

A S T U D Y

**THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF
SOUTH VIETNAM**

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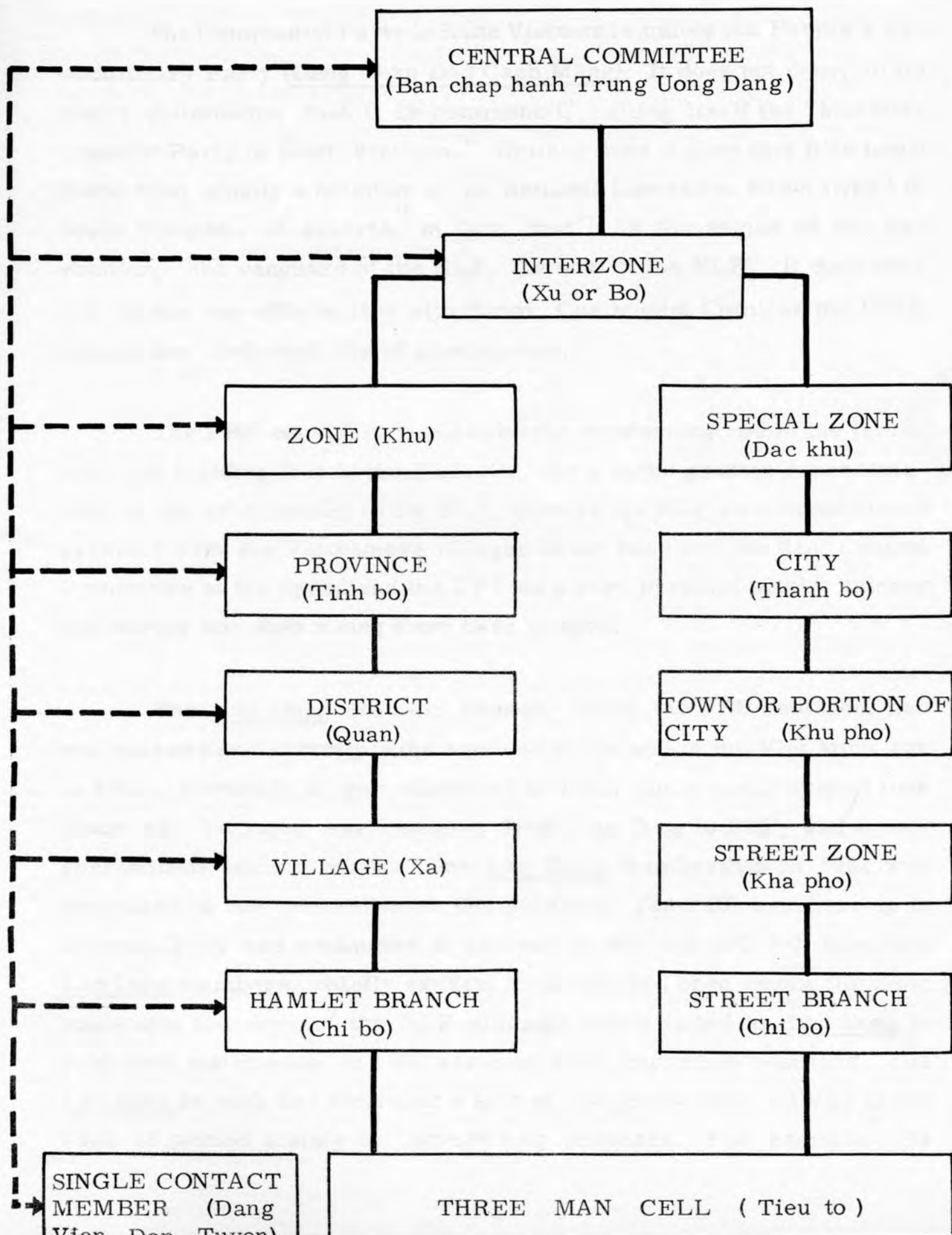
SAIGON-VIETNAM

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ORGANIZATION OF THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN SOUTH VIETNAM



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The Communist Party in South Vietnam is called the People's Revolutionary Party (Dang Nhan Dan Cach Mang). It does not deny, in its public statements, that it is communist,¹ calling itself the "Marxist-Leninist Party of South Vietnam." Neither does it deny that it is much more than simply a member of the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam. It asserts, in fact, that it is the engine of the Revolution, "the vanguard of the NLF, the soul of the NLF". It does deny that it has any official ties with Hanoi, Communist China or the USSR, beyond the "fraternal ties of communism."

