addressed memoranda calling for freedom and justice for the people of Indochina. Following this, he is known to have participated in the Socialist Party Congress of Tours in 1920, which saw the left-wing Socialists split to form the French Communist Party. As a member of the French Communist Party in 1921, he was influential in forming a group called the "Inter-Colonial Union," which included Arabs, Africans, and other colonial subjects of the French Empire. He soon devoted all his time to its Vietnamese membership.¹

He left France in June 1923 as the French Communist Party delegate to the Peasants' International, or Krestintern, Congress meeting in Moscow of October 1923. He lived in the USSR for a year and a half as the colonial representative on the permanent directing committee of the Krestintern. His next assignment was to the Soviet Consulate at Canton, where he served under Borodin as a "Chinese translator" -- a euphemistic cover for his efforts to create an Indochinese Communist Party. At the time, Canton was a center for many young Vietnamese who, in answer to the appeal of Phan Boi Chau, journeyed there to acquire an education in order to help liberate their country.

In 1925, Ho Chi Minh published a brochure entitled Le Procès de la Colonisation Française. It contained a statement of grievances of the nationalists against French imperialist rule and ended with an appeal to the Vietnamese student youth to emulate the Chinese in forming associations to liberate their country.²

In considering the social structure of Annam and the possibilities it afforded for achieving this end, Ho accepted the thesis of the Communist International as it applied to the colonial countries. This envisaged the development of the proletarian revolution in Indochina in two stages. The first stage was designated the "bourgeois-democratic revolution," leading to independence. The second was of specifically Communist nature, leading to Indochina's integration into a world Soviet federation. In amplification of this view Ho is reputed to have said in Moscow in

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the summer of 1927 that the creation of an Indochina Communist Party was impossible at the time because "no one as yet understood the significance of the word communist. However, he continued, it was "possible to constitute an Indochinese nationalist-socialist and revolutionary party whose leaders would be responsible for bringing all its members step by step to orthodox marxism."

i. Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. In June 1925 at Canton, Ho founded an association named the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Cach Minh Thanh Nien Hoi).^{*} At the same time, in concert with the Indian Communist, M. N. Roy, he launched the League of Oppressed Peoples, but he abandoned this organization shortly after its creation.

The new youth organization published a weekly paper called Youth (Thanh Nien). Eighty-eight issues were printed from June 1925 to April 1927. The paper was concerned primarily with appeals to nationalist sentiment and included material on the history of the country. Only in 1926, after a preparatory period of educational activity, including translation of Marxist terminology into Sino-Annamite, did Ho finally write that "only a communist party can ultimately insure the well-being of Annam."

At the same time, selected members of the youth organization enrolled in the Whampoa Military Academy, where Chinese Nationalists and Communists were receiving training as the future leaders of the Chinese Nationalist state and army. The members of the Youth League also received special courses of instruction under Ho's direction.

The League's program actually comprised these tasks:

1. Teaching the young émigrés;
2. Preparing written propaganda and issuing the weekly paper;
3. Creating and maintaining liaison with nationalist and Communist organizations in the interior of Indochina and sympathetic organizations abroad;
4. Establishing Canton as the center of the émigré movement, with authority over the interior movement in Indochina as well as over the training of new recruits from Indochina.

* See above, pp. 18 ff.

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The internal situation in Indochina favored these activities of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. Nation-wide meetings and demonstrations had been held in support of Phan boi Chau,* who had been arrested on June 30, 1925 and condemned to death on November 23, 1925. (He was later pardoned to spend the rest of his life in custody at Hue, Annam.) Phan chu Trinh** had returned from Europe on June 26, 1925, and was active politically until his death on March 26, 1926, which was the occasion for nation-wide student commemorative meetings. The young revolutionaries of the Youth League found fertile ground for the creation of cells in all three regions of Indochina and for the selection of new recruits for the Canton school.

