

RESTRICTED

outstanding political personality in Indochina. He plays down his past Communist connections, emphasizes the nationalistic aspects of his program, and is popularly considered a man above parties.

The Viet Minh exercises its control over the mass nationalist movement through a variety of "national welfare" organizations of women, youth, peasants, soldiers, etc., which in their totality embrace most of the population of Vietnam. Hoang quoc Viet, the General Secretary of the Viet Minh, claims that the organization has a total membership of nine million.¹ The Viet Minh also maintains a system of political commissars in the Vietnam army and in the Tu Ve, a self-defense organization.

In the Vietnam National Assembly, the Viet Minh as a party nominally controls a bloc of 80 representatives headed by Pham van Dong, a known Communist, who was recently appointed Vice President of the government.* Le van Hien, as Minister of Finance, is another representative of the Viet Minh party in the present cabinet.² In spite of the strong position of the Communists in the organization, the Viet Minh has followed a moderate policy designed to allay fears and suspicions that it is an extremist organization.

In the recent period, faced with the establishment of a rival Vietnamese government under the direction of Bao Dai, the former Emperor of Annam,** the Viet Minh has attempted to consolidate its ranks. The League for the National Union of Viet Nam (known as the Lien Viet), created in 1946 as a broader coalition than the Viet Minh itself,*** agreed to a proposal of the Viet Minh, made in February 1949, to fuse the two organizations. By March 1949, fusion arrangements were undertaken in various localities. These arrangements were described by Hoang quoc Viet as steps which would "bring to a successful issue the grand-scale resistance of the Nation."³ The Lien Viet was to be the sole all-embracing organization of the Vietnam Democratic Republic.

* See above, p. 90.

** See below, pp. 103 ff.

*** See above, p. 78.

RESTRICTED

2. The Communist Party. Since leading Communists were influential figures in the Vietnam Government, it faced the danger of Chinese Nationalist and Allied disapproval. The leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party therefore decided to dissolve that party officially and thus allay fears of Communist domination within the nationalist camp as well as abroad.* The move was opposed by Tran van Giau and others, most of them members of the southern party that had been functioning independently as the Indochinese Communist Party for an extended period of time. Another consideration allegedly impelling the decision to dissolve the organization was bitterness on the part of many of the Vietnamese Communists against the French Communist Party and the international Communist movement because of lack of support of their independence aspirations.¹

The Indochinese Communist Party was dissolved on November 11, 1945. To take its place, an Association for the Study of Marxism, consisting of Marxist study groups, was founded.² It may be assumed that such typical party activities as the maintenance of contact with former members of the Communist Party, the dissemination of propaganda, and the recruiting of new members have to some extent been taken over by the new organization or relegated to a clandestine level. The Association has issued statements from time to time analyzing the political situation in Indochina. It publishes a newspaper called Truth (Su That), which now appears weekly.

The counterpart of the Association for the Study of Marxism in the electoral field is the association of fifteen deputies in the National Assembly known as the Marxist Group. None of these deputies were elected on the basis of a party designation. However, they are all well-known and important personalities in Vietnam Government circles. They include Vo nguyen Giap, Minister of National Defense and the Commander in Chief of the Vietnam Armed Forces; Nguyen van Tao, the present Minister of Labor in the Vietnam Government and a leading Cochinchinese political figure; Nguyen Khanh Toan, present Vice Minister of National Education; and Tran huy Lieu, who served as

* See above, p. 76.

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

Minister of Propaganda in the provisional government and continues to function in leading governmental activities. Despite its small size, the Marxist Group is an influential component of the National Assembly.*

Up to 1949, the Communists in Vietnam maintained their leadership within the nationalist movement by strict adherence to a "popular front" line stressing the necessity for continuing the military struggle for independence. The Vietnamese Communists did not feature the usual pro-Soviet, anti-Western vituperative attacks so common to the world Communist movement. The Soviet Union and the world Communist press, however, were not reticent in claiming Ho Chi Minh as a Communist or in regarding the Vietnam Democratic Republic as part of the "world democratic front" fighting against American imperialism.¹

More recently, with the prospective victory of the Chinese Communists in the offing and rumors of American support of the French-sponsored Bao Dai government, the propaganda of the Vietnam Government has begun to parallel the world Communist line.² French sources claim that, in fact, the Indochinese Communist Party has been reconstituted and that a "Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party was recently held in North Vietnam." The French further contend that Communist directives have been circulated for a full-scale campaign, involving "all the mass organizations, against the United States."³

No indication of the reconstitution of the Indochinese Communist Party has come from the Vietnam Government or its supporters. Such a move would undoubtedly have grave repercussions on the unity of the resistance movement. President Ho Chi Minh in March 1949 continued to denounce the charge of "Communist domination" of the government he heads as "pure French imperialist propaganda."⁴ In any event, whether or not the Vietnamese Communists constitute a party, they are an important political factor within the Vietnam nationalist movement.

* See above, pp. 80 ff.

RESTRICTED

3. The Vietnam Democratic Party. The origins of the Vietnam Democratic Party (Viet Nam Dan Chu Dang) trace back to the "General Students' Association" of the University of Hanoi, founded in 1940.¹ The Students' Association was not a political party, but it served as a vehicle for nationalist penetration during the period of Japanese occupation of Indochina. On May 16, 1943, the Association held a mass meeting of some 1,500 students at which, with Japanese approval, a resolution was adopted calling for the creation of a "Viet Nam National United Movement." This act presumably was designed to demonstrate the growth of national consciousness among the Vietnamese people due to beneficent Japanese influence.² From this students' organization emerged the Democratic Party founded in June 1944.³ The president of the Association, Duong Duc Hien, was a leading organizer of the new party⁴ and is its present representative on the Tongho, the directing committee of the Viet Minh League.

The southern component of the party was an organization known as the New Vietnam Democratic Party (Tan Viet Nam Dan Chu Dang), founded in Cochinchina. Its founder and main leader was Huynh van Tieng, at present a leading member of the Nambo Executive Committee, which directs the anti-French resistance in the south.⁵ In October 1945 Pham Ngoc Thach, a leader of the Viet Minh in the south, described the Democratic Party as the "party of patriotic students completely won over to the republican and democratic ideas of the West. These students are the radical socialists of Vietnam, but radicals of the Turkish variety."⁶ Another source in Cochinchina described the Dan Chu Dang in the south as a "new democratic party which was inspired by local communist ideals."⁷

The Democratic Party serves to unite moderate elements among the students, intellectuals, middle class, and Catholics who, committed to democratic ideals, would not readily accept Communist ideology. An American observer stated in September 1946: "The history of its leaders since the party's founding indicated that the most important

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

... have a high personal regard for Ho Chi Minh and probably under no circumstances
... would oppose him on any fundamental issues. The Democratic Party was no sooner founded
... than it entered the Viet Minh Front where it remains to this day. In recent months,
... there has been some growth towards an entity of its own."¹

This evaluation was probably accurate. The Democratic Party even at its inception
... enjoyed privileges far out of proportion to any popular strength it might have had,
... generally confined as it was to student and intellectual circles. Its daily paper
Independence (Doc Lap) continue to be one of the leading pro-governmental organs in
... Vietnam territory. It follows the official policy quite closely and gives little
... indication of a specific program of its own. It confines itself largely to favoring
... "democratic republic" and unity in the struggle against French imperialism. Recently
... it has taken the lead in condemning the traitors and "false democrats" of the exile
... Vietnam Nationalist Party leadership.² That the Democratic Party is jealous of its
... own prerogatives and not anxious to have competition from other political formations
... was indicated in August 1946 when its newspaper Independence, commenting on the newly
... formed Vietnam Socialist Party, voiced the hope that the "new party would not follow
... the footsteps of some of its predecessors" or "follow the retrogressive path taken
... by such a large part of the Second International."³

The Democratic Party has a total of 45 members in the Vietnam National Assembly.
... This parliamentary representation, led by Do Duc Duc and Ton Quang Phiet,⁴ is an indi-
... cation of the popularity of the party's leaders as individuals rather than of its
... organized strength.

The Democratic Party has controlled important posts in the government. Before
... September 2, 1945, when the Viet Minh seized power, two members of the Democratic Party,
... Luong Duc Hien and Cu Huy Can, were listed on the "People's Liberation Committee."⁵
... In the Provisional Government in office from September 2, 1945 to March 6, 1946 the

¹ See above, pp. 80 ff.
² See above, p. 66.

RESTRICTED

Democratic Party controlled four ministries -- Youth, under Duong Duc Hien; Agriculture, under Cu Huy Can; Justice, under Vu Trong Khanh; and Education, Under Vu Dinh Hoe.* In the National Coalition Government, which served from March 2, 1946 to November 3, 1946, the Democratic Party retained only two ministries -- the Ministry of Justice, under Vu Dinh Hoe, and the Ministry of Public Works and Communications, under Tran Dang Khoa. Do Duc Duc was appointed Vice Minister of National Education.**

The Democratic Party took a leading role, in the period before the breakdown of the negotiations with France, in warning the French against further encroachments on the sovereignty of the Vietnam Republic. On December 1946 the Democratic Party underscored this position in an appeal stating: "There is a definite limit to our concessions. We had rather commit suicide than step over that limit."¹ The party's paper Independence continued this theme when it commented, on December 14, 1946, on the selection of Leon Blum as Prime Minister: "This event will have some bearing on French Vietnam relations However, reactionary forces ... are still great We must rely upon our own strength, and on our will to safeguard the integrity of our national territory."²

Since the outbreak of the fighting, the Democratic Party has been a loyal component of the Viet Minh coalition in the fight against the French. It holds the same two cabinet posts it held in the National Coalition Government, although the fourth government of Ho Chi Minh was reshuffled several times after its inception on November 3, 1946.*** The vice ministries the party now holds include those of Agriculture (Cu Huy Can) and Justice (Tran Trong Tuong). Democratic Party representatives play an important part in the various committees of government and in the leadership of the military resistance. Party anniversaries and party conventions are used to serve the dual purpose of keeping the name of the organization before the Vietnamese and to underscore the

* See above, p. 76.

