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When the Communists voted with the conservatives in the Saigon municipal council for "national defense" taxes, the Trotskyists capitalized on their own opposition to this measure. In the 1939 elections to the Cochinchina Colonial Council,¹ the Trotskyist slate of Ta thu Thau, Tran van Thach, and Phan van Hum won 80 percent of all votes cast. So crushing was the defeat for the Indochinese Communists that they split over the results. Nguyen van Tao formed his own organization, while Duong bach Mai maintained leadership in the official party.²

vii. The Communist Party at the Outset of World War II. The outbreak of war and events in France radically changed the situation. A decree of the September 26, 1939 pronounced the dissolution of the French Communist Party. It was applied vigorously in Indochina, where the French police used it to destroy all the extremist organizations, both Communist and Trotskyist. (Two hundred persons, all told, are reported to have been arrested.) The party was again driven completely underground, but, unlike the situation in 1932, it had a functioning, tightly knit organization that was to demonstrate shortly that it was capable of serious action against French authority.

The Indochinese Communist Party Central Committee met to consider the new situation on November 6, 7, and 8, 1939. As was to be expected, a new line was adopted to bring the party in step with the "anti-war" position of the Comintern and the USSR as it developed after the Stalin-Hitler pact. The resolution called for replacement of the "Democratic Front" by a new "United Front of Anti-Imperialist Indochinese Peoples." This new front would, with the help of the USSR, "the fortress of world revolution," carry on a struggle against the "imperialist war." It would overthrow "French imperialism and the native feudalists," recover the independence of Indochina, and install a republican regime.

The practical effect of this resolution was to oppose (1) sending Indochinese troops abroad, (2) raising hours of work to get greater production, and (3) increasing taxes to meet the cost of the war. In short, all measures designed to aid the

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French war effort were proscribed.

The colonial authorities acted with dispatch. Application to the Communist of a decree of January 21, 1940 led to the arrest of "120 agitators and their incorporation into a special work formation" and to restrictions on the liberty of some 184 others. This action was of small import, however, since the party was strengthening its underground apparatus in preparation for an overt attempt to take power.

viii. The Fall of France. The situation created by the fall of France led to new decisions by the Indochinese Communist Party. It is believed that, at the end of June 1940, the Central Committee of the Indochinese Communist Party adopted a policy leading to armed insurrection in view of the critical internal situation and the external Japanese threat. This insurrection was designed to install a republican government that would ally itself with the resistance front of the Chinese people and with the USSR and was to be a prelude to world revolution. The resolution called for "the creation in the city and countryside of zones of agitation under unified direction by the organization of anti-imperialist committees. These committees would prepare the general strike, demonstrations, and, finally, provoke armed insurrection which would permit the taking of power."

Numerous other documents seized by the French authorities in July 1940 are said to have revealed the systematic preparation by the Central Committee for education of its militants on questions relating to insurrection, guerrilla warfare, and sabotage. The Indochinese Communist Party distributed literature in three languages (Vietnamese, Chinese, and French) calling on the masses to struggle against French imperialism and Japanese Fascism and to constitute a unitary government of Indochinese democratic countries with the help of the Chinese Communist and the USSR. These appeals were addressed to all sectors of the population, not only the workers. Rich proprietors, government functionaries, military personnel,

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and intellectuals were invited to join in the struggle under the banner of the "anti-imperialist united front of the Indochinese peoples." The tracts emphasized the weakening of the colonial regime occasioned by the defeat of the metropolitan country and warned against an alliance of French imperialism with Japanese Fascism. To proprietors and cultivators, they stressed the raising of taxes, the seizure of property, and high prices of goods as the consequences of such an alliance. Further, the pamphlets warned the Cao-Daists to beware of Cuong De, as a Japanese puppet, and to abandon their pro-Japanese sentiments, since they would be the first to suffer the consequences of Japanese victory.

The leaflets addressed to students, teachers, and white-collar workers held up the example of the Soviet and Chinese youth and their struggle against capitalist domination. The women of Indochina, as mothers, wives, and sisters of those called up for military duty in the service of capitalism and Fascism, were reminded of the heroic Trung sisters and Joan of Arc, who had delivered their countries from foreign invaders. All this propaganda ended with a pressing call to rally to a Soviet regime and to install it after driving the French from the colony.

Chinese-language literature was distributed in commemoration of the Sino-Japanese conflict and the Chinese revolution. It outlined the desires of the Indochinese Communist Party to link its struggle with that of the Chinese revolutionaries and called for the creation of a volunteer Chinese corps to take part in the defense of Indochina.

Leaflets to the French inveighed against the Governor General's policy of making concessions to the Japanese and appealed for solidarity of the French and Indochinese against reaction and the Japanese danger.

These new policies adopted after the fall of France were not without effect. For the first time since the beginning of the war, demonstrations were held in the provinces of Vinhlong, Tra Vinh, Baclieu, and Rach Gia. These meetings called for opposition to arrests, refusal to recognize the authority of officials, pillaging

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of the wealth of rich proprietors, destruction of French imperialism, barring of the way to Japanese invasion, and realization of Indochinese independence.

Japanese pressure on Indochina further fanned internal Communist activity. On September 4, 1940, the Cochinchina Regional Committee of the Indochinese Communist Party issued an order that explained that the Japanese were coming to Indochina to find new markets, to exploit the raw materials, and to create military bases. The order called upon all forces to unite in resisting Japanese invasion and preparing for an armed insurrection to seize power. It asserted that, to foil the Japanese designs, it was necessary:

1. To propagandize the masses with anti-Japanese slogans and to oppose the capitulation of the reactionary Indochinese Government to the Japanese;
2. To apply immediately the directives of the Regional Committee covering the preparation of the insurrection. The regional organizations were asked to put "Revolutionary activity in the forefront and to direct the struggle of the masses in all its forms." The vehicle for organization was to be the United Anti-Imperialist Indochinese Front. Self-defense committees were to be created, composed of the most energetic and courageous individuals, who would be indoctrinated politically and would be instructed in the military arts, including guerrilla warfare, by former soldiers.

The external directing bureau of the Indochinese Communist Party was then located in Kuming and headed by Ho Chi Minh. The organization in Cochinchina was believed to number some 3,000 members and supporters distributed throughout various front organizations, despite the imprisonment or internment of some 800 members of the Indochinese Communist Party during the preceding year. Most of the new recruits were won during the period of legal activity.

It appears that there was disagreement in the ranks of the Communist Party over the question of the insurrection. The left wing of the Indochinese Communist Party alone was responsible for the calling of the insurrection of November 22, 1940. This attempt to utilize the crisis created by Thai and Japanese pressure on the colonial regime to establish a "Popular Government of the Indochinese Democratic

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Republics" may well have been the work of dissident elements capitalizing on peasant unrest in Cochinchina and aided by the Trotskyists and pro-Japanese nationalists. The chief Communist leaders -- Duong bach Mai and Nguyen van Tao -- and the chief Trotskyist leaders -- Ta thu Thau, Tran van Thach, and Phan van Hum -- had managed to have themselves hospitalized at Cho Quan and thereby removed from the Central Prison in Saigon at this time, perhaps to be in a better position to take part in the revolt.

The entire plot was known to the French police, who took swift measures to foil it. The afore-mentioned revolutionary leaders were returned to the Central Prison. Guards were strengthened, police forces augmented, and the administrative chiefs of the provinces notified. The movement flared up as expected on November 22, 1940, but it was crushed by the alerted French forces.

The regional committee of the Indochinese Communist Party was reconstituted following the wave of arrests engendered by the unsuccessful revolt. An important meeting of the committee was held on January 21-28, 1941. The clandestine paper Flag of Liberation (Co Giai Phang) was published and carried a resolution inveighing against those responsible for the insurrectionary movement. The committee condemned two of its members to death and expelled several others. Provision was made for the immediate reorganization of the smashed apparatus. Liaison with the Chinese colony, as well as with the masses of Tonkin and Annam, was declared necessary. The new program called for concentration of forces in an army located in the region of Saigon-Cholon and western Cochinchina. This striking force would, after augmenting its ranks sufficiently, move into Tonkin and Annam. These decisions remained on paper, however, since the movement had been effectively destroyed as a functioning organization. The party was forced to regroup in exile in southern China during World War II.*

* See below, p. 59.

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d. The Trotskyist Movement. The central political doctrine around which the Trotskyist groups in Indochina were organized was the "theory of permanent revolution" and its application to the colonial world. This theory was first advanced by Leon Trotsky in the period preceding the 1905 revolution in Russia. It was Trotsky's contention that only the proletariat -- although a weak and embryonic class in colonial countries -- could successfully lead the struggle for national independence as well as solve the tasks of the democratic revolution, e.g., land division, separation of church and state, and the granting of democratic rights. This was because modern imperialism gave rise to a corrupt and compradore bourgeois class in the backward colonial lands, a class that was unable to play the progressive role of the rising industrial and commercial classes in the nations of western Europe during the period of bourgeois revolution.¹

In line with this conception, the Trotskyists bitterly attacked the official Comintern policy of alliance between the Communists and Chiang K'ai-shek during the period 1924-27. They predicted defeat for the young Chinese Communist Party at the hands of its reactionary Nationalist allies, who, the Trotskyists claimed, would behead the revolution. Following the rupture of relations with Chiang K'ai-shek, the Trotskyists attacked the creation of Soviets by the Communists. They claimed that this policy would isolate the Chinese Communists from the nationalist movement. In fact, the policy led to their suppression by the Kuomintang in the large cities and forced the Communists to evacuate their forces to the countryside.¹

These developments were closely studied by the Indochinese Communists and led to the creation in 1931 of groups opposed to the official party line and the policy of the Communist International. The Trotskyist groups -- "Left Opposition" (Ta Doi Lap), "October Left Opposition" (Ta Doi Lap Thang Muoi), and "Indochinese Communism" (Dong Duong Cong San) -- were strengthened by returned students from France, among whom was Ta thu Thau, the most prominent leader of Indochinese Trotsky

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These students had received their education under the direction of the French Trotskyists. By 1932, a small Trotskyist organization comprising these elements was formed in Cochinchina. It was in the throes of an internal schism over the issue of cooperation with the Communists when some thirty of its leaders were arrested by the French colonial police in August 1932. The Trotskyists, in common with all the other nationalist organizations, had to rebuild their organizations following the repressions of 1932.¹

The split in the Trotskyist movement that existed in 1932, exacerbated by regional particularism, was to be a permanent feature of Indochinese Trotskyism except for a short period in 1939. One group, called the "Bolshevik Leninist Group" or the "International Communist League" but popularly known as the "October" group because of its illegal publication of the same name, existed principally in Hanoi under the leadership of Ho Huu Tuong.² The other group, led by Ta thu Thu, centered mainly in Saigon and was known as "The Struggle" group since it functioned within a united front organization with the Communists that published the joint paper The Struggle (La Lutte).