The PRP considers itself to be the reinforcing rod in the ferro-concrete building that is the NLF. Or, for a more graphic representation of its relationship to the NLF, picture the NLF as a broad-based pyramid with the Vietnamese villages at the base and the NLF Central Committee at the apex, and the PRP as a core pyramid within, thinner and harder and also rising from base to apex.

The Lao Dong southern branch, which the PRP replaced, had maintained itself covertly in the south after the end of the Viet Minh war in 1954. Formally it was dissolved in 1962, but in actuality what took place was its name was changed, from Lao Dong to PRP, and an organizational buildup begun. The Lao Dong membership in 1962 was estimated at not more than 35,000 persons.² The PRP membership in January 1966 was estimated at between 85,000 and 100,000 members. Lao Dong members, chiefly ex-Viet Minh who had been among the most important founders of the NLF although never listed as Lao Dong in published statements, in 1962 assumed PRP leadership positions. The Lao Dong as such had continued a sort of low grade overt activity in the 1955-62 period mainly for advertising purposes. For example its

members frequently scattered Lao Dong signed leaflets by night in Mekong Delta villages; the leaflets usually called for reunification of Vietnam. Covertly the Lao Dong continued its organization and penetration work but this also was limited, since most of the effort of its members was devoted to furthering the newly formed NLF. Not until late 1963 did the PRP begin to concentrate its efforts on its own internal organization.

FORMATION OF PRP

First public announcement of the formation of the PRP came on January 18, 1962, via Radio Hanoi quoting the Liberation News Agency. The announcement said a new party had been formed by a "conference of Marxist-Leninists meeting in South Vietnam in late December under the guidance of veteran revolutionaries." Later it was learned that these were Vo Chi Cong, who became the Chairman of the PRP Central Committee and Huynh Van Tam who was named Secretary-General. Tam was later replaced (and sent to Algeria as NLF representative) by Tran Nam Trung. There have been persistent reports through the years that DRV leader Le Duan, came secretly to South Vietnam at this time and assisted in the formation of the PRP; this has never been substantiated.

For the first months of its existence the PRP continued to employ the liaison net and other channels of communication established by its predecessor, the southern wing of the Lao Dong Party. Its pipeline into North Vietnam for example was by means of the Lao Dong apparatus and the Party itself appeared to be its chief sponsor in Hanoi. In 1963 however, there was established a special group in Hanoi, called the Committee for Supervision of the South, which had among other tasks, the administration of the PRP. This committee was headed by Le Duc Tho, a member of the DRV Politburo and included Nguyen Van Vinh, Chairman of the DRV National Assembly Committee for Reunification.

The PRP is more proletarian than the NLF. A PRP cadre training manual describes it as "The party of the laboring class which will lead the people of South Vietnam to final victory ... Its aims are first to waken the laboring class, then awaken the poverty-stricken class, and finally arouse the whole people, who together will revolt ... The Party uses the people's united front policy (chanh sach mat tran dantoc thong nhat) based on agricultural and worker class distinctions ... The South Vietnamese proletariat has as a class several advantages: It controls the means of production, it is imbued with a highly developed collectivist spirit; it has a link with the people in the countryside who are struggling against local landlords, bourgeoisie money lenders and American imperialists; and its members are highly motivated."

A statement circulated among NLF cadres at the time of the PRP formation declared frankly that creation of the PRP was mandatory, and went on to outline the role of the PRP cum the Lao Dong :

"For over six years members of the Lao Dong have been working in the South and with the help of the people, have struggled against the US-Diem regime ... The revolutionary movement has become stronger and has developed. But it continues to lack organization and leadership. At the lower levels especially, the organization is not well formed nor is there adequate leadership system at the district level. For these reasons it is required that the Revolution in the South be placed under a unified leadership system. Only by this means can the Revolution be accelerated ... The PRP was established to assure that the Revolution in the South will have proper leadership ... No matter what circumstances develop, the Party has the means and policies to cope with and lead the people in overthrowing the enemy. The Party always is able to consider the situation at hand and devise correct counter-measures ... The Party is the highest organization. It is responsible for the leadership of all other organizations, the liberation associations, as well as leader-

ship of all the people who will overthrow the old regime for the sake of the new. The Party is the paramount organization."