** See above, p. 77.

*** See above pp. 88 ff.

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

unified character of the resistance movement. The party, which now claims a membership of 100,000, held its last convention in September 1948.¹

4. The Vietnam Socialist Party. The Vietnam Socialist Party (Viet Nam Xa Hoi Dang) was founded in July 1946. The formation of the party was announced by a manifesto issued on July 27, 1946 at Hanoi. The manifesto clearly identifies the organization as the Vietnam equivalent of the European Social-Democratic parties of the Second International.²

The manifesto was addressed to "Workers of Vietnam, Fellow Countrymen." It stated that the efforts of the party would be finished "when the country is free ... when socialism is victorious." Although clearly intended for "manual and intellectual workers," it equated the realization of its ideal with "the task of national liberation" and consequently welcomed into the party's ranks "all enlightened patriots, all sincere democrats, all men who love liberty."

Before World War II there existed in Indochina a Socialist Federation, which included both Vietnamese and French among its members and was part of the Metropolitan French Socialist Party.* The new Vietnam Xa Hoi disassociated itself from this organization, which was "ruptured in the ordeal of war" (a reference to the hostility shown by certain French Socialists in Indochina to the Vietnamese independence struggle), but called on all those who had "remained faithful to socialism" to join the "new socialistic organ on Vietnamese soil, formed by members of that old Federation and by new militants recently come to Socialism."

The manifesto was signed by three members of the National Assembly and by intellectuals, professionals, and workers outside the government. During the month of August 1946, the party held organizational meetings and engaged in public activities to rally support for its program. This program emphasized:

- (1) Cooperation in the work of the present government;

* See above, p. 14.

RESTRICTED

- (2) Cooperation with other Vietnamese parties to defend the country against foreign aggression, to support national reconstruction, and to fight for democratic liberties.
- (3) Reliance on parliamentary means, organisational means, and propaganda.

The birth of the Socialist Party was favorably received by the other parties in the Viet Minh coalition. This welcome was not without qualification, however; both National Salvation (Cuu Quoc), organ of the Viet Minh Tongbo, and Independence (Doc Lap), organ of the Democratic Party, warned the new party not to betray its program.

When the National Assembly convened in October 1946, the Socialist Party formed a bloc of 24 delegates. This bloc, headed by Phan tu Nghia and Nguyen Xien,^{*} was part of the left wing of the National Assembly. The party's most prominent representative is Hoang minh Giam, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs when President Ho chi Minh relinquished this office.^{**} Also prominent is Phan Anh, who was appointed Minister of National Economy in January 1947^{***} and has also served in several other leading posts, including that of Minister of National Defense.^{****} In addition, Socialist Nguyen van Huyen is Minister of National Education. The Vice Minister of Communications and Public Works is Dang phuc Thong, also a Socialist.^{***}

The exact influence of the Socialist Party is difficult to assess. Its newspaper Forward (Tien Len) criticized the governmental shifts of July 19, 1947 as providing inadequate representation for the workers, although it described the changes as "necessary". An important representative of the Vietnam Government in Bangkok was Le Hi, a long-time Socialist. The party has connections with the Socialist Party in

* See above, p. 81.

** See above, p. 88.

*** See above, p. 85, Footnote 1.

**** See above, p. 77, Footnote 4.

RESTRICTED

France, and some of the members of the Vietnam Government's unrecognized delegation in Paris are Socialists. Since the outbreak of the French-Vietnamese war, the party has held one national convention. At this convention, which took place "in a Bacbo province" (Tonkin) on July 28, 1947, the party reiterated its determination to go on "fighting French colonialism...for peace and democracy."¹ As long as the present fighting continues, the Vietnam Socialist Party can be expected to subordinate its own objectives to the common struggle for independence. Should peaceful conditions be restored, it is likely that it would emerge as an independent entity with a considerable following.

5. The Independents. There are 90 independents in the National Assembly. They represent many political viewpoints, including that of the conservative mandarin hierarchy. The leader of the independents in the National Assembly is Hoang minh Chau.²

The influence of the independents in the Vietnam Government is strong. They include in their ranks political personalities who are quite capable of creating political organizations should the occasion arise. They also hold five cabinet ministries and six vice ministries. In a sense, they are the political weather vane of the Vietnam Government. Their willingness to support the resistance movement against the French is the outward sign of national unity under the Vietnam Government.

6. The Vietnam Nationalist Party. The Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) is represented in the National Assembly by the wing of the party that did not go into opposition to the Vietnam Government following the French-Vietnamese agreement of March 8 and the withdrawal of Chinese troops.³ Of the fifty seats allotted to representatives of the Nationalist Party by the pre-election agreement with the Viet Minh, twenty were occupied in the meetings of October 1946.⁴ Following the flight of the Vice-President of the Vietnam Democratic Republic, Nguyen hai Than, and the Minister

¹ See above, p. 81.

² See above, p. 78.

³ See above, pp. 77, 82.

RESTRICTED

of Foreign Affairs, Nguyen tuong Tam,* Chu ba Phuong remained as Minister of National Economy. He has survived various governmental shifts and now heads the Ministry of Social Welfare.**

The section of the Vietnam Nationalist Party that remains in the Vietnam Government is unimportant and will in all likelihood remain so unless the prominent exiled leaders return and take over control of the party.

7. The Vietnam Revolutionary League. The Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi) also has a wing that remained in the Vietnam Government when the main leaders of the party fled to China.*** Seventeen of the twenty members allowed to the Dong Minh Hoi in the National Assembly attended the sessions in October 1946.**** The League has one minister of cabinet rank in the present Ho chi Minh government -- Bo xuan Luat, Minister without Portfolio, who previously occupied the post of Minister of Agriculture in the National Coalition Government from March 2, 1946 to November 3, 1946.*****

The position of the Dong Ming Hoi is similar to that of the Nationalist Party in Vietnam. It has little influence in the government and will undoubtedly remain weak unless some of the important leaders now in exile return to manage party affairs.

B. The Trotskyist Movement

The Trotskyists occupy a unique position in the Vietnamese nationalist movement.*** Their uncompromising opposition to French rule in Indochina has made it difficult for them to work with the elements involved in the Bao Dai restoration movement. At the same time, their participation in the war against the French is complicated by the

* See above, p. 78.
** See above, p. 88.
*** See above, p. 78.
**** See above, p. 82.
***** See above, p. 77.
***** See above, pp. 46 ff.

RESTRICTED

continued hostility of the Communist elements within the Viet Minh, who follow a policy of exterminating their Trotskyist opponents.¹

In December 1946, The Struggle (Tranh Dau) was again published illegally in Saigon, ostensibly as a bi-weekly.² A Trotskyist report claims that in Tonkin the Trotskyists have "organized many big meetings in which even speakers of the Vietnam government participated" and that "the Trotskyist group is supported by a large number of workers and students."³ It is further claimed that, despite the efforts of the Ho Chi Minh government to suppress the Trotskyists, The Struggle (Chien Dau) continues to be published in Vietnam territory as an illegal publication.⁴

A Vietnamese section of the Fourth International has been set up in exile in France. The Trotskyists have considerable influence among the large émigré Vietnamese population in France; their French party has held meetings and engaged in activities protesting against French warfare in Vietnam. A manifesto of September 1947, reporting the creation of the "Vietnamese International Communist Group in France," clearly delineates Trotskyist opposition to the French-Vietnamese agreement of March 6, 1946, the modus vivendi of September 14, 1946, and the line of political compromise adopted by the Viet Minh, "directed by Stalinism." The Trotskyists "do not accept limiting their action to a struggle for imposing on French imperialism, negotiations with Ho Chi Minh, whose program is an illusory independence in the French Union. We know, in advance, that negotiations with Ho Chi Minh will result in a new compromise, more harmful to independence than that of March 6, 1946. Although we are ready to unite our blows with those of the Viet Minh against imperialism, we are not in the least disposed to make ourselves the accomplices of its policy of capitulation."⁵

The task of the newly created organization has been defined as the rendering of "all possible aid to the Trotskyist movement in Indochina. On returning to the country, it [the group] will reintegrate itself in the ranks of the Vietnamese section of the

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

Fourth International bringing it new forces." It was reported that, at the plenary meeting of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International held from September 10-17, 1947, a representative of "the Indochinese Trotskyist movement" was present and assisting in the work.¹

It is likely that the Trotskyist movement in Indochina continues to be split into two groups.² However, the politics of both groups will tend to be similar. Since the Trotskyists represent an ideologically well-knit movement, they may constitute a rallying point for extremist elements dissatisfied with the insistence of the Viet Minh that Vietnam remain within the French Union. They may also attract those who desire more immediate social reforms than the Vietnam governmental coalition is prepared or able to grant.

RESTRICTED

C. The Bao Dai Restoration Movement

Following the outbreak of French-Vietnamese hostilities on December 19, 1946, the nationalists opposed to the Vietnam Government of Ho chi Minh grouped themselves in a loose coalition centering around Bao Dai, ex-Emperor of Annam. The coalition included otherwise heterogeneous elements, but was united in the hope that Bao Dai might serve as negotiator of an agreement with France that would satisfy the aspirations of Vietnamese nationalism. Monarchist elements favored Bao Dai's return as a possible means of restoring their influence. Republican groups pointed to his disinterested patriotism as evidenced by ^{his} abdication in September 1945 and the fact that the Ho government itself had recognized his influence by appointing him to the post of Supreme Councillor. In addition, Catholic groups could expect to exercise influence through his wife, an ardent Catholic. The coalition hoped through Bao Dai to split away the bulk of the supporters of the Vietnam Government from continued collaboration with the Communists, whose influence they opposed. This difficult and complicated maneuver was, however, beset with a number of problems that tended to create confusion and disunity within the Bao Dai restoration movement -- problems that even now limit the effectiveness of the government that he subsequently established in July 1949.

The principal difficulty became apparent in the course of the negotiations with the French. The French were willing, and in fact actively participated in the plans, to set up a rival government to that of Ho chi Minh; it had become apparent early in 1947 that a political solution was necessary, since military victory eluded their grasp. However, they were not willing to grant Bao Dai terms better than, or even equal to, those demanded by the Vietnam Government. Such agreements as they were willing to conclude fell far short of the independence and unity for Vietnam that was the common aspiration of the entire nationalist movement. Bao Dai could not afford to compromise his own position by accepting a settlement that Vietnamese nationalists would recognize as allowing his regime little more than puppet status. As a consequence, the negotiations dragged on for

RESTRICTED

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almost two years while the Vietnam Government continued the resistance against French troops in Indochina.