The split in the Kuomintang between the Communists and Chiang K'ai-shek's followers forced Ho to leave Canton in April 1927 for Hongkong and then Moscow. Some of the members of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League were imprisoned, but the organization continued to function, since the Kuomintang authorities were basically anti-French and were willing to allow it to exist as long as it directed its agitation, even though of Communist nature, against the French. In December 1928, after the arrest of some of the leaders of the Youth League who were members of the Chinese Communist Party, the center of the organization was transferred to Kwangsi and then Hongkong. Despite difficulties encountered, it was estimated that the following results had been obtained by May 1929: (1) 250 Annamese, at the minimum, had received revolutionary training abroad; (2) more than 200 had returned to Indochina and established new contacts; (3) the organization had an estimated 1,000 members and sympathizers.

In Indochina, the league was organized as follows. Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina had regional central committees. In Tonkin, two city committees (Hanoi and Haiphong) and three provincial committees (Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, and Bac Ninh) directed numerous cells comprising several hundred supporters. In Annam there were

* See above, pp.3, 8.
** See above, pp.4, 9.

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some 200 followers in the northern and central provinces. In Cochinchina, there were three centers -- in the cities of Saigon, Mytho, and Cantho -- each controlling a group of provinces; in Cochinchina as a whole, there were 100 members in 19 cells, as well as 275 sympathizers in 12 auxiliary associations (women's auxiliaries, cooperatives, study circles). The majority of the Tonkinese members belonged to the laboring class. In Annam and Cochinchina, the social composition was mixed, including workers, teachers, students, and peasants. The party machine was composed predominantly of teachers and intellectuals, and the important functions were carried out by graduates of the Canton emigration.

ii. The Hongkong Congress, 1929. Under Ho's leadership the Communists had assumed control of the organization. Led by the Tonkinese, they now desired to build a separate Indochinese Communist Party. A congress of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League, held in Hongkong from May 1 to 9, 1929, revealed that the émigré leadership was out of step with the new trend of the interior organization.¹ This was demonstrated particularly clearly when the one delegate from Annam and two delegates from Tonkin proposed adoption of the name "Indochinese Communist Party" for the organization and split away when they were not upheld. The émigré leadership conceded the necessity of organizing a Communist party, but maintained that the congress had no authority to take such action until the Youth League itself had adopted a Communist program. In reality, the leadership was unwilling to deviate from the political line previously set by Ho Chi Minh, which had aimed at building a revolutionary nationalist party with socialist tendencies.

The congress continued its work and adopted statutes bringing the organization in line with the decisions of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International while maintaining its quasi-nationalist character. This is evidenced by its decision to continue fusion negotiations with the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang).^{*} However, it did decide to wage a struggle against

* See above, pp. 17 ff.

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the Vietnam Nationalist Party of Tonkin,* which it regarded as a "bourgeois party." It also addressed a letter to the Comintern requesting recognition of the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League.¹

The dissident delegates returned to Indochina and were successful in winning the Tonkin and Annam regional organizations of the Youth League to their point of view. They set up a new organization called the Indochinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang). Emissaries to Cochinchina succeeded in establishing a section in this region, and by November 1929 the Indochinese Communist Party was sufficiently strong to rival the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League organization there, which had upheld the émigré leadership. By this time the émigré leadership had secretly adopted the name Annamese Communist Party (Annam Cong San Dang), for fear of losing its militant members to its rivals within Indochina.

The new Indochinese Communist Party also had its effect on the other nationalist groups, such as the Nguyen an Ninh Association in Cochinchina and the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party of Annam. On numerous occasions, the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party had unsuccessfully undertaken fusion negotiations with the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League. It kept losing members to the Youth League in the process. In 1929, to hold its losses, it too, created a Communist affiliate, called the Indochinese Communist Alliance (Dong Duong Cong San Lien Doan).** The Nguyen an Ninh Association, or, as it was secretly known, the Hope of Youth Party (Cao Yong Thanh Nien Dang), which had been organized by Nguyen an Ninh, a prominent nationalist, in Cochinchina in 1927 following his return from France, had a membership of 700 to 800 and had adopted an agrarian socialist program.** When Nguyen an Ninh was arrested in September 1929, it was destroyed, and some of its members joined either the Indochinese Communist Party or the Annamese Communist Party.