Publicly the DRV pictured the PRP as simply an indigenous southern proletarian party. A Nhan Dan editorial May 5, 1964, for example explained its formation in these terms :

"The South Vietnam working class has clearly realized that to defend the people's, and its own interests, it must have a leading party, closely allied with the working peasants, broadly united with the other sections of the people ... The founding of the South Vietnam National Liberation Front and the birth of the Vietnam People's Revolutionary Party, a party of the South Vietnam working class and laboring people and at the same time of all patriotic South Vietnamese, are historic events on the road to victory of the national democratic revolution in South Vietnam."

Internally, to Northern Lao Dong members, Hanoi leaders explained that the PRP was simply a continuation of the older party. A captured Lao Dong cadre document turned over to the ICC by the GVN in 1962 declared that :

"In regard to the foundation of the People's Revolutionary Party of South Viet-Nam, the creation of this party is only a matter of strategy; it needs to be explained within the party; and, to deceive the enemy, it is necessary that the new party be given the outward appearance corresponding to a division of the party (Lao Dong) into two and the foundation of a new party, so that the enemy cannot use it in his propaganda."

"Within the party, it is necessary to explain that the founding of the People's Revolutionary Party has the purpose of isolating the Ameri-

cans and the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, and to counter their accusations of an invasion of the South by the North. It is a means of supporting our sabotage of the Geneva agreement, of advancing the plan of invasion of the South, and at the same time permitting the Front for Liberation of the South to recruit new adherents, and to gain the sympathy of non-aligned countries in Southeast Asia."

"The People's Revolutionary Party has only the appearance of an independent existence; actually, our party is nothing but the Lao Dong Party of Viet-Nam (Viet-Minh Communist Party), unified from North to South, under the direction of the central executive committee of the party, the chief of which is President Ho ... During these explanations, take care to keep this strictly secret, especially in South Viet-Nam, so that the enemy does not perceive our purpose ... Do not put these explanations in party bulletins."

Another party circular of the same date said :

"The reasons for the change in the party's name must be kept strictly secret. According to instructions of the Central Committee, one must not tell the people or party sympathizers that the People's Revolutionary Party and the Lao Dong Party of Viet-Nam are one. One must not say that it is only a tactic, because it would not be good for the enemy to know."

Throughout the years the PRP, NLF and the DRV all have maintained that the PRP was the paramount member of the NLF. In the January 1966 issue of Hoc Tap, theoretical North Vietnamese journal, Hong Vu in an article entitled, "The Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party and its Historic Mission of Liberating the South," reiterated this concept of the PRP Role :

"The partisans of Marxism-Leninism are in fact the soul of the NLFSV ...

"The experiences of the world and our country's revolution have shown that in order to win the greatest success the national democratic revolution must be led by a workers' revolutionary party ... The partisans of Marxism-Leninism in the south have clearly noted the need of a thorough revolutionary party to act as a vanguard force for the southern revolution ...

"The PRP is a revolutionary party of the working class in South Vietnam, a Marxist-Leninist Party. It has applied in a creative manner the principles of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete situation of the south in order to set forth correct revolutionary policies, lines and methods ...

"The PRP maintains that the revolutionary struggle of the southern people must necessarily use the revolutionary violence of the masses to ... advance toward smashing the reactionary government and replace it by a genuinely revolutionary government ... Straying from this path can lead only to a failure."

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS OF PRP

Shortly after its creation the PRP launched an intensive propaganda campaign throughout South Vietnam to acquaint Vietnamese with its existence and to promote its acceptance. Members distributed widely a four-page pamphlet titled. "A Statement by the Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party":

"To fulfill their glorious historic duty, the peasants and working people in South Vietnam need a vanguard brigade, a revolutionary party

of their own. The conference of Marxist-Leninists in South Vietnam, December 1961, decided to form the Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party; it adopted the party's declaration of principles and regulations. The publication described the PRP as "the party of the working class and the laboring people in South Vietnam."

The first output of the PRP carefully hid the communist element -- and in fact its initial statements and policies did not differ in any way from the NLF. For example the PRP announced its "Ten Point Platform" in January 1962":

"1. We will overthrow the Ngo Dinh Diem government and form a national, democratic coalition government."

"2. We will carry out a program involving extension of democratic liberties, general amnesty for political detainees, abolition of agrovilles and resettlement centers, abolition of Special Military Tribunal law and other undemocratic laws."

"3. We will abolish the economic monopoly of the U.S. and its henchmen, protect domestically-made products, promote development of the economy, and allow forced evacuees from North Vietnam to return to their place of birth."

"4. We will reduce land rent and prepare for land reform."

"5. We will eliminate U.S. cultural enslavement and depravity and build nationalistic progressive culture and education."