The protracted nature of the negotiations and the fighting compromised the elements in the Bao Dai coalition, who were further divided by disagreement as to the kind of government to be formed. The first grouping of nationalists in support of Bao Dai had been established in February 1947 and was called the National Union Front.* Control of this organization rested primarily in the hands of the exile Dong Minh Hoi and Vietnam Nationalist Parties in China, allied with monarchist and republican elements in Cochinchina. These groups supported the continuation of the resistance until Bao Dai could settle the conflict on favorable terms. They favored the dissolution of the autonomous Cochinchina government and the administrative committees of Tonkin and Annam as discredited puppet regimes. When, in September 1947, French High Commissioner Emile Bollaert announced the terms on which France was prepared to negotiate, this organization virtually collapsed, since many of its constituent elements -- pro-Chinese, xenophobic, and extremist nationalists -- could not accept the basis proposed.

Control of the Bao Dai restoration movement passed into the hands of monarchist elements more willing to accept the modified terms of the proposed French settlement. The principal leader of the new coalition was Le van Hoach, formerly president of the Cochinchina autonomous government, who helped to create the Vietnam National Rally (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)** as the new front embracing nationalists committed to acceptance of Bao Dai as the negotiator for Vietnam. In December 1947, representatives of the various nationalist groups and delegates from the Cochinchina autonomous government and administrative committees of Tonkin and Annam conferred with Bao Dai in Hongkong. These meetings provided a new consolidated basis for the Bao Dai restoration movement.

In January 1948, the Cao Dai*** and Hoa Hao**** religious organizations signed a pact

* See below, pp. 106 ff.

** See below, pp. 127 ff.

*** See below, pp. 119 ff.

**** See below, pp. 122 ff.

RESTRICTED

in Cochinchina reaffirming their support of the Bao Dai coalition and thereby strengthened the Cochinchina Government, now headed by Nguyen van Xuan, a Vietnamese who had French citizenship and was a general in the French army.¹ However, the continued failure of Bao Dai to come to an agreement with France adversely affected the new coalition, and renewed efforts had to be made to imbue it with life.

A unitary "Provisional Central Vietnam Government" was created under the presidency of Nguyen van Xuan. The new "government" was installed at Hanoi on June 6, 1948. Since it came into being without obtaining any concessions from the French, it was not favorably regarded by many of the elements supporting a Bao Dai solution -- in particular, the Catholics and conservative nationalists. Further opposition was expressed by elements within the local Cochinchina Government who favored separatist and autonomous status for the south. The only face-saving gesture available was the signature of a protocol on June 5, 1948 by Bao Dai, General Nguyen van Xuan, and Emile Bollaert, providing for negotiations at some future time "as soon as a provisional government is set up" and stating that "France recognizes the independence of Vietnam upon whom it is incumbent to achieve its unification freely."²

The Bao Dai restoration movement continued to achieve little success in rallying Vietnamese nationalists to its support. Much of its initial vigor was dissipated. Some of its constituent groups continued to fight against the French. The Provisional Central Vietnam Government was ineffectual and was regarded generally as a useless puppet regime. Bao Dai's return to Indochina was deemed imperative if any success was to be achieved. Agreements were subsequently negotiated by Bao Dai with the French. At first, these agreements were not made public, and the resulting confusion concerning relations between Bao Dai and the French further prejudiced Bao Dai's prospects of setting up a regime capable of rivalling Ho chi Minh's government. Bao Dai returned to Indochina in June 1949 and established a government in July 1949. These events have, however, had little effect on the Vietnam Government, which has rejected Bao Dai and intensified its struggle against

RESTRICTED

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the French. Nevertheless, the various elements that comprise the Bao Dai restoration movement, discussed below, can be expected to play a role in future events.

1. The National Union Front. The National Union Front (Mat Tran Thong Mat Quoc Gia Lien Hiep), the first grouping of nationalists to announce its support of Bao Dai, was established at Nanking, China on February 17, 1947.¹ Its organization marked a successful effort of the exiled Nationalist Front (Mat Tran Quoc Gia), consisting primarily of the Dong Minh Hoi* and Vietnam Nationalist Party** leadership that had fled to China, to gain the support of a number of nationalist political groups in Cochinchina.² Its organization further indicated that previous statements of the Nationalist Front looking toward coalition with the Ho chi Minh Government in joint struggle against the French had come to nought.***

The National Union Front was no less concerned with winning independence for Vietnam than the Vietnam Government. Its member organizations included elements known for a hostility to the French that bordered on xenophobia. Their participation in the new Bao Dai movement was but a means of installing themselves in power in order to eliminate French influence. As opposed to the Ho chi Minh government, which at that time adhered to a settlement of the dispute "within the framework of the French Union," influential elements of the National Union Front wanted no more than an alliance between Vietnam and France.³ Nevertheless, the National Union Front appeared quite capable of uniting with the Ho chi Minh government, if by so doing it could help achieve an independent Vietnam.⁴

The leadership of the Front was shared by the following individuals:

1. Tran Trong Kim, formerly the premier of Bao Dai's puppet government under the Japanese and leader of the defunct Nationalist Socialist Party.**** He represented elements of the conservative mandarin.

* See above, pp. 62 ff; see below, pp. 111 ff.

** See above, pp. 21 ff; see below, pp. 113 ff.

*** See above, p. 87.

**** See above, p. 54.

RESTRICTED

2. Nguyen hai Than, who had been vice-president in the Ho chi Minh coalition government and was a leader of the Dong Minh Hoi.* He was representative of the old intellectual scholar group.
3. Nguyen van Sam, an influential Cochinchinese who led the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party.**He had formerly been the imperial delegate of the Court of Annam to Cochinchina.
4. Nguyen tuong Tam, who had been Foreign Minister of the Ho chi Minh coalition government and was a leader of the Vietnam Nationalist Party.***

The National Union Front, in a proclamation dated May 17, 1947 and issued from Saigon, stated its program as follows:¹

"For more than a year the Vietnamese people have been struggling ferociously for their emancipation. From south to north, a single will: the realization of unity and national independence.

"This heroic struggle has led the French people and the world to recognize the legitimacy of the aspirations of Vietnam.

"To struggle for independence does not imply xenophobia but simply affirms the strong intention of Vietnam to make France apply the principles of the right of peoples to self-determination and the equality of peoples.

"The March 6, 1946 accord and the September 14, 1946 modus vivendi have not given satisfaction to the Vietnam people; that is why the war continues.

"The Vietnamese struggle solely for a unified and independent Vietnam and not for a particular political party. If up to the present the people were grouped under the leadership of the Viet Minh government, it is because they wished to remain united in the struggle for independence. Now the Viet Minh government is but a Communist government and represents only the Communist Party. Its partisan and totalitarian politics deprive it of the authority and the prestige necessary to settle the Vietnam matter on the national and international plane.

"Responding to the desires of the people, the National Union Front was formed in Nanking on February 17, 1947 and its existence is brought to the attention of international opinion.

"The National Union Front unites the following parties and groups:

- Vietnam Revolutionary League - (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi)
- Vietnam Nationalist Party - (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang)
- Vietnam Democratic-Socialist Party - (Viet Nam Dan Chu Xa Hoi Dang)
- Vietnam Nationalist Youth Association - (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Thanh Nham Doan)

* See above, pp. 62 ff; see below, pp. 111 ff.

** See below, pp. 115 ff.

*** See above, pp. 21 ff; see below, pp. 113 ff.

RESTRICTED

People's League - (Doan the Dan Chung)
Cao Dai League - (Doan The Cao Dai)
Buddhist Group - (Doan Do Cu Si)

"In the face of the present situation and responding to the appeal for peace made by France in the speech of M. Bollaert, High Commissioner of France, at Hanoi, May 15, 1947, the National Union Front proclaims:

With Respect to France

France must recognize the unity and independence of Vietnam. Independent Vietnam will freely associate with France in the French Union. It undertakes to guarantee the economic and cultural interests of France throughout the territory of Vietnam.

The National Union Front considers the French Union as a free association of states equal in right and sovereign in their own territory in that which concerns their own affairs.

With Respect to Internal Vietnam Affairs

The consolidation of the republican structure of the state, the establishment as a principle of government the participation of all social classes in political affairs. In a word, the effective realization of a democratic regime. The abolition of all forms of totalitarian government and one-party rule.

With Respect to the Vietnam Communists

To invite the Viet Minh Communists to collaborate with the National Union Front and to participate in the direction of public affairs in conformity with democratic principles. Thus the National Union Front is a Front uniting all the parties and not an anti-communist front. Faithful to democratic policies, it fights totalitarianism in all its forms.

With Respect to Foreign Nations

Sincere collaboration with all nations that treat Vietnam on an equal plane.

Respect for the principles of self-determination of peoples and the equality of peoples.

To contribute to realize international solidarity and the maintenance of world peace in accord with the principles of the United Nations Organization.

The National Union Front Supports:

Citizen Nguyen Vinh Thuy Bao Dai, ardent patriot and man above parties, in his task of conciliating all the Vietnam political parties and of unifying all the forces of struggle to achieve a solution of the Franco-Vietnam problem."

The foregoing manifesto was the first major pronouncement of the National Union Front

RESTRICTED

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within Indochina. Previously, the leadership in exile in China had issued the propaganda of the Front.¹ It was not until late April 1947 that Nguyen van Sam announced the organization of the National Union Front in Cochinchina, indicating at the same time that he was the representative of Bao Dai empowered to "act in his name in all the preliminary talks which may take place with the French authorities in Saigon."² By this time there were also indications that trouble was brewing in the new coalition.

On April 24, 1947, a report from Hanoi referred to a schism in the ranks of the Vietnam Nationalist Party. Friction had arisen between an extremist group in the party, allegedly as intransigent as the Ho Chi Minh government itself in wishing to expel France from Indochina, and a moderate wing that was looking toward the "settlement of the Vietnam problem in sincere collaboration with France" and was led by "Bao Dai himself."³

This was the first public reference to existing differences between republicans and monarchists in the National Union Front that were ultimately to lead to its destruction.