The "October" group criticized "The Struggle" group primarily on the grounds that the latter collaborated too closely with the Indochinese Communist Party.³ The "October" group independently issued the underground newspaper October (Thang Muoi) from 1931 to 1936. At the end of 1937, the legally published weekly, The Militant (Le Militant) appeared, only to be suppressed. In 1938, October again appeared as a semi-legal paper, but it was superseded by the legal publication, The Spark (Tia Sang), published weekly at first, then daily.

The "October" group carried on active agitation in Hanoi, Haiphong, and Vinh among the numerically small laboring class. Its immediate object was the creation of a legal trade-union movement. Action committees that were set up with Trotskyist participation were successful in backing many strikes in the period

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from 1936 to 1940. When "The Struggle" group was recognized as an official section of the newly constituted Fourth International toward the end of 1939, the "October" group was disbanded and its members joined the unified party.¹

In Cochinchina, the major efforts of the Trotskyists centered around "The Struggle" group.² In 1933, the Trotskyists attempted to build a united-front organization in order to rally the disoriented and disorganized nationalists following the repressions of 1930-32. This projected organization, to be called the Indo-Chinese Revolutionary League (Dong Duong Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi)³, was to embrace all revolutionary nationalists agreeing on a minimum program of revolutionary demands. By May 1933, these efforts were rewarded with the actual creation of the organization known as "The Struggle." Ta thu Thau was able to play an increasingly important role in the political life of Cochinchina in the period 1935-37. In this period, "The Struggle" group, which had been a united front of Trotskyists and Communists, gradually came under his sway. When he was certain of support by "The Struggle" group, he published an article attacking the French Popular Front Government. This led to a two-year jail sentence but made him a popular martyr. During the 1939 elections for the colonial council of Cochinchina, the Trotskyists began publishing The Struggle in the vernacular with the same title (Tranh Dau). They won a smashing victory. Their candidates defeated 3 Constitutionalists, 2 Communists, and several independent representatives in the balloting.⁴ The Trotskyists gained many adherents during this period and were temporarily successful in overcoming the split in their own ranks by unifying the two existing organizations, "The Struggle" and the "October" groups. A Trotskyist source claims that the Trotskyists had a membership of 3,000 in 1939.⁵ They published a number of papers favorable to the Fourth International, among which was The New People (Dan Moi).

* See above, pp. 38 ff.

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In contrast to the official line the Comintern had adopted at its Seventh World Congress in 1935, the political line of the Fourth International in 1939 was clearly anti-imperialist. It did not permit any programmatic alliances with other groups, albeit progressive, but favored united action on specific issues. It further warned its supporters against any approval of national defense "even against the Japanese" on the grounds that the coming war was equally reactionary on both sides. In the given situation in Indochina, the Trotskyist propaganda was successful in attracting many who were thoroughly dissatisfied with French colonial rule.

In 1939, the political situation in France indicated that the French colonial authorities would soon resume the traditional policy of repression. The Trotskyists, who had thus far relied for the most part on their legal organizations, began to construct an illegal apparatus. An underground organization limited to the Saigon-Cholon working class was set up. In September 1939, the expected blow fell. The organization was dissolved and its leadership jailed.¹

The activities of the Trotskyists were effectively curtailed as a result of the repressions. The total number arrested by the French police in this period was 6,000 and included practically all of the leaders of the clandestine nationalist movement. The reemergence of the Trotskyist movement in Indochina awaited the end of World War II.*

e. The Vietnam Revolutionary Party. In 1939, a regrouping of nationalists appears to have taken place in Cochinchina with the formation of a new party, the Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dang). This new party embraced Duong van Giao and other leaders of the Constitutionalist Party; the pro-Japanese Nguyen van Nha; the revolutionary youth leader Tran van An; the ex-Trotskyist Dao duy Phien; and intellectuals such as Phan khao Suu, Nguyen van Thoi, and Ho van Nhut.² The organization is reported to have made plans for an insurrection in

* See below, pp. 64 ff.

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Cochinchina in September 1940, which was to be synchronized with the Japanese invasion of Tonkin. Nguyen van Nha is said to have consulted with the Trotskyist chief, Ta thu Thau, in an effort to effect common action, but this did not materialize. The plan itself failed when the Japanese and French reached an agreement.¹ A similar effort was to have been synchronized with a Thai attack on the western frontier of Indochina. Duong van Giao had intimate connections with elements in the Thai Government. However, as in the case of Japan, Thai demands were granted and the French obtained a free hand in dealing with their internal opposition. The conspirators were discovered and arrested. Duong van Giao, Phan khao Suu, and Dao duy Phien were each sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Nguyen van Nha was aided in his defense by the Japanese consul. He, Tran van An, and Nguyen van Thoi were interned until July 1941, following the Japanese occupation of Cochinchina.² This threesome was destined to play a role in the later pro-Japanese independence movement.

f. The Vietnam Restoration League. The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuoc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) was primarily an organized party of expatriate elements in the periods between World Wars I and II.³ Its headquarters were in Japan, its major leader was Cuong De,^{*} and it had members throughout China, Japan, and Formosa. It was committed to the principle of monarchical rule for Vietnam. Some recruits it made within Indochina among the young intellectuals and students soon accepted republican and Marxian doctrine.^{**}

A small group of its adherents emerged in 1931 in northern Tonkin under the leadership of Hoang Luong, a former employee of the Indochina-Yunnan Railroad Company, under the name of Vietnam Restoration Army (Phuo Quoc Quan).⁴ It was not till 1940 that the group achieved a measure of success. At that time, it won several hundred followers from among the Indochinese colonial troops who participated

* See above, p. 6.

** See above, pp. 17 ff.

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in a revolt attendant upon the entry of Japanese troops into Indochina. A "provisional government" was set up at Dong Dang, in the border region. It was short-lived, however, since the Japanese came to agreement with the French authorities, and Hoang Luong and his soldiers had to flee to China. There, Hoang Luong, regarded as a Japanese supporter, was arrested and put into a concentration camp by the Chinese National Government.¹ His troops were incorporated into the Chinese army to be used in the future invasion of Indochina.

The Vietnam Restoration League was to become the principal organizing agency of pro-Japanese Vietnamese nationalists during the Japanese occupation of Indochina in World War II.*

g. The Vietnam Revolutionary League. It appears that a federation of the various revolutionary nationalist organizations was provisionally constituted in the 1930's under the name Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Doi).² This loose organization permitted temporary collaboration, with individual rivalries continuing to exist. Its principal purpose is reputed to have been the maintenance of good relations with the Chinese Kuomintang. This League bears no relation to the subsequent group of the same name that emerged among the exiled Vietnamese in 1942 in southern China. **

* See below, pp. 53 ff.

** See below, pp. 62 ff.

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III. VIETNAM DURING WORLD WAR II

The Japanese occupation of Indochina from 1941 to 1945 wrought considerable change in Vietnamese political life. The principal change was recognition by the population that the weak French regime was dependent for its existence on the good graces of the Japanese. French efforts to secure native political support against the Japanese failed. Vietnamese who had formerly collaborated with the French turned to the Japanese in the hope of achieving new and improved status. The pro-Japanese monarchist, religious, and moderate nationalist political groups formed a Vietnamese national government when the Japanese dispensed with French rule in March 1945, and this government was, in turn, swept away by the pro-Allied underground when Japan surrendered in August 1945.

Abroad, the Communists attempted to enlist support for a newly created Vietnam Independence League from the "resistance" elements of the French population and to create a unified anti-Japanese movement in support of the Allies. At the same time, a Chinese-supported Vietnam independence movement was created in exile. The more adamant nationalists and Trotskyists continued the clandestine struggle for independence against both warring camps. All these activities were but a prelude to the assumption of power by the nationalist movement in August 1945.

A. Developments within the Country

1. The French-Sponsored Youth Movement. The attitude of the French colonial government itself changed as a result of the Japanese occupation. To offset growing Japanese influence, the government made an effort to gain control of Vietnamese public opinion. Admiral Decoux, Governor General of Indochina for the Vichy French regime, created a vast youth movement.¹ Before the war, the largest legal youth organization had been a non-political scout group numbering approximately 6,000 members. The new government-sponsored organizations claimed a membership of over one million. The movement emphasized physical education and sports. It branched out to include such diverse activities as rescue work, civilian defense, public order, and traffic control. The organizations also took on educational functions, such as the teaching of the romanized script

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(Quoc Ngu). Some training of a paramilitary character was given.

The political results of this activity went far beyond the plans of the administration. The new organizations emphasized the strength and responsibility of youth in contrast to the prestige of age and produced a change in the traditional attitude toward youth on the part of a large section of the population. They gave thousands of young people a consciousness of national interest and service. The organizations developed into a vast reservoir of strength for the nationalist movement, whose agents infiltrated ranks and found their principal support among these young people.¹ In March 1945 the Japanese nominally took over the direction of the youth movement, but in August 1945 it turned into an open nationalist organization whose best-known component group was the Advance Guard Youth (Thanh Nien Tien Phong).* Because of the circumstances under which the youth movement developed, the indoctrination of the membership was not along party lines but limited to a general nationalist appeal.

2. Japanese-Supported Nationalist Parties. Only when their military position grew worse under increasing Allied pressure were the Japanese forced to encourage the organization of Vietnamese nationalists in order to rally Vietnamese support for a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. These efforts were directed toward supplanting the undependent French by a native regime of collaborators. The major Japanese candidate for the role of leadership of the Vietnamese was Cuong De.² Prince Cuong De, titular head of the oldest nationalist organization, the Vietnam Restoration League,** had awaited his return to Indochina from exile in Japan for more than forty years. He was now to replace Bao Dai, the French puppet emperor.

The pro-Japanese nationalist movement began to take on a legal character in 1945. The Japanese protected its leaders from arrest by the French authorities.³ A period of political maneuvering and jockeying took place as Cuong De's candidacy for the throne was built up. In anticipation of the Japanese dismissal of the French Government in

*See below, p. 68.