"6. We will abolish the system of American military advisors and close all foreign military bases in Vietnam."

"7. We will establish equality between men and women and among

different nationalities and recognize the autonomous rights of the National minorities in the country."

"8. We will pursue a foreign policy of peace, and will establish diplomatic relations with all countries which respect the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam."

"9. We will reestablish normal relations between North and South as a first step toward peaceful reunification of the country."

"10. We will oppose aggressive wars and actively defend world peace."

The Central Committee of the PRP issued what might be considered its foreign policy platform in April 1962. It denounced the United States for "waging aggressive war" in South Vietnam; it thanked the USSR, Communist China, and the bloc nations for supporting its cause; it urged all "peace loving peoples" of the world to support the Vietnamese revolution; it urged the American people to demonstrate opposition to their government's policy in Vietnam; it denounced the British government for its stand on Vietnam; and it hinted that unless the Americans left Vietnam it would call on the DRV, China and the USSR to come to its aid. In short, it was a classic communist policy statement on Vietnam.

The language in the PRP statements, the emphasis on proletarianism in a country in which 85 percent of the people make their living from the soil, has a strangely alien quality about it. PRP leaders seem determined to force communist philosophy into an agrarian mold and portray their struggle in terms of a "workers revolt" even though less than 1.5 percent of the people in Vietnam can normally be defined as "workers". Even the Soviet Union, in its public pronouncements on

Vietnam, does not take this exclusively proletarian revolutionist tack. Instead it speaks of the NLF's aim and method as "the overthrow of the reactionary puppet regime to form an independent national democratic state based on a union between the working class and the peasantry."

Gradually the PRP emphasis on simple proletarianism has given way to fuller and more orthodox expressions of communism. And imperceptibly the national salvation theme as a goal began to merge with that of creating a collectivist society. This was apparent both in public output and internal documents. A 1963 training manual for use by PRP cadres in working with NLF organizations, instructed the cadres to emphasize that the PRP sought "to work through the NLF to achieve the liberation, neutralization and unification of Vietnam through the establishment of a democratic coalition government." A similar training manual dated early 1965 said that the PRP was "the vanguard of southern workers dedicated to achieving a patriotic, democratic and national revolution in order to introduce Socialism and then Communism to Vietnam." The earlier manual stressed the national salvation theme: "The pressing task for the Party and the Front is to unite all South Vietnamese in the struggle against foreign domination." The later manual added that the Party also: "Must seek to do away with the deprivations caused by the imperialists and feudalists. Then we must abolish all deprivation whatever the cause. And finally we will then be ready to guide the workers, the artisans and others along the road of collective production so they can come to live the life of people in other modern societies. Under Socialism, the early stage of Communism, there can be no economic deprivation, no individual poverty, no undeveloped segments of the society. The workers become the rulers of the country, its industry and natural resources. The workers then exploit the natural resources and build up the nation's industry. Market cooperatives, formed voluntarily in the spirit of brotherhood, are created by the farmers, artisans and retail traders. Intellectuals also cooperate, putting their talent to

work for the benefit of the workers. To prevent a return of parasitism and laziness, that characterized the old regime, we will follow the Socialist principle of reward each according to his ability. We shall all live together intimately in the great socialist family ... Once Vietnam is reunited and Socialism created the Party will then continue to lead the people toward the establishment of Communism. Communism will be practiced as it is in the Soviet Union. Factories, mines, fields, and all other land, will be the common ownership of all the people."

Another PRP cadre training manual, dated October 1965 also described the Party policies and goals :

"The Party (objective) ... is to overthrow imperialism, colonialism and feudalism, to build a life of peace, prosperity, and happiness without oppression and extortion... Once independence is obtained, the next step is unification, constructed and consolidated in every way to make the country powerful and rich, a stronghold of peace. Then will come the social reorganization, along socialist-communist principles, without land demarcations, cooperating in rural electrification, re-education of individuals, nationalization of private property, cultural and scientific education for everyone, progressing day by day to better and better things in all fields ... Also, helping other small weak countries to struggle against imperialism and rid the world of conflict and to help provide everyone with freedom, legality, warmth, food, and happiness .."

Over the years the PRP cadres have been under instructions to mute the socialist-communist theme should it be inappropriate in their areas, as for example in an area with a heavy concentration of Catholic Vietnamese. Strangely however, in outer trappings, such as flags, the communist imprint was firm. The PRP flag consisted of a red field on which was centered a white hammer and sickle. The PRP Youth League flag was a red field with three yellow stars centered and a white hammer and sickle upper right.