Nguyen Hai Than, leader of the Dong Minh Hoi, stated his position in a press statement on April 28, 1947 expressing approval "of the tendencies manifested among the Viet Nam parties with a view toward the conclusion of a pacific agreement with France."⁴

The manifesto of the National Union Front issued in Saigon, Cochinchina, on May 17, 1947 clearly denoted its support of the "republican structure of the state" and significantly referred to Bao Dai as "Citizen Nguyen Vinh Thuy." Further, on May 17, 1947 a spokesman for the Front indicated that "Ho Chi Minh had been invited to join," while Nguyen Hoan Bich, its general secretary, talked about the "Vietnam Republic," which "would belong to the French Union."⁵

The major effort of the National Union Front was designed to wrest the leadership of the nationalist movement from the Viet Minh itself, in the belief that only a united front of all parties led by moderates could attain recognition from the world powers for Vietnam. The Front called on the Vietnamese Communists to emulate the French Communists, who "knew how to withdraw from the Assembly each time that France needed American help."⁶ Pamphlets were circulated denouncing the Viet Minh for "interfering with activities of resistance elements that are not of the same political opinion as their

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own."¹ Under the vigorous leadership of Nguyen van Sam, efforts were made to establish contact with the Cochinchina autonomous regime and gain representation in it for the National Union Front. The movement increased its activities during the period of expectation before the important policy declaration from French High Commissioner Emile Bollaert defining the basis on which France was prepared to settle the conflict in Indochina. Internally, the relations between monarchist and republican elements became further strained. This disagreement came to light in the L'Echo du Viet Nam, a French-language newspaper published by Nguyen phan Long. On August 23, 1947 this paper carried a statement attributed to the National Union Front indicating that the Front had delegated all its powers to "Le van Hoach, President of the Cochinchina Republican Government, to contact M. Nguyen vinh Thuy [Bao Dai] to aid in the direction of the nationalist movement based on a program of realizing the independence and territorial unity of Viet Nam." Three days later, it carried a correction to the effect that the National Union Front (Mat Tran Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)² that had been responsible for the statement was not the same as Nguyen van Sam's National Union Front.

The speech by Bollaert at Hadong on September 10, 1947² actually broke the back of Sam's National Union Front. The limited concessions that it offered only serve to discredit the nationalists who were willing to accept them. For the National Union Front specifically, acceptance would completely destroy its pretensions to more effective leadership than that of the Viet Minh. Its leadership, therefore, reacted with a vigorous denunciation of the speech as ignoring "the principles of the Atlantic Charter" and appealed to Chiang Kai-shek for "intervention in the Franco-Vietnamese Problem."³ The Front further called for United Nations intervention and support from Bao Dai for this move.⁴ Bao Dai did not act favorably on these proposals, and press accounts soon indicated that the Front had developed misgivings about Bao Dai's ability to struggle for real independence.⁵

¹ See below, pp. 127 ff.

RESTRICTED

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The National Union Front suffered a telling blow when its principal spokesman, Nguyen van Sam, was killed in October 1947.¹ The breach between monarchist and republican elements widened further. Le van Hoach, ex-president of the Cochinchina Republic, was successful in creating a new coalition called the Vietnam National Rally (Viet Nam Hoc Gia Lien Hiep)^{*} in December 1947, which detached the support of the Cao-Daist and Ba Hao political formations from the National Union Front.² Leaders of the Dong Minh Hoi and Vietnam Nationalist Party in exile in China issued a joint statement on December 7, 1947 declaring that a scheduled conference of nationalists within Indochina could not have any result if the conference is held under the protection of only one government.³ On December 16, 1947, the National Union Front organization in Annam announced its adherence to the Vietnam National Rally. There was little left of the National Union Front by this time. Its dissolution in April 1948 to give "each party belonging to the National Front liberty of action" was a mere formality.⁴

In spite of the official dissolution of the Front as an operating organization, almost the same combination of political groups provided the backing for the Bao Dai government in July 1949. The factors limiting the effectiveness of this coalition in winning support of Vietnamese nationalists remain the same also: inability to gain substantial concessions from the French and to reconcile monarchist and republican political desires. The individual parties associating in a coalition such as the National Union Front must be considered separately in order to assess their impact in shaping the direction of the Bao Dai government and define their relationship to the Vietnam Government.

a. The Vietnam Revolutionary League. The Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi) was reestablished as an exile organization in China by Nguyen hai Than following his break with the Ho chi Minh government in 1946.^{**} It is doubtful that the exile organization has much support among Vietnamese nationalists.

* See below, pp. 127 ff.

** See above, p. 78.

RESTRICTED

A French source credits it with a membership of 5,000¹ under the leadership of Nguyen hai Than, Vu kim Thanh, and Nong quoc Long.² However, another source states that, when Nguyen hai Than fled to China, the direction of the organization was taken over by Chu ba Phuong "and practically the whole membership followed him into cooperation with the Viet Minh."³ This claim is supported by the fact that seventeen of the twenty members of the Vietnam National Assembly assigned to represent the Dong Minh Hoi attended the sessions of the Assembly in October 1946.⁴ The same source states that "it is believed that either because of personal political convictions or from opportunism some of the former leaders now resident in Indochina would support an anti-Viet Minh native movement and might bring a few hundred or even several thousand followers over with them." The lower figure is probably more accurate. Dong Minh Hoi elements who have participated jointly with the Viet Minh for over two years in the struggle against the French may not be disposed to recognize the authority of leaders in exile who have been engaged in futile negotiations with the French during the same period.

The exile Dong Minh Hoi offered to unite in joint action with the Vietnam Government following the outbreak of the fighting in December 1946.⁴ These attempts apparently were rebuffed, and the party became a constituent section of the National Union Front in February 1947.⁵ Within the Front, Nguyen hai Than apparently associated with elements looking toward the restoration of the monarchy in Indochina.⁶ However, previous close association with the Vietnam Nationalist Party tended to produce agreement on policy despite differences as to the future character of an emergent Vietnam regime.⁷ While supporting the return of Bao Dai as a constitutional monarch, the Dong Minh Hoi has clearly indicated its unwillingness to follow a soft policy with respect to the French. For example, Nguyen hai Than issued statements indicating that he was "doubtful of the negotiations"

¹ See above, p. 82.

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

in which Bao Dai was engaged. He further praised the "attitude of the Vietnam Nationalist Party and the Vietnam Restoration League," which presumably followed an equally cautious policy.¹

This reference to the Vietnam Restoration League may indicate possible support of the exiled Prince Cuong De as an alternative candidate for emperor of Vietnam, since he remains an opponent of French rule in Indochina.* Nong quoc Long, one of the leaders of the Dong Minh Hoi, is a former partisan of Cuong De's who participated in the abortive insurrection in 1940 against the French.** The recently reported critical illness of Nguyen hai Than, who is a septuagenarian,² may lead to the absorption of the monarchist elements of the exile Dong Minh Hoi by the Vietnam Restoration League, which has shown signs of new political activity. The republican-minded followers would probably go over to the Vietnam Nationalist Party. There appears to be little prospect that the exile Dong Minh Hoi will develop into a serious factor in future Vietnamese political alignments.

b. The Vietnam Nationalist Party. As one of the oldest parties in Vietnam, the Vietnam Nationalist Party*** (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) has considerable prestige. It has, however, proved unable to maintain a tightly knit organization and has suffered from the opportunism of individual leaders striving for personal power and from its dependence on support from various foreign powers, particularly Japan and China. Its continued close relationship with elements in the Chinese Nationalist Government has provided the organization with funds when it was at a low ebb. Currently, the émigré section of the party appears to be weak.

Pro-French sources state that the Vietnam Nationalist Party has 5,000 adherents.³ Other sources say that it has a "few thousand members at most and some few medium grade

* See below, pp. 130 ff.
** See above, pp. 50 ff.
*** See above, pp. 21 ff.

RESTRICTED

intellectuals.* The program of the party is described as: "(a) fight for the independence of Vietnam; (b) establishment of a Vietnam Republic; (c) establishment of a democratic regime, which will assure individual liberties to all, and to each the right to work, property and welfare; (d) creation of cooperatives for production and consumption; (f) limitation of private property by the institution of progressive taxes such as income, inheritance, and luxury taxes; (g) democratization of the land, and nationalization of the basic industries."¹ Leaders of the party include Nguyen tuong Tam, Vu Khong Khanh, Nghien ke To, Phan Tran, Le Minh, Vu dinh Tri, and Nguyen van Chau.² The organization lost one of its more capable leaders when Nguyen tuong Long, brother of Nguyen tuong Tam, died in the summer of 1948.³

Little remains of the military forces that were once at the disposal of the Vietnam Nationalist Party. The National Union Front claimed that Vu Khong Khanh, one of the party's leaders, was fighting the French and the Viet Minh in the provinces of Lao Kay and Lai Chau during 1946 and 1947.⁴ The number of men under his command was estimated at 300,⁵ but no evidence of their military activity has come to light recently. Vu Khong Khanh was reported to be living in Canton in December 1948.⁶

In exile, the Vietnam Nationalist Party operated jointly with the Dong Minh Hoi in the Nationalist Front.* When proposed unity with the Vietnam Government failed to eventuate following the outbreak of the fighting in Indochina in December 1946, the Vietnam Nationalist Party helped found the National Union Front.** However, its strong republican principles made for conflict with other forces supporting Bao Dai who were desirous of restoring some form of monarchy and more willing to come to terms with France. Its relations with the monarchist elements were further exacerbated by its repeated demands for Chinese, American, and United Nations intervention in the Indochinese conflict. These difficulties

* See above, p. 106.

** See above, p. 104.

RESTRICTED

finally led to a split.* The Vietnam Nationalist Party apparently now operates independently. Nguyen tuong Tam is reported to have indicated that he would back Bao Dai on condition that "Vietnam becomes a republic with Bao Dai as President."¹

The relationship of the exile leadership to the party within Indochina is not clear. The activities of the Vietnam Nationalist Party in Indochina seem confined to occasional circulation of party literature in Hanoi and collaboration with other political elements favoring the return of Bao Dai. Truong dinh Tri, a prominent member of the Vietnam Nationalist Party, became head of the French-established Tonkin administrative committee in May 1947 and paid for this act with his life in October 1947 at the hands of Viet Minh agents.** His death must have weakened the party considerably, since he was one of its more dynamic personalities. It is likely that the party is generally divided over the question of relations with the Bao Dai government, since individual leaders would probably forego republican principles if they could insure their own positions within the government.

c. The Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party. The Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party (Viet Nam Dan Chu Xa Hoi Dang) was formed in September 1946 to regroup resistance elements in Cochinchina who had come to disagree violently with the Viet Minh leadership. The party was described by the National Union Front as the "union of a number of political, religious, labor and disunited groups resisting French aggression, among them notably the Vietnam National Independence Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Doc Lap Dang),*** Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Cochinchina Intellectual Group (Doan The Tri Thuc Nambo)."² This listing of the components of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party is undoubtedly exaggerated. However, prominent individuals from the indicated organizations are known to have joined the new party.