* See above, pp. 21 ff.

** See above, p. 20.

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Both the Annamese Communist Party and the Indochinese Communist Party sought to gain recognition from the Third International as its official section in Indochina. They attempted to locate Ho Chi Minh to help in this task. In July 1929, it was learned that Ho was in Thailand, where he had been secretly working in the large Vietnamese colony, numbering 30,000 émigrés. He had succeeded in building a group of purely nationalist character called the Annamite Fraternity of Siam (Hoi Than Ai Nguoi Annam O Xiem).

iii. The Unification of the Communist Party, 1930. Ho journeyed to Hongkong in January 1930. By March 1930 he was sufficiently in touch with the situation to arrange for the fusion of the Indochinese Communist Party and the Annamese Communist Party, as well as the Indochinese Communist Alliance. The Central Committee of the new party was transferred from Hongkong to Haiphong in Tonkin. From February to October 1930, this organization was known as the Vietnam Communist Party (Viet Nam Cong San Dang). In October 1930, a congress was held in Hongkong to formalize the actions of the preceding period. The congress adopted for the party the name "Indochinese Communist Party" (Dong Duong Cong San Dang) to conform to the rules of the Communist International, since that title included all of Indochina and not solely the three Vietnamese provinces. The Central Committee was transferred from Haiphong to Saigon. The party organization included such subsidiary organizations as self-defense sections, workers' unions, peasants' unions, women's associations, an anti-imperialist league, and a branch of the international Red Aid Organization. Ho is known to have been in touch with the Chinese Communist group in Thailand and to have attended, as representative of the Comintern Bureau of the Orient, the Third Conference of the South Seas Communist Party in Singapore in April 1930.

The South Seas Communist Party had been formed at the end of 1927, as had the South Seas Communist Youth Organization. These organizations included among their membership Malaysians, Thai, and Indochinese. Both of these organizations

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were directly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, which itself was responsible to the Comintern Far Eastern Bureau at Shanghai. In addition, a South Seas General Labor Union functioned in 1928 and 1929, leading to the creation of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, with headquarters in Shanghai and Vladivostok, in the summer of 1929.

At the April 1930 meeting in Singapore, the formal decision was made to split the South Seas Communist Party and give its component national groups a status independent from direction by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Coordination was accomplished through a Southern Bureau responsible to the Comintern Far Eastern Bureau at Shanghai.

In 1930, the Indochinese Communist Party had very clear and defined relations with the International Communist apparatus comprising (1) the Comintern Bureau of the Orient at Shanghai, (2) the Secretariat of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union, (3) the Communist organizations of Malaya and Thailand, directed and controlled by a Southern Bureau, (4) the French Communist Party, through the intermediary of the Secretariat of the Unitary Confederation Generale du Travail, and (5) the League against Imperialism and for National Independence, with headquarters in Berlin.*

In April 1931, at its eleventh plenum, the Central Executive Committee of the Comintern recognized the Indochinese Communist Party as a national section.

iv. The Events of 1930-32. The work of the newly formed Communist Party was facilitated by the internal situation during 1930 and 1931, when a wave of nationalist unrest swept over Indochina. The massacre of Yen Bay took place in 1930.** Political killings, strikes, robberies, and demonstrations were widespread as both nationalist and Communist organizations strove to augment their revenues and influence.

The membership of the Indochinese Communist Party is believed to have reached

* See appended chart of the international connections of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930.