The PRP is a Janus-faced organization. In the South, it insists to the Vietnamese people it is not communist but Marxist-Leninist, indicating philosophic but not political allegiance and implying some sort of national communism without outside ties. In the North, the DRV characterizes the PRP as a vanguard Marxist-Leninist organization, indicating it is in the mainstream of the worldwide communist movement, both spiritually and materially connected to the North Vietnamese, the DRV government and the Lao Dong.

REASONS FOR FORMATION OF PRP

It would appear that a shift from covert to overt communist participation in the southern struggle would carry with it certain inherent negative factors, especially with respect to the image presented abroad. Previous to 1962 the NLF propagandists had been conspicuously silent on the whole business of communism in the south. And since this had been by and large a successful gambit, a switch would appear counter-productive. However to the leadership both in the south and in Hanoi the needs were great and outweighed the disadvantages. There were at least four reasons for the formation of the PRP.

First, there was the stated reason: the revolution needed a better engine. It needed a tighter, more centralized organization and a more effective leadership. Countering the GVN's strategic hamlet program especially required stronger organizational methods than previously had been necessary and called for, they felt, communist type discipline, experience and knowledge.

Second, there was a need for stronger ideological content, to help explain the Revolution to itself and to help hold it together. Communism was the doctrinal cement. But communism without a com-

munist party was unworkable. Foreign communism, even of the Lao Dong brand was strategically unsound. And a covert communist party had proved inadequate to the needs. So the PRP was created. However it was not just Marxism that was required but the larger body of communist thought. The PRP leadership obviously felt that the NLF was jerry built, chiefly because its members lacked a strong sense of class consciousness, something which communism could inject. The PRP leaders also saw clearly, more so than the rank and file of the NLF, the need to break out of the anti-Diem role and develop a broader xenophobic spirit of hate for the United States, or what was usually expressed as "the movement for the salvation of the country against the Americans," This national salvation theme took as its model the "Chinese communist anti-fascist war against Japan." As the PRP influence developed and the revolution became "regularized" the effort did shift from the GVN to the Americans. The PRP leadership saw as the task of the revolution the neutralizing of the Vietnamese army, chiefly if possible by proselyting activities, and then concentrating on the Americans and their military forces.

Third, it was necessary better to support communist followers in the South. In talking, in the 1960-2 period, with defectors who professed to having been Marxists one frequently sensed in them a feeling of ideological isolation. Many indicated they felt cut off from the mainstream of communist thought, surrounded by nonbelievers, unable to suppress their doubts about the correctness of their actions, particularly those involving violence. Some even gave this as their reason for defection. At first, one cadre said, everything had been simple and understandable; capitalism meant poverty and slavery; communism, abundance and freedom. Then he came South and found prosperous villages, more so than in the North, and people who seldom felt the touch of a governmental hand, unlike the omniscient government of the North. Events swirled about him and, with his inadequate grasp of Marxism,

realistic explanations began to slip away. Uncertainty entered, followed by doubt, followed by a break in faith, followed by defection. Whether these feelings were endemic or deep, we do not know, but probably they posed a serious enough problem to cause Hanoi to give instructions to form a strong and overt party that would shore up the ideological underpinnings in the South and give the party member a firmer platform on which to stand.

Fourth, there was the fear by the DRV leadership and the southern communists that the revolution might turn bourgeois, as it continually threatened to do, especially among the provincial farmers with their narrow range of interest which went little beyond land reform. The PRP formed an automatic pilot that would keep the revolution on the track and going the whole route. The entire thrust of the struggle in the early years was in terms of anti-Diemism. With the demise of Diem it was feared that revolutionary zeal would wane and the cause would degenerate into simple reformism. Coupled with this was the fear that the war might be won but the subsequent peace lost. Indeed, as we have seen, something of this nature did take place. The golden aura of the revolution faded and the struggle continued not because of spirit but because of organization that trapped its followers and prevented their escape.

ORGANIZATION OF PRP

The organizational structure of the PRP closely resembled that of the NLF, a requirement imposed by the fact that the PRP was designed to be an integral part of the front organization. There were two exceptions: the PRP developed the standard communist cell structure to link together the individual members, and it developed a separate chain of command for urban areas, similar to but separate from the rural chain of command. Under the PRP Central Committee (Ban Chap Hanh

Trung Uong Dang)³ came the central committee of the interzone (xu or bo). Below the interzone the ladder split; the rural consisted of the zone (khu), province (tinh bo), district (quan), village (xa) and hamlet branch (chi bo); while the urban chain of command consisted of the special zone (kha pho) and street branch (chi bo). At the bottom, both rural and urban, was the three-man cell structure. In addition there existed what was called the single contact member (dang vien don tuyen), found at all levels from the zone to the branch whose identity was not known to fellow PRP members; the leadership at the interzone and central committee level often found it useful to have such an individual sur place particularly if the organization at his level were compromised or destroyed. He also acted as a top secret courier and probably as a Party inspector.