* See above, p. 104.

** See below, p. 137.

*** See above. p. 55.

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The principal leader of the new party was Nguyen van Sen, who had been a prominent spokesman of the Vietnam National Independence Party. Other former members of the dissolved organization were also prominent in the new party, i.e., Nguyen hoan Bich (also known as Nguyen bao Toan), Tran van An, and Phan khao Suu. This fact led other former leaders of the Vietnam National Independence Party, some of whom were supporters of the Ho government, to repudiate actions taken in the name of the party and to reiterate that it had been officially dissolved.¹

From the Cao-Daists, the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party enlisted the support of Le kim Ty, a long-time nationalist and influential leader.² Similarly, Trinh dinh Thao, who had formerly been Minister of Justice in the Tran trong Kim government* and was a personal friend of Tran trong Kim's, is claimed to have been enlisted from the Intellectual Group.³ The bulk of the intellectuals in this group have generally supported the Ho chi Minh government.⁴ Hoa Hao affiliation was claimed since Huynh phu So, the principal leader of the Hoa Hao, was a founder of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party.⁵ While some of his principal lieutenants, such as Nguyen phuoc Hau, Le van Kinh, and Ngo van Hai, are known to have joined the party,⁶ it is highly doubtful that any large numbers of Hoa Hao followers actually joined a political party. The Binh Xuyen has also been claimed as a component of the new party;⁷ this is probably due to the fact that Lam ngoc Duong (or Nguyen van Hai), a prominent leader of the Binh Xuyen, was also a member of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party.⁸ Actually, the party was primarily a coalition of socialist-minded elements in Saigon and part of the leadership of the Hoa Hao religious movement.

The program of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party is said to call for:⁹ (1) the fight for the independence of Vietnam; (2) the establishment of a democratic regime and opposition to all forms of dictatorship; and (3) the realization of a socialist society

* See above, pp. 56 ff.

RESTRICTED

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in which there will be no exploitation of man by man, in which each man will have the right to compensation for labor, and in which there will be no class struggle. The party newspaper, edited by Nguyen van Sam and Tran van An, was named The Masses (Quan Hung).¹

The vigorous participation of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party in the National Union Front and its opposition to the Communist leadership of the Vietnam Government brought it into sharp conflict with the Viet Minh-directed administrative committee of Nambo, which apparently ordered the dissolution of the party on April 18, 1947.² A special tribunal of April 25, 1947 condemned Huynh phu So to death for his refusal to obey the authority of the Vietnam Government in the south.³ Later, on May 20, 1947, Nguyen van Sam was condemned for his refusal to obey the April order.⁴ Huynh phu So was executed in June 1947,⁵ and Nguyen van Sam likewise was killed in Saigon on October 10, 1947.⁶ The death of its two most prominent leaders was accompanied by clashes within the organization between provincial Hoa Hao adherents and the Saigon leadership.

Numerous reports of brutalities allegedly inflicted by supporters of the Hoa Hao had been appearing in the Saigon press in August 1947. On September 3, 1947 the Interprovincial Executive Committee of West Cochinchina of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party made public an appeal signed by Le van Kinh, the President, and Ngo van Hai, Secretary General, which indicated that these stories were being spread in an effort to discredit the party.⁷ The appeal marked the public admission of the existence of two directing committees of the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party, one in Saigon and one in the provinces. Differences became manifest early in October 1946 over the question of participation in the local Cochinchina government, which was in the process of being reshuffled.

Tran van An participated in the government set up in October 6, 1947. Bao Dai disavowed support of this government,⁸ and was echoed by the Hoa Hao leader Nguyen phuoc Hau, who declared that the Hoa Hao would not participate in a separatist or autonomous

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government. The Saigon Committee indicated on October 15, 1947 that it desired Tran van An's participation inasmuch as the new government, under President Nguyen van Xuan, did not favor autonomy or separatism. Further, the Saigon Committee claimed that the Hoa Hao sect had been dissolved by Huynh phu Bo when he joined the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party. The breach between the Hoa Hao leaders and the Saigon committee widened, and by November 1947 it apparently became irreconcilable.¹

Deprived of its principal leaders through assassination and split by contending groups, the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party has become practically defunct. The Executive Committee of Southwest Vietnam issued a manifesto in December 7, 1948² calling for speedy negotiation of an agreement between France and Bao Dai. No further indications of activity on its part have been noted.

d. The Popular Movement. The National Union Front claims that the Popular Movement (Doan The Dan Chung) was "organized in December 1945 as a reaction to the policy of terror and treachery of the Viet Minh. Originating in Hanoi, it had its echoes notably in Hung Yen, Thai Binh and Hai Duong, the three most populous provinces of Vietnam." It repeatedly advocated "overthrowing the Vietnam government" of Hoshi Minh and establishing a "truly democratic government...with Bao Dai as president of the Republic." The National Union Front further reports: "After the establishment of the sham coalition government, in which the representatives of all the political groups participated in principle, the Movement ceased to be violent in order to direct its activities into social and more suitable political channels."³ The platform of the Popular Movement calls for (a) liberation of political prisoners held by the Vietnam Government; and (b) organization and education of the masses. Leaders of the Popular Movement are Nguyen gia Tuong, Nguyen gia Tri, Luu due Trang, and Phan huy Dan.⁴ Except for its nominal participation in published manifestoes, it seems to have fallen into oblivion.

e. The Vietnam Nationalist Youth Alliance. The Vietnam Nationalist Youth Alliance (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Thanh Nien Doan) is another group for which exaggerated claims are made

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the National Union Front. It is reported as having "17,000 members, most of whom are intellectuals and peasants; 1,200 to 1,500 of them are fighting in the ranks of the Viet-Nam Nationalist Party among the guerrillas of the Tonkin Delta."¹ French sources opposed to the Vietnam Government lump the Alliance together with the Democratic Socialist Party and the Popular Movement, and place their total membership at 5,000.² Vietnam Government sources say the Alliance is a "pure French invention."³ If it exists as an operating body, it is probably a very minor group. Its listed leaders are Nguyen tuong Bach, Nguyen Tuan Tung, and Tran van Tuyen (or Tran Con).⁴

f. The Cao Dai League. The Cao Dai League (Doan The Cao Dai) is a political auxiliary of the Cao-Daist religious movement⁵ in Cochinchina, headed by the Pope of the order, Pham cong Tao. He exercises authority at Tay Ninh, the center of the major Cao-Daist sect in Cochinchina. There are a total of twelve sects in all, with a total membership estimated at from one to four million.⁵ The Cao Dai League claims to have from one to two million adherents, who allegedly supported the National Union Front when the League was one of its constituent organizations.⁶ While this claim is undoubtedly a gross exaggeration, the Cao Dai League is important, primarily because it has a number of armed troops at its disposal, some of whom are used against the forces of the Ho government in the south.

There is considerable confusion as to the exact situation in Cochinchina insofar as the loyalties of the Cao-Daist religious followers are concerned. It is clear that the principal leaders of the Cao-Daist religious movement have come to support the Bao Dai restoration movement. French radio reports continually refer to engagements between the Cao-Daists and "Viet Minh forces." The Vietnam Government radio rarely mentions such conflicts and maintains that the twelve Cao-Daist sects in the south "recognize only the authority of President Ho."⁷ It is likely that such conflicts do occur, since many Cao-Daist leaders are bitterly opposed to the southern leaders of the Vietnam Government as a result of

* See above, pp. 14 ff.

RESTRICTED

hostilities in Cochinchina in September 1945 and during the following months." The Vietnam Government radio has, significantly, only claimed the support of Cao trieu Phat as a member of the League for National Union of Vietnam,** which favors "the unity of the people behind President Ho's government."¹ However, Cao trieu Phat, who is the leader of the Western Cochinchina sect known as the "Minh Chon Dao"² and has troops under his command, has also been claimed to be a supporter of the National Union Front.³ Further, the Cao-Daist movement has control over large areas in Cochinchina where it has governmental autonomy recognized to a degree by both the French and Vietnam Governments. The situation is, however, very fluid. This was shown most recently by the French-reported claim of the Cao-Daist Headquarters at Tay Ninh in July 1949 that some 7,000 Vietnamese in the Tay Ninh area "had put themselves under the protection of the Cao Dai after suffering persecution at the hands of the Viet Minh."⁴

The actual strength of the military forces at the disposal of the Cao-Daist forces opposing the Ho government is not clear. Estimates range from "perhaps 200 [armed] members of this sect carrying on a kind of guerrilla warfare" against the Viet Minh in the south⁵ to 50,000 "armed and equipped."⁶ The principal military leader of the Cao-Daists is Tran quang Vinh, Commander in Chief of the Cao-Daist troops under the authority of Pham oong Tac.⁷

Politically, the Cao-Daists opposing the Viet Minh are divided on the issue of cooperation with the French and there is a good deal of rivalry for positions of authority within the movement. During the war, under Japanese domination, Cao-Daism was utilized by the Japanese as a vehicle for their propaganda for a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere."^{***} With the fall of Japan, some of the Cao-Daist elements came into conflict with the Viet Minh in Cochinchina, whose conciliatory policy toward the Allies they

* See above, p. 73.

** See above, p. 91.

*** See above, pp. 55 ff.

RESTRICTED

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opposed.* There is a strong current of xenophobia in Cao-Daist ranks. Some Cao-Daists continue to favor the return of Cuong De.**

In October 1947 a large section of the Cao Dai withdrew its support from the French-sponsored Cochinchina government because its representative, Le van Hoach, was displaced as premier by General Nguyen van Xuan.¹ In Saigon, the supporters of Le kim Ty's Cao-daist Union elected Bui van Nhan as their provisional head and declared themselves in favor of the Xuan government.² The differences between the Cao-Daist political groups were soon reconciled, however, and they jointly supported the Xuan government and accepted Bao Dai as Vietnam's negotiator with the French.

