

Memoires of EARly Vietnamese Communism: Circa 1929

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MEMOIRS: RECALLING THE DAYS SPENT ATTENDING THE 6TH CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese No 7, Jul 83 pp 65-68

[Article written by The Tap as told to him by Nguyen Van Tao]

[Text] Editorial Note: the 6th Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in July and August, 1928, was of very important significance to the international communist and worker movement as well as to the national liberation movement. Nguyen Van Tao was a member of the delegation of the French Communist Party that attended this congress.

Below, we have printed the memoirs of Nguyen Van Tao concerning his attendance at the 6th Congress of the Communist International.

Nguyen Van Tao was born on 20 May 1908 in Phuoc Loi Village, Cho Long (Nam Bo). In 1926, in the movement to mourn the death of Phan Chu Trinh, he mobilized students at the Sa-xo-lu Loba [Vietnamese phonetics] Middle School (Saigon) to boycott classes. Expelled, he fled on a ship to France, where he conducted revolutionary activities. In late 1926, He was accepted into the French Communist Party and later elected to the Central Committee of the French Communist Party. In May, 1931, he was deported from France. Returning home, he actively participated in revolutionary activities in Nam Bo. In 1939, he was arrested by the French imperialists, sentenced to 5 years in prison and 10 years in exile and sent to Con Dao. With the victory of the August Revolution, he regained his freedom. In 1946, he was elected as a deputy to the 1st Legislature of the National Assembly and continued to serve as a National Assembly deputy and went on to serve many more terms as a National Assembly deputy. He was appointed Minister of Labor and held this position for 20 years. He died on 16 August 1970.

In 1926, in response to the intense, nationwide movement to mourn the passing of Phan Chu Trinh, I mobilized the students of my class to boycott classes together with the rest of the students at the Sa-xo-lu Loba Middle School in Saigon. Expelled from school, I fled on a ship to France, where I studied, worked and engaged in revolutionary activities. In late 1926, I was accepted into the French Communist Party.

In 1927, I went to Paris in search of Nguyen Ai Quoc, but he had long since left for the Soviet Union. I remained in Paris and was assigned a job in a department of the Office of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, where I followed the revolutionary movements in the colonies, primarily the movement in Indochina, through press and news reports; gathered information on the situation and reported it to the Central Committee of the French Communist Party so that the communist members of the French Parliament had materials that they could use to question and criticize the French government regarding its policy in Indochina; and sent material back to Vietnam and propagandized and agitated among Vietnamese workers, students and soldiers in France.

In April, 1928, an Indochinese communist group was established during a conference at the Xanh Do-ni [Vietnamese phonetics] Factory. Attending the conference were nine Vietnamese delegates from Paris and the various provinces together with a delegate from the Colonial Department of the French Communist Party, Henry Lo-do-rai [Vietnamese phonetics]. I was put in charge of publishing an underground newspaper called LAO NONG (the combination of the two words "Lao Dong"[laborers] and "Nong Dan"[peasants]); later, the name of this newspaper was changed to VO SAN [THE PROLETARIAT]. Our activities involved bringing persons together to research and study Marxism-Leninism. A number of members of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party frequently came to guide and help us in our studies and organize us in the common struggle alongside the French Communist Party. However, we Vietnamese communists continued to maintain regular activities within the party chapters of the French Communist Party as we did before.

As a result of the revolutionary activities conducted in France and my work in the Colonial Research Department, I was appointed to the French Communist Party delegation attending the 6th Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow (the Soviet Union) in 1928. The delegation was headed by Comrade Xe-ma [Vietnamese phonetics], who was the general secretary of the French Communist Party at that time. The delegation consisted of Henry Lo-do-rai, Phlo-ri-mong Bong-te [Vietnamese phonetics], Phrang-song Va-ra-nhe [Vietnamese phonetics], Raymond Guy-o [Vietnamese phonetics], Bi-u [Vietnamese phonetics], Ra-ca-mong [Vietnamese phonetics] and others. The delegation also included three Vietnamese, myself, Tran Thieu Ban (a seaman representing manual workers) and Nguyen The Vinh (1) (a student at the Far Eastern College who represented students).

The delegation's journey was not impeded in any way; all we had to do was obtain passports and train tickets. The passports of we three Vietnamese were obtained by a Chinese person named Hou and we had to assume Chinese names; I took the name Van Pinh. As we travelled from Paris through Berlin, Germany, our delegation stopped at the headquarters of the German Communist Party, which was, at that time, conducting strong public activities. From Berlin, we travelled to the port of Stettin and then travelled by Soviet ship to Leningrad; from there, we took a train to Moscow. The delegation gave me the responsibility of writing a speech on Indochina.

The speech began by presenting the Indochina issue as one of the most important issues facing French imperialism. The geographical position of

Indochina caused it to be coveted by the Japanese imperialists, as a result of which Indochina had become a source of bloody conflicts in the Pacific.

On the basis of providing a detailed analysis, which was supported by data, of the economic, political and social situations in Indochina, the speech denounced the French imperialists for oppressing and exploiting the people of Indochina, primarily workers and peasants, and making their lives very miserable; exposed Varen, the French Socialist Party member who was sent to serve as Governor-General of Indochina in a vain attempt to placate the people; pointed out the reactionary nature of the "Constitutional Party" headed by Bui Quang Chieu; and stated that the Chinese bourgeoisie, who were concentrated in Cho Lon, were also a force that was oppressing and exploiting the Vietnamese people, in addition to the French colonial government.