Headquarters for the PRP Central Committee was in Binh Duong province, in the famed Zone D area, north of Saigon but within easy reach of the city. Purportedly what existed there was the headquarters of the Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh Special Zone (of the NLF). However a part if not all of this headquarters complex was overrun by a joint GVN-US military operation in January 1966 and some six thousand documents captured and from this incredible haul came information to fill in many gaps in the GVN knowledge of the NLF and the PRP. It was clearly established that although the NLF Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh Special Zone headquarters did exist, it was little more than a housekeeping unit for the PRP. Of course the leaders of the PRP did not remain long in any one place, since the chance of betrayal increased with the passing of each day. There were over the years persistent reports that the PRP Central Committee members spent much of their time in a second headquarters just inside the Cambodian border west of Hau Nghia province; other reports placed them in Pathet Lao country in Laos.

The functions of the PRP Central Committee were three fold; military commissar work, manipulation of the NLF, and general ad-

ministration. Chairman Vo Chi Cong was chiefly responsible for NLF sponsored activities; the proselyting program, agit-prop and indoctrination work, recruitment and organization building. Tran Nam Trung, the secretary general, handled military affairs, that is the NLF Army. As far as could be determined the PRP had little to do with the PAVN units operating in South Vietnam; these North Vietnamese army elements apparently maintained their own exclusive chain of command directly to Hanoi. Administrative work at the PRP headquarters was divided among a number of sections, including economic and financial, intelligence and counter-intelligence and communication and liaison.

The Interzone Central Committee basically was a liaison and administrative echelon necessitated by the fact that geography and security prevented the complete centralization of leadership within the Central Committee. It consisted of some 21 members headed by a chairman who according to the by-laws must have had five years of active Party membership. He was assisted by a presidium which consisted of the secretary general and an assistant secretary in addition to the chairman.

The provincial central committee (tinh bo) or city central committee (thanh bo) generally had from eight to ten members. It too was headed by a presidium (the chairman, secretary and assistant secretary) and a series of section heads (for military activities, proselyting, agit-prop, finance and economic production, liaison and communication and intelligence and counter intelligence). The by-laws stipulated that the provincial committee was to be elected at a convention held every two years. However there is no evidence that such elections were held; captured memoranda on the subject argued that elections could not be held for security reasons, thus justifying the appointment of the committee by the Central Committee. At any rate the central committee at all levels met only infrequently hence affairs in effect were in the hands of the presidium.⁴

The district level -- the district central committee (quan) or town or portion of city (khu pho) -- probably was the most important lower level element of the PRP. It was responsible for overseeing all PRP activity within its area and had considerable latitude in its operations. It was the implementing area of the Central Committee and prior to 1964 was the lowest operating level of the Party. Before this time Party members were reported frequently in villages, but as visitors and not as permanent operators. After 1964 the apparatus was extended to the level, below the district; this was part of the general PRP organizational buildup which began at that time. The district central committee consisted of three to twelve members most of whom were from the area and in fact, after 1964, lived in the villages and served as village level PRP officials.

The village (xa) or street zone (khu pho) was the lowest echelon with any significant amount of decision making power at its command. It was the first echelon of the Party in specific geographic areas; villages, schools, rubber plantations, factories or sections of cities. Its executive committee was composed of five to seven members and it had under it from three to a dozen branches or chibo. Leadership generally was in the hands of a single full time Party leader.

The basic PRP unit, to which all members belonged, was the chibo, usually referred to in English as the hamlet branch group or the street branch group. It consisted of from one to seven three-man cells. The chibo was the Party's "link with the masses" and was charged with the responsibility of extending and maintaining Party influence either directly with the people or through NLF and other organizations. It also was charged with the task of upward reporting of local sentiment and of keeping the higher echelons informed of local conditions and situations.

The various levels of the Party appeared to be well integrated

through the use of overlapping committee membership, that is the central committee at each level was composed in part of ranking leaders from the level just below.