** See above, p. 24.

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1,000 during this period.¹ This numerically small membership was no measure of its true influence, however; it is estimated that some 100,000 peasants followed the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party in this period.² The party played a leading role in the strikes and demonstrations as well as in actual insurrectionary attempts. Guided by the "third period" philosophy of the Comintern, it attempted to create peasant soviets through uprisings. In Ha Tinh and Nghe An, it led a peasant movement that killed the landlords and divided the large estates.

The violent methods employed by the Indochinese Communist Party, corresponding as they did to the methods employed in early insurrectionary attempts to rid Indochina of the French, were censured even by the Comintern. The Comintern regarded unfavorably activities that smacked of terror and pillage on the part of individuals since they were not in consonance with the "organized violence" of Marxist doctrine.

The French authorities not only were able to suppress the Communist movement but also publicly tried many of its leaders and members as common criminals. The entire apparatus of the Indochinese Communist Party was smashed. The party suffered a final blow when its international connections were severed with the detention of Ho Chi Minh by the British authorities in Hongkong.

Reorganization of the destroyed organization was attempted in 1932, and some success was apparent by the end of the year in the setting up of a provisional apparatus in Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. However, the French police were fully informed of these activities and destroyed the embryonic organization. Two hundred arrests were made. The French also apprehended émigrés from Thailand and China who attempted to return to help reconstitute the Indochinese Communist Party.

v. Reconstitution of the Indochinese Communist Party, 1933. In 1933, new efforts were made to reconstitute the Indochinese Communist Party -- efforts augmented by the release of many political prisoners who had been jailed for their participation in the events of 1930 and 1931. Detention had heightened their morale

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and welded them together in their common cause. They immediately undertook a vigorous educational program to raise the level of leadership.

The first steps were the creation of a regional committee at Saigon and the issuance of a paper called the Red Flag (Co Do) and a magazine called the Communist Review (Tap Chi Cong San). Under the leadership of a former student of the Oriental Institute of Moscow, Tran van Glau, the Indochinese Communist Party was reconstituted. It soon began to have a significant influence on the numerically small laboring class.

A particularly important step was the reconstitution of the League against Imperialism*-- not as a individual-membership organization serving as a front for the Communist Party but as an organization with which workers' unions, peasant organizations, and nationalist parties could affiliate. The Indochinese Communist Party, in the framework of such a coalition, maintained its independence of action and the right to criticize in order to be able to influence those of non-Communist persuasion. The party enjoined its members not to engage in violence and warned against the execution of "French traitors" on the grounds that such terrorism on the part of individuals would lead to repression of the party. In effect, there was a return from the ultra-left period to the tactics that Ho Chi Minh had used successfully to build the movement at its inception.

A framework of international contact was again set up through the medium of Vietnamese sailors who visited the ports of Nanking, Shanghai, and Hongkong, where centers were established.

The Indochinese Communists also established contact with Chinese Communists in Thailand. In April 1933, a congress of the party was held in Ban-Mai, Thailand, across the Laotian border. The party was still in a weakened state. No representatives from Tonkin were present. The Central Committee had to be located in Thailand, contrary to orthodox principles requiring that the directing committee be inside the country. It was decided (1) to reestablish contact with the Comintern, (2) to

* See above, p. 35.

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reestablish liaison and rebuild the Tonkin organization, (3) to establish an émigré school at Ban-Mai. It was not until 1935, however, at a congress held in Portuguese Macao, that the real reorganization of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party was accomplished. In the interim, the activity of the nationalist movement took legal forms in Saigon, Cochinchina, where there was a relatively large European population and a degree of freedom of the press for French-language papers.