At that time, the French imperialists in Indochina had instigated a quarrel between Vietnamese and Chinese in Haiphong. However, Vietnamese revolutionaries had declared that they would assist the revolutionary movement of the Chinese people. The speech highly praised the spirit of struggle displayed by the 800 Vietnamese workers at the Ba Son Works (Saigon) who went on strike and refused to repair the Misole, a ship that was used by the French imperialists to massacre Chinese.

Analyzing the classes in Indochina, the speech rejected the opinion that there was no proletariat in Indochina and stated: the Indochinese proletariat, although it was not the large, nationwide class that the proletariat was in the European countries, was very highly concentrated in the major industrial centers. Because Indochina was a region of uneven economic development, it was necessary to stress the centralized nature of the proletariat. As regards the peasantry, the revolutionary spirit of peasants was increasingly being displayed in struggles against the imperialists and landowners who had robbed them of their cropland and were oppressing and exploiting them. On the basis of analyzing the classes in Indochina, the speech raised the following issues: the bourgeoisie within a colonial country cannot lead the national liberation revolution; a political party of the working class had to be established to lead the Indochinese revolution. The speech concluded as follows: "The Communist International must give full attention to the matter of establishing a communist party in Indochina and must research the establishment of a trade union to rally workers and the establishment of organizations to bring peasants together. Only in this way can the workers and peasants of Indochina move forward to liberate themselves completely and forever... Being an enslaved people, enslaved laborers, exploited workers and peasants, we have but one desire, to free ourselves from the yoke of oppression of imperialism, of the parasitic bourgeoisie within our country in order to take our place within the socialist world, in order to stand beneath the banner of the Communist International."

The speech that I drafted was unanimously approved by the delegation of the French Communist Party. However, I still presented to Nguyen The Ruc and a number of other Vietnamese who were studying at the Far Eastern College for their examination and opinions. One comrade told me that some persons, because they did not understand the situation at home at that time, maintained that we should not immediately establish a communist party at home but should

only organize an overseas center to guide the Indochinese revolution. However, on the basis of the situation at home, that is, the strong growth of the worker and peasant movement, it was possible to establish a communist party at home to directly lead the movement, consequently, I held to the position stated in my speech.

The 6th Congress of the Communist International was held at the Hall of Soviet Trade Unions in Moscow. During the 35th session of the congress, on the afternoon of 17 August 1928, I, using the alias Nguyen An, delivered my speech to the congress. As I was standing at the rostrum, the delegates burst into resounding and prolonged applause, the reason for which I did not know; immediately thereafter, I saw Stalin enter and take a seat among the presiding officers of the congress. In keeping with the principle of secrecy, when delivering my speech and during the time I spent at the congress, I did not have my photograph taken. The speech that I delivered was warmly received by the congress and printed in THU TIN QUOC TE Journal, issue number 128, 1928. The congress debated and adopted the Platform of the Communist International and elected the new executive committee. Stalin was again elected to serve as general secretary of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. During the time that the congress was being held, I met and became acquainted with various leaders of fraternal parties, such as Tenlemann, Togliatti, Cu-xi-nen [Vietnamese phonetics], Ka-ta-i-a-ma [Vietnamese phonetics], Giacomo, Govan, Bi-e-rut [Vietnamese phonetics], etc. I later learned that, following the congress, the Communist International sent a directive to the revolutionaries in Indochina through the French Communist Party in which it contributed its opinions on how to organize and lead the struggle in Indochina. This directive was printed on very thin paper that was folded many times, placed inside a match box and given to Bui Lam, who at that time was using the alias Sau, to take to Vietnam...

During the days I spent in Moscow, I once visited Tran Phu, Nguyen The Ruc, Nguyen Khanh Toan and others who were studying at the Far Eastern College. During that time, Le Hong Phong was attending the Non-Military Cadre Training School in Leningrad, so, I visited him, too.

After the congress closed, the organizing committee arranged for the delegations to tour the Soviet Union. I accompanied the group that travelled to the Urals, Siberia, Bakiri (an ethnic minority area) and the Volga region through Moscow to Leningrad and then back to France.

Upon my return from the 6th Congress of the Communist International, I, and a number of other comrades were elected to supplement the Central Committee of the French Communist Party. At that time, the French Communist Youth Congress was being held; the Central Committee of the French Communist Party assigned me and Bi-u and Raymond Guy-o the task of disseminating the Platform of the Communist International. Afterward, I resumed my work at the Colonial Research Department of the French Communist Party and assisted the Central Committee of the French Communist Party in observing the revolutionary movement in the colonies. Shortly thereafter, I went underground with a number of other comrades. I and Marshall Casanh were given lodging in the home of a taxi driver. When the situation calmed down, I went back to my overt activities. In 1930, during a demonstration in front of Elysees

Palace, I was arrested by the police and spent 8 months in the La-xang-te [Vietnamese phonetics] Prison along with many leaders and cadres of the French Communist Party. The party organized a struggle to demand our release. In May, 1931, I was "kidnapped" by the French imperialists. Using force, they put me on a ship and made me return home. The International Red Cross sent a French lawyer to accompany me in order to protect my life and prevent them from finding some way to kill me on route...

Later, I reread the 13 May 1931 issue of L'HUMANITE Newspaper, the organ of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, in which Maurice Torres wrote an article entitled "Protecting the Indochinese Revolution," in which he denounced my "kidnapping," appealed for unity in the struggle and emphasized: "A strong protest by the mass of workers would certainly guarantee that Tao and many Indochinese revolutionaries will be saved from the serious threat posed by the murderers..."

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Later, when he was arrested by the French imperialists, Vinh surrendered to the enemy and began serving as their lackey.

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