** See above. p. 6, pp. 50 ff.

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Indochina on March 9, 1945, several underground organizations emerged in February 1945, to function legally under the Japanese regime following March 1945.¹ The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi), one of these groups, soon absorbed the others as affiliates and became the central organization.

a. Northern area. The principal components of the Japanese-sponsored nationalist movement in the north, i.e., in Tonkin and Annam, according to Domei,² were the Great Vietnam Nationalist Association (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Hoi) and the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi).

The Great Vietnam Nationalist Association (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Hoi) was an outgrowth of pro-Japanese wings of the Vietnam Nationalist Party.* It grouped together:

1. The Great Annam People's Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), "which at its height about 1940 -- had about 25,000 members; but as a result of the pressure of the French authorities in Indochina it is now somewhat reduced. Its members are chiefly from the lower classes, students or boy scouts, and its influence extends from the provinces of Ha Dong, Hai Duong, Bao Ninh and Central Annam to the Laos District."
2. The "Great Annam Democratic Party, which was disbanded in 1941 as a result of official pressure but reformed in 1942 and consists chiefly of intellectuals and men of letters; its members number about 2,000." This was probably the section of the Vietnam Nationalist Party known as the Dai Viet Dan Chinh and directed by Nguyen tuong Tam.**
3. Three other groups whose "total membership is two or three thousand." One of these smaller groups was probably the Youth Patriots (Thanh Nhien Ai Quoc), led by Vo xuan Cam, which has been described as a terrorist party that maintained a flow of violent anti-French propaganda.³ Another was the Servants of the Country (Phung Xa Quoc Gioi), directed by Pham Dinh Cuong.⁴

The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) organization, according to Domei,⁵ consisted of the following:

1. "The Annam National Party, consisting of a volunteer corps, a civilian section, and a military section. The volunteer corps, which is the principal element, counts 1,500 in the north, 3,000 in the center, and 5,000 in the south and has influence amongst business men, officials, and intellectuals."
2. The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), "made up of doctors, lawyers and intellectuals in the liberal professions and having latent power among young intellectuals."
3. The National Socialist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Xa), "having about 2,000 members and its chief sphere of influence in the light industry towns of Haiphong and Hanoi." This party was directed by Tran trong Kim, late premier of the Bai Dai government,** and is said to have been inspired by the Japanese Military Police and Intelligence Organization (Kempei Tai) to recruit Vietnamese for the puppet

* See above, pp. 21 ff.

** See above, p. 28.

*** See below, p. 56 ff.

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military forces.

b. Southern area. The main organizations comprising the Vietnam Restoration

League in the south were:¹

1. The Vietnam National Independence Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Doc Lap Dang), founded by Tran van An, Nguyen van San, Ho van Nga, and Ngo tan Nhon. Some of the elements of the dissolved Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dang),* which had been founded in 1939, joined the new organization. The party was markedly pro-Japanese in orientation. It favored collaboration with the Japanese Army and the adherence of Vietnam to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
2. The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), a group of intellectuals and students.
3. The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), an outgrowth of the Cochinchina Vietnam Nationalist Party, consisting of pro-Japanese elements.
4. The Vietnam National Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Dang), a minor political group.
5. The Youth Justice Association (Thanh Nhien Nghia Dong Doan), a minor youth group.
6. The Youth Patriots (Thanh Nhien Ai Quoc), the southern branch of a terrorist youth group. Elements of this southern group created an organization known as the Vietnam Democratic Party (Viet Nam Dan Chu Nghia Dang).
7. The Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect (Phat Giao Hoa Hao),** also known as the Vietnam Independence Restoration Party (Viet Nam Doc Lap van Dang), a militant Buddhist sect led by Huynh phu So.
8. The Great Religion of the Third Amnesty (Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do), a Cao-Daist sect led by Tran Quang Vinh, the principal subordinate of the Cao-Daist Pope, Pham cong Tao.*** The Cao-Daists had been furnished arms by the Japanese and were used as an auxiliary police force throughout Cochinchina.

3. Party Alignments under Direct Japanese Control (March-August 1945). The Japanese

permitted the establishment of an "independent" government of Annam on March 10, 1945 and thereby facilitated political activities on the part of groups other than the French- and Japanese-sponsored parties. On March 10, Bao Dai, Emperor of the Court of Annam, declared the French-Annamese treaty of 1886 abrogated. He further proclaimed the adherence of the new state to the Japanese bloc of Greater East Asia. This concession of "independence" by the Japanese was only the first step in a planned series that was meant to result ultimately in the replacement of Bao Dai by Cuong De.²

Although Annam was declared independent, the status of Tonkin and Cochinchina was as yet undetermined although there as elsewhere Vietnamese functionaries took over all administration on the lower levels. Resident superiors were to be appointed by the

* See above, pp. 49 ff.
** See below, pp. 122 ff.
*** See above, pp. 14 ff.
See below, pp. 119 ff.

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Imperial Court of Annam. In fact, only the resident for Tonkin, Phan ke Toai, was chosen. The Japanese governed Cochinchina directly as a colony, merely replacing French top administrators in that area. It was only on July 19, 1945, by imperial rescript, the Tonkin was officially joined to Vietnam with the return of the cities of Hanoi, Haiphong, and Tourane to the aegis of the Annam court. Cochinchina was joined to Vietnam by imperial edict on August 14, 1945. Thus, Vietnam was formally united, but political developments in the north and south continued to follow different paths.

a. Northern area -- The Tran trong Kim government. During the period following March 10, 1945, political intrigue at the court and popular nationalist activity proceeded apace. The Bao Dai monarchy was supported in the main by the moderate royalist group of Phan Quynh, who served as Minister of the Interior in the Imperial Cabinet. The other members of the cabinet were all representatives of the mandarinates.¹

Bao Dai's first cabinet was hardly representative of the political forces then operating in the "independent" kingdom of Vietnam. Bao Dai himself was not held in popular esteem because of his long period of subservience to the French. However, he was not replaced by Cuong De, although the cabinet was reshuffled on April 17, 1945 and the pro-Japanese supporters of Cuong De under the premiership of Tran trong Kim actually constituted a majority.² The new cabinet, although more representative of the pro-Japanese parties and of independent public opinion, still showed that Bao Dai had little support even among the mandarinates and that he was also opposed by the conservative Catholic elements represented by the influential and ambitious Ngo dinh Diem. Ngo dinh Diem's friend, Tran van Lai, was selected as mayor of Hanoi.³

An effort to give representation to a wider section of the nationalist movement seems to have been made in the selection of individuals for the Finance Council of the cabinet on May 18, 1945. The Vietnam Council formed on July 15, 1945 to "work in conjunction with the political organizations of the Vietnam countries" -- Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina -- included an even more representative group of nationalist leaders.⁴ The persons listed as members of these bodies were mandarins, conservative and moderate

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nationalists, religious leaders, and revolutionary nationalists, including Trotskyists. However, the Vietnam Council was reported dissolved in August 1945 and little is known of its work. The inability of the Tran trong Kim government to include Cochinchina under its rule, as well as its obvious subservience to the Japanese, prevented it from gaining support among the mass of the Vietnamese. The developing crisis in Japanese military affairs further weakened its hold.

b. Southern area. The Japanese assumption of power in Indochina and the proclamation of the "independence" of Vietnam by Emperor Bao Dai placed Cochinchina under a direct Japanese, instead of French, regime and permitted a section of the underground nationalist movement to emerge from hiding. This group included monarchist elements, most of whom supported Cuong De; Cao-Daists who had become politically influential with Japanese help; and some revolutionary nationalists.

On March 18, 1945, the first Japanese-sponsored demonstration for independence took place in Cochinchina. The demonstration was held under the auspices of the southern branch of the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuo Quoc Dong Minh Hoi), which grouped together many different parties and organizations.* At the meeting of March 18, 1945, one of the leaders of the League stated its program as follows: "Union of all forces for the total independence of our country. We must never forget that the indispensable condition for the maintenance of liberty and independence of the countries of Greater Oriental Asia is the final victory of the Japanese Army." At this time, this sentiment was probably shared by all the participating organizations.¹

Events revealed that the status of Cochinchina had not changed since the assumption of power by the Japanese. The Japanese had no intention of recognizing the authority of the court of Annam in Cochinchina. A marked change began to take place in the ranks of the nationalist parties. As the military situation grew worse, many Vietnamese nationalists began to lose confidence in Japanese victory and the underground anti-Japanese

* See above, pp. 54 ff.

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revolutionary nationalist parties increased their agitation.

B. Nationalist Movements in Exile and Underground

The defeat of the nationalist movement within Indochina in 1940 and 1941 had resulted in the resumption of Vietnamese nationalist activities in southern China. South China had been a safe haven for Vietnamese nationalists throughout the years of struggle against French domination. In 1946, an agency of the Vietnam Government, the Vietnam Cultural Association for National Liberation, acknowledged this debt in the following terms: "Thus it came to pass that southern China became the by-word of all Vietnam revolutionists. It was the birth place of the Vietnam revolutionary movement, the base from where were directed all revolutionary activities 'beyond the border' - on Vietnam's own territory."¹

The general toleration by the Chinese of Vietnamese nationalist activities in China against French rule in Indochina expressed a permanent Chinese interest in northern Indochina. To this was added in 1941 the immediate problem of the extension of Japanese strength into Indochina, which closed a valuable channel of supply from the port of Haiphong to southern China. It became a matter of direct military concern to the Chinese National Government to strike a blow against the Japanese in this area. The utilization of Vietnamese for espionage purposes and the creation of a local military force against the Japanese became a military necessity. The remnants of the nationalist parties and groups in exile began to reform their ranks and vie for support from the Chinese. Two competing leagues were formed, the Vietnam Independence League and the Vietnam Revolutionary League.

The first regrouping of Vietnamese nationalists in China was sponsored by the Indochinese Communist Party in the form of a united-front organization to which both parties and individuals could adhere. The organization was named the Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi), popularly known as the Viet Minh, under

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the leadership of Ho chi Minh.* Its influence, which became strong in Tonkin and Annam, did not extend to Cochinchina, where the Communist Party itself continued to operate independently. Another league, under Kuomintang sponsorship, but otherwise parallel to the Viet Minh, was set up in southern China a year later.** It adopted the name of Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Manh Dong Minh Hoi), popularly known as the Dong Minh Hoi.

The amount of arms and aid that each League could obtain was recognized to be a factor that would to a large extent determine the future political situation within Indochina. The two Leagues, the Viet Minh and the Dong Minh Hoi, were to wage an unending political, and later at times a military, struggle against each other. Until the spring of 1945, Indochina remained under firm French and Japanese control. Only when this control began to disintegrate were the two Leagues able to test their popular strength within the country and to claim the leadership of the postwar nationalist mass movement. In their struggle for power, the various pro-Japanese and royalist groups were quickly reduced to insignificance.