On January 27, 1948, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao signed a pact of alliance to eliminate fratricidal struggle between the two religious orders. The pact provided for recognition by the two groups of each other's "zones of action" and committed both to a struggle for the "defense of the interests of Vietnam." They further agreed to support "Bao Dai in his negotiations with France in order to realize the aspirations of the people, principally, independence of Vietnam within the French Union."³ It was reported that "French authorities had given their approval to the merger -- with some reticence," since the words "within the French Union" are said to have been "added only after the signature of the pact."⁴ Pham cong Tac was quoted later to the effect that, should the negotiations with Bao Dai fail, "then Cao-Daists and Hoa Hao, who have enough men and strength, will show firmness to the world and show the will of Viet Nam's people to independence and unity."⁵ Pham cong Tac has subsequently aligned himself with the Bao Dai government set up in July 1949.

However, the bulk of the Cao-Daists are not clearly committed to any one group. Cao-Daism is a large semi-political religious movement in which a great variety of political opinions occur. The great majority of its followers are nationalists who support

* See above, p. 75.
** See above, p. 57.

RESTRICTED

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the struggle for independence, whatever differences separate them from the Ho chi Minh government. They may well exert considerable political influence following the restoration of peace in Indochina.

g. The Hoa Hao. The Hoa Hao (Phat Giao Hoa Hao) is a political religious sect based on Buddhist doctrine.¹ Its principal membership is in the border country between western Cochinchina and Cambodia, with its main stronghold at Long Xuyen. The number of its followers has been variously estimated at from 200,000 to 1,000,000. The leader and founder of the Hoa Hao was Huynh phu So. He became politically important during the Japanese occupation of Indochina and was used by the Japanese to foster anti-white, xenophobic tendencies in connection with Japanese propaganda for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

With the approach of the Japanese defeat, Huynh phu So returned to Cantho Province. In the prevailing state of semi-anarchy, he set up the Can-tho-Quoc, or independent state of Cantho. This state gave way to the authority of the southern government of Vietnam following the August 1945 revolution. For a time Huynh phu So and his political cohorts supported the Vietnam Government and the resistance movement in the south,² but late in 1947 they split away to form their own combat groups. Huynh phu So was also instrumental in forming the Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party.* His refusal to work under Vietnam orders led to his capture³ by the resistance forces in the south, who executed him for treason in June 1947.⁴ His death led some Hao Hoa followers to collaborate with the French in military actions against the southern resistance forces. Leadership of the Hoa Hao passed into the hands of Tran van Xoai (also known as Nam Lua).⁵

The Hoa Hao consists of terrorist groups not averse to killing Cao-Daists or other Vietnamese. They are basically anti-French and their current alliance with French forces is undoubtedly tenuous. The Hoa Hao was committed to the National Union Front policy of support to Bao Dai, but divided on the question of whether the government

* See above, pp. 115 ff.

RESTRICTED

to be established should be a monarchy or republic. It has indicated opposition to French High Commissioner Bollaert's Hadong speech of September 10, 1947* and demanded far greater concessions, including independence and unity for Vietnam. On the occasion of the signing of the pact between the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao,** General Nam Lua declared: "Actually Hoa Hao are fighting against Communists and not against resistance soldiers who are sympathizers of Hoa Hao....We desire an independent Vietnam with its own army, finances, economy and diplomatic representation, but we do not want to break our bonds with France. We do not approve of the policies of the South Vietnam government which advocates decentralization of power. We want a full unification."¹

Besides Tran van Xoai, important leaders of the Hoa Hao are: Ho nhut Tan (or Pham cong Minh), a monarchist favoring the return of Bao Dai as emperor, and Nguyen phuoc Hau, Chief of General Tran van Xoai's staff. Nguyen phuoc Hau has claimed that the Hoa Hao army consists of 40,000 men, an obvious exaggeration.² An official of the National Union Front has stated that 500³ Hoa Hao men are armed; another source estimates the number at 700.⁴ There have been reports that some Hoa Hao troops are used as adjuncts to the French in operations against southern Vietnam forces.⁵ That many of them are still fighting against the French is borne out by French reports, which continue to stress defections of Hoa Hao troops from the resistance.⁶

The Hoa Hao undoubtedly has political strength in Cochinchina. Like the Cao Dai, it exercises authority in areas of Cochinchina removed from the control of both the Vietnam Government and the French. It can be expected to play an active role in making aggressive demands on the French through the medium of the Bao Dai restoration movement.

* See above, p. 104.

** See above, p. 121.

RESTRICTED

h. The Buddhist Group. The Buddhist Home Contemplation (Tinh Do Cu Si) is a religious social movement with a large Chinese membership whose principal tenet is reported to be that "profound contemplation at home" is superior to the use of priests and pagodas.¹ French sources place the number of its followers at 500,000. Vietnam sources are reputed to admit that this group has a considerable following and is largely opposed to the Viet Minh. In keeping with its religious beliefs it has no hierarchy of command and offers only uncohesive passive resistance to the Ho government. No actual membership figures are available to indicate the extent and effectiveness of its opposition to the Vietnam Government.

i. The Vietnam Catholic League. The Vietnam Catholic League (Viet Nam Lien Doan Cong Giao) was organized in December 1945 by the influential Bishop of Phat Diem diocese, Le huu Tu, as the official political organization of Catholics in Indochina.² Indochinese Catholics number almost two million, and most of them are concentrated in the province of Annam. There are reportedly 1,500 native clergy, as contrasted with a small French mission.³ At the time of its organization, the Vietnam Catholic League was headed by Nguyen manh Ha, president; Le van De, treasurer; and Nguyen xuan Dong and Phan van Dien, advisers.⁴ Nguyen manh Ha was a minister in Ho chi Minh's provisional government.* He remained in Hanoi when it came under French control with the outbreak of fighting on December 19, 1946.** He has not since publicly repudiated the Ho chi Minh government nor has he associated himself with any of the efforts made to set up a rival government. His own stand has apparently been paralleled by the bulk of the Vietnamese clergy, who supported the Vietnam Government at its inception and have, since the fighting began, upheld the fight for Vietnam's independence despite any fears of Communist control of the Ho government.

Since the outbreak of the fighting, political control of the Vietnam Catholic League has apparently passed into the hands of Ngo dinh Diem, a conservative nationalist.⁵ He is anti-Communist, an attitude stemming in part from the fact that his brother Ngo dinh Khoi, former governor of Quang Ngai Province, was killed by the Viet Minh in August 1945.*** On the other hand, Ngo dinh Diem is violently opposed to French control of Vietnam and advocated complete independence, following which Vietnam and France might negotiate agreements as equals. Bishop Le huu Tu

* See above, p. 76.

** See above, p. 84.

*** See above, p. 87.

RESTRICTED

known to favor a monarchical form of government and collaboration with the French on a reasonable and sincere basis.¹ It was under the aegis of Ngo dinh Diem and Bishop Le huu Tu at the Vietnam Catholic League became a component of the National Union Front.²

Apparently the differences that led to the demise of the National Union Front³ also plagued the Vietnam Catholic League. The bulk of the Catholics continued to support the resistance. There was division in the leadership, however, over the extent of concessions to be made to the French and over support of the Bao Dai movement. The French were apparently concerned enough about the situation to have High Commissioner Emile Bollaert visit the Pope on a mission attributed to French desires to have the Vatican exert pressure on Vietnamese Catholics to give up their opposition to French control.⁵ The mission had no apparent success.⁴ Prominent Catholics have subsequently indicated the basic dilemma of the church in Indochina -- whether, faced with the universal desire of its followers for the independence of their country, to collaborate with the Communist-led resistance or to support the effectual Bao Dai government.⁶

The exact status of the Catholic League is not clear at present. Bishop Drapier of the French mission was reported to have disbanded the organization in Cochinchina in February 1958.⁶ Ngo dinh Diem apparently is quite dissatisfied with the Bao Dai government and has stated that "the national aspirations of the Vietnamese people will not be satisfied until the nation has achieved the same status as India and Pakistan". He is also clearly in favor of reserving "the best positions in the new Vietnam for those who have earned the gratitude of the Fatherland. I refer to the Resistance elements."⁷ It would appear that the Catholic leaders in Vietnam are still opponents of French rule to the extent that they will not associate with the Bao Dai government as long as it has not clearly won the independence that remains the common aspiration of most Vietnamese nationalists. Vietnamese Catholics constitute an important element of the resistance today and can be expected to exercise political influence in the future.

j. The Binh Xuyen. The Binh Xuyen (Lien Khu Binh Xuyen) is another group that the National Front claimed as an affiliate in its struggle against the Vietnam Government.⁸ The origin of the group has been described as the "result of the fusion of a number of

See above, pp. 106 ff.

RESTRICTED

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bandit bands, some of whose members were released from the island prison of Poulo Condore by the Japanese. It is also certain that a large number of the Binh Xuyen...fought at the side of the Viet Minh in the early days of the French attempt to return to power in Indochina. After operating "largely as roving bands, primarily harrassing the French but also preying on the countryside," the bands "became more closely connected and better organized, continuing their fight with the French and, because its leaders have been assassinated by the Communists, adding the Communists to their list of enemies."

The members of the Binh Xuyen are said to be "responsible for much of the terroristic activities in and around Saigon" and to be "making life uncomfortable for the French forces and French supporters, but curiously enough avoiding any conflict with the Cao-Daists. Politically the Binh Xuyen, although cooperating to a certain extent with the nationalist elements of the Viet Minh, are weakly ranged on the side of the National Union Front Party... the forces of the Binh Xuyen number approximately 8,000, divided into three regiments, but...arms are available for probably not over 5,000 -- the arms being in part captured from the French or handed over by native sympathizers in the struggle against the French, but mainly a heritage from the Japanese."

The organization and program of the Binh Xuyen have been summarized as follows:

"...It comprises persons from all classes and is neither a political nor religious party but simply a bloc of armed patriots fighting the invaders of the country; it will cease to fight only when the aspirations of Vietnam for national unity and real independence are realized, but there is no objection to inclusion within the framework of the French Union; while it does not obey all the orders of the Viet Minh Communists, it is in close contact with the Viet Minh in all that concerns the fight against their common enemy; it aims to protect the population, even against the Viet Minh, and cites its protection of the Cao-Daists; it has been in contact with the National Union Front of which it speaks rather highly, and with Bao Dai in Hongkong; it appeals to all nationalist elements to emulate its close organization and to unite not only in the fight for union and independence but also against the Communists; it asserts that it is the best of the guerrilla bands and optimistically states that it can restore order in Cochinchina within three to four months if the nationalists will be guided by it."