Throughout, the Party seemed chiefly concerned with two major activities: political control of the military arm of the NLF, the paramilitary and full military forces and implementing the political struggle which manifested itself chiefly in the form of military and civilian proselyting (binh van) work. Political commissars, undoubtedly all Party members, were found in all NLF Army units. The task of the commissar was to insure that the military unit commander did not deviate from instructions from higher headquarters; he also was responsible for troop indoctrination work. Political activities, including the proselyting work, were administered through the NLF apparatus. The entire "struggle movement" also involved PRP cadres but again the NLF served as the front for public activities.

An applicant for membership in the PRP was required to be sponsored by two Party members who had themselves been members for at least three months. Unlike the Lao Dong party a potential member could come from a less proletarian social group or class; the by-laws stipulated he must be "a worker, a peasant or a city proletarian, a middle class peasant or petit bourgeoisie; a student or intellectual; a Montagnard; or (an ARVN) deserter." Actually the chief requirement seemed to be that the individual had actively been supporting the cause and had a good record in this respect. His sponsors were responsible for both his indoctrination and his behavior during the probationary period, which lasted from four to six months depending on his social class. During his probationary period, when his application was being screened by higher headquarters, he was obliged to familiarize himself with the Party by-laws, attend meetings (although he could not participate in the meetings) attend indoctrination courses and pay dues.

The Party member was expected to remain activist at all times and beyond this serve as an exemplary model of behavior for non-Party members. "Party members must be carefully selected and well indoctrinated," declared the training manual, "They must be pioneers ... They must be able to win the people's confidence and must set an example for the people by being bold, energetic, fearless, able to suffer all hardships and misery, willing to make great sacrifices." An indoctrination booklet dated 1965 declared: "As militant members of the working class we must, when entering the Party, cast off our former values and thoughts and prepare to devote the rest of our lives if necessary to the Revolution. We must remain loyal to the working class, always understanding its sufferings and miseries, always loving it and always struggling ceaselessly for its liberation."

In early 1966 there was evidence that the PRP was attempting to broaden its base into something resembling a mass political movement. Instructions went out to create what was called a "sympathizer group" which apparently was an element standing somewhere between the PRP and the NLF, closely allied to the PRP and a reservoir from which the Party could draw new members. The instructions said: "(You are instructed) to investigate and discover persons who are sympathetic to the Party and who may be qualified for admission into the Party, that is, those who have made some achievement in the Revolution either in the liberated area or in the strategic hamlets, towns or cities or those who have influence over a number of other people. Investigate these persons thoroughly -- their past activities, their social class, their attitude toward the enemy -- also investigate their relatives. Then indoctrinate them in Communism and the Party's policies; heighten their sense of responsibility and correct any erroneous thoughts. Then indoctrinate them on the Party's by-laws. After being indoctrinated the sympathizers may request admittance into the Party ... They may then become probationary Party members and, eventually, official members ... Abso-

lutely do not admit a large number of sympathizers at any one time ..."

The standard communist principal of collectivist agreement reached through the mechanism of democratic centralism ostensibly prevailed in the PRP. Democratic centralism was defined in various Party documents as "Decisions made at committee meetings by majority vote which individuals must then obey... The minority obeys the decision of the majority... the lower echelons obey the decisions of the upper echelons, all elements of the Revolution obey the Central Committee... There is one shout and a thousand echoes ..."

Criticism and self-criticism sessions (kiem thao) were considered an integral part of Party life as were individual efforts by member to promote his own "spirit of self-enlightenment, self-improvement and voluntaryism."

Discipline was apparently strict. Captured documents frequently cited disciplinary actions taken against individual members, usually because of immoral behavior or corruption. There were three forms of discipline: reprimand, official warning and expulsion. Both individuals and Party units were subject to disciplinary measures.

FOOTNOTES

1. The communists in Vietnam, both north and south, eschew public use of the word "Communism" and employ extreme semantic dodges to avoid it. The Communist Party in North Vietnam is the Vietnam Labor Party (Dang Lao Dong Vietnam); in the South, the Vietnam People's Revolutionary Party (Dang Nhan Dan Cach Mang Vietnam). Likewise, the youth groups, equivalent to the Komsomol in the U. S. S. R. , are the Labor Youth League in the DRV, and the People's Revolutionary Youth League in the South. Internal documents use the simple terms "Party member" (dang vien) in the PRP, and League member (doan vien) in the PRYL. In the same way, the term "worker" (lao dong) is preferred to "proletariat" (vo san). The last time the word "communist" was used in a party organization was the Indochinese Communist Party, formed in 1930 and abolished in favor of the Marxist Study League in 1945.