1. The Viet Minh and the Communist Party. The Viet Minh was formed during 1941 in Liuchow, China,¹ where its headquarters remained. The city was used as a training base and center. The following organizations composed the Viet Minh at that time:² (1) The Indoohinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang); (2) The New Vietnam Party (Tan Viet Dang)³; (3) The Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Thanh Nhon Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi);⁴ (4) sections of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang); (5) various "National Liberation Associations" -- comprising workers, peasants, youth, women, soldiers, and officers. Only part of the Vietnam Nationalist Party adhered to the Viet Minh. The dominant political group in the Viet Minh was the Indoohinese Communist Party, whose membership in northern Indochina functioned exclusively within

*See above, pp. 28 ff.

**See below, pp. 62 ff.

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- the League and formulated the policy of the organization.

The program of the Viet Minh was built around the concept of collaboration with the Allied nations to defeat Japan and liberate Indochina. The Viet Minh program has been summarized as follows:¹

"At a conference in 1943, delegates of all anti-fascist revolutionary organizations adopted the following political program: (1) Election of a constituent assembly to work out the constitution for a free Indo-China on the basis of adult suffrage; (2) Restoration of democratic liberties and rights, including freedom of organization, press and assembly, freedom of belief and opinion, the right to property, the right of workers to strike, freedom of domicile and freedom of propaganda; (3) The organization of a national army; (4) The right of minorities to self-determination; (5) Equal rights for women; (6) Nationalization of banks belonging to fascists and the formation of an Indo-Chinese national bank; (7) The building up of a strong national economy by the development of native industry, communications, agriculture and commerce; (8) Agricultural reforms and the extension of cultivation to fallow lands; (9) Labor legislation, including the introduction of the eight-hour working day and progressive reforms in social legislation; (10) Development of national education and culture.

"In the international sphere, the program stands for the revision of unequal treaties and an alliance with all democratic nations for the maintenance of peace. More important for the anti-Japanese war, however, is the immediate program of action, which is: (1) Organization of the masses -- workers, peasants, women, and youth -- for the anti-fascist struggle. This has already attained promising successes. (2) Preparation of an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps. (3) The formation of guerrilla bands and bases which will assume greater importance as we gradually approach the time of country-wide military action."

Early in 1942, Ho chi Minh, who was then operating in the north of Tonkin, crossed the border to establish contact with the Chinese and émigré groups as the representative of the Viet Minh in Indochina.² He was arrested and put in jail as a "French spy" for a period of thirteen months until June 1943.³ In the interim, the Viet Minh affiliated with the newly formed Vietnam Revolutionary League* while maintaining its separate organizational identity.⁴

In June 1943 Ho chi Minh was released from jail to help establish liaison with groups in Indochina and thereby facilitate the gathering of information about Japanese troop movements in Indochina. As a leader of the Viet Minh, he became a member of the

* See below, pp. 62 ff.

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Central Committee of the Vietnam Revolutionary League.¹ The Chinese Government furnished the Viet Minh itself, as well as the whole Vietnam Revolutionary League, a monthly stipend and military equipment. In addition, members of the Viet Minh received training at General Chang Fa-kuei's military schools.²

Although the Vietnam Revolutionary League, as a coalition, was designed to end the conflict between the various exile nationalist and revolutionary groups, friction continued between Viet Minh supporters and other nationalists. During 1944 the Viet Minh leadership vied with the leadership of the Vietnam Revolutionary League for support from China and from the US. The Chinese attempted to bring pressure on the Viet Minh to subordinate itself to the Vietnam Revolutionary League leadership, which the Chinese regarded as a more docile group. Relations between the Chinese and the Viet Minh became strained.

Because of strained relations with the Chinese, the Viet Minh attempted to get aid from the United States.³ Liaison was maintained with French resistance elements and with American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) groups, and an espionage net was formed in Indochina. The Viet Minh drew into its ranks an ever increasing stream of Vietnamese opposed to the Japanese occupation. These elements were attracted by the promise of independence with the victory of Allied arms. In August 1944, the Viet Minh claimed a membership in Tonkin of 220,000. French sources placed the figure at 50,000.⁴

The Viet Minh in Cochinchina was little more than an appendage of the Indochinese Communist Party. During the underground period, the Communist Party had repaired the internal schism occasioned by the results of the 1939 elections to the Saigon council.* It clandestinely published the newspaper The Flag of Liberation (Co Giai Phong). The Viet Minh appeared as a legal organization in August 1945 with the emergence of the underground Communist Party. Under the leadership of Tran van Giau and Nguyen van Tao, the Communist Party made a strong effort to build up the Viet Minh as the governmental

* See above, p. 41.

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power in the south parallel to the Vietnam Government in the north.*

2. The Vietnam Revolutionary League. The competing League, the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi), was also founded in Liuchow, China, in October 1942.¹ The League at its inception included the anti-Japanese and anti-French elements of various Vietnamese political groups, principally the following: (1) The Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang);** (2) The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi);*** (3) The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang);**** (4) The Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi);***** and (5) The Liberation League (Giai Phong Hoi).²

The Chinese National Government, anxious to strike at Japanese domination of Indochina, was a prime mover in the formation of the Dong Minh Hoi. In May 1942, Nghiem ke To, the representative of the Vietnam Nationalist Party at Chungking, returned to Yunnan with a mandate to liquidate existing disagreements between the various revolutionary parties by creating a coalition organization.

Previous efforts to compose differences had been unsuccessful. In September 1941 a new revolutionary group named the Indochina Revolutionary Party (Dong Duong Cach Menh Dang) had been formed at Kunming, composed principally of some sixty employees of the railroad in Yunnan. This group had come to the attention of Vu khong Khanh, a leader in exile of the Vietnam Nationalist Party in Yunnan. Vu khong Khanh had been instrumental in effecting a merger with the group, which entered the Vietnam Nationalist Party. A party organ called The Appeal (Tieng Goi) had been issued. Nghiem ke To had been dispatched to Chungking to obtain support from the Kuomintang government and liaison had been established with other émigrés in Kwangsi Province. However, no firm centralized organization had been created. In February 1942, a small Communist-influenced group of

* See below, pp. 67 ff.
** See above, pp. 21 ff.
*** See above, pp. 50 ff.
**** See above, p. 26.
***** See above, pp. 59 ff.

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Some thirty Vietnamese, principally small businessmen in Kunming, had entered upon fusion negotiations with Vu khong Khanh's Nationalist Party. A unified league under the name Liberation League (Giai Phong Hoi) had been created. This fusion had been unsuccessful, however, and the two groups had split apart in March 1942. The Communist-influenced group had retained the name of Liberation League, while Vu khong Khanh had regrouped his supporters under the former name, the Vietnam Nationalist Party.

Responding to Nghiem ke To's request, all the Kunming revolutionary groups in May 1942 sent representatives to Liuohow, where the negotiations to merge all exile revolutionary groups were to take place. There were three Vietnamese organizations then operating in Liuohow: (1) the Vietnam Restoration League, comprising some 700 members, led by Hoang Luong; (2) the Viet Minh; and (3) a group of Vietnamese nationalist exiles formed of elements from the Vietnam Nationalist Party and the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party.

On October 10, 1942, the Dong Minh Hoi was launched, with official recognition from Chinese Marshal Chang Fa-kuei. The principal leadership was provided by the Vietnam Nationalist Party, which dominated the new organization. The program of the Dong Minh Hoi was modeled broadly on that of the Chinese Kuomintang, including the Three People's Principles of Sun Yat-sen. It sought the liberation of Indochina from the French and the Japanese and envisaged close cooperation between Vietnam and China.¹ Organizationally, the Dong Minh Hoi was set up as a paramilitary formation to work in close liaison with the Chinese Nationalist Army. It also maintained an espionage network in northern Tonkin centering in Monocay, Hanoi, and Haiphong.

The coalition character of the Dong Minh Hoi came to an end in 1944. Ho chi Minh, who had been brought into the leadership of the Dong Minh Hoi on his release from jail, returned to Tonkin clandestinely. Within Indochina, there had been no corresponding fusion of the Viet Minh and Dong Minh Hoi forces. Ho chi Minh devoted himself exclusively to the interests of his own organization.² The Dong Minh Hoi became an important political factor within Indochina only when it served as an adjunct to the Chinese occupation

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troops who entered northern Indochina following the defeat of Japan in September 1945.*

3. The Trotskyists. The repression of 1939-40 had smashed the Trotskyist organization in Indochina.** It was not until August 1944 that the first regrouping of adherents of the Fourth International took place in Saigon.¹ These elements were partisans of the former "October" group. Aided by several supporters of the movement from the north, they reconstituted the International Communist League. Apparently the unification of the Trotskyists into one party in 1939 had not been effective. The differences between the "The Struggle" group and the International Communist League, revolving mainly around the question of relations with the Communist Party, evidently had not been reconciled. In general, however, there was programmatic agreement between both groups and they were known popularly as the Fourth Internationalist Party (Trang Cau De Tu Dang).

Shortly after the Japanese coup of March 9, 1945, the International Communist League called on the "revolutionary Saigon masses" to prepare for the coming revolution. A manifesto of March 24, 1945, declared:

"The future defeat of Japanese imperialism will set the Indochinese people on the road to national liberation. The bourgeoisie and feudalists who cowardly serve the Japanese rulers today, will serve equally the Allied Imperialist states. The petty-bourgeois nationalists, by their aimless policy, will also be incapable of leading the people towards revolutionary victory. Only the working class, which struggles independently under the flag of the Fourth International, will be able to accomplish the advance guard tasks of the revolution.

"The Stalinists of the Third International have already abandoned the working class to group themselves miserably with the "democratic" imperialisms. They have betrayed the peasants and no longer speak of the agrarian question. If today they march with foreign capitalists, in the future, they will help the classes of national exploiters to destroy the revolutionary people in the hours to come."

The program of the Trotskyists called for opposition to imperialism and for support of world revolution, a worker-peasant united front, the creation of people's committees (soviets), establishment of a constituent assembly, arming of the people, seizure of

* See below, p. 76.

** See above, pp. 46 ff.

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the land by the peasants and nationalization of the factories under workers' control, and the creation of a workers' and peasant government.