"Thus, the two operative considerations of the Binh Xuyen program are to fight the French and to fight the Communists. While these considerations appear to be incompatible, they resolve themselves into the ultimate program of obtaining a union of the nationalist forces and thus winning union and independence. Inter alia at a recent meeting of the various political elements in Cochinchina, directed by Nguyen van Sam, the leader of the National Union Front, the Binh Xuyen took an active part in the meeting along with the Cao-Daists, the Hoa Hao, the intellectuals of Cochinchina, the Popular Movement Party, and others. Accordingly, one must credit the Binh Xuyen with a certain amount of influence and with the potentiality of playing a role in the course of events in Annamite Indochina."

RESTRICTED

2. The Vietnam National Rally. The Vietnam National Rally (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Lien Hiep), an outgrowth of the National Union Front, developed following the break-up of the Front due to internal differences between monarchist and republican elements. The Vietnam National Rally came into existence officially on December 23, 1947 at Hanoi, Indochina,¹ following a period of maneuvering and negotiation between various political groups opposed to the Vietnam Government.

In July and August 1947, Vu tam Anh, a Cochinchinese nationalist, had been instrumental in setting up a National Union Front (Mat Tran Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)² parallel to the then existing National Union Front of Nguyen van Sam.* Vu tam Anh named his organization after the former unified resistance organization in Cochinchina that had included the Viet Minh.** This was done presumably to give Vu tam Anh's Front the appearance of a genuine organization of resistance groups fighting against the French. It was Vu tam Anh's Front that delegated to Le van Hoach power to make contact with Bao Dai and enlist his services in negotiating an agreement with the French.*** (The role of Vu tam Anh's National Union Front in subsequent events is not clear. Apparently Vu tam Anh was temporarily restrained by the Cao-Daist leadership at Tay Ninh from further activity.³ In June 1949, before the installation of the Bao Dai government, his National Union Front came forward with a proposal for the convocation of an elected national assembly that would form a provisional government that would then negotiate agreements with France.⁴ This Front is important only because its leadership is said to include Nguyen hua Hiep and Colonel Bay Vien⁵ -- two of the few individuals who actually commanded small bodies of troops that made their peace with the French.)****

Le van Hoach, in line with the Front's mandate, approached the various political groups in Saigon in an effort to group them together behind his project. A period of confused negotiations took place during which, in October 1948, Le van Hoach was forced to relinquish his post of President of the Cochinchina Government. He then

* See above, pp. 106 ff.

** See above, p. 79.

*** See above, p. 104.

**** See above, p. 79.

RESTRICTED

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devoted his efforts to building a new nationalist alliance. It was not until December 11, 1947 that Le van Hoach was successful in helping to build a new organization called the Vietnam National Assembly (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Tap Doan).¹ He left Saigon on December 17 to visit Tonkin and Annam and win adherents to the new organization.² Le van Hoach was successful in establishing contact with a number of minor political groups and personalities generally associated with the existing "administrative committees" set up under French auspices to aid in governing those areas in Indochina under French control. With his aid, an organization called the Vietnam National Rally was created on December 23, 1947 in Tonkin and Annam. Le van Hoach, in a speech for the new organization, for the first time declared himself a monarchist, and pledged the support of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Catholics, and Protestants in Cochinchina, who, he claimed, comprised "more than three millions of a population of four million inhabitants who are monarchists."³

The Vietnam National Assembly in the south then changed its name on December 25, 1947 to Vietnam National Rally "because the national groups from the north to the south always desire to form themselves in one bloc." Its claimed constituent groups in Cochinchina were: "Southern branch of the Vietnam National Rally, Cao Dai Tay Ninh, Hoa Hao, Catholic (Cong Giao), Protestant (Tinh Lanh Hoi), Democratic League (Lien Minh Dan Chu), Vietnam Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang)."⁴

This list is probably exaggerated. The noted affiliation of the various organizations probably refers to individual members or small groups who favor the monarchist views of the Vietnam National Rally. The Protestant group (Tinh Lanh Hoi) is a minor political association. The Democratic League (Lien Minh Dan Chu) is alleged to be a republican-oriented organization, which, while opposed to the Viet Minh, fights with it against the French.⁵ Its representative in negotiations with the other nationalist groups is Do du Anh.⁶ He further has contact with nationalist resistance groups, including one known as the Le Khoi Khang Chieu Quoc Gia group and another known as the Kha van Can group, which is described as of "Trotskyite tendency."⁷ It is doubtful that these groups will give up their demand for independence to accept the concessions that have been made

RESTRICTED

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to date to Bao Dai.

It was not until February 2, 1948 that the various component parts of the Vietnam National Rally held a national meeting at Saigon for the election of a central committee, the drawing up of a plan of joint action, and the formulation of the political objectives to be attained.¹ The organization decided to convoke a National Congress in conjunction with the existing administrative committees of Tonkin and Annam and the provisional government of Cochinchina.² This congress was held under the auspices of Nguyen van Xuan in Saigon on May 20, 1948 and established a "Provisional Vietnam Central Government" with Nguyen van Xuan as its president.³

The Vietnam National Rally has been closely associated with the Bao Dai restoration movement since its inception and is closely associated with the government that he subsequently created. It held another national congress at Hanoi in December 1948.³ It also held a regional meeting of the North Vietnam (Tonkin) organization in May 1949.⁴

One of the principal constituents of the Vietnam National Rally in Annam has been the little-known, small monarchist society known as the Monarchist Party (Bao Hoang Chinh Dang),⁵ which was formed in September 1945 by Commandant Lang, a Mandarin Superior of the Court of Hue.⁶ It apparently draws its principal membership from the conservative mandarin and the royal family. One estimate places its membership at 10,000, but this figure is undoubtedly exaggerated.⁷ The party is apparently broadening its activities; in February 1949, it adopted a new name -- New Vietnam Party (Tan Viet Nam Dang) -- and opened up party headquarters in Saigon. The principal leader is Nicholas Truong Vinh Tong, a supporter of the Provisional Vietnam Central Government of Nguyen van Xuan.⁸

Despite its imposing array of constituent organizations, the Vietnam National Rally is a minor political organization whose influence is quite limited. It represents principally the small monarchist elements of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina.

* See below, p. 137.

RESTRICTED

3. The Vietnam Restoration League. The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phus Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) is another minor nationalist party that continues to vie for the leadership of the nationalist movement in Vietnam.* The importance of the Vietnam Restoration League is in part attributable to the prestige and influence of its principal leader, the exiled Prince Cuong De. Having dedicated more than forty years to the struggle for Vietnamese independence, Cuong De personifies the continuity of present-day Vietnamese nationalism with the now legendary personalities who distinguished themselves in the early period of Vietnamese opposition to French domination of Indochina.**

The Vietnam Restoration League virtually disappeared from Vietnam political life following the defeat of Japan and the accession to power of the Viet Minh in September 1945.*** The bulk of its former supporters became partisans of the Vietnam Government and joined the various parties represented in that government. Its leadership, apparently discredited for having gambled on the success of the Japanese, was eclipsed, disappearing for a time from public life.

Following the outbreak of the fighting between the French and Vietnamese in December 1946, Prince Cuong De, in a letter to the President of the United States dated June 9, 1947, attempted to solicit American aid for the Vietnam people who "for the past eighty years...have been under the control of the French Government, and... have suffered greatly from its despotism and tyranny."¹ Later, on October 7, 1947, four Cuong De emissaries were reported to have made contact with Bao Dai, then in Hongkong, as participants in the effort to set up a rival Vietnam government to that of Ho chi Minh.² Prince Cuong De disavowed responsibility for these emissaries, stating that they were in fact envoys of his supporters acting on their own authority. He also remarked that his only plans were to leave Japan to visit China and meet with Chiang K'ai-shek, an old friend. As far as support to Bao Dai was concerned, Cuong De

* See above, pp. 50 ff.

** See above, pp. 3 ff.

*** See above, pp. 53 ff.

RESTRICTED

further indicated that the struggle for Vietnam independence took precedence over the question of leadership and that he was in favor of agreement between Bao Dai and Ho chi Minh.¹ This unwillingness of Cuong De to associate himself too closely with Bao Dai may be attributed, apart from Cuong De's own personal desires for leadership, to his intransigent advocacy of Vietnamese independence. This attitude has marked the subsequent activities of the Vietnam Restoration League, which had tried to play the role of an intermediate third group in Vietnamese nationalist politics. Although opposed to the Communist leadership of the Vietnam Government, the Vietnam Restoration League has refused to identify itself with the Bao Dai government, since it considers such French concessions as have been made inadequate.

In December 1947, Cuong De elaborated on his politics in a letter to the Vietnamese press. He indicated that Vietnam's struggle for independence was favorably regarded by the democratic countries of the world, but that the Communist leadership of the Vietnam Government was a complicating factor that was perpetuating the conflict. Cuong De appealed to Ho chi Minh, "whose sincerity and patriotic sentiments are unquestionable, to look carefully into the international situation and to give way to other persons who can be accepted by the democratic countries."² Later, in May 1948, Cuong De again appealed to the United States to assist in negotiating a French-Vietnam agreement for the independence of Vietnam.³

It appears that headquarters of the Vietnam Restoration League were established in 1948 in Canton, under the active presidency of Hoang nam Hung. Other spokesmen and supporters of the organization included Vuong minh Son, Phan trong Doan, Truong anh Nghia, and Tran boi Long.⁴ Cuong De apparently made repeated efforts to leave Japan for China, where he might make contact with Chinese Nationalist officials and presumably establish connections with the émigré center of his organization. According to Cuong De, permission to leave was denied by United States occupation officials.⁵

In October 1948, the Saigon Vietnamese press featured stories that Cuong De

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had made approaches to Nguyen van Xuan, President of the Provisional Central Vietnam Government, to meet in Hongkong and discuss Cuong De's return to Indochina as a mediator between Bao Dai and Ho chi Minh.¹ While these reports were not confirmed by the principals involved, their appearance testifies to the desire on the part of some Vietnamese politicians for the return of Prince Cuong De to Indochina as an alternative nationalist leader. By March 1949 Cuong De apparently felt that the situation in Vietnam had become more critical, for in a press interview at that time, he underscored his desire to get to Canton and "direct actively the campaign for freedom." Cuong De made the exaggerated claim that the Vietnam Restoration League had a membership of "160,000 effectives" and 10,000,000 supporters. Significantly, he indicated willingness to accept aid from the USSR or the Chinese Communists and to collaborate with Ho chi Minh in a united front in the struggle to win independence for Vietnam. He also referred to his appeals to the United States for support.² An April 1949 report indicated that the Vietnam Restoration League had formed a party in Kwangsi, China.³ In July 1949, a further report indicated that Cuong De had declined an invitation from Bao Dai to participate in the Bao Dai government, an action that underscored Cuong De's continued unwillingness to accept the concessions made by the French thus far.⁴

It would appear that the Vietnam Restoration League had some importance as a Vietnamese nationalist political group. Having refused to compromise Vietnamese nationalist demands for full independence, it may succeed in attracting elements from the Bao Dai government that object to the puppet status of that government. It may also attract support from resistance elements opposed to the Viet Minh leadership.