2. Thu Do, Hanoi, Feb. 3, 1963 said that the Party was founded in March 1929 with seven members, that its membership in 1945 totaled 5,000 and that in February 1963 it stood at 500,000. Presumably this did not include the PRP membership. Thu Do listed this breakdown of membership: under eleven years of age, nine percent; from eleven to fifteen years, 50 percent; from sixteen to thirty years, 37 percent; and over thirty, four percent.

3. The PRP Central Committee frequently is referred to as the Central Office, South Vietnam (COSVN or sometimes COSVIN). The implication of this useage sometimes is that the Central Office is organizationally and geographically separated from the Central Committee of the NLF, but the PRP at all times works through the Front and is not separate from it.

4. Also referred to as the standing committee or sometimes as the current affairs section.

PRP LEADERSHIP BIOGRAPHIES

PRP Central Committee Chairman Vo Chi Cong. He was born in 1912 in Quang Nam province and became a revolutionary at an early age. Vo Chi Cong is the Anastas Mikoyan of the Viet Cong, the indestructible old guard revolutionary who began his clandestine revolutionary activity in 1930 when still in his teens. As a member of the Indochinese Communist Party in the 1930's and 1940's he loyally served the Party, first opposing the French, then violently opposing the Japanese during their wartime occupation and again opposing the French upon their return to Vietnam after World War Two. He was arrested by the French in the late 1940's and exiled to house arrest in Central Vietnam, a mild sentence, where according to his official biography, he continued to act as a secret advisor to revolutionary groups in Central Vietnam. Vo Chi Cong was one of the major founders of the NLF (as Vice Chairman) and probably the key figure in the formation of the PRP. He served as the security chief in the newly formed NLF and as a sort of inspector general of the NLF's organizational work and proselyting activities. He was in effect Hanoi's political commissar in the NLF Central Committee. Vietnamese who have known Vo Chi Cong describe him as a thoroughly indoctrinated Marxist, a person who has throughout his life stood for military and terror in revolution.



VO CHI CONG



TRAN NAM TRUNG

PRP Central Committee Secretary General Tran Nam Trung. Less is known about Tran Nam Trung than almost any of the other leading figures of the NLF or PRP. He was born in 1913 in Central Vietnam, although in that portion of Annam which now is part of North Vietnam. His official biography says simply that he served as a militant revolutionary throughout the 1930's and 1940's, was jailed several times by the French and served in the Viet Minh. He is a late comer to NLF and PRP activities in South Vietnam. His name did not appear on any NLF Central Committee rosters prior to the Third Congress, February 1963. At that time he was listed as a vice chairman of the NLF and as "representative of the Liberation Army and People's Armed Forces." GVN officials maintain that Tran Nam Trung spent the 1954 to 1963 period in Hanoi, as an officer in the North Vietnamese Army. This is probable. It is possible, as some Vietnamese claim, that he is the top military commander in the Viet Cong forces in the south. But it is more likely that he is the DRV's political commissar for all Viet Cong military forces. At any rate the evidence is strong that he is a high ranking military officer from North Vietnam with a record a commissar type activity and relatively new to South Vietnam. He also probably is the most powerful single individual in the entire communist apparatus in South Vietnam.

COMPARISON OF PRP AND LAO DONG BY-LAWS

	LAO DONG	PRP
Probationary period members cat. 1	6 months	4 months
Sponsors, cat. 1	2 members, in party 6 months	2 members, in party 3 months
Probablionary period cat. 2	one year	six months
Sponsors cat. 2	2 members, in Party one year	two members, in party six months
Categories for admission	1. Workers, "peasants of many generations poor peasants; poor urbanites. 2. Middle class peasants; petit bourgeoisie; intellectuals	1. Workers; peasants and poor in cities. 2. Middle class peasants and petit bourgeoisie 3. Students and intellectuals 4. Montagnards 5. ARVN deserters
Village comm.meetings	Once a month	Every 12 months
District comm.meetings	Once a month	Every 3 to 4 months
Province congress meetings	Each year	Each 18 months
Presidium CC zone meetings	Every 3 months	Every 3 to 6 months
Zone congress meetings	18 months	Every 2 years
General Congress meetings	Every 3 years	Every 4 years

SUMMARY: There is no substantive difference between the Lao Dong and the PRP. It was easier to join the PRP and especially student membership was made easier; the central committees met less often and there were arrangements whereby elections could be (as they were) postponed.