It is not clear when "The Struggle" group of Trotskyists was reorganized, but it is known that it played an influential role in the events of August and September 1945. Its attitude toward the Japanese was summed up in the statement made by Ta thu Thau, Trotskyist chief of "The Struggle" group: "We must never have confidence in them [The Japanese]. However, at this time, we must clutch their shoulders to lift ourselves up. As soon as we are capable of keeping our footing, we must use our shoulders to throw them over."¹

"The Struggle" group was a leading element in the United National Front, which amalgamated with the Viet Minh in September 1945.* It also published its paper, The Struggle (Tranh Dau), as a daily during this period. It is claimed that "The Struggle" group refused unity with the International Communist League in order to unite with the Viet Minh in support of national independence and the establishment of a Vietnam republic.² However, the political line of both organizations was similar and brought them into conflict with the Communist-Viet Minh leadership of the southern government of the Vietnam Democratic Republic.

C. The Seizure of Power by the Nationalists

1. Northern Area. In May 1945 the Viet Minh officially set up a liberated zone in the northern part of Tonkin comprising the six provinces of Cao Bang, Lang Son, Ha Giang, Bac An, Tuyen Quang, and Thai Nguyen. In June the Viet Minh Central Headquarters, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, took the initiative to convene a National Congress. Due to transport difficulties, the Congress was postponed till August. It formally opened in the liberated zones on the day of Japan's capitulation.³

The defeat of Japan at the hands of the Allied powers brought with it the abdication

* See below, pp. 68 ff.

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of Bao Dai and the installation of a "People's Revolutionary Government" headed by Ho Chi Minh. The events leading to the abdication of Bao Dai and the assumption of power in the north by the Viet Minh have been described as follows by the Vietnam Government:

"These epoch-making developments prompted the Viet Minh Party to convene without further delay the National Congress. A revolutionary committee was created and the general revolution was ordered on the night of August 13, immediately after the news of Japan's unconditional surrender.

"On August 16, the National Congress opened at Tan Trao, a locality in Thai Nguyen province, in the liberated zones. Sixty representatives from all parts of the country came to learn additional details on the order for the General Revolution. The home and foreign policies of the Revolutionary Government were mapped out and the Viet Nam people's Liberation Committee,² which became later the Provisional Government of the Viet Nam Democratic Republic,³ was created.

"At this historical gathering, the Viet Minh Party laid down a clear-out program which bore on the following points:

- a) to disarm the Japs before the entry of Allied forces into Indochina;
- b) to wrest the power from the hands of the enemy;
- c) to be in a position of authority when receiving the Allied Forces.

"In some areas, the order for the general revolution was not received. Acting on their own initiative, members of the Viet Minh Front ordered a general mobilization and led the population into the fight for power. Thus, on August 11, our compatriots of Ha Tinh took up arms against the Japanese fascists while uprisings also took place at Quang Ngai.

"On August 14 and 15, our forces seized numerous enemy advanced positions in the vicinity of the liberated zones.

"On August 16, with the news of the Japanese capitulation, millions of people throughout the country rose up to the occasion and a general attack on Japanese barracks and military establishments began.

"On August 17-18, huge demonstrations took place in the capital-city of Hanoi. The fight for power effectively started here, on the 19, with the local military forces going over to the Revolutionists' side. Spearheaded by youth formations, the people's army under the command of the Viet Minh forced their way into the compounds of the Home Ministry Building. Governor Phan ke Toai had already fled with his closest collaborators. The Tran trong Kim puppet government promptly gave way while at the former capital of Annam, Emperor Bao Dai signed his act of abdication in the presence of representatives of the Viet Minh Central Headquarters.

"Thus, a new Power came into being, as the people's Revolutionary Government

* See below, p. 76.

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was officially proclaimed and was given the unqualified support of the entire population."

"A few days later, members of the National Liberation Committee met in session in Hanoi. In view of the changed situation, the New Power was re-organized and a provisional Government which included several non-party members was established with Ho Chi Minh as its president."

This account of the seizure of power at Hanoi has been corroborated by other sources.¹ It is clear, however, that throughout the rest of Tonkin and Annam considerable opposition to the Viet Minh existed. In the northern provinces of Vinh Yen, Lao Kay, Yen Bay, Phu Tho, and Lang Son, in which the Nationalist Socialist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Xa) and the Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) exercised considerable control,² there was bitter fighting between military formations of these parties and Viet Minh forces. Quang Ngai Province in Annam also saw fighting between Viet Minh forces and other nationalists. Among the victims were Pham Quynh, a political figure in the Imperial Government before March 9, 1945, and Ngo dinh Khoi, an important mandarin, former governor of the province, and brother of Ngo dinh Diem, the prominent Catholic leader.³ It was here, also, that Ta thu Thau, outstanding leader of the Indochinese Trotskyist movement, was killed under orders of Tran van Giau of the executive committee of the resistance in the south.⁴ He was executed despite protests by organizations that demanded that he be given a fair trial; their appeals to the government at Hanoi were rejected on the grounds that this was a matter within the purview of the local committee.⁵ In spite of such initial difficulties, the Hanoi government succeeded in composing temporarily its conflicts with the local opposition groups and in establishing itself as the recognized civil authority in Annam and Tonkin.

2. Southern Area. In Cochinchina, the defeat of Japan produced a political vacuum. All the nationalist organizations moved to fill it by proclaiming the independence of the country from all imperialist domination. There was a great political upsurge on the part of the population with the realization of their new-found freedom. All over Cochinchina huge independence demonstrations took place. The Japanese-created Bac Dai

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Vietnam government had proclaimed Cochinchina's incorporation in Vietnam on August 14, 1945, and appointed Nguyen van Sam as regent for Cochinchina, but that measure had come too late to restore confidence in the government.

The nationalist movement in Cochinchina was ideologically split in several ways. The different political groups had, moreover, obtained arms and were thus able to force the concurrence of the local population in areas under their control. The Cao Dai* and Hoa Hao** religious-political organizations attempted to set up unitary religious states. The city of Tay-Ninh was controlled completely by militant Cao-Daists, who maintained the seat of their order there. The pacifist wing of Cao-Daism was located in Ben-Tre. The Hoa Hao set up an independent state of Can-Tho. The Viet Minh, under Communist direction, leaned toward the Allied powers and was disposed to make concessions in their favor, while the Trotskyists maintained their intransigent opposition to all foreign powers, including the Allies.

The first to organize were the formerly pro-Japanese parties and the Trotskyists of "The Struggle" group. On August 14, 1945, a "United National Front" (Mat Tran Quoc Gia Thong Nhut) was established, composed of the following organizations:¹ (1) the National Independence Party (Vietnam Quoc Gia Doc Lap Dang);^{***} (2) the Advance Guard Youth (Thanh Nien Tien Phong);^{****} (3) the Intellectual Group (Nhom Tri Thuc);² (4) the Functionaries' Federation (Lien Doan Cong Chuc);³ (5) the Buddhist League (Tinh Do Cu Si);^{*****} (6) the Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect (Phat Giao Hoa Hao);** "the Struggle" group (Tranh Dau); and the Cao-Dai League (Doan The Cao Dai).* The United National Front was strongly influenced by Trotskyist doctrine. In a demonstration staged on August 23, 1945, Trotskyist slogans such as "Arm the People, Organize a Popular Army, Workers' Government" were evident. Leaflets called on the population to overthrow the Tran trong

* See above, pp. 14 ff; see below, pp. 119 ff.

** See below, pp. 122 ff.

*** See above, p. 55.

**** See above, p. 53.

***** See below, p. 124.

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the government and to repudiate Nguyen van Sam, the "Imperial Resident" appointed by Bao Dai.¹

About the same time, leaflets were issued calling for attendance at a meeting on August 25, 1945 organized by the Viet Minh. A typical leaflet stated: "The people of Viet Nam will show on this day their desire to live free and independent under the sign of a new democracy The Viet Minh call on French citizens to invite them to participate in this meeting. It does not forget that Democratic France, risen from the 1789 Revolution and the Paris Commune, will bring all its help to sustain the demands of oppressed peoples. The Viet Nam people show no hate against foreigners, although they are ready to fight with all their means against foreign imperialism. The Viet Minh calls on the French workers and technicians to set up the new Vietnam democracy, which will be one of the bulwarks of the Great World Democratic Front in the Far East." Printed slogans were issued stating, "Long live the Democratic Republican Government of Viet Nam. The Viet Minh to power."²

An interesting feature of this period was the use of the prestige of the Soviet Union as a means of augmenting Communist and Viet Minh influence. A leaflet of August 17, 1945 issued by the Indochinese Communist Party in Saigon and addressed to French officials and the French population enjoined them to refrain from provocative acts and racial discrimination. It stated that the Communist Party and the Viet Minh disapproved of "all actions of provocation and violence between inhabitants of Indochina of every origin and every race; they will enforce by all means at their disposal the repression of disorder from any source." The leaflet significantly noted that "the authorities and the French population of Indochina must remember that the powerful ally of their country, the USSR, is also the guide and hope of the Indochinese Communist Party and the Viet Minh; that this community of attitude must be the guarantee of an exact understanding of the situation."³

At the meeting of August 25, 1945, a Southern Executive Council, called the Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic, was formed.⁴ It regarded

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itself as the southern representative of the Hanoi government. The imperial delegate, Nguyen van Sam, cabled his resignation to the Vietnam Court on August 26, 1945 and recognized the authority of the committee to rule in the south. However, the committee was dominated by the Indochinese Communist Party and was not representative of the general nationalist movement. In order to represent Cochinchina authoritatively, it had to be broadened. In the meantime, it took on the functions of a government and negotiated with the British, whose troops were to occupy southern Indochina in accordance with arrangements made to effect the surrender of Japan.

The United National Front and the Viet Minh had to compose their differences if they were to meet the Allied troops with a common policy. Unity was difficult to achieve, however, because their principal conflicts concerned their attitude toward the Allies and the organization of the struggle to maintain the independence of Vietnam. The Trotskyists in the United National Front sponsored the creation of People's Committees in the Saigon-Cholon area, called for arming the population against Allied restoration of French rule, and sponsored social reforms. The Viet Minh, which had taken over the old governmental structure, was disposed to negotiate with the Allies. Favoring unity among the various social classes at the time, the Viet Minh leadership was opposed to social reforms that would encourage division among the Vietnamese. The necessity for agreement to present a unified front in the negotiations with the Allied occupation authorities forced a temporary reconciliation, however. The United National Front participated in the Viet Minh meeting of August 25, 1945. Formal negotiations for unity between the two nationalist groups were held in the Saigon City Hall on August 30, 1945. At this meeting, some of the existing differences between the two groups were clarified, and, although no decision was reached at the time, sufficient basis was established for subsequent amalgamation.¹

While these negotiations were going on, the dissident Trotskyists, organized in the International Communist League, denounced the Viet Minh as a coalition including bourgeois elements in Vietnamese society and called on the masses to complete the revolution by building up "people's committees" as organs of power. This agitation was

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opposed by the Viet Minh, whose representative, Nguyen van Tao, is quoted as saying: "All those who have instigated the peasants to seize the landowners' property will be severely and pitilessly punished." He added: "We have not yet made the Communist revolution, which will solve the agrarian problem. This government is only a democratic government, that is why such a task does not devolve upon it. Our government, I repeat, is a bourgeois-democratic government, even though the Communists are now in power."¹

Formal unity between the Viet Minh and the United National Front was achieved during the following week. On the night of September 6, 1945, the Viet Minh chose five delegates to serve as a permanent committee to deal with matters relating to the Southern Resistance Committee and to work on the formation of a national bloc.