In the 1933 elections for the municipal council of Saigon, the Communists and Trotskyists* joined hands in a united front movement. They jointly published a newspaper called The Struggle (La Lutte) and presented candidates for the contested positions. The Communists Nguyen van Tao and Tran van Thach headed the "workers' list" against the "bourgeois representatives" led by Nguyen dinh Tri. "The Struggle" group won a distinct success in the elections. The Struggle was published in French and not the vernacular. Consequently, it was limited in its influence. Even so, it became widely known for its attacks on the prison regimes in Poulo Condore, Dak Pao, and Lao Bao. It campaigned for better working conditions and for amelioration of the lot of the peasants. In the council, Nguyen van Tao and Tran van Thach took every opportunity to pillory and excooriate the colonial regime.¹

v. The Comintern line, 1935. In 1935 a Macao congress of the Communist Party was organized under the aegis of an "exterior directing committee."² Delegates from Indo-China were present. This conference ushered in the new policy of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International. In its application to the colonial world, the new policy indicated abandonment of the struggle for separation from the mother countries. In place of the goal of recognition of the right of colonial peoples to decide their own future was substituted the objective of obtaining democratic rights to allow for collaboration with the mother country against the menace of Fascism.

* See below, pp. 47 ff.

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This congress reaffirmed the adherence of the Indochinese Communist Party to the Communist Third International. It established the organizational form of the party parallel to all other national sections of the Comintern. It tightened the party's ranks organizationally and politically. The Central Committee was transferred to Saigon-Cholon.

In the course of 1936 and 1937, the Indochinese Communist Party created a legal front movement called the "Indochinese Congress." This movement embraced moderates and conservatives. Its purpose was to present a bill of particulars to a long-awaited Metropolitan Inquiry Commission that had been authorized by the French Popular Front Government.

The congress was buttressed by the creation of "action committees" comprising fraternal organizations and workers' and peasant unions. These committees are variously reported to have numbered from 600 to 1,500. Many meetings, demonstrations, and strikes were conducted on the occasion of the visit of the Inquiry Commission from France.

With the inauguration of the Popular Front Government in France and the application of the new world Communist policy adopted at the Seventh World Congress in 1935, internal difficulties began to manifest themselves in this united front coalition. The Indochinese Communists adopted a policy of collaboration with the Popular Front in France. The Struggle began to take a friendly tone toward the Constitutionalist leaders, Nguyen phan Long and Bui quang Chieu.* In time, the Indochinese Communist Party began to adopt a more conciliatory policy even toward the colonial regime. The Trotskyists violently disagreed with this trend. They maintained that the Communist faction was betraying the Indochinese to please the French Communists and ultimately the Soviet Government, which had signed a mutual defense pact with France.¹

* See above, p. 12.

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In the extra-parliamentary field, the "committees of action" that had been formed were instrumental in leading strikes for higher wages, better working conditions, and recognition of trade unions. This practical activity of "The Struggle" group won it a good deal of sympathy, and, in the 1937 elections to the municipal council of Saigon, three of its candidates were elected -- Ta thu Thau (Trotskyist), Nguyen van Tao (Communist), and Duong bach Mai (Communist). Shortly thereafter "The Struggle" group split into its component factions. The last common meeting of Trotskyists and Communists in "The Struggle" group took place on June 14, 1937. Ta thu Thau, the Trotskyist leader, presented a resolution criticizing the Popular Front, which was voted upon favorably. Thereafter "The Struggle" became a strictly Trotskyist venture.*

As the split between the Communists and Trotskyists developed in 1937, the Communists put out their own legal publications, a paper called Advance Guard (L'Avant-Garde) and later a paper called The People (Dan Chung), which finally published a French edition as well. They controlled a trade-union group, whose leadership called itself the "Committee of Saigon-Cholon Worker Delegates," which put out its own propaganda paper, The Worker (Lac Dong). In 1939, a youth front of "democratic youth" was created, which published a paper called New (Moi).

The Indochinese Communist Party line closely paralleled that of the French Communist Party. The "Democratic United Front", which was under Communist direction and embraced progressive groups and parties, mirrored this development. It spoke of the "resolute soldiers who would struggle on the battle-field in the event of invasion by the Japanese fascists." The party had developed into a strong organization, but it began to lose ground among its supporters and to develop internal schisms as the new policy of "democratic collaboration" led to abandonment of its militant line.

* See below, pp. 47 ff.