4. French-Sponsored Regimes. Various governmental bodies set up by the French authorities to help administer the areas under their control have played a considerable role in the Bao Dai restoration movement. The most prominent of these bodies have been the "Government of South Vietnam," the "administrative committees" of Tonkin and

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Annam, the "Provisional Vietnam Central Government" and now the Bao Dai "Vietnam Government". While these governments came into being through appointment by the metropolitan power rather than through indigenous political processes, they have acquired varying amounts of political life of their own by virtue of their control of patronage, official propaganda facilities, and administrative pressure and by providing forums for existing political organizations.

a. The Government of South Vietnam. The Government of South Vietnam had its beginnings in the "Consultative Council of Cochinchina," an advisory group of four Frenchmen and eight Vietnamese appointed on February 14, 1946 by the Governor General of Indochina.¹ The Council gave official publicity to autonomy demonstrations that were organized in Cochinchina during the following months. It proclaimed the "Republic of Cochinchina" on June 1, 1946, while the delegation of the Vietnam Government was on its way to Paris to negotiate with France the basic issues of French-Vietnam relations, including that of the status of Cochinchina.* With the establishment of the Republic, the Council was expanded to an assembly and limited executive functions were assigned to a government formed from among the members of the assembly. During its entire existence, all members of the Consultative Assembly were appointed by the French and all but a few were French citizens. Elections were postponed repeatedly because of lack of public order.²

Although separatism, as represented by the new republic, was sponsored by the French administration, it was not entirely without Vietnamese support. Cochinchina is the wealthiest of the three Vietnamese states. Its historical development differed from that of Tonkin and Annam in that French influence in Cochinchina was stronger, representative institutions were more highly developed, and educational standards were higher. A number of minor political parties and groups were formed in 1946 around the Consultative Council, with platforms demanding various degrees of separatism or

* See above, p. 80.

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

autonomy within a federated or unitary Vietnam.* These organizations comprised mainly middle-class and wealthy Vietnamese, the bulk of whom were French citizens. Their popular influence was negligible.

The Government of the Republic of Cochinchina also attracted at various times, in addition to the separatist groups, the support of wings of the much more real and powerful Cao Dai** and Hoa Hao movements.***

The first president of the Cochinchina Republic, Nguyen van Thinh, committed suicide in November 1946, apparently because he felt that his government had become a farce.¹ A new government with Le van Hoach at its head was installed on December 6, 1946 under the slogan "Neither separatist nor unionist, but autonomist."²

Following the complete breakdown of relations between France and Vietnam on December 19, 1946, the new government was welcomed by Marius Moutet, Minister of Overseas France, on December 26, 1946³ and by Leon Blum, French Premier, on December 29, 1946.⁴ On December 31, 1946, Le van Hoach felt that the position of his government had improved sufficiently to take the lead in espousing Vietnamese nationalism: "We refuse to give the Viet Minh the monopoly of nationalism...Let France translate into concrete fact her promise of independence and on that day many patriots will follow me once more....We believe that Tonkin has no more right than Cochinchina to lead."⁵ These words were followed with a statement on January 17, 1947 conceding that the Viet Minh controlled most of the area that his government claimed.⁶

On February 4, 1949, the Cochinchina Republic was proclaimed a "free state" forming part of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. It was given a number of additional powers by the French Governor General.⁷ This effort to bolster its authority among the Vietnamese was supplemented by approaches by Le van Hoach to Ho Chi Minh in February;⁸ negotiations with resistance elements, Cao-Daists, and the

* See below, pp. 135 ff.
** See above, pp. 119 ff.
*** See above, pp. 122 ff.

RESTRICTED

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Hoa Hao in March;¹ contacts with Dong Minh Hoi elements in April;² and liaison with Bao Dai in August.³ In September 1947 a meeting of all elements in the Cochinchina Assembly was held to discuss the return of Bao Dai to Indochina. No agreement was reached,⁴ and The Cochinchina Government went through another crisis. It divided into three wings: the pro-French wing of Tran van Ty; a group headed by Le van Hoach; and another headed by Nguyen van Xuan. On October 1, 1947, Nguyen van Xuan was elected president. Le van Hoach refused to serve as vice-president in the new government.⁵ He had the support of influential wings of the Cao Daist and Hoa Hao movements, and his withdrawal reduced the strength of the government by removing from it the only groups controlling Vietnamese forces and territory of their own.

The Xuan government, too, embarked on a program of appeasement of the nationalist movement in resistance. It changed its name to the Provisional Government of South Vietnam on October 13, 1947 to signalize its desire for a unified Vietnam.⁶ It secured the release of imprisoned resistance elements and improved the welfare of others left in jail.⁷ Through its propaganda agency, it held out an olive branch to Ho Chi Minh and identified itself with all Vietnamese who had the sole aim of liberating their country.⁸ All these steps were designed to win support for Xuan's proposal to employ Bao Dai, as the man above parties, to negotiate with the French for the independence and unity of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the Government of South Vietnam remained ineffectual, maintained and supported by the French authorities rather than by popular consent. Bao Dai himself requested dissolution of the government on October 6, 1947, recognizing thereby the extent to which it was a political liability.⁹

Of the separatist parties that drew their strength largely from participation in the successive forms of the Consultative Council, those described in the following paragraphs were identified with specific programs and were active over a period of time.

1. The Indochinese Democratic Party. The Indochinese Democratic Party (Parti Democrat Indochinois) was led by Nguyen van Thinh, the first premier of the

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"Republic of Cochinchina." Pro-French in orientation, the party accepted the French declaration of March 24, 1946, which envisaged an Indochinese federation composed of five autonomous states -- Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia -- forming a part of the French Union. The party favored a hierarchical system of indirect elections for village councils, provincial councils, and a Cochinchina council; strong ties with France; and French representation with a strength of one-third in the Cochinchina government. In 1946 it advocated complete separation from Tonkin and Annam.¹

ii. The Cochinchinese Democratic Party. The Cochinchinese Democratic Party (Parti Democrat Cochinchinois) was led by Nguyen tan Cuong, a member of the Cochinchina Consultative Council. The party was separatist and favored a completely autonomous Cochinchina tied to France.²

iii. The Popular Front of Cochinchina. The Popular Front of Cochinchina (Mat Tran Binh Dan Dam Ky) was led by Phong Tan and/or Nguyen Tan Cuong³ and resembled the Cochinchinese Democratic Party. It published a paper called The Appeal (Tieng Goi).

iv. The Popular Movement of Cochinchina. The Popular Movement of Cochinchina (Phong Trao Binh Dan Nam Ky) was led in 1946 by Le tan Truong. The party stood for an autonomous Cochinchina within a republican federation of Vietnam and believed in a decentralization of powers for Cochinchina in a Vietnam bloc. It still publishes the paper Cochinchina (Nam Ky).⁴

b. The administrative committees of Annam and Tonkin. With the outbreak of hostilities on December 19, 1946 parts of Tonkin and Annam came under direct French administration. In May 1947, steps were taken to create committees of Vietnamese to help administer the areas. The French authorities made clear that this was done not to "return to the old administrative formulas", but, "since the present situation is becoming prolonged", in order to permit a certain number of Vietnamese, "some of whom are top-ranking personalities, to assume responsibility of a purely administrative nature."⁵

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The French had considerable difficulty getting candidates to serve on the committees. Enthusiasm for participation was low, and the fear of assassination and reprisals by Vietnam Government supporters was great. The overwhelming bulk of trained intellectuals were in Vietnam Government territory with the resistance. The only outstanding figure secured was Truong dinh Tri of the Dong Minh Hoi party, a former minister in the Ho chi Minh government.* He was assassinated at Hanoi on October 11, 1947.¹ The French continued, however, to build up the authority of these committees, and a report was carried by the Saigon radio to the effect that "according to reliable sources, the Haiphong and Hanoi administrative committees will be reorganized into de facto temporary governments since the French authorities have handed back almost all the administrative services."² The administrative services had been given over to the committees on February 16, 1948.³

These administrative committees and their personnel constituted the main vehicle of support for the Bao Dai restoration movement in Tonkin and Annam. No elections were ever held, but these officials, all appointed by the French, were absorbed into the Provisional Vietnam Central Government set up by Nguyen van Xuan in May 1948 and later became the local agencies of the Bao Dai government set up July 1, 1949.

c. The Provisional Vietnam Central Government. On May 5, 1948, President Nguyen van Xuan of the Government of South Vietnam announced in Hanoi the forthcoming formation of a new "Provisional Vietnam Central Government" based on an agreement to be reached between Xuan and French High Commissioner Bollaert, with the explicit approval of ex-Emperor Bao Dai.⁴ The new government was founded by representatives of the administrative committees and of the Government of South Vietnam on May 20, 1948,⁵ in anticipation of a satisfactory settlement with France. When the agreement, subsequently negotiated aboard a French cruiser in the Baie d'Along, was ratified by the French Assembly, accepted by Bao Dai in principle, and supplemented by detailed implementing agreements, the new government was to assume an active role. In the meantime, few

* See above, p. 77.

RESTRICTED

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Vietnamese leaders besides Xuan committed themselves firmly to the new body. The French Government and Assembly ultimately endorsed the Baie d'Along agreement, but the Provisional Vietnam Central Government never achieved more than a nominal existence. Bao Dai announced the formation of a cabinet on July 1, 1949. This new government has not yet taken over the principal government functions from the French administration and has not thus far caused a significant realignment of political forces in Indochina.

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