The next morning, September 7, 1945, Viet Minh delegates met with delegates of various groups and parties not yet part of the Viet Minh and some interested individuals who were not affiliated with any of the groups.² The International Communist League did not participate. It was decided to choose from among the persons present eleven or twelve members to constitute a committee of the national bloc.³ It was further decided that each member selected would be empowered to convoke the subcommittee to be constituted. The committee issued the following appeal: "Before the excessively grave situation now in progress we appeal to all the groups and parties as well as all the patriots of the south to uphold the Viet Minh Southern Committee as well as the Southern National Bloc Committee in order to resist and repel the strong invasion which now approaches us."⁴

The merger thus effected under the stress of revolutionary events belied the true situation, since it covered up the real differences that existed within the nationalist camp on the issue of admitting or resisting Allied troops. For practical purposes, this became a question of distributing or not distributing arms to the population. On September 2, 1945, a large demonstration had been staged

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in Saigon during the course of which a riot developed, leading to the death of some Vietnamese and at least one Frenchman.

The Trotskyist paper, The Struggle, published an editorial on September 7, 1945 entitled "What Does The Executive Committee Think?" which charged that the Viet Minh executive committee had failed to make the necessary security preparations for the demonstration of September 2, 1945 although trouble was expected. It further called attention to the absence of a protective cordon of police who could have put an end to the firing.

The same day, over the signature of the Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic, Tran van Giau issued an appeal to the population of Saigon-Cholon that blamed "provocateurs" for the fighting that had developed. The appeal stated that "a group of persons have organized a meeting demanding that the population be armed. The Japanese and Allied authorities, informed of this, fear that new and more bloody difficulties will ensue." It went on to say: "According to international agreement, the Japanese army must assure order up to the arrival of the Allied army of occupation and everyone cannot but know that the Japanese forces here are still intact despite the surrender. Japanese General Headquarters have therefore decided to: (1) disarm the national troops; (2) confiscate machine guns and other arms; (3) ban all political movements which trouble order and security; (4) ban all demonstrations without prior authorization of Japanese General Headquarters; (5) disarm the population. In the interest of our country, we call on all to have confidence in us and not let themselves be led by people who betray our country. It is only in this spirit that we can facilitate our relations with the Allied representatives."¹

This appeal forced the issue between the Viet Minh and the nationalists opposed to its leadership. The Trotskyist International Communist League held meetings calling for arming of the population. Moreover, it incited its followers against the arriving British troops.² The people's committees that had been

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established challenged the authority of the Vietnam Southern Executive Committee. And there were a number of clashes between Viet Minh troops and Hao Hao or Cao Dai troops in the provinces.¹

The appeal of Tran van Giau of September 7 was followed by one of September 8 that attributed the Japanese repressive measures to provocations and said: "Who are those who have provoked these measures? In this situation can they oppose a superior military force? Have they means with which to make diplomatic protests? Democratic liberty, which we, the Administrative Committee, have given to the people, these irresponsible individuals have used to harm the people, to harm the country. So, for the people's rights, for the nation's life, the Viet Minh Executive Committee appeals to the population to unmask the egoistic provocateurs. This alone will permit us to surmount the difficulties of the moment and to get the people out of the trap which has been set by their enemies."² On September 12, the entire Central Committee of the International Communist League was arrested by the police chief, and its headquarters was closed. A violent conflict ensued. The result was the suppression of the Trotskyist organizations. Tran van Thach, Phan van Hum, and dozens of other Trotskyists were killed.³

The fighting within the nationalist movement in Cochinchina left deep scars. The disunited resistance groups were unable to forge a common front against the imminent French attempt to reconquer power. When, on September 23, 1945, the French, with British help, took over power in Saigon by a swift coup, the Vietnam southern government was politically unprepared. After having taken responsibility for negotiating with the British and protested to no avail, in a memorandum issued in October 1945, the Vietnam Southern Executive Committee noted that: "Suppression of the press, which was unanimously defending the independence of Vietnam, prevented us...from controlling and directing public opinion at a time when the mob was already exasperated by provocations of the French...The British army, to accomplish its

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mission of disarming the Japanese forces, had no need to disarm our police force and suppress our government as it did. Yet we have demonstrated by our actions that our government is most cordial in its desire to lend every possible assistance to the British army in the accomplishment of its task."¹ These statements and appeals were useless. In the month to follow, the nationalist movement waged a disunited fight against the French. The center of the political scene shifted to the north, where the newly established Vietnam Democratic Republic succeeded in maintaining its hegemony.

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IV. NATIONALISM IN POWER

In spite of the serious setbacks suffered by the nationalist movement in the south, and its limited freedom under Chinese military occupation in the north, the power of government in the greater part of the country remained in the hands of the nascent Vietnam Government after September 1945. Governmental activities within the area under its control centered around the formation of political and administrative machinery, the conduct of foreign policy and of military operations, the provision of food, the issuance of currency, and flood control. Individual party lines and activities of the groups participating in the government tended to be submerged in a coalition policy in order that the pressure of the French and Chinese might be met by a united nationalist front.

However, political differences within the Vietnam Government were reflected in the changes in composition of the cabinet and the representation at the meetings of the newly formed National Assembly in March and October 1946. In the summer of 1946, disagreement within the government resulted in open clashes between government forces and troops under the leadership of dissident elements of the Vietnam Nationalist Party and Dong minh Hoi. The governmental coalition was successful in overcoming these difficulties. It faced a more formidable foe in the French, however; negotiations for a political settlement were unproductive.

Although unity of northern and southern Vietnam remained at all times one of the principal tenets of all factions of the nationalist movement, political developments in the two areas continued to follow distinctly different patterns.

A. The Vietnam Government

1. Northern Area. The executive organ set up on August 16, 1945 by the Viet Minh to assume power as the official government in Hanoi was the "People's Liberation Committee."^{*} Although it had popular support, this committee was not representative

* See above, p. 68.

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of the whole nationalist movement. It was dominated by the Indochinese Communist Party, which was represented by six members. Other Viet Minh adherents were also six in number, and two Vietnam Democratic Party representatives completed the roster.

Coincidentally with the declaration of independence on September 2, 1945 of the Vietnam Democratic Republic,¹ the "People's Liberation Committee" gave way to a ministerial government known as the "Provisional Government," which ruled until March 2, 1946. This government was slightly more moderate in its composition.² The center of gravity shifted from the extreme left to left of center. The largest representation was still that of the Communists, who had five posts. Other Viet Minh adherents controlled three posts, the Democrats had three, and there were three independents and one Catholic representative. It was under this government that the Indochinese Communist Party was dissolved in November 1945, ostensibly in the interest of national unity.³ A number of further steps were necessary to create a stable governmental coalition that was representative of all the major nationalist elements in the Vietnam. The formation of such a coalition on the basis of a non-controversial program was imperative in view of the many difficulties confronting the Vietnam Government.

The chief difficulty was the occupation of Indochina north of the sixteenth parallel by the Chinese army, in accordance with Allied directives to accept the Japanese surrender and disarm the Japanese soldiery. The drain on the resources of Tonkin by the Chinese force sent to accomplish this task was very great. Moreover, the Chinese military had as adjuncts the Dong Minh Hoi and the Vietnam Nationalist Party,* which could be established in power as a new government should the Chinese authorities decide to do so, particularly since areas in Tonkin were under the military control of the Dong Minh Hoi. The Dong Minh Hoi and Vietnam

* See above, pp. 62 ff.

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Nationalist Party, plus some minor political groups, functioned together under the name Nationalist Front (Mat. Tran Quoc Gia).¹ A further complicating factor was the imminent threat of a French invasion to regain control of the north.

The Vietnam Government under the leadership of Ho chi Minh had to steer a course between the Scylla of the Chinese Army and the Charybdis of the French invasion fleet. Under these pressures, the Viet Minh managed to compose its differences with a dissident section of the Dong Minh Hoi. On October 23, 1945, a pact was signed between the two organizations as a prelude to future unity in the interest of the "common struggle against the aggressive attempts of the colonial French; in order to defend the liberty and independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."² Other elements of the Dong Minh Hoi and the Vietnam Nationalist Party were not so easily pacified. On December 23, 1945, before the Vietnam Government conducted elections for the Vietnam National Assembly^{*} in Tonkin and Annam -- and clandestinely in parts of Cochinchina -- in January 1946 to legitimize its rule,³ it was agreed that the Vietnam Nationalist Party and the Dong Minh Hoi were to be assigned fifty and twenty seats respectively.⁴ A further price that the Ho chi Minh government had to pay for its existence under the Chinese occupation was the constitution of a National Coalition Government⁵ at the first session of the newly selected Vietnam National Assembly on March 2, 1946. The composition of this government was: two Communists, three representatives of the Vietnam Nationalist Party, one of the Dong Minh Hoi, two Democrats, one Socialist, and three independents. The Vice Ministries were divided as follows: 1 Viet Minh, 1 Socialist, 1 Democrat, 3 independents, 2 Dong Minh Hoi, and 1 Vietnam Nationalist Party.

It was this government which assumed responsibility for the French-Vietnam agreement of March 6, 1946 which, following on the heels of a agreement between France and China, provided for a limited French force in Tonkin and Annam to replace

* See below, pp. 80 ff.

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the Chinese army and for recognition of the Vietnam Republic as a "free state within the French union."¹ The agreement constituted a retreat from the full independence proclaimed by the Vietnamese on September 2, 1945. There was a great deal of opposition to the agreement from nationalists who saw in it the first wedge of returning French control of their country.² Only the great personal prestige of Ho Chi Minh made it possible to obtain acceptance of the agreement by the bulk of the nationalist movement.³

Despite the fact that their representative, Vu Khong Khanh, was a signatory of the March 6 agreement with the French, important leaders of the Dong Minh Hoi and the Vietnam Nationalist party withdrew their support of the Vietnam Government in protest against the "pro-French" policy that they attributed to the Viet Minh. The strained political situation was temporarily eased with the creation of the "League for the National Union of Viet Nam" at Hanoi on May 27, 1946. The twenty-seven founding fathers included prominent representatives of all the principal political organizations as well as independents, who jointly pledged "to safeguard our autonomy, so as later to attain complete independence".⁴

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The agreement thus signed was short-lived. One of the planks in the platform agreed upon was unification of the administration and the army. In subsequent months, the Vietnam Government took positive measures against dissident nationalists who challenged its authority in a number of areas in northern Tonkin. Some leaders of the Dong Minh Hoi and the Vietnam Nationalist Party, including Nguyen Hai Than, Nguyen Tuong Tam, and Vu Khong Khanh, fled to China and then to Hongkong after troops under their control were defeated by Vietnam Government troops acting in conjunction with French forces.⁵ There, they reorganized the Nationalist Front to group nationalists disaffected with the Ho government.⁶ This split weakened the nationalist cause. The Viet Minh leadership in the north, as well as in the south, faced

* See above, p. 77.

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opposition from within the ranks of the nationalist movement on matters relating to the conduct of the struggle for independence.

2. Southern Area. A continuing guerrilla struggle had gone on in Cochinchina since September 1945, when the southern arm of the Vietnam Government was displaced by the reestablishment of French control in Saigon. This struggle was conducted by armed forces of many different political groups, with no central unified command. In areas not under French control there were frequent clashes between various nationalist groups who attempted to establish themselves and their organizations in power.

The agreement of March 6th further complicated matters for the resistance in the south, since under its terms the status of Cochinchina was to be determined by referendum. Abiding by the agreement would have meant the cessation of hostilities and a maintenance of a politically undetermined condition until such time as the referendum could establish the position of Cochinchina with respect to the Vietnam Republic. In the meantime, the French claimed a free hand in Cochinchina. Inasmuch as the various resistance organizations controlled the greater part of the countryside, this was a great deal to grant. Not many nationalists were willing to accept such a solution. Only a very small body of troops under the leadership of Nguyen Hoa Hiep did make their peace with the French.¹ It appears that in April 1946 a successful effort was made to unify the southern resistance groups. Under the leadership of Nguyen Binh, the principal southern military leader, a National Union Front (Mat Tran Quoc Gia Lien Hiep) was created at Ba Queo (Cochinchina) on April 20, 1946.²

The Vietnam Government made partially successful efforts to get the resistance elements in the south to cease hostilities in order to facilitate diplomatic negotiation with the French. The French authorities soon made a continuation of this policy impossible, however, by attempting to stimulate autonomist or separatist tendencies in Cochinchina. A profusion of splinter parties and groups came into being that

* See above, p. 77.

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sought public support on the issue of creating an independent state of Cochinchina that would not be an integral part of the Vietnam Republic.* This was followed by the French High Commissioner's promulgation of a decree on June 1, 1946 setting up a provisional government of the Cochinchinese Republic.¹ The provisional government, headed by Nguyen van Thinh, represented a small wealthy group of Vietnamese and was completely French-controlled.** This action aroused particular antagonism in the nationalist camp because it came on the eve of negotiations between the Vietnam Republic and the French Government at Fontainebleau, France to achieve a settlement by implementing the agreement of March 6.² It was met by renewed pledges of the newly created National Union Front in the south to continue the struggle for an independent and united Vietnam.³

In subsequent months, friction again developed between various nationalist organizations in the south, leading to a break-up of the unified resistance. On July 13, 1946 Nguyen Binh ordered the dissolution of the National Union Front and placed all its component groups under the authority of the Vietnam United People's Committee (Hoi Lien Hiep Quoc Dan Viet Nam). Sections of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao religious groups came into conflict with the Vietnam United People's Committee, recognized as the southern arm of the Vietnam Government. Even the outbreak of hostilities between the Vietnam Government and the French on December 19, 1946 did not close the breach. A small number of the nationalist elements in the south collaborated with the French in an effort to win in this way the long-sought independence for Vietnam and displace the leadership of the Viet Minh in its control of the Vietnam Republic.***

B. The National Assembly

The Vietnam Government had been in power a year when the second meeting of

* See below, pp. 132 ff.
** See below, pp. 133 ff.
*** See below, pp. 103 ff.

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the Vietnam National Assembly took place in Hanoi from October 26, 1946 to October 31, 1946. During the year the relations with France had deteriorated considerably.¹ The establishment of the provisional government of Cochinchina by the French,² the failure of the negotiations at the Dalat Conference to produce a settlement of disputed issues,² the invasion of southern Annam by the French,³ and the unimplemented modus vivendi signed on September 14, 1946 following the breakdown of negotiations at Fontainebleau⁴ set the stage for these sessions of the Vietnam National Assembly.

The composition of the Assembly⁵ was the result of elections held on January 6, 1946.^{**} There is considerable doubt as to the extent to which these elections reflected the popular will. Not only were the opposition parties, the Vietnam Nationalist Party and the Dong Minh Hoi, assigned seventy delegates before the election, but also examination of the results issued by the Vietnam Government reveals that an inordinately large vote was claimed for a country where the parliamentary system was for the most part unknown. The figures released for Tonkin imply that 73 percent of the total population of voting age registered and 91 percent of those registered actually cast ballots.⁶

However constituted, the National Assembly itself could hardly be discounted as a representative body for the Vietnamese. Its membership⁷ reflected all political currents and tendencies, from the conservative mandarin to the extreme left. Two hundred and ninety-one members of the Assembly were present at the opening of the second session in October 1946. The largest grouping consisted of 90 independents, led by Hoang minh Chau. The Viet Minh was the biggest party, having 80 delegates, led by Phan van Dong, Nguyen dinh Thi, and Nguyen trong Nham. The 45 Democrats were led by Do duc Duc and Ton quang Phiet. Phan tu Nghia and Nguyen Xien shared leadership of the 24 Socialists. The Communist delegation (Groupe Marxiste) of 15 had as its

* See above, pp. 79 ff.
See below, pp. 152 ff.
** See above, p. 77.

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prominent spokesmen Vo nguyen Giap, Nguyen van Tao, Khuat duy Tien, Tran huy Lieu, and Ngo thi Hue. The Dong Minh Hoi filled 17 of its allotted 20 seats, while the Vietnam Nationalist Party mustered 20 of the 50 it was allowed.¹

The Vietnam National Assembly meeting of October 1946 was significant in many additional respects. It provided a test of the existence of democratic liberties under the Ho chi Minh government. By and large, the atmosphere of the Assembly gave the appearance of a typical legislative debating society. A neutral observer of the proceedings states: "It is however a healthy sign that the opposition is at least allowed to speak and that their questions, however embarrassing, are reported in the local press."² It should be noted, however, that the ubiquitous police agents of the government kept a close check on some of the dissidents and that a few members disappeared after the convocation. Police agents conducted several house searches and contributed in some measure to a feeling that it was dangerous to oppose the government too strongly.

The Assembly adopted in October 1946 the basic constitution defining the nature of the Vietnam Democratic Republic by a vote of 240 to 2. As adopted, the constitution embodies many of the ideals of the Western democratic states, including freedom of the press, assembly, inviolability of person, etc. It provides for a unicameral legislature and for a ministerial government responsible to the legislature.³

Further, the Vietnam National Assembly is significant in that the parliamentary strength of the existing political groups gives some indication of the importance of their organizations. The changes in composition of the Vietnam Government selected by the National Assembly reflected the weakened position of the Dong Minh Hoi and Vietnam Nationalist Party, some of whose leaders had fled to China.* The cabinet was increased in size from twelve to sixteen posts in an effort to broaden its base. The post of Minister of Economic Affairs was left open for a Cochinchinese representative. The Vice-Presidency was also left vacant.

* See above, p. 78.

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The deterioration in relations with the French authorities in Indochina resulted in increased representation of the Communists in the government. Communist cabinet strength increased from two to five ministries, which gave them effective control of the government. The Vietnam Nationalists were reduced from three to one; the Dong Minh Hoi, from two to one. The Socialists and the Democrats retained one and two ministries respectively. The number of independents increased from two to four. Nine of the total of twelve vice ministries were filled. Three each were assigned to Communists and independents, one each to the Viet Minh, Socialists, and Democrats. Bao Dai remained as Supreme Councillor.¹

The new government was announced on November 3, 1946. It came to power immediately preceding a period in which the Vietnamese-French conflict was to erupt into open warfare in Tonkin.

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V. NATIONALIST ALIGNMENTS SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF THE FRENCH-VIETNAM WAR

Official diplomatic relations between the French and Vietnam Governments were terminated when Vietnam armed forces launched a prepared attack on French troop positions at Hanoi on December 19, 1946. The formal outbreak of widespread hostilities climaxed a preceding period of deteriorating political relations and intermittent clashes between the French and Vietnamese soldiers. In November 1946, following local disputes, French troops had assumed control of Haiphong and Langson. The French had violated the existing military agreement by landing a battalion of heavily armed men at Tourane, Annam. Vietnam Government protests were to no avail in rectifying these situations. There had been repeated friction between French soldiers and the local population in Hanoi and other cities in Tonkin. The referendum on inclusion of Cochinchina within Vietnam had not been held, and a new cabinet had been installed on December 6, 1946 in the French-sponsored government there. The attack launched by the Vietnamese at Hanoi was a direct reaction to the French policy of attempting to establish full military control of the country before negotiating a definitive political settlement with the Vietnam Government.

Initially, the transition from armed truce to open violence tended to unify the nationalists in support of the Vietnam Government. It was generally recognized that only a coalition policy of deferring political differences would permit the maximum devotion of effort to successful prosecution of the war. Most nationalists recognized that the effectiveness of the resistance to the French would determine the extent of the concessions to be gained in the eventual settlement.

The French, on their part, attempted to supplement their military actions by a political offensive. This offensive took the form of stimulating public speculation on the imminent collapse of the Vietnam Government.¹ Every opportunity was utilized to stress possible disagreements among Vietnam leaders. French propaganda pictured Ho Chi Minh as the prisoner of his government.² Nguyen Manh Ha, a prominent Catholic political figure and member of the Ho government who had remained in Hanoi when the

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Vietnam Government withdrew from the city following the attack of December 19, 1946, was publicized as the possible leader of a new government.¹ The Dong Minh Hoi elements in exile in China and ex-emperor Bao Dai were also discussed as likely elements in the formation of a new government.² A series of solicitous statements were made by French leaders Leon Blum and Marius Moutet in regard to the autonomous republic of Cochinchina,³ whose new president, Le van Hoach, had evinced a desire to expand the scope of his government to include Vietnam.⁴ Administrative committees of Vietnamese willing to work under French auspices were created for Tonkin and Annam. Having ruled out negotiations with Ho chi Minh's government, the French cast about for a suitable native regime with which to deal.

The necessity for a political solution became all the more apparent as the fighting continued. The Vietnam Government demonstrated that French hopes of limited police action leading to pacification of Indochina were unjustified. The French held the larger coastal cities, but the Vietnamese retained control of the countryside. Unable to end the impasse by military means, the French turned toward a political solution that envisaged the setting up of a rival government in opposition to the Ho regime. The French negotiated with ex-emperor Bao Dai^{*} in hope that he would be able to split the resistance leadership through signing an agreement that would satisfy the aspirations of the moderate nationalist elements.

In June 1947 a French representative, Paul Mus, met with Bao Dai in Hongkong, and shortly after this meeting a French-sponsored campaign for Bao Dai's return to Vietnam was begun in French-held areas of Indochina. At Hadong on September 10, 1947, French High Commissioner Emile Bollaert announced the terms under which the French were willing to negotiate the future status of Vietnam. These terms, rejected by the Vietnam Government, were accepted as a basis for negotiations by Bao Dai. Bao Dai met with Bollaert aboard a French cruiser in the Baie d'Along on December 6, 1947 and subsequently in Geneva, Switzerland, in early January 1948. An agreement was finally

* See below, pp. 103 ff.

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signed on June 5, 1948 by Bao Dai and Bollaert at a second meeting in the Baie d'Along. Bao Dai subsequently established a government in June 1949.

The nationalist movement in Vietnam is thus divided into two wings: one supporting the Vietnam Government, the other associated with the rival government under Bao Dai. This division has become the basic factor in current nationalist alignments. The Vietnam Government camp, which embraces the vast majority of the nationalists in Indochina presents a probably somewhat deceptive picture of unity, the fringes of the governmental coalition remaining fluid and in communication through many channels with elements on the opposite side. The Bao Dai government presents a perhaps more accurate picture of confusion and impotence.

A. Parties in the Vietnam Government Camp

The Vietnamese decision to resort to military action to effect a favorable political settlement with the French probably reflected the transfer of actual leadership of the Vietnam Government to the hands of more extremist and anti-French elements within Vietnam. The beginnings of this development can be traced back to November 1946. Following the occupation of Haiphong and Langson by the French, the Tongbo, the ruling committee of the Viet Minh and the strongest of the parties in the Vietnam Government, demanded that the Vietnam Government take more energetic measures to protect its sovereignty, stating: "We can negotiate only if we defend ourselves."¹ Even the more conciliatory elements saw little hope in the continued efforts of President Ho Chi Minh to reach a peaceful settlement.

Thus, the outbreak of war with the French tended to unify the Vietnam Government camp. The Communists and the Viet Minh, identified with the French-Vietnamese agreement of March 6, 1946 and the modus vivendi of September 14, 1946, had been under constant attack from pro-Chinese, Trotskyist, and extremist elements for their policy of compromise with the French. Unwillingness to accept the French interpretation of the modus vivendi and opposition to French action in Haiphong and Langson brought the parties

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together on the principal issue that had caused division in their ranks, that of relations with France. The exile Nationalist Front (Mat Tran Quoc Gia) in China,^a consisting primarily of disaffected Dong Minh Hoi and Vietnam Nationalist Party elements, announced its willingness to make "common cause with the Vietnam Government...with a view to the adoption of a common line of action toward French."¹ The Communists and the Viet Minh were relieved of the burdensome responsibility for operating the French-Vietnamese condominium in Tonkin and could join with all other parties in a nonecontroversial policy of support for the war.

Government activities in general became limited to the conduct of military operations, the provision of food and military supplies, control of the flood problem in Tonkin, and the coordination of the nation-wide education program. Other matters had, of necessity, to be deferred, and administrative responsibilities had to be delegated to, or left in the hands of, local authorities. Moreover, the military pressure exerted by the French at many scattered points within Vietnam could be met only with the political support of the local population and the established local leadership. This leadership was in many cases completely out of sympathy with any leftist program, although strongly nationalist. Important Catholic areas, for example, were in a position to choose sides freely, and could be aligned with the Vietnam Government only by a policy of broad nationalist appeal. Aside from the internal factors that made unity imperative within the government coalition, the foreign relations of the Vietnam Government imposed upon it a policy of caution. Benevolent neutrality, if not active assistance, on the part of the Thai Government, the Chinese Nationalist Government, and the Chinese Communists was a necessary condition for Vietnamese military success. The attitudes of the US, USSR, India, the Vatican, the Arab League, and the United Nations were of great potential importance.

It appears that the policy followed by the Vietnam Government has, in fact, been that of a wide coalition united on certain basic nonecontroversial, non-party

^a See above, p. 78.

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issues, and that unity has been achieved not by resolving, but by deferring resolution of, the issues that divide the members of the government coalition.

The few nationalists -- such as the Catholic leader Nguyen manh Ha -- who remained in French-controlled territory following the beginning of the conflict did not collaborate with the French, although the French attempted to use their presence as an indication of defection from the nationalist cause. In Saigon, a vigorous legal and illegal press continued to campaign for recognition of the Ho chi Minh government and the cessation of hostilities.

The Vietnam Government itself was reshuffled twice in an effort to establish the broadest coalition possible in the struggle against the French. Other reasons for its reorganizations were to meet foreign and internal criticism of the government as "extremist" and to provide new personnel with whom the French might negotiate a peace.¹

The first changes occurred in March and April 1947. On March 20, 1947 Ton duo Thang, a Viet Minh supporter, was given the Ministry of the Interior, replacing Huynh thuo Khang (an independent) who had died. Tran duy Hung, an independent, was given the post of Vice Minister of the Interior when the incumbent Communist, Hoang huu Nam, died.² Following a ^{meeting of the} Council of Ministers on April 30, 1947, President Ho chi Minh relinquished the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to his Socialist Under Secretary, Hoang minh Giam.³

After a cabinet meeting of July 19, 1947, other important changes were announced. The Viet Minh Minister of Interior, Ton duo Thang, was given another job and his post was left vacant (to be filled by a Cochinchinese) in charge of his Vice Minister, Tran duy Hung, an independent. The post was later filled by Phan ke Toai, an independent. Vo nguyen Giap, Communist Minister of National Defense, was replaced by his Vice Minister, Ta quang Buu, an independent. The Vice Minister of National Economy, Phan van Dong, a Communist, was replaced by Cu huy Can, a Democrat. Other changes in

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vice ministries included: Communications, Le Dung, an independent, acting pro tem for Dang phuc Thong, a Socialist; Health, Ton that Tung, an independent, acting pro tem for Nguyen kinh Chi, an independent; Agriculture, Nghiem xuan Yem, an independent, replacing Cu huy Can, a Democrat. An additional ministry, the Ministry of War Veterans and Invalids, was created, and the post was assigned to Vu dinh Tung, a Catholic, with Ngo Tu Ha, a Catholic, as Vice Minister. Dang van Huong, an independent Buddhist, was made a Minister without Portfolio.¹

Thus the 1947 changes in government were markedly to the right. The distribution of the ministries as compared with that of November 3, 1946 was as follows: the Communists were reduced from 5 to 3; the Socialists were increased from 1 to 3; the Democrats were unchanged, with 2; and the Dong Minh Hoi and the Nationalist Party were unchanged, with one each. Independents now held 6 posts, an increase of 1, and a new post had been assigned to a Catholic representative. The greatest shift occurred in the vice ministries. Of the 9 posts filled, only 1 Communist remained of the former 3; the Socialists retained 1 of their original 2; the Democrats added 1, for a total of 2; the Catholics gained 1 representative; and the independents increased from 3 to 4. The shift strengthened the Vietnam Government. The southern underground, which had been seriously split following the agreements previously reached between the Vietnam Government and the French, established a loose coalition against the common enemy, although friction between different groups continued.²

This government remained unchanged for almost a year following the cabinet meeting of July 19, 1947. On May 26, 1948, the Vietnam Government radio announced the death of Nguyen van To, Minister without Portfolio in the Ho chi Minh cabinet. His death has been attributed to French military operations.³ No replacement has been appointed to fill the vacant post. On July 21, 1948, Vo nguyen Giap (Communist) was reappointed Minister of National Defense and Ta quang Buu (Independent) again became the Vice Minister.⁴ Late in July 1948, the announcement was made that the post of

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Vice-President of the Vietnam Government had been filled by Pham van Dong (Communist-Viet Minh).¹ This brought the total of posts held by Communists in the Vietnam Government to 5 out of 17 filled cabinet positions and probably indicates a consolidation of their control of that government.²

Nevertheless, the Vietnam Government coalition has remained firm in almost two additional years of fighting. Party activities conducted within the areas controlled by the Vietnam Government have been limited to the publication of party newspapers and the convocation of annual congresses. These congresses have been made unity demonstrations of support of the Vietnam Government by having representative delegations of the various elements in the coalition participate in the proceedings. However, the strength of the individual organizations will determine the future pattern of development of the nationalist movement in Vietnam.

1. The Viet Minh. The Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi), or Viet Minh, is the most influential political organization within the Vietnam Government.* It is the only political group whose organization extends down to the smallest villages. Its members include both individuals and parties, i.e., the Vietnam Socialist Party, the Vietnam Democratic Party, etc. As a League, it groups together a wide coalition of political personalities from moderate nationalists to doctrinaire Communists. It most closely resembles the Chinese Kuomintang during the period 1924-26, when the Communists and Chang K'ai-shek collaborated in China's nationalist movement.

The Viet Minh Executive Committee, or Tongbo, is the real repository of power in Vietnam territory. The influential government paper, National Salvation (Cuu Quoc), is the organ of the Tongbo and reflects the line of the government. A majority of the Tongbo members are believed to be former members of the dissolved Indochinese Communist Party. Within the mass nationalist movement, the Communists are undoubtedly the most cohesive political factor. President Ho Chi Minh is a Communist but has great prestige as a nationalist leader among the mass of Vietnamese. He is the

* See above, pp. 59 ff., for early history.